

From English Literature and the Indian Mind – T.V.Subbarao

On V.S.Naipaul

Time and time again we meet with this lack of intelligence in the university teacher's opinions and arguments. If you tell him about it, he will be offended. Offence or no offence, we shall have to carry out our investigation. We will be plain with him whether he comes to his senses or not. But this time we will take a different author, who has made a splash in India, and he will be our last example – the example of an author whose estimate by the Indian teachers is far out of proportions to his merits, and whom they take as an author to research; he is Mr.V.S.Naipaul, who deserves special consideration for putting India on the map through his interest, as an extraordinary traveler (to be distinguished from ordinary tourists), in Indian history, civilization, culture and through his still greater interest in the contemporary Indians, in their manners and their institutions. Mr.Naipaul has written a good deal on India, and well enough to impress the Indian University teachers; and I hope he will write more and more, as it is his Aunt Sally. In short, he is a success with them, which means that he is equally admired by other educated Indians. It is not possible for them to resist his charm of observations, analysis and inferences. Surely, the charm of his observations, analysis and inferences as a great traveler is that of smell, titillation, and flattery. Mr.Naipaul's claim is that no Indian is capable of producing this charm, I mean in writing; He has an eye for places of putrid smell in India – I wonder if he has not kept his eyes skinned for them – and describes them with a three-dimensional effect on the reader, our University teacher, as if they are special to India. The Indian teacher has the pleasure of recognizing them in the author's writing, which he knows by sight only. The author has a talent for what the Indian does but does not expect it to be described by travelers and describes it again with three-dimensional effect on the reader, our university teacher, as if it is special to India. Being ill-educated, the Indian teacher has the added pleasure of reading things in Mr.Naipaul's writing which he applies to other Indians. The pleasure for Indian readers is that titillation, and now they have a habit of responding to it. One expects that they would be ashamed of responding to it.

No, on the other hand, they want it, and now native writers too are meeting the demand. The third element of author's charm is flattery. Mr.Naipaul is a successful journalist, and a journalist, in order to be successful, must be an expert in using words aptly for effect. The skill of using words depends upon the interests he serves, and not the ideas he entertains – but anyhow a journalist never entertains worthwhile ideas. Mr.Naipaul, as a journalist, is a tradesman and a salesman, so to speak. Just as his description of putrid dwelling (dirty huts and shanties) and of Indians' urination and defecation (in open spaces) have a three-dimensional effect, so too his *judgments* on India with reference to its civilization and its past have a consequence – an effect flattering to his Indian readers. A journalist does not have convictions – there cannot be in him a mental development leading to them. But Mr.Naipaul strikes the Indian reader as having them based on 'sound' observation, 'scientific' analysis and 'logical' inference. He has the air of being self-assured and inviolable in his opinions. But the air of being so is due to a confidence

that he cannot be seen through. He is a good strategist, being a foul writer. He makes a monkey of the Indian civilization and its past, of the Indians with pre-industrial habits and customs, of the modern Indians who are inferior to the Europeans by imitating them, but his opinions are yet flattering to the Indian readers, but how? There is the rub.

The Indian who has received education in English for a career through the mediation of the Western impact will have the habits of comparing India with the West, of regarding Indian as very backward, and therefore, disliking it and finding causes in the quality of its civilization and in its past for its backwardness, and of finally believing himself to be superior because of his education and ideas. The educated Indian is sunk in this morass of vicious but modern habits, and he becomes, at times, emotional, lashing out abuses against India and Indians for any discomfort he suffers or when he does not find anything flattering to his vanity. Mr.Naipaul's readers in India are of this type, though varying in degree in their hostility to India. Is it then a surprise that he appeals to his readers because he flatters them by his opinions on the Indian civilization and past?

There are other reasons why the author appeals to his Indian readers: One, his Indian origins attract them, two, he writes English so well that it passes off with his admirers as the English of the English-man. Three, he is successful as a writer in England itself, which is a great point in his favour; four, the Indian readers can get ideas from him and use them against India and Indians. Nevertheless, here and there, a few Indian readers register the horror of his opinions, because he exacerbates and wounds their sensibility. To these he appears like a man blind-drunk raving that he is quite sane, but it is sadly true that for them the circumstance of his success is too overwhelming. But unfortunately, they feel the violence of his opinions rather than recognize their shallowness. Today, Mr.Naipaul can get away with any scornful remark on India on account of his intimidating success. Many Indians in fact accept his competence to judge India, and I have pointed out the reasons for their acceptance of it. The more insistent and louder he is in repeating tirelessly his opinion 'Hindu civilization is a decaying civilization', 'India is so horrid a place', 'Indians are despicable for their intellectual second-ratedness', the more admirable he is to his Indian readers. It is obvious in what esteem he is held in India. But I make no secret of my opinion that his admirers are intolerably wrong in their estimate of him and that he is an author far from deserving such an estimate. As we made earlier a sensible estimate of Mr.Penn warren and Lionel Trilling for whom, as we say, the Indian university teachers' admiration is out of place, now we attempt a sensible estimate of Mr.Naipaul whose claims to any worth his Indian readers mistake, and for whom there is now misplaced enthusiasm.

In offering my judgment on Mr.Naipaul, I wish to show how the Indian university teacher makes a wrong estimate of him, and how he is without the discipline of enabling him to see the defects of the author's writing. Reviewing is too bad in India to be of any help to the teacher, nor does he read reviews often. One thing is that he deals with a book in terms of ideas; that is where he goes wrong. The habit of dealing in ideas about an author and his work is very injurious to a proper judgment. The habit is kept unrevised with him by lack of mental improvement which he is never disposed to seek. Suppose the Indian teacher finds certain ideas in an author with which he agrees; we must know what

happens to see the true nature of his mind. First, there is no conceptual exercise before arriving at agreement. Second, he has no idiom to define the author's ideas with any precision and the point of this agreement. Third, his (pathetic) condition compels him to read his ideas into the author's work and defend himself as if he is unquestionable in his understanding of the author. Fourth, his English is too bad and when he reads an author in English, invariably he loses his bearings but talks tall about the author's 'ideas'. He cannot grasp the content of the author's work and therefore, he cannot keep to the point. By ideas he either condemns or exalts the author, so that he suffers for want of an idiom for proper discourse on the author's work. Fifth, indiscipline leads him to borrowings and pretentiousness and affects his character, undoubtedly rendering him incapable of being self-critical and of arguing with content in his head.

Presently, we shall take up Mr. Naipaul's *The Area of Darkness* and *India: a wounded civilization*, leaving out his fiction since these two books enjoy popularity, inviting the reader to the controversial judgments made on India. At any rate, they seem to engage the readers' attention, as I have shown above. One notices at first that the titles themselves are attractive, making one believe that Mr. Naipaul must be a serious writer, and like banner headlines in a newspaper they promise something stunning. What exactly do they say, then? They consist of the author's impressions and observations as a traveler, gathered from his meetings with a wide range of Indians in different situations all over India. But had he not made these two books more important than a traveler's record, they would not have received any attention here. The author made them more important by a design on his part to tell the Indians and the Western readers that India is a stinking place, its civilization is a decaying civilization, very inferior to others, and the Indians, who had always been subject to foreign invasions, suffer from thousand and one evils like caste, religious superstitions, uncreativity and so on, handed down from generation to generation for so many centuries and that, therefore, their inferiority is bred in the bone. According to him Indians are, and have been, little short of yahoos, and they must again, for their own safety, invite a foreign invader. He makes it clear that the foreign invader had better be a European invader. The author is tender about the prospective European invader being made to suffer to rule over such a horrid nation as India. If you catch the author's design, theme and his intended effect in my representation, which has only one mistake of attributing to Mr. Naipaul that he wished India to be again subject to a European invader, which, to do him justice, he did not, you will find it true to his books. He is a gentleman, he would not wish India again a subject nation ! But who can doubt that his anti-Indianism has the same force of Hitlerite anti-semitism. If Hitler had been successful and if India had been a subject country under his heels, Mr. Naipaul would have celebrated the event in one of the public houses in London, saying "History knows what is right". Since such a thing did not happen, he had no choice except to visit India and publish books on its *true* condition to enlighten the Indians and the Western readers. I said I made a mistake in my representation of Mr. Naipaul but I made it deliberately so as to bring out the emotional intensity of his hatred of India. His hatred of India is reserved mainly for two classes of Indians. He cannot hear of the pre-industrial India, and attacks fiercely those who are still in that past. Equally he attacks those Indians who make bungling attempts at imitating the West. There is another class of Indians, writers or professionals, who have insights like him,

that India is hopeless and Indians are contemptible; with this class he has little quarrel, and he would be even at home in the houses of those of this class who are rich and have no trace of India about them.

Mr. Naipaul's method is vitally related to his subject, and his subject is vitally related to his intentions. His method is natural and logical, his intentions are to entertain and enlighten his readers, and his subject is the objective study of the ugly scenes. To visit India is to watch the ugly scenes, and if the visitor is a writer the result is a book. Mr. Naipaul, as a celebrated writer, cannot escape the ugly scenes on his visits to India. Who could contend that it is his fault to see Indians defecating in the open spaces. But, oh! Does not such a sort of thing strike you as horrible, I mean, are not you, Indians really, well, ashamed of it? Well! Well! What can be concluded from it? "Why, describe such things, having a writer's skill, and entertain and enlighten your readers, and make money". The rational and logical method is this. People defecating in the open spaces are barbarous, and their civilization is, therefore barbarous. People living in huts and shanties in rural India, and people living crowded in dingy lanes and on the pavements in big cities, are as much barbarous for being under-fed, poor, and dirty. Their civilization is barbarous too. Mr. Naipaul meets a petty officer with broken English and bungling attempts to do this or to do that. The officer is a dunce and so, his nation is a nation of third-rate men. The author now encounters a politician in Gandhi cap, who makes imbecile generalizations. He concludes logically that India is a nation of intellectual second-ratedness. But, now, he calls on an author who is himself very critical of India and Indians, and despairs of the future of India, and for Mr. Naipaul it is a relief to meet this enlightened Indian. They have dinner together and across the dinner-table they exchange similar views. The enlightened Indian shakes hands with the celebrated writer. "Mr. Naipaul, it is splendid having met you. I am sure, when you come next to India, you will let us have the honour to host you, you will stay with us for at least, shall I say, a week. Sure, you are not so disgusted with India! Well, nothing can be done about it". Mr. Naipaul responds warmly to his host and kisses his ifew a' la' Europe and takes leave of them to go to the ugly scenes to finish his book on India's decaying civilization. The poverty of India is a big attraction to anyone out of his senses, and it is all the more an attraction to a writer from the West intending to write a book on India. Poverty is a problem, no doubt. When it becomes a writer's problem for description in his work whose purpose it is to entertain and enlighten his readers, it offers readily, to his skill, scenes and events such as can *move* his readers. After dealing with poverty, what next? Why, naturally, the writer can write about those who make imbecile generalizations and fail to solve the problem of India's poverty. Is that enough? No, but to make his book interesting, he must condemn the nation, its civilization, its past, and its people. The writer, I mean, Mr. Naipaul, has found out the real India, and presented its conditions and features – its contour – in his unmistakable style. Mr. Naipaul is a perceptive writer, and his perception of India is a corollary to this perception of the West. After all, India cannot be judged without comparing it with the West, whether the judge be a European, or a writer like Mr. Naipaul with Indian origins but settled in Europe, or an educated Indian. The comparison is inevitable. It is now as habitual as it is thoughtless, whenever it is based on ideas and impressions. What supports, as we said, the logical conclusions of Mr. Naipaul, is this comparison, in which, we paid a tribute to him by saying that he is

perceptive. Is there, in Europe, poverty so disgusting as the Indian poverty? No. Are there in Europe dirty people living in huts and shanties, and people living in dingy lanes, and on pavements, and that too in hundreds of thousands? No. Are there imbecile politicians dealing in imbecile generalities in Europe? No. And on top of this what a wonderful order Europe is possessed of in which an individual lives as a free individual, unfettered by customs, bonds, and usages such as disgrace India, and attractive for its pulls on mind – the order of production and exchange determined by demand and supply. Obviously, India, struggling to attain to this order to provide the individual with freedom for which Europe and America are justly famous has cracked up. Now, compare India with Europe in the light of so many facts discovered, analysed, and put together by Mr. Naipaul's genius, you will find his conclusions on India ineluctable. Shame on anyone who suspects that Naipaul could, for a moment, be wrong. What genius, what style, and what depth one meets in his writing! It is quite fair that he clobbered India and Indians, isn't it?

I must now ask whether Mr. Naipaul is original, or comes of a line of writers on India who showed him the way, and answer it. My answer can only be brief, and I cannot help it. Yes, there had been writers who condemned Indian thoughtlessly from ulterior motives. For instance William Archer⁷ made insulting remarks on India, to whom Sri Aurobindo replied with sound content and admirable zeal. He had a good sense of the journalist in Archer, but did not show him up by examining his writing. If a reply to such a writer as Archer is essential, the reply must be serious for the sake of helping those who would be misled, while dismissing the author by a discussion of the quality of his work. We must not take up ideas in such an author – obviously they are worthless, but the quality of his writing, because worthless ideas and good writing cannot go together. We should not take a journalist seriously, except when his influence is menacing. Sri Aurobindo's gallant defense of Indian civilization is the most organized reply to an attack on India I have known. He had perhaps in mind the menace of Archer's attack and took it up. Usual replies would be profuse in sentiment, taking on the nature of a quarrel and lax in thought, and not a little boastful, making you blush for shame at the poor answering. Sri Aurobindo has, on the other hand, an admirable concept of the Indian civilization, being a formidable scholar with enviable conceiving power of mind and mastery of English. His treatment of the Vedas, the Upanishads, and the two great epics are the most valuable part of "The foundations of Indian Culture". But the weakest part of it is his chapters on Indian polity. But what is marvelous is that the book has the fundamental ideas related to the achievements of the Indian civilization, indispensable to the Indian mind, and I cannot imagine that anyone else in India could have been capable of them. So many 'great' people in the last hundred years whom we admire in India are undoubtedly inferior to him, for one reason that they do not have his conceiving power, and his grip on the Indian past, and for another that he could resist all that in the West – in particular, the Western scientific advance – spell-bound them. The deeper strain in

⁷ When I read Archer, at Cambridge, on the modern and Elizabethan dramatists, I understood his remarks on the latter to be those of a shallow progressivist, because I had the standard of Yeats' comment (Autobiographies) on Ibsen. It was a shock to me when I learn from Sri Aurobindo's reply to him in the 'Foundations of Indian Culture' that Archer had written on India. But I have not read him on India, though.

him belongs securely to the Indian past, and his mind is so inward with the past that the vulgar explanations of the social sciences and psychology for religion and religious experience, which would be convincing to the 'great' men, inferior to Sri Aurobindo, as I said, are repelled by him, as a first-rate mind, understanding their origin, their status and their purpose. There is one defective side to his book, though it is not by any means a blemish. The defect of any Indian addressing himself to the European when he talks of India as if he is anxious to convince the European of the merits of the Indian civilization, yes, this defect seemed unavoidable in Sri Aurobindo too. So, he could not maintain the tone equal to his thought. The greatest benefit of the book is that one's confusions about the relation between India and the West are cleared up, and that a feeling based on the content of the past is evoked and kept up.

Catherine Mayo's 'Mother India' is too well known, which I read in parts years ago when I was thinking of doing a short article on the topic of "Attacks on India". The man from whom I borrowed was an Indian who approved of the book, as he stood at the top of the list of list of the baiters of India, what with his education in America, his job in Madras Christian College and his lively sense (his abuse of India is hair-raising) of India's inferiority to the West. She drew a lurid and ghastly picture of India, which is, no doubt, lacerating to the Indian with Indian sensibility, and shocking to a Western reader. One who is incapable of conceptual exercise will be struck by the *truth* of her account of India. But the question with Catherine Mayo and Archer is, whether they have a mind competent to judge a civilization?⁸ If we do not raise this question, and if we take them seriously, we will understand them as having ideas, and invite ourselves to argue with them. When there is no basis for argument, we argue to disprove their 'ideas'. What there is is a crude partisan hostility to India and a journalistic report with ulterior motive. In order to be impressive, they are wild in their opinions and lurid in description. Gandhi's reply to Catherine Mayo, like Sri Aurobindo's to Archer is sound, but it implies, as in the earlier case, a consideration for her 'ideas'.

The basis for their judgment (which we have said comes from an incompetent, partisan mind) is their notion of the superiority of the West to India. It has been, and is still, a powerful notion with many Europeans and Indians. To those who hold by it there is so much authority of real evidence in their favour that they are fixed on it forever. The evidence which gives so much authority to their notion is, of course, there for anybody to see; the dominance of the West over Asia, the scientific advance and bourgeois prosperity of it, the individual in the Western social organization being free from the Indian social fetters. From this position of the West certain easy conclusions are drawn and accepted – that India is far behind the west, and hence, backward, that its civilization is responsible for its backwardness, in the same way as the Western civilization is responsible for its progress, and that the Indians must be inferior in their religion, social organization and individual manners. Out of these conclusions comes the spirit of hostility to India, and the Indians, touched by this spirit worship Europe and America. Let this spirit, whether it manifests itself in a European or Indian or Mr. Naipaul, neither European nor Indian, but a gentleman and a celebrated writer, be known as Westernism. And the stamp of it is

⁸ I do see some point in invoking Lord Macaulay and Kipling here, but it is not necessary.

unmistakable wherever it manifests. For lack of space I cannot discuss here this Westernism at any length. One or two points must be noted at this stage. Comparison between the West and India is inevitable, and on account of it, Westernism is inevitable too. But the question is, is Westernism conceptually valid? No. What is in favour of the West by comparison at one level is found untenable by comparison at another level. The very idea of comparison between the two civilizations does not hold water, though, being historically and conceptually blind, we draw a comparison because we want those things which the West has, and conclude that we are backward and inferior. This topic of comparison between India and the West is a very complex one requiring lot of space, and it has an urgency for the Indians. On another occasion I shall deal with it far more fully but at present I want to point out that, conceptually regarded, the comparison cannot have any validity whatsoever, no matter who makes it if its purpose is to pass a judgment on one of the civilizations. For any judgment condemning Indian civilization by comparing Indian civilization by comparing India with West – though common, and defensible too, according to many Indians and Europeans – there can only be on the basis of feeling, impression, and idea (superficial) but never thought. If there is to be a thought for a comparative judgment, there must be comparable terms which must be independent of feeling, impression and idea which cannot be supported. And comparative terms independent of them are not possible – our mind cannot establish them, for there is so much unique in each civilization, – therefore, strictly speaking, comparative judgment would be wrong-headed. But, comparative judgment will be made, because it can be used for a set purpose. That is the point Mr. Naipaul is as good an illustration of it as any other writer of the same species. We must remember that at the most our mind can only conceive of a thing which is in one civilization, while it is wanting in another, but on this basis no worthwhile concept can be formed. If you still form a concept using one or two details, it is contradicted by what is unique to each. I dare say you can yet compare two civilizations, but you must be, in perceptiveness, intelligence and sensibility, equal to the task. I don't know anybody who is qualified for it. Yes, comparison between India and the West is inevitable which amounts to warring at times for rival claims of being right, and judgment against India too is inevitable. Then, there are two things which follow of necessity. One, to read the Indian past and the Indian style of life in the light of controlling ideas, impression and emotions related to the idolum of the West has become so habitual to us as to be regarded as right and incontestable. It follows, then, that we deny the value of the Indian past and make all kinds of nugatory assertions to this effect. It is not a question of criticizing the Indian past by asking what is good or bad; if that is so, it is welcome, however severe the judgment would be as a result. On the contrary, the point at issue is our very denial of the value of the past itself. Secondly when we are affected by the comparison habitual to us now, I claim that it is difficult for us to have a character, a mind, a style of life, bearing the stamp of the distinction of the Indian civilization, and we become vulgarized and false, having no standard in the use of language, in behaviour, and in forming concepts. We accept, in the sequel, whatever appears to us attractive from the West, displaying a base spirit. In the matter of this comparison, the Indian mind is either partisan to Westernism, or confused, or sentimental and furious when stung by the insults of adverse judgments on India. But, it is so because it is not guided by thought. We could not be guided by it, for impression, idea, etc. have corrupted mind. I therefore intend here to show what it is like to think of the

issue of comparison, but once again it will only be brief, involving some obscurity, unavoidably.

In pointing out the defects of the comparative judgment against India, there is an underlying assumption, which can be expressed as a commonplace, but we must keep the force of its thought distinct from its being degraded to a commonplace. If we consider the passing of a judgment on a civilization, we must remind ourselves that it must be understood and judged in its way. There is, then, room for comparison, but only within defined limits. The emphasis on comparison will overbalance judgment; and in the modern circumstances we habitually lay emphasis on 'comparative merits'. Our guiding assumption is on all hands thrown overboard, whenever comparison is instituted. Going by the assumption we have made, we will argue thus.

A civilization to which one belongs is an absolute, and if one commits a violation of it, one is disfranchised. You will have a mind capable of feeling and thinking only when you are vitally related to it, and through being grown up in it. If you forsake it or change yourself to spite it from whatever motive or justification, you will have no mind, whether you are a world-famous scientist or a writer or a local rationalist. You cannot have a mind on the basis of anything modern – science of philosophy – in negation of the past. If you want to change your species, by all means forsake your religion, your civilization, your past, and your nation too! Some Indians have done it before. Another civilization in relation to its inheritors is likewise an absolute for them. Times are such now that the mind is degenerate in educated men and women, and they compare two absolutes, derive pleasure, and if they are writers, entertain their readers, by the application of superficial ideas on the basis of mere impressions. Comparisons between two civilizations are legitimate, if there is a benefit coming from them, but they are out of court when the intention behind them is to value-judge one or the other in terms of inferiority or superiority for the purpose of flattering one's own vanity. The educated Indians, I repeat, are too easily disposed to condemn India by their image of the west and by their ideas about the backwardness of India. They find themselves attached to the superiority of the West, becoming irritable and nasty about India and Indians. They rely too much on their 'knowledge' and the rightness of their opinions. Even among students, you will find, here and there, one giving oneself airs, thinking that one is superior to others by one's knowledge of English and one's manners which are not Indian. Such a student already admires Europe, condemns India and Indians. The mind with the habits of comparing India with Europe and of judging the former adversely is an unthinking and unhistorical mind, and so, it is without memory animated by the content of the achievements of its civilization. The value of the civilization is forced out by the newspaper ideas and impressions about the west which are flattering to the Indians with education and good positions, who imagine themselves to be above other Indians without them. To be educated now is to put oneself against India and in favour of the West, and hence, modern education is a menace to the Indian civilization. So, our inference is that Mr. Naipaul's filth, or anybody else's, on India, ideologically slanted towards Westernism is generally understood in images contrasting of the backward and the advanced countries and accepted as a valid critique of India. We see how the Indian readers of Mr. Naipaul are prepared under the Western impact to receive his 'judgment' on India.

So far I have argued that comparison between Indian and the west is not possible, except within certain bounds, that comparison can be misused for ideological purposes, or instituted by ignoramuses out of vanity, and that Indians who accept comparison and its sequel, adverse judgment on India are unthinking and unhistorical – of a special species, cut off from the Indian civilization and its past, pervert, superficial, ‘sophisticated’ and ‘progressive’. They plume themselves on being enlightened while in truth they exhibit only conceptual poverty. All this has been the inevitable sequel to the Western impact. We know now how the Indian teacher will fail in arriving at a sensible estimate of Mr.Naipaul. But there are things still beyond his scope making him an incompetent and self-deceived judge of the celebrated author, to which I shall turn presently.

What deserves consideration is first the relation between the journalist, of the type of Mr.Naipaul, in the West and those readers to whom he appeals. The Imperialism of the West has its evangelists, and like the religious evangelists, they are conceptually empty-headed, and are flag-waving journalists. Imperialism makes its low-brow people vain, self-important, vulgar readers of journalistic productions, who would enjoy reading any work of exciting ideas putting their nation above others and flattering to their idea of themselves. If the flag-waving journalist can write dirty things round the theme of the inferiority of other countries, he is sure to have a good run of luck. Mr.Naipaul is just like the flag-waving journalist, though he was not born a European. Mr.Naipaul’s background is that of Europe’s superiority, its scientific and technological achievements, its social organization with the absence of any fetters, the journalism of the English Language. As far as India is considered he is a journalist of Westernism *a outrance*. Not being a European, but a journalist trained in Europe he will have to emphasize his identity with Westernism, for survival. He can attract readers by offering what flatters them, though in the name of factual observations and reasoned inferences. His main design in the two books of his mentioned above is to turn his idea of India to his advantage, flattering both his Western and Indian readers. Therefore, conceptually regarded, he has no right to a hearing from an intelligent reader⁹. But unfortunately, just

⁹ I had an encounter with Mr.Naipaul some thirteen years ago in Madras Christian College. I still remember his uncouth behaviour in the classroom, when I gave my lecture hour at the instance of the authorities. I said to him that I was going to talk on George Eliot, and asked him to choose his topic according to his convenience. HE was seated in the chair, and began saying that he would address the students on ‘Imagination’. But instead of going on with his topic, he put a question to one of the girl students; that is, ‘what is the difference between a Jane Austen’s novel and say, a short story ‘The Illustrated weekly?’ True, she did not answer, but he went on asking the same girl this question for over six times. She was getting nervous. I had to intervene, knowing the special condition of girls in the Indian classroom. Then I stood up and requested him, no doubt, conveying to him my displeasure, to say something on his topic first and then invite questions. He blew up and insulted me. I answered him back, and I was prepared for any eventuality. But at once he left the room in a fit of distemper and walked out on the waiting hosts – Dr.Chandran Devanesan and his wife, and the fashionable set called ‘Motivators’.

For myself I thought he was presumptuous. He talked in a manner as if he could show off to his advantage and get away with it. Of course I had no idea of him before, since I had not read any of his books. HE left us in no doubt that he behaved like a crud. My impression of him, including his delvering (public school imitation of English accent) with an author’s gesturing, still remains that he was not cut out to be a better human being. To me he did not look like an author with the mind of knowledge, creative intelligence, and

as Lionel Trilling is a great critic for the Indian reader, Mr.Naipaul's blague on the Indian civilization would be a substance of profound thought with irresistible appeal to him. If we can ask two questions, we can see through his journalistic bluff. What urge has he for dealing with India as he does? and what kind of readers does he attract? We don't ask them but we are impressed by his writing as he administers insult upon insult to India, and as I have shown, we, of the modern India, think it deserved them. In fact there are many educated Indians, who are morbid haters of India, formed and set on the gospel of Westernism, in need of answers to their complaints against India, and Mr.Naipaul's writing serves this need to the full.

What urge has he, let us ask once again, for writing and judging on India as he does? My finding is that Mr.Naipaul is incapable of any feeling or thought which has a content of a civilization, either European or Indian. He knows English enviably, and writes successfully, but that is a matter of journalism. What is to the point here is that he knows neither Sanskrit nor any other Indian language, and he cannot, therefore, possess the inwardness of the Indian past. But, he might have learnt from his parents in Trinidad enough of Indian life to condemn India. What was character shaping in him was his background similar to that of *evolue* since he could not live an Indian life and since he had been exposed to Westernism from his school days. Settled in England as a writer, he would have nothing deeper than Westernism to draw upon. One or two things deserve notice here. He has to be a writer to the English readers to whom he cannot offer anything worthwhile, and naturally identity with Westernism alone can suit him best. But he has another side; he is a Trinidad Indian, knowing something of India, and therefore as a writer, I mean journalist, he is prompted to make India an object of his exercise. Now Westernism goes down with one class of English readers, and with many English-speaking Indians whose high priest is Mr.Nirad Choudary with weapons of bronze or iron brandishing his hatred of India. This Trinidad writer of Indian origins, brought up in Westernism and having learnt his trade in journalism writes much better than Mr.Nirad Choudary, who is something like a high school teacher turned atheist adopting perverse views, issuing challenges with those weapons I mentioned above, and expressing in bold-face English and quaint phrases from other European languages, including Latin and Greek, to frighten Indians by condemning India and flatter the British by admiring their institutions. Either in condemning India or in admiring British institutions there is no sense in Mr.Nirad Choudary's writing. If you read carefully these writers of westernism (here we must know that Mr.Ved Mehta and Mr.Dom Moraes are of the same tribe, and stand below Mr.Naipaul but above Mr.Nirad Choudary, I mean, not in their age but in rank), there is about their writing an ideological aspect, very sinister, and, of course, it is one of the reasons for their success. But the churlishness of their attacking India or describing it in lurid pictures does, no doubt, pass off as criticism of India (having ideas), because it has the attraction of presumption and assertiveness. Any worthwhile criticism against India is welcome. Let it be as unfavourable as its content requires it to be. But it must satisfy two conditions, if it is to help us: one, it must arise from the urge for the Indian civilization and its past; two, it must be from a mind inward with the true style of Indian life. Mr.Naipaul's 'criticism' of India does not fulfill these

perceptiveness and with manners which go with such a mind, but like an intimidating salesman. And he has the temper of the fascist camp-follower.

two conditions, but, as in the case of other writers of Westernism, Indian or non-Indian or expatriate, it agrees with the interests of a journalist who ransacked India for materials, it seems to me, suited to his readers.

Like the evangelists of imperialism, William Archer and Catherine Mayo, Mr. Naipaul is in essence an evangelist of Westernism, of which the ideological characteristics are the West being superior for its scientific and technological progress, the Western social organization allowing the individual maximum personal freedom, and the Western affluence and liberalism with its far higher standards of living, which other nations could not achieve for being poorer, contemptible civilizations. Westernism is the only identity he can lay claim to, being neither Indian nor European. But it is a Westernism, which for historical reasons, is an easy bait for any educated Indian or Asian. But think of what it excludes. It excludes religion, the achievements of the past and the sensibility related to them, and it abhors revolutionary thought. We get a sense of tragic fall for the human mind when it excludes values, but sets up in their place standards of observation and analysis. Its medium of expression is journalistic and it is averse to conceptual scrutiny. A conceptually poor mind will always be drawn toward Westernism, because in it the force of ideas, impressions, 'facts' and observations-analysis-inference logic is irresistible. The mind drawn towards it thinks of only higher standards of living, ignoring self-blindly all else. The categories of Westernism are ideological and partisan, and self-flattering, so that its evangelist can divide civilizations either into good or bad or into progressive or decaying and can take sides to his advantage. The bourgeois spirit in India or Asia enslaves the mind to these categories, with the result that the more violently an attack is launched on its civilization and past, the more attractive it becomes to one with modern education. Surely, Westernism is the greatest menace India has suffered from its history. In dwelling at length on Mr. Naipaul as an evangelist of westernism I have at heart the purpose of exposing the Indian teacher's mind and its sad limitations, because to be impressed by this evangelist is to have a mind with no possibility of intelligence and conceiving power, and I have taken in hand this exposure to enable ourselves to come to close quarters with the contemporary India and its spirit. Very briefly now we shall examine Mr. Naipaul's writing and its import to us.

As I said earlier, it would not be the right thing to deal with Mr. Naipaul's ideas. Even if he has ideas they would be worthless, because they have not a strong point of relation to the achievements of the past of any civilization and to the sensibility related to them. Take the following difference he makes between the Indians and Europeans in favour of the latter, and it seems to me it is a difference in favour of himself too.

"The child-like perception of reality that results does not imply childishness – Gandhi proves the opposite. But it does suggest that Indians are immersed in their experiences in a way that Western people can seldom be. It is less easy for Indians to withdraw and analyze. The difference between the Indian and the Western ways of perceiving comes out most clearly in the sex act. Western man can describe the sex act; even at the moment of orgasm he can observe himself. Kakar (a Delhi psychiatrist) says that his Indian

patients, men and women, do not have this gift, cannot describe the sex act, are capable only of saying 'It happened'."

The first sentence is meaningless and vicious; nothing goes before to show that it says: 'results' is the most inappropriate verb for its subject. Note carefully 'The childlike perception does not imply childishness.' The sentence will be somewhat better without 'that results'. Gandhi proves the opposite of both 'childishness as well as child like quality of perception? Imagine what the first part of the sentence means and how it applies to Gandhi; can you see any sense there? To go on like this would be class room work, but I am sure that my readers can perceive that the sentence is not only not idiomatic, but also senseless as, no distinct and forceful ideas is registered, if you take the parts separately and look for units of sense combined into a whole - an idea.

The whole passage is woolly and wild, redolent of the language of shockers. The human mind must be ashamed of such a distinction being made between two kinds of people, and of one sort being held up while the other is scorned on this score. To cite passages like this would be tedious, but one must know that nowhere else is he better; take this again:

"And the heritage has oppressed: Hinduism has not been good enough for the millions....."

The rhetoric and impudence swells like froth. But, which religion, dear Mr.Naipaul, has been good enough for the millions? Is 'being good enough' a standard to judge religions? Mr.Naipaul now raves, but his readers imagine him to be an oracle.

"The past can now be possessed only by enquiry and scholarship, by intellectual rather than spiritual discipline. The past has to be seen to be dead; or the past will kill".

Here is the journalist of Westernism having no claim of an identity with the Indian or European past. He too talks of the past elsewhere, but emptily without what he calls 'intellectual inquiry and scholarship'. Oh! Claptrap, this ware is now in demand! The sentiment in the passage against the past has a tremendous appeal to a shallow mind, that is, to the educated Indians attracted towards Westernism.

Let us take one or two passages from his earlier book and see if he was then a better author. For many authors decadence sets in later, and following it they talk rot. If Mr.Naipaul is like these, there can be a good excuse for a kid-glove treatment of this work. Let us not be in a hurry to rejudge him, till the evidence provides us with an idea how to estimate him.

"With the British, continuity was broken. And perhaps the British are responsible for this Indian artistic failure, which is part of general Indian bewilderment, in the way the Spaniard were responsible for the stupefaction of the Mexicans and the Peruvians. It was a clash between a positive

principle and a negative; and nothing more negative can be imagined than in eighteenth century of a static Islam and a decadent Hinduism. In any clash between post Renaissance Europe and India, India was bound to lose”.

It is nothing more than a journalistic mumble. But note the positive principle being identified with the British (whom he is flattering) in contrast with the conjunction of static Islam and decadent Hinduism! The only compliment he deserves is that he knows his trade well. In a foot-note, he says, I think, in order to appear scholarly, that had he read Camus’s ‘The Rebel’ earlier, he might have used his (Camus’s) terminology like ‘capable of rebellion’, instead of his own. Let us further see how he deals with India; he says,

“India, it seems, will never cease to require the arbitration of a conqueror. A people with a sense of history might have ordered matters differently.”

And he goes on to say, still more penetratingly,

“The Taj Mahal is exquisite. Transported slab by slab to the United States and re-created, it might be wholly admirable.”

This guff is intolerable, and he is making an ass of himself. It seems obvious to me that Mr.Naipaul was rotten much earlier than I thought he was. If you are not a reader of good writing, with your head full of newspaper ideas and with zeal for progressive measure, looking after yourself, Mr.Naipaul strikes you as a serious writer. Let us see how he himself gives the impression of being a serious author.

When he writes like this,

“The medieval mind, which saw only continuity, seemed so unassailable. It existed in a world which, with all its ups and downs, remained harmoniously ordered and would be taken for granted. It had not developed a sense of history, which is a sense of loss, it had developed no true sense of beauty, which is a gift of assessment.”

because he appeared to dwell on serious things, he appears to us profound. The air of saying something deep here takes us in. But we are too shabbily educated (trained) to notice his vacuity. The turn of sentences is meretricious and their ‘sense’ is more difficult to catch than the easier sentences; for instance, ‘The sense of history is a sense of loss’ which has no content, but which is not easy to know what it seems to say. That is, either you see it has no content or you are impressed by its ‘sense’. The point is that we are far more likely to be impressed by its ‘sense’ (the journalistic trope is a little overwhelming) which has a surprise for us (the effect of “sense of.....”) than to find out its emptiness. No remark on history can be meaningful unless history suggests it.

I wonder if there is a single sentence in the two books under discussion with a reference which is conceptually valid. There is a good deal of scenery description to focus our

attention on India's inferiority. He chooses his details, his words, to insult India and I have already pointed out that his design must be ideological. True to his type he wrote these two books on India, in which you never find yourself contemplating an insight or a feeling or thought from the author, carrying you to his deeper resources. When Mr. Naipaul talks of India, he is presumptuous, impudent, meretricious and empty; is he the same when comments on Britain? Let us close with an example of his commentary on Britain.

“In the beginning of this period we can see the swiftness of change, from stage-coach to railway, from the essays of Hazlitt to those of Macaulay, from ‘Pickwick papers’ to ‘Our Mutual friend.’ In painting it is like a second springtime. Constable discovering the sky, Bomington discovering the glory of light, of sand and sea; youth and delight that can communicate to us even today. It is a period of newness and self-discovery. Dickens discovering England, London discovering the novel; newness even in Keats and Shelley. It is a period of vigour and expectation. And then abruptly, there come fulfillment and middle age. The process of self-discovery is over, the English national myth appears, complete. The reasons are well known; the narcissism was justifiable. But with this there was loss. A way of looking was weakened. What was English was settled; by this the world was to be assessed, and in the travel-writing of the century we can observe a progressive deterioration, from Darwin (1832) to Trollope (1859) to Kingsley (1870) to Froude (1887). More and more these writers are reporting not on themselves but on their Englishness.”

Read it over again, and tell me if he talks sense, if he *can* talk sense. About the period and its achievements he is writing, he says nothing worthwhile. What he actually says is really shameful. It is unmistakably the turn of journalism with its knowing gestures and meretricious tropes. I shall not run over each sentence and demonstrate the absence of sense. Surely what can be greater offence against expression than to say ‘newness even in Keats and Shelley’, and ‘a way of looking was weakened’. No word which is here used to represent or suggest a characteristic of the period had any reference and content; but it is a praise-word for Britain, carrying self-importance and appeal. There is every chance that a low-brow reader would be impressed by such writing, and if it is not so, an evangelist of Westernism as Mr. Naipaul could not have been in existence. At the same time he cannot say anything on Indian without insulting it, without the superior stance of being qualified to judge the Indian civilization. Note how he mentions Kalidasa with indifference as so-and-so, regarded as a great dramatist whose ‘Sakuntala’ according to him, reads (in translation) as a romance of recognitions! To continue discussing Mr. Naipaul would be a torture to us, and I admit that my study of him is too long for the conclusion it warrants. Perhaps, I will be excused if the reader knows that I have in view the menace of his journalism acclaimed by the Indian teacher who is too ill-trained and ill-formed, like any educated Indian, for making a true appraisal of the type of Mr. Naipaul's writings. This type of writing, striking us as being forceful with ideas, turns up frequently and we will have more of it in the future. I felt, in the circumstances obvious to the reader now, the necessity of dealing with him rather than the point of

showing him up. He could have easily been bypassed if there had been a force of intelligence condemning him as another worthless pulp-writer, and dismissing him as such by a sense of Lawrence's magnificent achievement and by his concept of western civilization and its possibilities for living. I felt the call of putting Mr. Naipaul in his place as a type author and dismissing him; but if what I set against him to convince ourselves that he has not claim to a standing as an author is an open matter, I have, however, no need to recognize him as a worthwhile writer deserving a discussion of his merits and demerits. Mr. Naipaul is a globe-trotter carrying English journalism with him, like a camera, and taking snap-shots for the sake of appealing to corrupt taste. In this venture, success is crucial and it depends upon the demand created.