

A linkage between the work of V.S. Naipaul and R.K. Narayan has been established by several critics. Western writers including George Woodcock<sup>1</sup> and William Walsh<sup>2</sup> as well as Indian commentators such as C.D. Narasimhaiah<sup>3</sup> and Nissim Ezekiel have shown these two novelists as writers whose works counterpoint each other. The greatest interest in the relationship between them, however, has been shown by V.S. Naipaul himself. In several places in his non fiction Naipaul makes comments about Narayan's work in relation to his own vision. Indeed, in India: A Wounded Civilization he spends thirteen pages analysing some of Narayan's fiction critically.

From what one is able to gather, it appears that Naipaul was quite an admirer of Narayan's work before he visited India. He expresses a sense of affinity with the Indian ironist whom he regards as India's best writer. Moreover his attitude towards Narayan is very closely linked with his feelings about India ('a resting place for the imagination'). Thus, when Naipaul spends a year in India and suffered a kind of psychic shock, this influenced his feelings about Narayan considerably. In his first essay on India, An Area of Darkness<sup>4</sup> he includes half a page of ambivalent criticism of Narayan's work. But

---

<sup>1</sup> See George Woodcock: "Two great Commonwealth Novelists R.K. Narayan and V.S. Naipaul" in The Sewanee Review (Winter 1979 Vol. LXXXVII No. I)

<sup>2</sup> William Walsh, Commonwealth Literature. O.U.P. London 1973. pg. 59

<sup>3</sup> C.D. Narasimhaiah, "Indian Writing in English: An Area of Promise" in Journal of Commonwealth Literature (Vol. IX No. I)

<sup>4</sup> V.S. Naipaul, An Area of Darkness, Andre Deutsch, London 1964

here he has not yet assimilated the Indian experience and is still attempting to come to terms with it.

His later work India: A Wounded Civilization<sup>5</sup> takes up the issue of Narayan's writing more fully. By this time, (thirteen years have elapsed) he has placed India in a kind of perspective in his own mind. Thus, where before he had made somewhat vague judgements ('The virtues of R.K. Narayan are Indian failings magically transmuted') now he is able to make far more specific comments, presenting Narayan in a wholly unfavourable light. He claims that Narayan is a true product of the Indian middle class, exhibiting through his attitude of ironic acceptance a 'Hindu view of the world.'

But Naipaul is using Narayan's work to prove his own case concerning the Indian mind. He is using literary criticism to reveal what he believes are the attitudes which have resulted in the Indian social and political chaos. This leads one to wonder how genuine these criticisms are, ~~and~~ whether they are not totally coloured by the author's feelings about India.

This study therefore proposes to follow Naipaul through the various phases of his relationship with ~~Narayan's~~ <sup>Narayan's</sup> work. In our first chapter we will examine the basis for his early

---

<sup>5</sup>V.S. Naipaul, India: A Wounded Civilization, Andre Deutsch, London, 1977

feeling of affinity with Narayan. We will look at the social and cultural parallels which have given rise to a certain similarity in theme between his work and Narayan's. Next we will look at the divergence in attitude between the two writers as it manifests itself in stylistic differences. We will do this primarily through an examination of a novel of each of the writers. These novels have been chosen because of a certain striking thematic similarity; we hope that an analysis of how the same theme is handled by the two writers will bring out the essential differences in their vision.

Finally we will undertake a thorough examination of Naipaul's remarks on Narayan. We will weigh these remarks against the evidence of the novels themselves, seeing whether Naipaul's castigation is truly justified. Through this exercise we hope to come to a fuller appreciation of what R.K. Narayan has attempted and achieved in his work.

\* \* \* \* \*