



Book Review

Tamali Neogi. *V.S.Naipaul: His Dark and Comic Vision*

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V.S.Naipaul: His Dark and Comic Vision is an insightful study by Dr. Tamali Neogi to investigate the dark and comic vision of V.S.Naipaul in his selected fiction and non-fiction. The book reveals the scholarly and perceptive venture of Neogi to unravel the creative and proliferative genius of Naipaul (1932-2018), a literary giant of the contemporary times “known for his ‘terrifying honesty’ in addressing cultural dislocation and restlessness caused by migration and rapid unsettling social and technological changes” who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2001 for mapping the predicaments of the wounded and fragmented psyches of the people of most of the post-colonial cultures and societies in various continents. After giving an exhaustive and incisive account of the plethora of angles from which Naipaul’s literary oeuvre has been critically analysed, highlighting his personal life, personality and peep into the existential realities of different cultures and communities he came across during his journeys to many first world and third world countries, Neogi has very well delineated Naipaul’s truthful portrayal of the dark and comic aspects of the dilemmas, displacements and cultural confusion of the “exilic consciousness” of the voluntary and involuntary immigrants in the contemporary global-local scenario. Authenticating the facts and arguments from a few biographies available on Naipaul and his interviews and statements on his personal life, his attitudes and visions, the book endeavours to recreate Naipaul as a person and his making of an evolving writer disseminating his convictions through multiple platforms.

Divided into five chapters including “Introduction” and “Conclusion,” *V.S.Naipaul: His Dark and Comic Vision* explores Naipaul’s perceptiveness about the displaced condition of human life, comprising dark as well as comic sides as depicted in his four travelogues and select fiction. The introductory chapter briefly discusses the life of V.S.Naipaul (Sir Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul) born in Trinidad whose grandfather had been brought as an indentured labourer from a village in UP in India to settle in the Caribbean Islands, his long literary career and his visits to a few continents. With the help of the views of a few prominent theorists of diasporic experiences the chapter also precisely brings out the various issues confronting immigrants e.g. “fluidity, fragmentation, difference, cross-cultural interaction, hybridisation” and Naipaul’s portrayal of a vast “range of people, places, milieu and issues,” “himself changing from phase to phase “yet remaining constant and consistent in his emphasis on the ‘comic.’” The chapter

also highlights the dark and comic vision of Naipaul emerging from his presentations in his Travelogues and novels. Chapter 2 “The Woman Question” draws attention to the presence of comparatively less women characters in his fictional and non-fictional universe for which he has met severe criticism. Despite his two marriages, though unsuccessful, and many affairs, the women characters presented by him are not convincing and full of life. Neogi attributes this possibly to some socio-psychological factors in his life. Chapter 3 “Dark Vision: Four Travelogues” analyses Naipaul’s four travelogues: *An Area of Darkness* (1964), *India: A Wounded Civilization* (1975), *Among the Believers* (1981) and *Beyond Belief* (1998): enunciating his visits to India, Pakistan, Indonesia, Iran and Malaysia and his dark vision based on his “warped perceptions” about India, biased attitudes towards Islam and a few Third world “subjectivities.” Chapter 4 “Comic Vision in Select Fiction” comprehensively examines the comic vision of Naipaul in the three phases of his career by probing into the “exilic experiences” of many characters portrayed in his eight novels: *The Mystic Masseur* (1957), *The Suffrage of Elvira* (1958), *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961), *The Mimic Men* (1967), *In a Free State* (1971), *A Bend in the River* (1979), *Half a Life* (2002) and *Magic Seeds* (2004), and his deft employment of the techniques of wit, humour, parody, irony and humour to communicate his vision. In the last chapter “Conclusion” Neogi convincingly sums up the discussion on a balanced note stating that no doubt Naipaul has been “denounced as a spokesman for the West against developing countries and societies owing to “his harsh accounts of ‘areas of darkness,’ wounded civilizations,’ Africans, non-Arab Islamic countries and the ‘converts’ and for his “behavioural oddities, arrogance and prejudices” but “let us listen to his voice, though bleak at times, was his own, steeped in unpalatable verities.”

The book is written in a persuasive and lucid style keeping the reader glued to the flow of arguments. It is a worth read not only for the scholars working on Naipaul’s life and works and other post-colonial issues but is also an immensely useful source of knowledge and understanding of diaspora studies providing fresh insights into the inner and outer layers of “exilic consciousness.”

