

ISSN 0976-8165

The Criterion



The Criterion

An International Journal in English

Bi - Monthly Refereed & Indexed Open Access eJournal

April 2014 Vol. 5, Issue- 2

5th Year of Open Access

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Islam : V. S. Naipaul's Politics

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Naipaul's entirely negative understanding of India's Islamic history has its roots in the mainstream imperial historiography of Victorian Britain.

(William Dalrymple)

This paper tries to analyze V. S. Naipaul's politics and his attitude towards Islam and India's Islamic history. It will try to show that Naipaul's treatment of Islam far from being objective is based on Orientalist historiographies of the Victorian England. It has been argued that Naipaul's attitude to India's Islamic history is based on preconceptions and presumptions derived from the history written by the historians of the Raj and conditioned by his sympathies towards BJP and the Hindutva ideology of RSS. This paper looks at Naipaul's treatment of the Third World and the Muslim countries in order to render bare the ideology that underpins his engagement with Islam and India's Islamic history.

V. S. Naipaul is one of the greatest living writers of English literature whose crisp, polished and easy flowing prose has attracted attention of readers very often. He has become one of the trend setters of prose writing. Even those who feel enraged by Naipaul's statements about Africa, Indian subcontinent and Islamic world does accept and give him due credit for his qualities and characteristics as a writer of prose. Indeed, he is one of the great living prose writers in the world of imaginative literature. His keen observatory power, photographic description of the things, persons, places and events has been cited during Nobel Prize ceremony of 2001 when Naipaul received much coveted and long awaited prestigious award. The Swedish academy maintained that the prize has been awarded to him purely on literary grounds and artistic merits. The academy lauded Naipaul for the "perceptive narrative and incorruptible scrutiny" he brings to his subjects and denied that they had considered anything but literary merits in awarding the prize. But looking at the provocative and often derogatory views and statements made by Naipaul about third world countries in general and about Muslim world in particular, and keeping in view the context in which Nobel prize has been awarded to him, many critics and academicians claim, and rightly so, that Naipaul has "attacked Islam and so won this year's Nobel prize for literature" (Judith Gabriel: 2001). Meena Kandasamy writes that it is in recognition of his anti-Islamic and anti-third world propaganda that Naipaul has received the prestigious Nobel. The award has been seen as another round from the Anglo-American arsenal directed at Arabs and Muslims, in a backlash emanating from the September 11 attacks but harkening back to centuries-old vitriol against Islam. Similarly, the Islamic, Educational, scientific and Cultural Organization reacted against awarding Nobel to Naipaul and accused him of "willfully distorting realities and facts of religion, history and civilization, placing him in the ranks of biased writers" (Judith Gabriel: 2001). Many writers including Derek Walcott, Nissim Ezekiel, Edward Said, William Dalrymple, Ejaz Ahmad and others have also resented Naipaul's views about third world and Islam, and have accused him of "taking orders from the Raj" (Derek Walcott's poem 'The Mongoose').

V s Naipaul has dealt with a range of subjects and themes, both in his fictional and non-fictional works. The subjects range from caste, community, and race to larger issues of identity- social, political, economic, religious and cultural. But his main preoccupation in both fictional and, mainly, in his non-fictional travel works has been the postcolonial societies and Islam. *The killings in Trinidad, the Loss of Eldorado (1969), The Overcrowded*

Baracoon (1972), *The Middle Passage* (1962), deal with his place of birth and Africa, and give vent to his Orientalist prejudices in his statements like “history is built around achievement and creation; and nothing was created in the West Indies”(Naipaul: 1962). About Trinidad Naipaul says “I knew Trinidad to be unimportant, uncreative and cynical”. He concludes with Orientalist triumph that the third world countries “are half-made societies doomed to remain half-made” and “Africa has no future”. In *A Bend in the River* (1979) Naipaul expresses his racist attitude towards slaves when he says, “Slave peoples are physically wretched, half-men in everything except in their capacity to breed the next generation”. He does not realize that they were not slaves but were made to enter into slavehood forcefully by Naipaul’s “universal civilization”, not because its values were universal but by force. They are half-men in everything- thus Naipaul denies them even the basic humanity. Similar kind of jaundiced attitudes are reiterated in his Indian trilogy: *India: A Million Mutinies Now* (1990); *India: A Wounded Civilization* (1977); and *An Area of Darkness* (1964). Indian is an “area of darkness’ to which he travelled in 1962. But here he finds nothing other than what he has already known or read: “world’s largest slum” (Naipaul: 126,1964). In India he sees nothing except “Indians defecate everywhere. They defecate, mostly, besides the railway tracks” (Naipaul:70 ,1964). The scorn with which he speaks about poor people of India is apparent when he finds “Indian sleepers on an Indian railway station” (Naipaul: 84,1964). At another place in *An Area of Darkness* Naipaul writes that the Indian institutes are the products of British Empire. He fails to recognize and accept the stark reality that the colonial rule of British Empire did not only drain the natural resources and wealth of India but it even introduced western institutions not for Indians but for their own benefit so that ruling India would be easy. Lord Macaulay’s “The Minutes on Education” is an important instance that shows the malicious nature of the plot that was hatched by British government to destroy the indigenous languages, culture, history, and literature on the one hand, and, on the other, to introduce institutions and education that would have served their own purpose and policies. But it is an irony that what the British introduced in Indian and elsewhere to “produce a class of clerks”, Indians in blood and color but English in thought and values, helped to whiten the revolt against the empire and finally brought about its demise. Similarly, in *India: A Wounded Civilization* Naipaul calls India a wounded civilization-wounded by Muslim invasions. Without any regards for historical facts and figures, Naipaul’s anti-Islamic bias makes him conclude that Islam has wounded Indian civilization. This distortion of reality and historical facts will be dealt with in the next parts of the chapter. Here it suffices to say what Mena Kandasamy has said about Naipaul: “Sir Vidyadhar Surajprasad Naipaul has spat on us. Spat too much on India that we are actually stinking from his spitting expeditions” (Meena Kandasamy, 2010). She says that his disgust for the deprived is clear and with all his works and interviews, there is one thing Naipaul has established. He is a casteist, communalist and a racist. Like someone said of him: a colonial among colonials. Another theme that runs parallel to his other preoccupations throughout his travel writings on India, Africa and Muslim world is his belief that the Third World countries will forever consume, they will never create. Naipaul deals with this theme to his satisfaction in *Among the Believers* and *Beyond Belief*. There he develops his Orientalist idea of “universal civilization” and calls western civilization as “our universal civilization” (Naipaul: 192,1999). He fails to recognize what Samuel Huntington writes in his work on post-Cold War world, *The Clash of Civilizations and The Remaking World Order* (1996) (The main thesis of the book, ‘clash of civilizations’, is highly reductive and exclusive and needs to be countered at all levels. Huntington has taken this thesis from Bernard Lewis and this thesis has rightly been condemned and critiqued by great scholars like Edward Said and Noam Chomsky). The book maintains that in the postcolonial world the economic, military, social and political power of once colonized countries is rising with tremendous speed and

simultaneously the relative power of the western world is decreasing in all respects. The book records with detailed statistical data the growth, in the Western world, of the consumption of things created and manufactured in countries like Japan, china, India, Korea , Malaysia and others. Although the decrease in Western power is slow and western world still has a important say in the world, Huntington makes it clear that the relative decrease in power of west is a sure fact and is apparent in the emphasis given by the Third World countries and the Islamic world to their cultures and other aspects and values of their civilization.

Naipaul has created a storm in the Muslim intellectual and academic world by his provocative and what writers such as William Dalrymple, Edward said and others call his “jaundiced” “anti-Islamic views”. He has been severely criticized for his treatment of Islam and Islamic history. Even those who call him the greatest writer of English prose doubt his knowledge of historical facts. “Naipaul’s credentials as a historian, however, are less secure”, writes Dalrymple in “Trapped in the Ruins” (2004). He has been charged of distorting historical facts and religious beliefs of Islam. Fundamentalist brand of Islam and Islam in general has been his preoccupation throughout his literary career. He has dropped statements about Islam here and there in his Indian trilogy. But it is in *Among the Believers* and *Beyond Belief* that he dealt with Islam thoroughly, and provided his criticism of fundamentalism in particular and Islam, a religious faith, in general. Although one cannot but give credit to Naipaul for his insightful exploration of fundamentalism that has swept across the world from past two decades, his criticism of Islam and India’s Islamic history is jaundiced based on the preconceptions and presuppositions that have been present in the western world since the crusades and were perpetuated in great detail by Orientalists in the nineteenth century. According to Dalrymple, Naipaul’s criticism of Islam and his “entirely negative understanding of India’s Islamic history has its roots firmly in the mainstream imperial historiography of Victorian Britain” (Dalrymple: 2004). Naipaul’s social and political commentary on the third world has been seen as reflecting what the western academics wanted from him and “the politics of Naipaul” has thus earned him the title “a colonial among the colonials” (Meena Kandasamy). His negative image of Islam becomes clear to us when we put that in the context of his commitment to BJP and to the Hindutv ideology of Rastriya Samsawka Sang. Not only the mainstream historiography of Victorian Britain but also his allegiance to anti- Islamic Hindu chauvinistic ideology and political thought of Sangh Parivar has played a tremendously important role in forming and expressing the negative views about Islam. His allegiance to Sangh Parivar and its ideology is confirmed beyond doubt by his visit to “the office of India’s ruling Hindu nationalist party, the Bartya Janata Party, and gave what many in the Indian press took to be a pre-election endorsement not just of the party but of the entire far right-wing revivalist program”(Dalrymple: 2004). He had maintained that India was surging forward under the Hindutva ideology represented and upheld by the political wing, BPP, of the Sangh Parivar. He had “declared himself happy” at having being “appropriated” by the party (khadmeul Islam: 2004). BJP and the entire Sangh Parivar along with its lesser cultural wings, has always been seen expressing and propagating anti- Islamic views. It has become notorious not only in India but throughout the world for its prejudice against anything Muslim. Sangh Parivar’s main ideology is that India is basically a Hindu nation; the invasions of India by Muslim rulers have been a long period of destruction and plunder, and therefore the right place for Muslims is either in Pakistan or in the grave. The demolition of the Baburi Masjid in December 1992 and the Gujarat pogrom of Muslims in 2002 are the nightmarish expressions of Sangh Parivar’s rage and hatred of Muslims and Islam. BJP had played the Ram factor to win elections, and this, according to A G Noorani, “L K Advani has acknowledged with unconcealed pride the dividends which this plank in election campaign yielded to the BJP” (Noorani: 6-7,2000). Naipaul’s happy appropriation to such a party and ideology is best explicit in his quote about destruction of Babura Masjid:

“Ayodya is a passion. Any passion is to be encouraged. Passion leads to creativity”. This endorsement of the act of vandalism and barbarity undertaken by a Hindu fundamentalist group leaves one in no doubt that Naipaul’s understanding of Islam and Indian Islamic history is based on the prejudiced and biased preconceptions perpetuated by Sangh Parivar which, in its rage against Islam, even changed the history text books of government schools to present its own Hindu version of Indian history.

Naipaul has always been accused of “distortion of history” in the Sangh Parivar style “to produce a saffron history with a sacred thread” (Kandasamy, 2010). Meena calls Naipaul a “highly prejudiced Hindutva torchbearer” who, in his travel works on India and the Muslim world, is constructing Sangh Parivar’s version of history, thereby willfully distorting facts and figures. For example to understand the Brahmanic concept of fasting, Naipaul recommends to perceive historically the “Indian austerity”. He argues that in the ancient days the Brahman priestly caste was supported by the Hindu temples. Because of Islamic invasions the temples became poorer and the Brahman priests were caught in a web of poverty. So they began to fast often and this concept was respected. This is Naipaul’s version of self denial. But the Manusmriti, an ancient Brahmanic code, suggests fasting as a penance for Brahmins when they commit sins. This law-book was composed even before the birth of Christ, not to talk of Prophet Mohammad. There were no Islamic invasions and conversions at that time. To blame the Brahmanic concept of fasting on Islamic invasions is a “highly crooked way of interpreting and representing history” (Kandasamy, 2010). Painting the Mugal period in India as the dark age where the Brahmins and Hindus suffered is more in tune with Hindutva propaganda than an intellectual’s justified probe into the aspects of Hindu asceticism. Naipaul’s saffron hued tunnel vision again comes alive from his comments in an interview on Hindu militancy and India’s secularity:

“To say that India has a secular character is being historically unsound. Dangerous or not, Hindu militancy is a corrective to the history I have been talking about. It is a creative force and will be so. Islam cannot reconcile with it”. (*Outlook*, November 15, 1999)

This is in absolute sync with the ideology of Sangh Parivar and an endorsement of their anti-secular, anti-Islamic, anti- intellectual propaganda and tendencies. India was never secular; India was always Hindu; India, from the very beginning was saffron. The vandalizing and destructive activities of Hindu fundamentalists are creative and therefore must be appreciated. The demolition of Baburi Masjid and the horrific anti-Muslim pogroms that followed Ayodya, when BJP mobs went on the rampage across India and Muslims were hunted down by armed thugs, burned alive in their homes, scalded by acid bombs, or knifed in the streets, is according to Naipaul a passion, a creative force. This endorsement and license given to the Hindu fanatics by a Nobel laureate reveals a dangerous contradiction in him—he endorses in Hindutva ideologues what he admonishes and condemns in Muslims. His criticism and backlash at the fundamentalist brand of Islam has been treated as a deep insight into the Muslim world. Writers writing on Islamic fundamentalism quote him extensively. Yet here he is endorsing the killing of hundreds and thousands of innocents in the name of ideology that disguises the political interests of the Sangh Parivar. This is a serious intellectual fault in a Nobel laureate who always entertains anti-Islamic views. By denying secular nature to India, Naipaul is excluding all and everything non-Hindu from India, thereby committing a blunder which all the fundamentalist groups of various religions commit. Naipaul, thus, becomes the member of one of the fundamentalist organizations of the world. Fundamentalist belonging to one fundamentalist group [Hindu] castigating and demonizing the members of other fundamentalist group [Muslim]. This is the ideological politics in which Naipaul revels in, and this comes as no surprise to us when we find Hindutva outfits buttressing their anti-Islamic points with chunky Naipaul quotes.

Naipaul's analysis and exploration of Muslim countries and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism is based on a thesis presented in the Prologue to *Beyond Belief*. The "element of neurosis and nihilism" (Naipaul: xi, 1999), which, according to Naipaul, characterizes the "irrational behavior" of Muslims in Iran, Pakistan, Indonesia and Malaysia, rather in the whole non-Arab Islamic world, is because:

"Everyone not an Arab who is Muslim is a convert. Islam is not simply a matter of conscience or private belief. It makes imperial demand. A convert's world view alters. His holy places are in Arab lands; his sacred language is Arabic. His idea of history alters. He rejects his own; he becomes, whether he likes or not, a part of Arab history" (Naipaul: xi, 1999).

This is Naipaul's peculiar thesis to explain why "these countries can be easily set on the boil" (Naipaul: xi, 1999). To Naipaul's utter dismay this thesis is faulty in its very base and, therefore, the conclusions found on it are highly illogical. The idea that the non-Arab Muslims are converts presupposes a wrong conception that Arabs are not converts. It maintains unreasonably that Arabs were Muslims from their very beginnings. Naipaul seems to say that as far back as we can go in history Arabs were Muslims and Islam was their religion. This Naipaulean thesis reveals how less knowledge Naipaul has about the origin and history of Islam. Naipaul does not know that Arabs were generally polytheists at the time of Prophet Mohammad, and in order to become Muslims, necessarily, converted. History reveals that at the time of Prophet Mohammad there were three hundred and sixty idols inside the Kabba, the grand mosque of Mecca, and Arabs used to worship them. When Prophet started propagating Islam, one by one the polytheist Arabs began to come within the fold of Islam. To become Muslims they were required to abandon their idol worship and thus convert. Perhaps Naipaul dismisses this factor "because he believes that the sacred places of Arabs are in their own lands?" (Wendy O'Shean Meddour: 68). Assuming that this is Naipaul's reasoning, it would follow that European and American Christians and Jews suffer from a similar "neurosis" because they too are "converts" and their sacred places are abroad in Jerusalem. However, it is clear that Naipaul regards western Christians and Jews as mentally sound. The logic behind his argument is impossible to follow. Eqbal Ahmad asks:

"Who is not a convert? By Naipaul's definition if Iranians are converted Muslims, then Americans are converted Christians, Japanese are converted Buddhists and the Chinese, large numbers of them, are converted Buddhists as well. Everybody is converted because at the beginning every religion had only few followers. Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, all prophetic religions developed through conversion. In that sense, his organizing thesis should not exclude anyone" (Eqbal Ahmad: 9-10, 1999).

One doubts whether Naipaul will have the gumption to say that the people belonging to "our universal civilization" suffer from "neurosis" because they are "converts" and still be celebrated as the greatest living writer of England. Will Naipaul write that the Christian converts have to stamp out their history and only look up to the history of the land of Jesus? Jesus Christ was born in the Arab world and therefore by origin Christianity is an Arab religion. Therefore the holy places of the Christians are in the Arab world and their history is Arab history. The Christians have to abandon their own history and associate themselves with Arab history. This is the conclusion which one gets by applying Naipaul's thesis to the religion of "our universal civilization". I doubt whether Naipaul would have become a Nobel Laureate had he applied his reasoning about Muslim "converts" to other religions.

From *An Area of Darkness* through *India: A Wounded Civilization* to *Among the Believers* the rule of Muslims in India has always been his preoccupation. He has dealt with it throughout his literary career and has attempted to resurrect what according to him is the "correct history" of Sind and Muslim India. As a result, in a chapter "Killing History" in *Among the Believers* Naipaul talks about *Chachnama*, a book which was written five hundred

years after the conquest of Sind by Muslim rulers, which, he says, provides the correct version of the history. He refers to *Chachnama* and maintains that “Hijab has issued precise instructions for this first victory: the residents of Debal are not to be spared. The Arab army has to slaughter for three days: this is what Bin Quasim tells the people of Debal” (Naipaul: 138, 1987). This is the version of history which Naipaul believes in. It is presented as a story of slaughter and barbarity. Muslim soldiers killing people indiscriminately for days together. Meena Kandasamy writes that Naipaul indulges in selective history to substantiate his anti-Islamic bias. She writes that Naipaul has plainly not mentioned the woes of the oppressed caste majorities during these periods of Brahmin tyranny. Or the glaring truth that the Buddhist majority and oppressed castes converted willingly to Islam to escape their sufferings. Or that Mohammad Bin Qasim invaded Sind to release Muslim women who were held hostage in a captured ship. Even this has been chronicled in *Chachnama*. T. N. Madan in *Modern Myths, Locked Minds* (2009) also reiterates the same fact that Mohammad Bin Qasim invaded Sind because the king of Sind denied Qasim’s request to protect ships of Arab traders from pirates. But Naipaul’s account of *Chachnama* makes no mention of it. Meena rejects Naipaul’s version of history that people were forced to become Muslims. Rather, she argues that the people were former untouchable and shudras who converted to Islam to escape the tyranny of the caste system and because they wanted to realize their humanity which was denied to them by the Brahminical social setup. To substantiate her view that it was because of the oppressive nature of Brahminical social structure that compelled people to embrace Islam, Kandasamy refers to an unprecedented incident that took place some three decades back in the village of Meenakshipram in Tamil Nadu. The whole village converted to Islam and renamed itself Rahmat Nagar. Why such a mass conversion? There were no Islamic conquests. No Babar, no ‘cruel’ Mohammad Bin Qasim. What forced this unprecedented conversion? “Oppression under Hinduism. Untouchability. A search for respectability” (Kandasamy, 2010) that compelled people to enter into the fold of Islam.

Naipaul’s treatment of Muslim rule in India is perfectly compatible with the Hindu right wing revisionists who present Muslim rule as a long and dark night of ignorance and destruction. The Muslim period was a “force looting the temples of Hindustan and imposing the faith upon the infidel” (Naipaul: 247, 1999). Naipaul’s statements such as his remarks that the first Mughal emperor Babur’s invasion of India “left a deep wound” are consistent with the ideas he has been propagating for many years now. In 1998, in an interview to *the Hindu* newspaper, he said:

“I think when you see so many Hindu temples of 10th century or earlier disfigured, defaced, you realize that something terrible happened. I feel that the civilization of that closed world was mortally wounded by those invasions------. The old world is destroyed. That has to be understood. Ancient Hindu India was destroyed” (*The Hindu*: 1998).

This line of thought has been consistent in Naipaul from *An Area of Darkness* (1964) to the present period of his literary career. In *India: A Wounded Civilization* (1975) he surveys the shattered ruins of the great medieval Hindu capital of Vijayanagar and goes on to lament the fall of this “great center of Hindu civilization”, then one of the greatest cities of the world. It was pillaged in 1565 “by an alliance of Muslim principalities and the work of destruction took five months; some people say a year” (Naipaul: 77, 1975). According to Naipaul “Vijayanagar was committed from the start to the preservation of a Hinduism that had already been violated----”(Naipaul: 79, 1975), and therefore it had failed to develop military means to challenge the aggressive Muslim sultanates that surrounded it.

For Naipaul the fall of Vijayanagar is the paradigmatic wound on the psyche of India, part of a long series of failures that he believes still bruises the country’s self-confidence. The wound was created by a fatal combination of Islamic aggression and Hindu weakness. Throughout his *oeuvre* Naipaul talks about Vijayanagar as the empire of Hinduism that was

later “defeated and physically laid waste by a combination of Muslim rulers; almost at the same time, in the north, the Mogul power was entering its time of glory” (Naipaul: 143, 1978). This is Naipaul’s account of India’s Islamic history: a tale of destruction and devastation. However, “Naipaul’s entirely negative understanding of India’s Islamic history has its roots firmly in the mainstream imperial historiography of Victorian Britain” (Dalrymple: 2004). The Muslim invasions of India tended to be seen by the historians of the Raj as a long brutal sequence of pillage in stark contrast- so 19th century British historians liked to believe- to the law and order selflessly brought about by their own “civilizing mission.” Similarly, art historian Catherine B Asher and the historian Cynthia Talbot in their book, *India Before Europe* document the same views. The authors record that it were the British scholars who, in their antipathy to Muslims, said that Asian society was fundamentally divided along religious lines and that Muslim rulers were harsh to non-Muslim subjects. This conviction was not only expressed in British modes of thinking about South Asia’s people but also in their politics toward them. It were the British machinations that lead the Indian nationalists and later Sangh Parivar to cast the Muslims of India’s past as similar to the colonial British in being alien invaders and oppressors. Naipaul has written “finally through the unlikely British presence in India, a Hindu India had grown again, more complete and unified than any India in the past” (Naipaul: 143,1978). Again, Naipaul maintains that the “British period -----was a time of regeneration”. Such and other views of Naipaul about the ‘destructive’ rule of Muslims and the regeneration of Hindus under colonialism are at best seen as the distortion of history. *India Before Europe* documents that the British scholars presented the rulers of Vijayanagar “not as kings who promoted a cosmopolitan culture that valued Islamicate traditions, but rather as the champions of Hinduism against predatory Muslims” simply to give credence to their own rule and pit Hindus against Muslims to make their own task easy. This distortion of history, earlier by the British historians and later after independence by Sangh Parivar, has served to obscure the rich composite culture of south Asia which started to come into being after 1200 and fully matured during the Mugal era. A G Noorani in his review, “Story of Synthesis”, of the book *India Before Europe*, writes that the book is the study of Indian history and culture from 1200 to 1750 and it reveals the fruitful cross-cultural interaction between Islamic and Hindu civilization. Noorani writes:

“Muslim scholars, mystics and institutions enriched the already pluralistic human landscape of south Asia and, over time, a composite culture developed that drew on both the Indic and Perso- Islamic tradition” (Noorani: 2009].

The book does not accept the label Muslim that was applied to the period 1200-1750 in histories of south Asia written during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The authors object to the use of the religious affiliation to characterize the set of rulers who ruled the subcontinent during this period. Rather the era from 1200 to 1750 is shown to be the foundation for the highly pluralistic human landscape of modern south Asia, with its composite culture that draws on both Indic and Islamic high traditions in many and rich regional variants. This composite culture came under threat after the Partition from the votaries of Hindutva who are known notoriously for their anti- Islamic and anti- Muslim sentiments and policies.

The tradition, practiced by V S Naipaul, to present Vijayanagar as the custodian of Hinduism, destroyed by Muslim invasions, was started by the historians of the Raj and later by zealots of Sangh Parivar. In this context, the fall of Vijayanagar was written up in elegiac terms by Robert Sewel, whose 1900 book *Vijayanagar: A Forgotten Empire*, first characterized the kingdom as “a Hindu bulwark against Mohammadan conquests”; a single brave but doomed attempt at resistance to Islamic aggression. This idea is elaborated eagerly by V S Naipaul and Hindu nationalist, who wrote of Vijayanagar as a Hindu state dedicated

to the preservation of the traditional, peaceful, and pure Hindu culture of southern India. It is a simple and seductive vision, and one that at first sight looks plausible. The problem is that such ideas rest on a set of mistaken and Islamophobic assumptions that recent scholarship has done much to undermine. To undermine the claims of Hindutva ideologues and, therefore, of Naipaul, a brilliant essay entitled “A Sultan Among Hindu Kings”, published by Phillip B Wagoner in 1996, is an important landmark. The essay falsifies the claim that in the realm of cultural policy Vijayanagar strived to contain the spread of Islam and to preserve Hindu purity in the southern peninsula. It rejects the view that Vijayanagar was insulated from the broader cultural influences of neighboring Muslim dynasties and that Vijayanagar was destroyed by a combination of Muslim rulers. This simple formulation that sees history of Vijayanagar as one of conflict and war between Muslims and Hindus is believed by Naipaul throughout his career. Contrary to Naipaul’s formulations it is now widely recognized that the actual patterns of political conflicts and wars in south India between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries cannot be understood in terms of a simple Hindu- Muslim conflict because in south India “both Hindu and Muslim states fought among themselves as much as they did against one another” (Phillip Wagoner: 852; 2000). Contrary to the Hindu- Muslim conflict envisaged by Naipaul, Wagoner argues:

“that the Hindu culture in Vijayanagar was in fact deeply transformed by its interaction with Islamic culture” and that “this transformation, far from being the result of mere changes in taste of fashion, was a deliberately calculated act on the part of Vijayanagar’s courtly elite, and that it was integrally related to changes in the political culture of the court” (Wagoner: 854; 2000).

The Islamic- inspired forms and practices altered the courtly life and the characteristic cultural manifestations of the Vijayanagar period in such diverse areas as military technology and strategy, political and administrative institutions, and the transformations in the material culture of the court were a direct result of nearly two centuries of intense and creative interaction with the Islamic world. In this period, for example, the Hindu kings of Vijayanagar appeared in public audience not bare chested, as has been a tradition in Hindu India, but dressed in quasi- Islamic court costume-the Islamic inspired *kabayi*, a long-sleeved tunic derived from Arabic *qaba*, symbolic, according to Wagoner, of their participation in the more universal culture of Islam. Vijayanagar underwent what Wagoner calls “Islamicization”- a dynamic and creative process of cultural, political, economic and military technological change, a process that has nothing to do with religious conversion or syncretism; certainly in the case of Vijayanagar there is little evidence of conversion to Islam or even syncretic movements, despite the fact that the material and political culture of Vijayanagar’s elites underwent Islamicization to a remarkably high degree.

Thus the Islamicate culture of Vijayanagar was not a result of some inevitable consequences of the onslaught of Islam, but quite the opposite, as the result of conscious and deliberately calculated acts of creative individual’s seeking to maximize their opportunities in an ever-widening world. He also maintains that the indigenous Indic sources in the Vijayanagar period do not speak of Islam or Muslims, but identify the bearers of Islamicate civilization in the Deccan in the ethnic terms, speaking inevitably of Turks and it were the historians of the Raj and later the Hindu communalists and their supporters like Naipaul who talked of history of Vijayanagar in terms of Hindu- Muslim conflict.

Since it is in the context of Mughal empire that Naipaul expresses his most favorite anti-Islamic views such as Islam is the most calamitous imperialism and religious hatred of Muslims was the main cause behind the destruction of Hindu temples and institutions, some more light must be shed on the issue that would deflate the claims of Naipaul and other Hindu communalists. In this connection Richard Eaton’s article “Temple Desecration and Indo-Muslim States”, published in a book of essays entitled *Beyond Turk and Hindu (2000)*,

edited by David Gilmartin and Bruce B Lawerance, is of invaluable service. In sharp contrast to nearly 60000 instances of temple desecrations in the pre-modern era cited by the Hindu communalists, Richard Eaton suggests that there are only 80 documented cases of temple destruction carried by pre-modern indo-Muslim rulers, and a careful analysis reveals that in most cases the destruction of temples was not guided by religious or sectarian hatred, but were motivated by political considerations. Only those religious structures were despoiled which were seen as the symbols of royal authority. The attack and plunder of religious places was not a distinctive trait of Muslim rulers, rather it was a common practice among the Hindu rulers before the inception of Turkish rule in India. The Turks therefore did not introduce the concept of religious violence in India. On the contrary, they simply followed and continued a pre-modern Indian practice. The article, however, does not mention the fact that the desecration of anything related to any religion is un-Islamic practice. The Quran categorically maintains that places of worship of non-Muslims should not in any case be harmed. It is binding on the Muslim ruler to protect not only the religious structures of his subjects but also their life, dignity and property irrespective of their religion, race, and creed. Even so-called politically motivated destruction of religious buildings is unacceptable. The desecration of even those 80 temples of which Eaton talks about was un-Islamic and highly contradictory to the religious beliefs of Islam.

Naipaul's account of India's Islamic history and therefore, his treatment of Islam, are highly erroneous as has been seen in the previous pages. Accurate or inaccurate, Naipaul's account of Islam in India only talks about the rulers and their "devastating" invasions. He gives no room to Sufis in his historiography. In spreading Islam in India, Sufis were the main force, and any account of Indian Islamic history cannot be considered objective or accurate that does not give ample space to them. As William Dalrymple writes:

"It is widely known, for example, that Islam in India was spread much less by sword than by Sufis" and yet Sufism, clearly central to any discussion of medieval India barely makes any appearance in Naipaul's work" (Dalrymple: 2004).

Sufism with its holy men, visions, and miracles and its emphasis on the individuals search for union with God has always born remarkable similarities to the mystical side of Hinduism. And it was under Sufi influence that the two religions almost fused into one, with Hindus visiting Sufi graves, while "Muslim villagers would leave offerings at temples to ensure the birth of children and good harvest" (Dalrymple: 109; 2009). Even some Sufis are still considered to be incarnations of Hindu deities. Although in India communalist feelings loom large now, still Sufi Dargas attract as many Hindu, Sikh and Christian pilgrims as they do Muslims. The history of Indian Sufism abounds in attempts by mystic to overcome the gap between the two great traditions and to seek God not through sectarian rituals but through the wider gateway of the human heart.

Also notably absent in Naipaul's work is any mention of the remarkable religious tolerance of the Moguls. Neither Akbar nor Dara Shukh makes any sort of appearance in Naipaul's writing, and his readers will learn nothing of the former's enthusiastic patronage of Hindu temples or latter's work translating the Gita into Persian. Naipaul makes no mention of Dara Shukh's book *The Mingling of Oceans*, a study of Hinduism and Islam which emphasizes the perfect compatibility of the two faiths and speculates that the Upanishads were the source of monotheism. Yet Naipaul continues to envisage medieval India solely in terms of Islamic vandalism.

Naipaul's concept of universal civilization, developed during his travels through four Muslim countries, is highly political idea that presents the western values and institutions in the guise of the universal. His concept is nothing but an attempt to perpetuate western cultural hegemony that becomes an instrument of power. This is nothing but saying that all the civilizations of the world should shun their values, beliefs, orientations, practices, and

institutions and adopt western values, practices etc. After analyzing the idea of “universal civilization”, one can easily maintain that Naipaul is propagating westernization and claiming that the non-western societies will progress and become modern only if they become western. Rather Naipaul makes no distinction between modernization and westernization. For Naipaul both are one. Modernization means westernization. Samuel Huntington says, “The term universal civilization may refer to the assumptions, values and doctrines currently held by people in western civilization and by some people in other civilization” (Huntington: 56; 1999). Naipaul’s “universal civilization” is nothing but what Huntington calls “Davos Culture”- belief in individualism, market economies, and political democracy, which are common among people in western civilization. Davos is a place in Switzerland where every year about a thousand businessmen, bankers, government officials, intellectuals and journalists from scores of countries meet in the World Economic Forum. It is Davos culture which is presented by Naipaul in terms of universal civilization. But outside West how many people share this culture? “Outside west, it is probably shared by less than 50 million people or one percent of world’s population”(Huntington: 57; 1999). This is far from being a universal culture. Rather it is a kind of cultural imposition where a dominant society sees to it that its values and doctrines are adopted, either willingly or slavishly, by subordinate societies. From this point of view we can say that Naipaul is helping to perpetuate neo-imperialism, a process whereby UN, WTO and other global institutions present and safeguard western interest in general and American interests in particular.

Naipaul’s main foundational argument supporting his “universal civilization” is the spread of western consumption patterns and popular culture around the world. This makes him believe that western civilization is universal. But this argument is neither profound nor relevant. Cultural fads have been transmitted from civilization to civilization throughout history. Innovations, discoveries, inventions and techniques in one civilization are usually taken up by other civilizations. This is a historical phenomenon. Languages are influenced by other languages, laws are influenced by laws, and political ideologies are transmitted from one society to another. Innovations in one civilization are regularly taken up by other civilizations. These are, however, either techniques lacking in significant cultural consequences or fads that come and go without altering the underlying culture of the recipient civilization. Huntington records that in previous centuries the western world incorporated many items from Chinese, Muslim and Hindu cultures. Now, in present world if non-western world imports many items from western world, that does not in any way make western civilization a universal civilization. Thus Naipaul’s claim is unfounded and is merely a reiteration of political propaganda of western politicians and intellectuals who present the western civilization as the universal civilization mainly in order to dominate non-western world by presenting western values as universal values.

Analyzed thus we can feel comfortable to say that Naipaul’s description of Third World in general and Islamic world in particular is neither objective nor accurate. Rather, it is highly political, based on biased preconceptions and prejudices of an orientalist. The historical works of British writers have formed his intellectual make up. And it is with that make up that he travels through the Third World countries and writes what he already knows. Similarly, his account of India’s Islamic history is based on his reading of historians of the Raj and, therefore, prejudiced.

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