

Writing Is Not “Anti-African”: How Naipaul “See(s) Much” About Africa

Mohammad Rezaul Karim*

Department of English, College of Science and Humanities, Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University, Al Kharj, KSA

Ramesh Sharma

Department of English, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Assam Don Bosco University, Guwahati, Assam, India

Wahaj Unnisa Warda

Department of English, College of Science and Humanities, Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University, Al Kharj, KSA

Abstract—Many critics have harshly criticized V.S. Naipaul's works, both fiction and trip memoirs on the postcolonial sociocultural milieu of Africa, for being racially objectionable. The indictment apparently has a rationale too in the sense that his writings- *In a Free State* (1971), *A Band in the River* (1979) and *Masque of Africa* for instance- outright seem to be intestinal butchery of the African life, past and present, without any sense of mercy. However, he has countered all the critics often to defend his writings. In fact, this stand of Naipaul on his writings prompts this paper for a scrutiny and apparently, it seems that, as it will be explored, his defense stands; he has seen “much” about Africa, its future. Paradoxically, in his internal butchery he is neither “anti-African” nor “anti-Negro.” His African discourse, though supposed to be they do not have any such offensive, butchery agenda in nature, rather seems to have a tendency of seeing “much” future possibilities in the postcolonial paradox with a spiral into its past. Although the African post-colonial paradox is colonial, he also understands it as a part of another form of ups and downs in the history of African civilization. This is more apparent in his writings and more perceptible in the context of the postcolonial viewpoint on displacement and dislocation. Postcolonial discourse usually emphasizes a crisis in its perspectives. However, for Naipaul, they are also, just like every other civilization, the nature of the history of the African civilization. It is in this understanding, being explored, he sees “much” possibilities, an enabling phenomenon, rather than a crisis in the African paradox.

Index Terms—anti-African, Naipaul, paradox, postcolonial, dislocation, displacement

I. INTRODUCTION

Writing isn't just being anti-African or anti-Negro-whatever. How on earth? It's Absurd... Instead of ...asking 'Why did you write this book?' you should be saying “How did you see much? - V.S. Naipaul, quoted in Smith (2010, p. 89).

The Nobel laureate V.S. Naipaul has a long writing career that extends roughly from 1957 (*The Mystic Masseur*) to 2010 (*The Masque of Africa: Glimpses of African Belief*). He has been read and understood, as Bruce King (2003) writes, along with the other writers of the time like “Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Derek Walcott, Margaret Atwood, Michael Ondaatje and Salman Rushdie” (p. 3). His writings have a wide geographical coverage that extends from Caribbean to Europe, India and Africa and a constant fluctuation between them. Accordingly, the representation of these narrative spaces has drawn global readership and attention. However, the readership across the world seems to be unanimous with one opinion that Naipaul is not fare in his representation; he is out and out colonial, bestial, although his texts will reveal quite a different picture. A few of these commentaries are worth reviewing here.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Charles (2022) writes, for instance, that, “Naipaul indirectly absolves the imperialist and colonizer, in the Caribbean, Africa, or India” (p. 22). Dayan (1993) observes him as “racially specific and horrific in their implications for the so-called Third World” (p. 159). Beyond these, he has been scathingly indicted in terms of a series of bestial imageries. For instance, he is termed as “inquiline” (Pathak, 2012, p. 27), “gadfly” (Bakari, 2003, p. 243), “mongoose...” (Walcott, 2018) and “scavenger” (Said, 2000, p. 100). Huggan (1994) writes, “Certain writers, like Naipaul, are best not spoken about at all; and if they are spoken about, then it is in terms of stunned disbelief... or thinly disguised contempt...” (p. 200). Hemenway (1982) thinks that the vision of Naipaul is “fiercely pessimistic, singularly unsentimental, somewhat lacking in charity and sympathy...” (p. 191). King (2003) charges he always ends in “inactivity, Indian fatalism” (p. 22). King (1983) asserts that he denies “the West Indian any hope for development or salvation” (pp. 231–32). Boyers (1981)

* Corresponding Author

humiliatingly finds his books “unpleasant” and not appealing. He concludes, “His books are demanding and, in the main, unpleasant, and there is no reason to feel that they should appeal to everyone” (p. 359). All the views in general are unanimous that Naipaul in his writings cut across the narrative spaces-Caribbean, Indian and African – is offensive and hence not worth reading. But paradoxically, this is what he is not; what actually he is gradually evolves from the fabric of his fictions.

III. RESEARCH PROBLEM

The views above are problematic in the sense that they seem to go against the spirit of the writings of Naipaul. They seem to be outright personal, subjective, negative and passionate which are in fact not the attribute of a complex writing that he produces. They are not oriented towards a critical understanding of the representation of the subject matter, they are thus paradoxical. This paper wants to confront this. His writings always demand a critical discourse oriented towards his represented content and not towards him. It is here this paper sees another scope for understanding Naipaul.

IV. AIMS AND OBJECTIVE

The aim of this paper is to study the represented content in the fictions of V.S. Naipaul that contextualize some of the African countries to probe that, as Naipaul puts, they are neither “anti-African” nor “anti-Negro,” or he is neither offensive nor bestial. The paper contends to say that Naipaul is pro-African, enabling and wants to demonstrate this in two ways which can also be understood as the concerns of Naipaul for Africa. First, it explores the representation of Africa which points to a premonition of a future catastrophe unless the Africans bring a radical behavioral change in themselves for themselves. Second, it shows inevitability of a gradual emergence of educated, humane, critical, and fearless Africans who can critique themselves. The first is a deep-rooted fear, a precaution, for the Africans in the narrative and the second a vision for them, an imperative for their future. The objective is to explore these concerns through the analysis of two of his fictions, *In a Free State* (1971) and *A Bend in the River* (1979).

V. METHODOLOGY

The paper is qualitative. As a part of its methodology, it involves a selected set of guiding ideas for approach. This paper uses analytical and interpretive methods to study the fictions in reference, validating and qualifying the study also as empirical fact from the secondary resources. In this sense the study becomes a fictional act and an empirical fact. In certain cases when there are no page numbers in e-sources, it uses (n. p.) at the end of the quotes to indicate the article being referred to does not have page number marked.

The paper draws insights from the postcolonial perspective of dislocation and displacement to understand the destination of this investigation. However, unlike in the postcolonial studies the ideas of dislocation and displacement, as mentioned before, do not confirm here to east-west encounter as their cause and condition. Rather, the paper takes their meaning from the several ups and downs in the African civilization, its fragility and vulnerability to alien forces in which the colonial period appears only as an intervention. The same fragility and vulnerability are also the attributes of every other civilization and hence they are not unique to Africa. The Mesopotamian, the Greek, the Roman and the Indus Valley civilizations, for instance, also suffered the offence of vulnerability and fragility across time. But though it took hundreds of years since then, they have transformed themselves into other forms of civilizations today doing every sort of wonder. Naipaul sees a possibility in the African civilization too in this act of de-contextualizing the colonial binaries of east and west, and in this regard, his exploration and representation of Africa in the fictions is not “anti-African” but rather an insurance of possibility.

VI. DISCUSSION

The fictions under enquiry need contextualization first. Taking insight from the civilizational attribute of the term’s dislocation and displacement as precaution, we can contextualize the postcolonial socio-cultural context of Africa as one of the latest paradoxes in the civilization of Africa where the fictions are set. Naipaul (2008) writes “*a Free State* is set in “Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda” (Preface to *In a Free State*, pp. ix–x), and *A Bend in the River* (2002) is set in a newly independent Francophone central African state resembling Zaire (now known as the Democratic Republic of the Congo), governed by a dictatorial former army officer, the “Big Man” (118). The works are also the outcome of his travels into six countries—Uganda, Ghana, Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Gabon and South Africa in the 1960s. It was the time these countries were being liberated. Kenya got independence from the UK in 1963, Uganda in 1962, Nigeria in 1960, Ghana in 1957, South Africa in 1961, Gabon from France in 1960, and Rwanda in 1962 from Belgium. Therefore, it was a great transitional phase in the history of these nation–states, and accordingly, a dynamic period in their cultural, political and social histories. Generally, with freedom and native rule there are changes and developments, though not always desirable and rewarding. As far as Naipaul and his records are concerned, this was rarely the case in Africa. This is the represented content in both the fictions.

From this context of the represented content in 1970s, Naipaul has a scary vision of the future of not only many of the African countries but also of the Middle East as its periphery. It’s a fear for a possible tragedy in the Africans and a

wish to avoid it. There are parallels between the events in the stories, which are often appalling and awful human experiences and the late Twentieth century chaos in Africa spilled over to the Middle East. It is worthwhile first to reflect into this twentieth century chaos to locate their parallels in the stories. Farrukh Dhondy makes this connection between Naipaul and “much” of the future developments obvious. He writes that Naipaul’s “view of African societies, whose potential for inter-tribal genocide he foresaw 20 or 30 years before the Hutus and Tutsis of Rwanda–Burundi killed each other in their thousands and before their child soldiers began to eat the entrails of their enemies, are labeled ‘racist’ by the nationalist race lobby” (Smith, 2010, p. 89). The “race lobby” is just another instance of the narrow understanding of Naipaul discussed in the literature review above. The *BBC News* dated April 4, 2009 thus reports in “Rwanda Genocide: 100 Days of Slaughter”:

In just 100 days in 1994, about 800,000 people were slaughtered in Rwanda by ethnic Hutu extremists. They were targeting members of the minority Tutsi community, as well as their political opponents, irrespective of their ethnic origin... About 85% of Rwandans are Hutus but the Tutsi minority has long dominated the country... On the night of 6 April 1994, a plane carrying then-president Juvenal Habyarimana, and his counterpart Cyprien Ntaryamira of Burundi – both Hutus – was shot down, killing everyone on board... With meticulous organization, lists of government opponents were handed out to militias who went and killed them, along with all of their families... The French, who were allies of the Hutu government, sent a special force to evacuate their citizens and later set up a supposedly safe zone but were accused of not doing enough to stop the slaughter in that area... Paul Kagame (Rwanda’s current president) has accused France of backing those who carried out the massacres – a charge denied by Paris. (n. p.)

Recently, the *Reuters* in a report titled “Gunmen kill more than 100 in attack in Ethiopia’s Benishangul–Gumuz region” recorded another ethnic genocide in Ethiopia, which Naipaul could foresee long before. It states:

Gunmen killed more than 100 people in a dawn attack in... Ethiopia... the latest deadly assault in an area bedevilled by ethnic violence... Africa’s second–most populous nation has been grappling with regular outbreaks of deadly violence since Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed was appointed in 2018... Elections due next year have further inflamed simmering tensions over land, power and resources. (n.p.)

Along the similar lines, the post–Arab Spring period that culminated in a violent reprisal against the spontaneous civil movements in Saharan and sub–Saharan Africa in 2011 can be seen as predicted by Naipaul long back in the seventies. “Beginning in December 2010,” writes Blakemore (2019) for the *National Geographic*, “anti–government protests rocked Tunisia. By early 2011 they had spread into what became known as the Arab Spring... Pro–democratic protests, which spread rapidly due to social media, ended up toppling the governments of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen” (n. p.). It was a series of pro–democratic agitations against dictatorship spread over the Islamic countries in North Africa and the Middle East.

The agitations were triggered by the self–immolation of a vegetable vendor, Mohamed Bouazizi in Tunisia, in protest against police threats to permanently shut down his vending cart for not having a licence to sell produce. Tunisia quickly responded with agitations against its dictator Zine al–Abidine Ben Ali. The protests took on a transnational imperative, spreading like wild fire to Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Libya, Jordan, Kuwait and Yemen and people confronted their autocratic rulers. Zine al–Abidine Ben Ali fled to Saudi Arabia, the parliament in Jordan and Kuwait was dissolved under mounting public pressure and the president of Yemen stepped down. In Egypt, Hosni Mubarak was made to step down and Syria was hit and continues to be torn by civil war. In Libya, President Muammar Gaddafi was executed and the country was torn apart between factional groups. Thus, the region witnessed a catastrophic political crisis with bloody violence and made hundreds and thousands of dislocated and displaced refugees. Naipaul already visioned “much” of these catastrophes in 1970s.

Naipaul is not an exception. Even among the African writers, the sense of menacing Africa has often become a central concern. Mention may be made of the play *A Dance of the Forests* by Wole Soyinka presented on the occasion of the Nigerian Independence celebration in 1960. The play incorporates the court of Mata Kharibu, a dictator who lived eight centuries before in a society marked by crime and injustice. The court dramatizes the brutal killing of a soldier who had refused to fight an unjust war and his pregnant wife who had pleaded for his life. In other words, the play is a reminder of a darker undercurrent embedded in African politics.

The President in *In a Free State* and the Big Man in *A Bend in the River* can be considered as the Naipaulean models for the same dictators and the unrest therein, the scary vision of Africa, which spilled over the Middle East foreseen by him much before. Hence, there are parallels; the stories are also the social facts. The narratives, as maintained by Wright (1998), “revert to primitive tribalism, oath–taking, and blood–letting, and that they waste their independence... in the postcolonial phase, and go back to the bush” (p. 8). Jhanji (2015) sees the narrative as “a statement on the perils of being ‘free’—a freedom that involves the loss of selfhood” (p. 133). Boxill (2013) sees the representation of freedom in the narrative as a “prison”, stating, “Prison is an important presence... more central in *In a Free State*... [But] No actual prison appears in [it]... because Naipaul manages to suggest that the... freedom itself functions as the perfect prison from which escape is not possible” (p. 81). This paradoxical state of affairs, of being entrapped in freedom, of moving forward in time yet regressing, estimate the apparent state of existence for some of the dislocated and displaced characters in the novels in particular and the state of African freedom in general.

The first fiction has three stories, the first two ('One Out of Many' and 'Tell Me Who to Kill') are “journalistic” pieces and the last (*In a Free State*) a novella, which is the part selected here for study. The novella narrates, “In this country... there was a president and... a king. They belonged to different tribes. The enmity of the tribes was old, and with independence, their anxieties about one another became acute. The king and the president intrigued the local representatives of white government” (p. 3). The Southern Collectorate is the region of the king and the northern, the president's. In light of its corporate interests, the West is hedging its support for the president. As noted by Adam (1987), “...native people are shown in a defeat which seems irrevocable, as the king's people of the bush are conquered by the president's troops with Western weapons and representing Western economic interests” (p. 68). A reign of terror is let loose to hunt down the king and many innocent people become scapegoats. The president had installed several check posts with barriers made of wood on the road that connected with the south, ostensibly to check possible arms smuggling into the region but actually intended to capture its king and his tribesmen. The people of the south are increasingly exploited, interned, and brutalized in the process. The damage done by the president has, as read by Hoon (?) in “Novel Idea: *In a Free State* by V. S. Naipaul,” transformed Africa into “a violent land, an unkind land” and “the president of the African country and his tribesmen slowly move down a highway, burning villages belonging to the opposing tribe” (n.p.). The novella notes the chopper keeps on hovering “YAK–YAK–YAK–YAK” (p. 14) looking for the king who is at large.

The same sense of fear is extended also to the next fiction. *A Bend in the River* follows, writes King (2003), “Many details from 'A New king for the Congo' by Naipaul which is set in a newly independent Francophone central African state resembling Zaire (now known as the Democratic Republic of the Congo), governed by a dictatorial former army officer, the Big Man” (p. 118). Further, Singh (2006) writes, “*A Bend in the River* is set in an unnamed African country undergoing political ferment. However, the landscape with the river, the rapids, the steamer service and close modeling of the Big Man's character on Mobutu as well as the events described make it obvious that the unnamed country is no other than Congo or the modern Zaire” (p. 48). Structurally, the novel begins with a rebellion—“The Second Rebellion” as the first part of the book— and ends with “Battle”, the last part, both precluding the rise of a brutal dictatorship from the context of freedom- a paradox. Naipaul visited east Africa and Zaire in 1965–66 and revisited east Africa in 1971 and Zaire in 1975. Zaire gained independence from Belgium (middle Congo was a French colony) on 30 June, 1960. The country got a Prime Minister and a president in democratic elections but was soon wracked by instability. The tribal leaders had more power than the government. In 1960, there was an army mutiny against their European officers. The mutiny spread quickly, like the post-Arab spring, and tore the country apart and continued until 1965. The history of Africa during the period of decolonization is also problematized as the result of continued international interference of foreign powers which filled the power vacuum left by the colonial rule. According to a US report “The Congo, Decolonization, and the Cold War, 1960–1965,” “The decolonization of Sub-Saharan Africa from the late 1950s to the mid-1970s resulted in several proxy Cold War confrontations between the United States and the Soviet Union over the dozens of newly independent, non-aligned nations. The first such confrontation occurred in the former Belgian Congo, which gained its independence on June 30, 1960” (n. p.). On November 1965, the military general Mobutu Sese Seko Kuku Ngbendu Wa Za Banga declared himself as the president. As part of a cultural campaign founded on a return to an “authentic” past, Mobutu renamed the country as the Republic of Zaire and began other mass colonial infrastructural demolition.

In a conference, as quoted by King (2003), Naipaul briefs what Mobutu does: “You'll find in the Congo all the nice ideas of Fanon ridiculously caricatured by the present ruler... Mobutu says... that he doesn't have a borrowed soul any longer; his particular black thing is 'authenticity'. Authenticity... is rejection of the strange, the difficult, the taxing; it is despair” (p. 118). Mobutu becomes the figure of the Big Man in the narrative, writes King (2003), who “brought a kind of peace—always threatened by violently destructive insurrections—and claims to offer an African Socialism combining the black nationalist demand for cultural authenticity... Colonial mimicry has moved on to mimicry of Maoist China” (p. 118). In this regard, as portrayed in *A Bend in the River*, the property of foreign nationals was seized and nationalized by force. However, the dictatorship of the Big Man was soon confronted by counter radical movements into which the narrative plunges towards the end. The radical movements spread like wildfire across the continent and, as observed in the report “Conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Causes, Impact and Implications for the Great Lakes Region” by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (2015-09), “...in 1996 alone, 14 out of the 53 countries in the continent were afflicted by armed conflicts. The list of conflict-affected countries included the Democratic Republic of Congo... that eventually brought to an end the 32-year regime of Mobutu in May 1997” (n. p.). The narrative roughly covers the period from 1965 to 1975, anticipating what might come to in 1997 many years prior. Hamner (1985) rightly sees a “Tiresian vision” (p. 74) in Naipaul here in how the represented existential paradox in *A Bend in the River* reflects the real circumstances in Africa. He adds, “the reality upon which [Naipaul's] sensitive intelligence plays is our reality... For his aimless, disillusioned characters, there are numbers of real men; for his themes of hypocrisy and misguided schemes, there are sufficient examples in actual events” (p. 74). This sense of “reality” and “actual events” in the story reflect more concern of Naipaul about the future course that Africa was taking. This vision speaks of a potential future human disaster, a Naipaulean precaution, unless there is a self-introspection in Africans for their behavioral change from resorting to dictatorship and violence for freedom and peace.

This lands us in our second approach above: a gradual emergence of humane, critical and fearless Africans, a hope, from the fictions under enquiry that indicates the behavioral change. This change is inevitable for Naipaul. Thus, he writes in *A Bend in the River* “The world is what it is; men who are nothing, who allow themselves to become nothing, have no place in it” (p. 3). Allowing oneself to become “nothing”, indirectly something is an act of gradual evolution of knowledge in Naipaul. He does not rely on the world for the change; it is “what it is” and only this understanding can trigger changes. He relies on a few sensitive and talented individuals as models of the change. Timothy (1985) succinctly writes “It expresses the strong conviction in Naipaul that the individual can, by his own efforts, escape the limitations of his origins. But this escape is only for those who are sensitive, talented and aware: not for the group as a whole” (p. 259). This change begins with knowing oneself which again begins with locating himself in the history of civilization behind. This is one of the reasons why Naipaul's writings frequently become part of history and *A Bend in the River* is no exception. Here, he uses two sensitive and talented individuals, Salim for a dive into the history of Africa and Ferdinand as an agency of hope for Africa. There is a beautiful relation between them: Salim, who has a vast insight into the African history, its ups and down, mentors and nurtures Ferdinand and the later, an educated African, the new generation, saves Salim from a possible execution at the end. This humane connection is what Africa wanting.

Naipaul first ditches the narrative into the history of the civilization of Africa from the eye of Salim to arrive at the cause behind the present postcolonial crisis that Africa is grappling with. With this, he sets connection between the ups and downs in the history and the present. King (2003) convincingly sees the fiction in terms of a flux. In it, he writes, “Nothing feels settled, nothing complete, final, reflected upon... everything is in movement” (p. 120). Chaubrey (2013) sees the fiction as the tension between the traditional and a dangerously modern African state of existence. He writes, “*A Bend in the River* (1979) vividly describes the disorder that follows in the wake of imperialism and the problems of embryonic but underdeveloped Third World people caught between old tribal ways and the new technology of dangerous arms...” (p. 44). As such, Salim is the connection between these fluxes, old tribal ways and the new.

The narrative is about an already literally displaced Africa in which, as can be understood, there are lots of concerns about the unfolding contestatory tribal conflicts, the frames of paradox in the Africa through which Naipaul wants to see a possibility, a hope for its future. King (2003) has correctly marked this concern in his review of *A Bend in the River*, saying, “If the scene in Naipaul's new novel is the turmoil of modern Africa, its concerns are the discrepancy between the appearances and the reality...” (p. vi). It is very interesting first to see how colonization and slavery, as Naipaul historicizes the context, deracinated and displaced the African from which the Big Man-like dictator sprang up. The colonized Africa has already lost its homogeneity of social origin until the regime of the Big Man. The first part of the narrative, “The Second Rebellion,” gives a vivid description of the deracinated/racially dislocated people in the eastern Africa and accordingly its disjointed demography. It has suffered from a series of reigns in the past that changed its history. Islam spread over Africa in the seventh century. According to Iliffe (1995), “The expansion of Arab power and the Islamic religion... in AD 632 was the central process in world history for the next 400 years. During that time Islam became the predominant faith throughout North Africa and established footholds in both West and East Africa” (p. 42). Alexander (1980) in *African History and the Struggle to Decolonize Africa* further elaborates on the Islamic expansion in Africa. He writes, “In AD 632 the Muslim (Arabs) had conquered Syria and Persia... Within 50 years they had spread right across North Africa to Morocco” (p. 17) and spread to West and East Africa through trade, “attracted to the East Africa coast by valuable goods such as gold, ivory and tortoise shell” (p. 17). Besides the trade interest, another drive for the colonization is slave trade. Thus, Alexander notes: “Another important item was human beings who could be made to work. In other words, the trade in SLAVES became one of the major links between Arabia and East Africa. Although the nature and scale of this Arab slave trade changed in the course of time, it continued well into our own century” (p. 17). Naipaul has also identified this historical slavery as instrumental in gradual racial displacement of African. This form of slavery is distinct but then yields to the next phase of European slave trading, across the Atlantic.

Slavery in this part of Africa is paradoxical, unlike the other parts where slaves are usually condemned to plantations. Here, as Salim gradually reveals, the native tribes are taken to Arabian homes as domestic servants. They come to the coast from the interior, on foot for many days pulled by the prospect of getting subsumed in a rich Arab family. Many of them became as powerful as the Arabians with their influence and thus cast off their ancestry. Displacement from African origin to Arabic is a means to status and power for the servants. Thus, Salim observes, “To an African, a child of the forest, who had marched down hundreds of miles from the interior and was far from his village and tribe, the protection of a foreign family was preferable to being alone among strange and unfriendly Africans” (p. 14). Therefore, the people who are considered as slaves always want to remain as they are for generations. They even want it known to others Africans, or Arabs or Indians that they are really slaves. Many of them show full devotion to the family they are attached to and become like its members. They take care of the young children of their masters as their own siblings. Salim was also raised by Mustafa, the family servant who earned his trusted place in the family. It was Mustafa who was always protecting him as his own elder brother against the assaults of the other children in the locality.

This representation is a problem for many, such as in Eid (2000) who does not agree with Naipaul's representation of Africa and of the Africans. Within the aesthetic realm of the narrative, Eid argues, Naipaul has perpetuated a politics of defending the empire, its slavery. In other words, Eid sees him as representing African society as broken, unstable and uncertain, and the Africans unable to reshape it as they lack in creative and political potential, and thus indirectly hinting at the need of an external power to govern them. Eid notes the text is “motivating them to seek an alternative by

proceeding on the basis of their own concrete reality, cultural heritage and history without losing the straightforward movement,” but ultimately, “Naipaul offers no solutions” (p. 12). However, what is apparent in the representation of the Africans as the displaced race in Naipaul is that even the slavery ensures them freedom from their brutality and earns them repute. As noted by Krishnan (2020), Naipaul has shown the ethical side of Islam in very clear terms, stating:

No religion is more worldly than Islam. In spite of its political incapacity, no religion keeps men's eyes more fixed on the way the world is run...I could see how Islamic fervour could become creative, revolutionary, and take men on to a humanism beyond religious doctrine: a true renaissance, open to the new and enriched by it, as the Muslims in their early days of glory had been. (p. 231)

This idea of Naipaul on Islam distinguishes his literary aspiration and political correctness. He has considered thinking individuals like Salim and Metty, Muslim narrators and characters who deviate from the mass, as the authority of the story in the fiction, which already indicates his sense of inclusivity which merits critical appreciation.

The impact of slavery not only deracinated the Africans tribes and communities but also their masters. Sometimes the “slaves” not only become the members of the family of their masters but also take over the responsibility of the family status and name. Many of them are no longer African. The historians Fage and Tordoff (2002) in reference to the Arabian occupation of Egypt in 639 in *A History of Africa* (2005) write that “...within a century, there were something like a million Arabs in Egypt. An ever-increasing number of Egyptians became associated with the Arabs as wives, servants and retainers of various kinds, and these tended to adopt their master's religion” (p. 151). This gradually continued with other African countries too. Alexander (1980) mentions that “Arab settlers intermarried with local Africans. They kept their Muslim faith but developed their own languages, such as Swahili which is still spoken in East Africa today” (p. 17). Trade ensures a transboundary and multicultural context even before the colonial encounter, which perpetuates this situation. Mustafa in *A Bend in the River*, for instance, has Gujarati blood, as does Metty. With the Arabians, Alexander further observes, the deracination even takes its full extent, wherein the “slaves had swamped the masters; the Arabian race of the master had virtually disappeared” (p. 16). To this Salim adds:

Muslim way they [the Arabian] needed wives and more wives. But they were cut off from their roots in Arabia and could only find their wives among the African women who had once been their slaves. Soon, thereafter, the Arabs, or the people who called themselves Arabs, had become indistinguishable from Africans... The authority of the Arabs... was only a matter of custom. It could be blown away at any time. (pp. 16–17)

In other words, the Africans represented in the text are already of mixed-heritage and had already undergone multiple historical dislocations and displacements. This gets further problematized with the arrival of the Europeans which can be seen in the observation of the eastern coast by Salim. Though the eastern coast exhibits modern attributes, it lacks a sense of capacity for selfhood and self-determination. Salim says, “The world is what it is” (p. 17) and people do just “what they had to do” (p. 18). They do not keep track of their history and what they know about themselves is just what the Europeans tell them. This triggers a sense of insecurity in people like Salim thinking about their future prospects and fires their desire for detachment. This leads to further displacements. Indar, Salim's friend, is originally from Punjab and has made up his mind to go to England “to a famous university to do a three-year course” (p. 20). Salim, on the other hand, decides to “go into the business” (p. 21). And this decision later on couples with the offer from Nazruddin, another displaced man from Uganda, who wants Salim to take over his shop at the bend in the river, on the eastern coast. Salim readily accepts the offer and this catapults him to the town that has started taking a modern shape with the coming of the Europeans.

The Arabs had extended up to the bend in the river at this juncture but in the late nineteenth century they were confronted, defeated and displaced by the approaching Europeans from the other direction. With the European intrusion, the continent underwent geographical displacement first. “During the last twenty years of the nineteenth century,” writes John Iliffe (1995), “European Powers swiftly and painlessly partitioned the map of Africa among Themselves” (p. 192). This invasion leads to political, economic, social and cultural displacements and dislocations in Africa. Since then, the town in the bend in the river had started taking a European shape. Salim describes the deposing of the Arabs from Africa almost in terms of a cosmic catastrophe that totally annihilated them. He reveals that since the European takeover, their “power was like the light of a star that travels on after the star itself has become dead” (p. 23). The defeat of the Arabs is followed by other transformations as perfectly visible in the eastern coast. The description of the eastern coast by Salim is worth quoting here:

Africa was my home, had been the home of my family for centuries. But we came from the east coast, and that made the difference. The coast was not truly Africa. It was an Arab-Indian-Persian-Portuguese place... True Africa was at our back. Many miles of scrub or desert separated us from the up-country people... But we could no longer say that we were Arabians or Indians or Persians; when we compared ourselves with these people, we felt like people of Africa. (p. 12)

What Salim hints at is a consciousness of both a modern world and a demographic deracination, a hybrid world of existence in Africa that has suffered multiples of historical dislocations and displacements. In this sense, he has a broader and larger view of Africa, its past and present, which is also a narrative strategy to understand the present crisis for a way out of it. Naipaul next makes this sensitive individual the mentor of an African youth, Ferdinand, which is an oblique attempt to make Ferdinand a future intellect.

Salim runs a shop at the bank in the river and it is here he comes into contact with Zabeth, a woman from inner Africa, who brings Ferdinand, her son, to the town to educate him in the lycee, a European educational institution restructured by the Big Man, and leaves him under the guardianship of Salim. Ferdinand is thus left to the mentorship of Salim, although at time he does not show much of his affiliation to him under the fast-changing context of the town which influences generation towards not being loyal to the nativity. However, towards the end, the town is hit by revolutionaries against the Big Man and everything becomes vulnerable, the town has become catastrophic with killing and blood everywhere. People are forced to flee for their life and Salim too has no option. It is here Ferdinand, who has become a commissioner officer under the Big Man, gives a safe passage to Salim. He not only helps Salim but also consciously runs the risk of being a fearlessly critical of Africa under Big Man. His critique of the context in the town, while seeing off Salim, is a clear confirmation that a new critic of the dictator regime has born from within:

You mustn't think it's bad just for you. It's bad for everybody. That's the terrible thing. It's bad for Prosper, bad for the man they gave your shop to, bad for everybody. Nobody's going anywhere. We're all going to hell, and every man knows this in his bones. We're being killed. Nothing has any meaning. That is why everyone is so frantic. Everyone wants to make his money and run away. But where? That is what is driving people mad... I felt I have been used. I felt I had given myself an education for nothing. I felt I had been fooled... The bush runs itself. There is no place to go to... nowhere is safe now. (pp. 319–320)

Being an employee under the Big Man, what Ferdinand says is not acceptable. But, as Naipaul sees, this is inevitable in Africa for its future and hence Ferdinand becomes the representative of this line of thought. A new humane elite is born in Ferdinand. “There is Zabeth, an African matriarch and trader, and her son Ferdinand,” as Weeks (1981) notes, “whom Salim befriends at her request—he becomes the ‘educated African’, one of the new elite, and saves Salim from prison” (p. 64). In this sense, for Weeks, it is a very “sensitive novel” (p. 64). While on the one hand the fictions anticipate more catastrophes, though apparently impossible, they also expect more educated, enlightened and critical Ferdinands in the future, and hence Naipaul is anticipatory in tone and not simply exploring “African nihilism” (Nixon, 1992, p. 100), so that the cause of the catastrophes can be questioned and confronted. Wise (1996) beautifully mentions the politics behind the representation of brutal African in his fictions as a “Utopian hope” which this paper endorses and considers as the concluding remark:

Naipaul suggests then that the only possible solution to the modern crisis of African history is the wholesale liquidation of its traditional cultures, so that a new or “absolutely modern” African culture may come into being. If Naipaul's “solution” is extreme, it nevertheless negatively embodies his Utopian hope for the ultimate liberation of Africa from political terror, civil-war, debilitating cynicism, and underdevelopment. (p. 68)

VII. FINDING

It is, thus, clear through the analysis that Naipaul is neither “anti-African” nor “anti-Negro.” He sees much of the humane potentiality in Africans to become an agent of change in which Ferdinand is a live example. But this change should be vetted through a reflection into vast historical folded centres of darkness, their dislocations and displacements which is explored in the fiction through the character of Salim. Salim shows vulnerability and fragility are the nature of the history of African civilization. It is through the combination of these two lines of thought in Salim and Ferdinand, the papers finds that the mission of Naipaul in the exploration and the representation of the crisis of Africa is not nihilism but an opportunity, an enabling phenomenon.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Naipaul's statement that “Writing isn't just being anti-African or anti-Negro” is thus established through the analysis of the works in reference. His suggestion to rather ask “How did you see much?” instead of asking “Why did you write this book?” prompted this paper and the answer to the first question evolves through this reading. Naipaul sees so much of the African chaos, its past and present and out of that, future developments in many of the African countries and the Middle East until today, where dictators mess up with the sense of freedom, through a reflection, spiral, into the history of African civilization in terms of his characters. This reflection is inevitable for the Africans as it can only give them their identity. However, this dimension of his discourse, the representation of the postcolonial chaos in its brutality only as an arch to spiral back, does not come under the consideration of the conventional readership as explored in the literature review above, which is inevitable to understand the politics of his fictions. This only will demonstrate that he is really not “anti-Negro” and differentiate the creative aspiration of a writer and its political correctness that the conventional criticism is reluctant to see.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study is supported via funding from Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University project number (PSAU/2023/R/1444).

REFERENCES

- [1] Adam, I. (1987). The Home Triptych via Modernism and Post- Modernism: Naipaul and Kroetsch. *Kunapipi*, vol. 9, no. 2, pp. 64-79.
- [2] Alexander, N. (1980). *African History and the Struggle to Decolonize Africa*. Centre for Education Rights and Transformation (CERT), Africa.
- [3] Bakari, M. (2003). V. S. Naipaul: From Gadfly to Obsessive. *Turkish Journal of International Relations*, vol. 2, no. 3 & 4, pp. 243-259.
- [4] Blakemore, E. (2019). What was the Arab Spring and how did it spread?. *National Geographic*, 29 March, 2019. Accessed on 28 August, 2023 from <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/arabspringcause#:~:text=It%20started%20in%20Tunisia&text=They%20demonstrated%20against%20government%20corruption,devices%E2%80%94spread%20to%20neighboring%20countries>.
- [5] Boxill, A. (2013). The Paradox of Freedom: V. S. Naipaul's In a Free State. *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fictions*, vol. 18, no.1, pp. 81-91. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00111619.1976.10690128>.
- [6] Boyers, R. (1981). Literature: V. S. Naipaul. *The American Scholar*, vol. 50, no. 3, pp. 359-367. Accessed on 29 August, 2023 from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41210744>
- [7] Charles, H. (2022). V. S. Naipaul: Native Son. *Caribbean Quarterly*, vol. 48, no. 2, pp. 22-24. Accessed on 28 August, 2023 from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40654265>.
- [8] Chaubrey, A. K. (2013). V. S. Naipaul: An Author with a Contentious Intellect. *Asian Journal of Literature, Culture and Society*, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 35-48. Accessed on 27 August, 2023 from http://www.aulibrary.au.edu/multim1/ABAC_Pub/Asian-Journal-of-Literature-Culture-and-Society/v7.2-4-2013.pdf.
- [9] United Nations. Economic Commission for Africa (2015-09). *Conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo causes, impact and implications for the Great Lakes region*. Addis Ababa. © United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. Accessed on 28 August, 2023 from <https://hdl.handle.net/10855/22687>
- [10] Dayan, J. (1993). Gothic Naipaul. *Transition*, no. 59, pp. 158–70. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2934881>
- [11] Fage, J. D., and Tordoff, W. (2002). *A History of Africa*. Routledge.
- [12] Fick, M. (2020). Gunmen kill more than 100 in attack in Ethiopia's Benishangul-Gumuz region. *Reuters*, 23 December 2020. Accessed on 28 August, 2023 from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-violence-idUSKBN28X26Q>
- [13] Hamner, R. D. (1985). Recommended: V. S. Naipaul. *The English Journal*, vol. 74, no. 6, pp. 73-74. Accessed on 30 August, 2023 from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/816905>
- [14] Hemenway, R. (1982). Sex and Politics in V. S. Naipaul. *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 14, no. 2, pp. 189-202. Accessed on 25 August, 2023 from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/29532160>
- [15] Hoon. (?). *Novel Idea: In a Free State* by V. S. Naipaul. Accessed on 28 August, 2023 from <https://novellamag.com/novel-idea-in-a-free-state-by-v-s-naipaul/>
- [16] Huggan, G. (1994). V. S. Naipaul and the Political Correctness Debate. *College Literature*, vol. 21, no. 3, pp. 200-206. Accessed on 26 August, 2023 from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25112146>
- [17] Iliffe, J. (1995). *Africans: The History of a Continent*. Cambridge University Press.
- [18] Jhanji, R. S. (2015). *Colonial Experience in the Major Fiction of V. S. Naipaul*. Atlantic.
- [19] King, B. (2003). *V. S. Naipaul*. Palgrave.
- [20] King, J. (1983). A curiously colonial performance: The Ec-Centric Vision of V. S. Naipaul and J. L. Borges. *The Yearbook of English Studies*, vol. 13, pp. 228-243. Accessed on 29 August, 2023 from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3508123>
- [21] Krishnan, S. (2020). *V. S. Naipaul's Journeys: From Periphery to Centre*. Columbia University Press.
- [22] Naipaul, V.S. (2002). *A Bend in the River*. Picador.
- [23] Naipaul, V.S. (2008). *In a Free State*. Picador.
- [24] Nixon, R. (1992). *London Calling: V. S. Naipaul, Postcolonial Mandarin*. Oxford University Press.
- [25] Pathak, S., Singh, SC., Upadhyay, M. and Chaudhary, L. (2012). V. S. Naipaul in the Line and Light of Colonial Culture. *International Journal of Recent Research and Review*, vol. 2, pp. 21-29.
- [26] Rwanda genocide: 100 days of slaughter. *BBC News*, 4 April 2019. Accessed on 27 August, 2023 from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-26875506>
- [27] Said, E. W. (2000). *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
- [28] Singh, A. (2006). *Literary Secularism: Religion and Modernity in Twentieth-Century Fiction*. UK: Cambridge Scholars Press.
- [29] Smith, D. (2010). A Case of Naipaulexity: V.S. Naipaul's Visions of Africa in "In a Free State". *Journal of Caribbean Literatures*, vol. 6, no. 3, pp. 81-93. Accessed on 28 August, 2023 from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41411863>
- [30] The Congo, Decolonization, and the Cold War, 1960–1965. *Office of the Historian*. Accessed on 28 August, 2023 from <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1961-1968/congo-decolonization>
- [31] Timothy, H. P. (1985). V. S. Naipaul and Politics: His View of Third World Societies in Africa and the Caribbean. *CLA Journal*, vol. 28, no. 3, pp. 247-262. Accessed on 28 August, 2023 from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44321830>.
- [32] Walcott, D. (2008). *The Mongoose*. Accessed on 2 September, 2018 from <https://uddari.wordpress.com/tag/the-mongoose-by-walcott/>
- [33] Weeks, S. G. (1981). A Sensitive Novel about Expatriate Life in Central Africa. *Africa Today*, vol. 28, no.1, p. 64. Accessed on 27 August, 2023 from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4185983>
- [34] Wise, C. (1996). The Garden Trampled: Or, the Liquidation of African Culture in V. S. Naipaul's A Bend in the River. *College Literature*, vol. 23, no. 3, pp. 58-72. Accessed on 28 August, 2023 from https://www.arsdcollege.ac.in/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/EngHons_Sem6_WL2.pdf
- [35] Wright, D. (1998). Autonomy and Autocracy in V. S. Naipaul's In a Free State. *International Fiction Review*, vol. 25, no. 1, pp.1-12. Accessed on 26 August, 2023 from <https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/IFR/article/view/7596>

Mohammad Rezaul Karim is currently working as an Assistant Professor of English in the College of Science and Humanities, Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University, KSA. He holds a Ph.D. in English from Gauhati University, India. He has been teaching English language to the undergraduate students for the last 6 years. He has presented papers at both national and international conferences, published research articles and papers in various journals, and also authored two books. His main area of interest is comparative literature and English language.

Ramesh Sharma is an Associate Professor and Head, Department of English, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Assam Don Bosco University, India. He has a Ph.D. in English from Dibrugarh University, India. He has been teaching literature at UG and PG levels for the last 9 years. He is also a Ph.D. supervisor. He has presented paper at national and international conferences. He has authored four books and edited four others. He has published papers in various journals and also several books' chapters. He keeps interest in Diaspora Studies, Ethnography and Oral Literature.

Wahaj Unnisa Warda, has been working in the Department of English Language and Literature, Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University, Saudi Arabia for the past ten years. Prior to that she worked as a senior lecturer in India for thirteen years. She has presented and published papers at various International conferences and journals in London, India, Australia and Saudi Arabia. She is a member of various national and international organizations besides being a reviewer for international journals. Her areas of interest are psychoanalysis, Classical Mythology, and detective fiction of the 19th century.