

Post – Colonial Consciousness in Travel Writings of V. S. Naipaul and Mark Tully: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

Writing is a cathartic act that opens the wounds of the past to heal them and dissects the circumstances that inflicted those wounds and methods to mitigate the same. Postcolonial travel writing is one such genre that empowers native writers to retell their side of the story and discuss how colonial subjugation and the resultant moral depredations have scarred them as a collective. In the case of India, Sir V. S. Naipaul and Mark Tully belong to this genre, where they have extensively written about India and its people. However, the similarity stops there; one is a thorough English – bred who can't see anything good in India, while the other is in total unison with the country's spirit and empathizes with the people. This paper aims to understand this difference in their styles about their observations about India and discuss the nature of postcolonial literature and its significance.

Keywords: Postcolonialism, Travel Writing, Postcolonial Literature, V. S. Naipaul, Mark Tully

Introduction to Post–Colonial Literature

Any nation-state with a colonial history is left with scathing scars on her population's collective psyche. These scars refuse to heal even when the yoke of colonialism is lifted, and the country gains freedom. The catharsis of these wounds is required for any society to emerge from the humiliation and depredations inflicted by the colonizer on the nation and find her voice and identity again. Postcolonialism acts as that bridge that connects the current population with the travails of the past and engages them with the experiences of colonialism and the effects it has generated in the past and present.

Postcolonial literature is an amalgamation of numerous streams of the human mind, experience, and consciousness that combine to form an outflow for the suppressed society of the native land. Postcolonial literature discusses various themes like race, gender, feminism,

slavery, oppression, migration, and resistance of the people. (Quayson) Postcolonial literature often comprises tomes of writings that deconstruct the imperial version of the occupancy with a discussion on the historical, cultural, and anthropological effects of the subjugation of the native people and how the imposition of the foreign culture and systems, often referred to in the Western literature as the process of civilization or a white man's burden, have harmed the local society and the people in the process. Postcolonial literature is often regarded as the voice of the subaltern who rises against the 'white-washing' of their history and presents the same stories from the other side of the table.

This repackaging of the native culture and society in the Western format by the colonizers was brought to the focus by the seminal work of Edward Said, who, in his career, *Orientalism* (1978) discussed how the colonial masters re-interpreted and modified the oriental knowledge of the occupied society and how this led to the destruction of the cultures and turned them into the copies of their masters.

Post-Colonial Literature in the Indian Context

Postcolonial literature creates a form of intellectual space for the colonized where they can re-write and re-interpret their earlier stories from the point of view of the victor or the oppressor. Now, this retelling engulfs the society, economy, philosophy, language, and other finer aspects of these people's lives, which the colonial writers earlier ignored. (Ashcroft et al.)

India, a centuries-old culture under British colonial subjugation for almost 190 years, found her 'tryst with destiny' in 1947 and emerged out of the colonial occupation battered, broken, divided, and failed. As is often with colonial oppression, India and her people were systematically brutalized and devoid of sentience; they were deemed fit to be ruled by the superior brothers from the West. Culture mocked, heritage destructed, and old ways of life rendered impossible to follow, the Indian psyche suffered from an inferiority complex and latched on to that last reminiscence of her oppressor, the language, that was far removed from the ethos and sentiments of the nation but acted as a unifying factor because of the sectarian divisions over the choice of language for the Indian State.

This choice of English proved beneficial in the long run, as is evident in the economic and international trade and business scenario, but removed the people from their roots and the Indianness that was the core of their existence and led to a prolific rise in the literature produced in this language, which, very often, brought international prizes and accolades to the Indian writers. As Salman Rushdie, in his work, 'The Vintage Book of Indian Writing' wrote, much to the chagrin of the vernacular writers as well as a few English language writers, "The ironic proposition that India's best writing since independence may have been done in the language of the departed imperialists is simply too much for some folks to bear."

While this statement may bear a typical Rushdie signature of straight talk with minimal sugar-coating, it once again brought the limelight on the discussion on the suitability of writing in the language of the oppressors about the very oppressions and the bestiality that the native people had suffered at their hands. English language writers in

India, and often around the world, are considered as uprooted from their countries, who speak more in the language of their masters and provide a façade to the narrative of the colonial powers of Europe about the benevolence of the colonial rule and how it improved the lives of the natives and helped in their nation-building process.

In the case of India, the subjugation to the British and the systematic dismantling of the organic systems, society, culture, history, and literature dealt a crushing blow to the self-assurance that Indians always lived with, being an ancient and developed civilization among their contemporaries. As the famous 'Minutes' speech of Macaulay, delivered in the British parliament, envisages this trampling of Indian ethos and her history at the hands of her colonizers, he denigrated the colonies by famously mentioning that one shelf of a sound European library is more than the worth of entire native literature of India and Arabia.

This rant and many more like it, whether it is Macaulay or Kipling in his work 'Kim' and 'Jungle Book', depict the East and her natives as uncivilized and uncouth who need to be brought to civilization by the West.

Travel Writings of Naipaul & Tully: A Postcolonial Study in Contrast

Travel writing has often been derided and chastised for being an accessory to the imperialism and colonialism of the West. In contrast, it could have served as a tool to counter the same. In the case of the 19th and some parts of the 20th century, this adage proves true as well, as Douglas Ivison (2003) deliberated that travel writing had become a tool that affects and, in turn, is affected by racial identity, gender politics, economic status and other markers of class and privilege prevalent in any society.

When the native writer engages in travel writing literature, it could result in two scenarios; one is where the travel has taken leads to the development of reflections on home, as in the country in this case, while it may also lead to a sense of hopelessness that arises due to dilution of the country-specific identity of the writer as they travel their native land. In the first case, while the writer can relate to and empathize with the present state of the nation's affairs, in the second case, the writer goes through the pain of shattered illusions as the distance often breeds romance for the land. The writer creates an image of his homeland or the country based on his readings of the same, and, as he travels himself across the length and breadth of the country, he realizes that most of the text written yet, is a glossing over of the poverty, pain, and deprivation that is the reality of the land.

It is not that the writer in the first scenario and the one in the second scenario are looking at a different country or the same country in different timelines. Still, the difference lies in the pre-conceived notions, a sense of familiarity and rootedness in the land, and a heightened level of empathy that distinguishes how both the writers look at the same country and derive two opposite conclusions out of the same. The same is the case with V. S. Naipaul, a Nobel Laureate, who was an Indian by origin, but a citizen of the world, and Mark Tully, the BBC correspondent and then BBC India Head who was a Britisher by birth but an Indian in all true sense of the word.

V. this passage from India can best exemplify S. Naipaul's strange and traumatic relationship with India: *A Wounded Civilization*, where he writes, "India for me is a difficult

country. It isn't my home and cannot be my home, yet I cannot reject it or be indifferent to it; I cannot travel only for the sights. I am at once too close and too far." (x)

As a person of Indian origin, he was born in Trinidad and later settled in the UK; thus, in a manner of speaking, he was always distant from his motherland, and many of his impressions bore the marks of an imperial English attitude. While he wrote more personally than Mark Tully, his characters often resembled his contemptuous pessimism and excruciating straight talk while describing India. This passage from 'A Writer's People: Ways of Looking and Feeling' expresses his disenchantment with India, "India has no autonomous intellectual life. Of the many millions whom independence has liberated, a fair proportion now looks away from India for ultimate fulfillment. They look in the main to Britain and the United States. They look especially to the United States".

All three books of his India trilogy, *An Area of Darkness*, *India: A Wounded Civilization*, and *India: A Million Mutinies Now*, discuss his hopelessness with India and how he feels that almost all the institutions prevalent in India have been imported from outside and their unsuitability to the Indian public's psyche and their feudal system. He includes democracy, parliament, courts, press, and many other important institutions that, according to him, would not survive in India.

On the effect of the colonial rule, Naipaul feels that India has been left a "demoralized land of plunder and licensed cruelty" that hasn't been able to find her ideology of rejuvenation. According to him, the person primarily responsible for this sorry state of affairs in India is Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, who imposed his own will so strongly over the Indian independence struggle that, after him, there was no alternative for the Indians to pick up.

In the case of the Indian writers, he feels a profound contempt for them as he feels that most of the work, especially in the field of novels, is strange, "insulated from the history", as the characters of these novels do not exhibit any impact or effect of their surroundings or their country's history in their characterization, which according to Naipaul is very strange as India has experienced a very traumatic independence struggle preceded by a plundering and scarring colonial rule.

There is inherent negativity and prejudice so intense in Naipaul's outlook towards India that he finds fault with the vast size of the country, which he calls "frightening geography". Although it can be argued that, among the three books, there is a real positive turn towards India from the first book, *An Area of Darkness* to *India: A Million Mutinies Now*, as he mentions in the third book that there is some hope for India in future as the growing young population is restless and challenging the status quo of earlier generations' staidness and the hope for the betterment of India's future rises from these young people.

An author profile that serves as a perfect foil for Naipaul is Mark Tully, that British gentleman, who was an Englishman by birth, but who felt a deep connection with India, so much so that he decided to settle down in India once his official role as BBC Bureau Chief ended. Contrary to Naipaul's trilogy, Tully's three books on India, *No Full Stops in India*, *India in Slow Motion*, and *India's Unending Journey*, do not judge the country or her people

based on their history, geography, political thoughts, or the institutions. Instead, it presents an empathetic picture of a country that has undergone a brutal colonial subjugation at the hands of its brethren and how she was now emerging out of that colossal black hole of impoverishment and under-development trying to achieve her "tryst with destiny".

His sympathetic attitude towards India and her people is visible in the Introduction of his book *No Full Stops in India*, where he writes,

India is still a land dominated by foreign thinking... the Western world and the Indian elite who emulate it ignore the genius of the Indian mind. They want to write a complete stop in a land where there are no full stops...the stories I tell in this book will, I hope, serve to illustrate how Western thinking has distorted and still distorts Indian life. I might almost say they are parables... They provide no answers to India's poverty but suggest we should begin to look for those answers in India itself (12-13)

While Mark Tully's first book introduced India to her readers in all the myriad forms and avatars, where he discusses the tribal and folk artists of India and how the market exploits them, or telecast of Ramayana and the cultural and religious impact it made on the collective consciousness of the country, he also discusses the troubled times of Indian life Operation Black Thunder and the earthquake in Gujarat that saw the devastation at an unprecedented level. With the second book, *India in Slow Motion*, Tully's writing starts probing the troubles of India as he ponders over the possible reasons for the slow growth of India. Tully mentions that, although there are many east and apparent answers like corruption, colonial rule, illiteracy, etc., the root cause is 'bad governance', a promise made by the elected representatives of this country of delivery of service and justice to every person, something that they have not been able to fulfill. Tully not only glosses over this deduction but systematically explains how 'bad governance' is altering the fate of Indians, who can grow at a much faster pace. This is the book where the difference with the cynicism of Naipaul is so clearly visible as Tully speaks the language of hope and catharsis to improve the present situation.

The third and final book exhibits even more difference from Naipaul as the tone of this book, *India's Unending Journey*, is philosophical, where Tully expresses his gratitude that he was able to spend his life in India, a country of immense spiritual joy and heritage, an idea that Naipaul would have balked at. Tully mentions in this book that growing materialism and commercialization would make India a copy of the West and lose her unique blend of religion, spirituality, and society.

Conclusion

As the readers browse through the works of Naipaul and Tully, remarkable similarities and differences, both at the same time, can be discerned by an attentive reader. Both agree that India was robbed of her rightful place in the world hierarchy because of the English colonial rule that permanently damaged the country and her people.

But the similarity ends there, as Naipaul views India from the eyes of an accuser who finds fault with almost everything India possesses or has to offer to the world. At the

same time, Tully is a more compassionate watcher of Indian society who witnesses the greatness and spirituality of this civilization and how much it has got to offer to the world.

While both of them realize that India is a country being pulled apart by two opposite forces, tradition and modernity, Eastern ethos and Western influence, however, contrary to Naipaul, Tully discusses the divergent streams of Indian consciousness in his third book and suggests a common path for both to come together and reconcile their differences. At the same time, Naipaul feels that these differences cannot be reconciled and, ultimately, modernity will throw away the established order of tradition. Only then would India have some hope of growth and advancement.

It can be summarized that while Naipaul, a person of Indian origin, could never connect with his motherland, Tully, an Englishman by birth, embraced India with all her contradictions and forged a strong connection with her.

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