

NAIPAUL'S INDIA: A MILLION MUTINIES NOW: THE DYNAMICS OF POLITICS

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ABSTRACT

Sir Vidiyadhar Surajprasad Naipaul is one of the eminent travel-writers and novelists in English. His writings deal with the problems of the Third World societies. He has candidly written about political corruption, oppression and revolution. His significant writings center around the themes of alienation, migration, displacement, search for identity, freedom and power, etc. The present paper attempts to examine the active forces, tools and means used for the operative politics by the political parties and their leaders and their effect on the nation and the masses. An analysis has been attempted of the dynamics of politics in Naipaul's *India: A Million Mutinies Now* (1990). The focus is on the use of religion, region, caste issues and coercion, corruption and nepotism in the game of politics. It remains the fact that the politics of the rulers after the end of the colonial rule has remained self-centred.

KEYWORDS: Dynamics, Politics, Forces, Tools, Religion, Coercion, Corruption, Nepotism

INTRODUCTION

Sir Vidiyadhar Surajprasad Naipaul is one of the eminent travel-writers and novelists in English. His writings deal with the problems of the Third World societies. However his political opinions about the Third world countries have been quite controversial. His works depict his own experiences about the erstwhile colonized societies. He is critical of the weaknesses and shortcomings of the traditional culture, as well. Naipaul who has authored a number of works of fiction and non-fiction deals with the effects of colonialism and migration on the indigenous people. He is also concerned with the experience of dislocation and displacement both in the physical and the psychic sense. He has openly written about political corruption, oppression and revolution. His significant writings center on the themes of alienation, migration, displacement, search for identity, freedom and power.

The present paper attempts to examine the active forces, tools and means used for the operative politics by the political parties and the leaders and their effect on the nation and the masses. An analysis has been attempted of the dynamics of politics in Naipaul's *India: A Million Mutinies Now* (1990). The focus is on the use of religion, region, caste issues and coercion, corruption and nepotism in the game of politics. It remains the fact that the politics of the rulers after the end of the colonial rule has remained self-centred. The political dynamics refer to the unique course of action or actions, the unique political modus operandi (subtle, gross, or both), successful or unsuccessful, local or foreign, etc. It contributes towards affecting an outcome integrative or disintegrative; temporary or permanent.

The corruption, criminalization and nepotism, continue to be the characteristic feature of the Indian politics. The politicians resort to the use of illegal, undemocratic and unethical means to grab power. In contrast to the past, when the leaders who were popular among the masses and got the opportunity to taste power by dint of their popularity, the leaders of today attain power through manipulative practices that dampen the democratic machinery. The divides between the

majority and minority communities can be attributed to the politics of the main political players who dominate the political scenario in India. The issues of caste, region, subalterns and minorities form the basis of political organizations. These organizations aim at fighting against the injustices meted out to them by the powerful political groups or the leaders. The politics of central government is responsible for the rising trend of regionalism and the formation of regional parties. The regional parties' politics aim at promoting the interests of the states.

Some critics term Naipaul as Eurocentric. Mallikarajun Patil terms Naipaul as a, "cynical writer" who, "visits India with a western eye." (Mahanta 2004:153) Satish K. Harit in his article entitled 'V.S Naipaul and Indian Psyche' talks about Naipaul's opinions about the democratic institutions in India. He is of the view that India is unable to follow the democratic model of Europe or the west as religion has considerable influence on the politics of the Indian rulers. (Ibid: 81) Malik Arjun is of the view that Naipaul's travel- writing "exhibits his varied aspects –his observation, aggressive mode of assessment, concern for the weak, sympathy for the sufferers and his grand evaluation of men, manners, objects and developments of a country he visits." (Ibid: 147)

It may be argued that the Indian society being diverse - the people belong to different religions, regions and castes - speak different languages. The clash of ideas is but natural as people have emotional ties with their religion, region and languages. The infighting among the different sections is the consequence of the above-mentioned factors. As a European, Naipaul sees India through the eyes of a European. Western education and experience enable Naipaul to understand India's problems better. Europeans are certainly better equipped to tackle the problems at home. In India, seventy percent of the people live in rural belt and have chosen agriculture as a profession for their livelihood. The people of the villages are attached to their respective faiths. The belief in religion is one of the important causes of the emergence of religious outfits like Shiv Sena. Naipaul shows that Ambedkar is like a Christ for Dalits, and they are ready to do anything for him. Malika, the wife of Nandedo the Dalit leader says that Dalits are sentimental about Ambedkar that: "They would slaughter their wife. Anything for Ambedkar..." (108) His rise as a national leader can be attributed to his popularity among the Dalits who form the large section of the Indian populace.

Politics has become the game of exchange of benefits. The Dalit Panthers supported the Emergency and in turn the government rewarded them by withdrawing the cases against them. This shows how the parties in power have to compromise with the opposing forces, so as to remain in power. On the other hand, the organizations or the pressure groups like Dalit Panthers support issues or the policies (like Emergency) which deny the constitutional rights to the citizens. Naipaul believes that the political system in India encourages politics of convenience and expediencies rather than the politics of principles. As a consequence of exclusion and oppression, the Dalits in Maharashtra get together. The Dalits and Muslims join hands against the dominant Hindu outfit, Shiv Sena. The treatment of Dalits as inferiors and Muslims as minority in Maharashtra brought them on one platform. Naipaul describes the alignment of the politically weak Dalits and Muslims against the formidable force-Shiv Sena:

...both those sections, the Dalits and the Muslims, are alienated.
And someone thought it would be a good idea to bring them
together... (25)

The violent clashes in Maharashtra were the result of the clash of interests on the issues of religion, caste and region. Dalit Panthers and Shiv Sena indulged in fights time and again in the state. The Dalits termed as 'Dalit pigs' raised the voice of dissent. There were voices raised by Muslims for propagating Islam. There were slogans painted in tall block letters: "Liberate humanity through Islam."(28) This clearly demonstrates how the leaders divide society through their

shrewd political tactics. The use of religion and caste in the politics leads to serious implications to the extent of riots and violence which results in the loss of public life and property. The politicians play with the emotions of the people. The religion and caste serve as, tools to provoke the people and incite violence. The Indians have a strong belief in their religion and have strong ties with caste which gives a sense of belonging and identity. Political affinities have a negative effect on family life as well as social relations. The Dalits develop hatred for the communists who insist on merely politics of class. Namdeo was a Dalit leader, his wife was a daughter of a communist. Malika describes to Naipaul: "His marriage to me added to his troubles. I was the daughter of a well known Communist, and Dalits do not like Communists." (106)

Before independence, the political leaders had worn home-spun as a symbol of sacrifice, service and their oneness with the poor and the downtrodden. Today the politician's homespun stands for political power. Poverty is a serious issue, but for them it is just a poetic concept. Men have become materialistic and honour only money. Investment in development at projects after independence has led only corruption and criminalization of politics. Nothing is certain now. The role of a policeman, thief and politician has become identical. Naipaul describes the significant shift that has taken place: "... And with money- the money of which the crowded, ugly skyscraper towers of Bombay spoke- many long buried particularities had been released. These disruptive, lesser loyalties of region- caste, and clan- now played on the surface of Indian life. ..."(4) Pankaj Mishra is of the view that the career of politician's can be judged by the wealth he has amassed through the game of politics. He suggests that politics "is now little more than investment opportunity, an idea cynically accepted in public discourse where a politician's career is assessed by the wealth he has amassed..." (Mishra, *The New York Review of Books* 63-64:1998)

During the period of Emergency in 1975, there was growth in corrupt practices. The smugglers turned into land mafias. Indira Gandhi had declared emergency to eradicate poverty, crime and corruption, but it led to criminalization of politics and corruption in everyday life. After 1975, all the mafia dons gave up smuggling and took up real estate business which intensified corruption. They encourage people, for instance to vacate the land. The form of corruption has also undergone significant vicissitudes. Naipaul gets the opinion from the people and columnists in the newspapers about the criminalization of the Indian society which is on the rise. The people are at the mercy of the leaders who use gangsters to "get their work done or to speed things up: to deter political defections, to encourage political donations; to enforce payment of a debt..." (69)

The use of gangsters by the political parties and leaders to grab power has made the democratic process a farce. The democratic machinery is hijacked. The question arises what are the democratic institutions for, if the voice of the people is to be silenced by sheer force or threat. Corrupt practices are an inseparable part of Indian political system. Naipaul shows how one suspended accountant who is from the constituency represented by Prakash visits him for his recommendation for reinstatement. The charge against him is of the misappropriation of Rupees 5000 from the collection from the land revenue. Prakash in a conversation with his wife gives his observation: "If there's been that technical flaw he will get his reinstatement, and his back wages." (183)

The political funding is common practice in the Indian politics. The bureaucrats, industrialists and businessmen who want undue favors from the politicians give funds to the leaders of the political parties who are contending for power. Politicians have an urge to mint money as well they want to keep their image clean. Acceptance of gifts is a decent way of corruption. Even the funds taken at the time of elections is considered as fair. Prakash, the politician describes to Naipaul the trend of political funding in India: "..... People would go and offer them gifts – gold ornaments, fruits and coconuts..." (184)

Parkash also highlights the negative trend of selection of candidates to various departments on political recommendations. Even the members of selection committees try every method to recruit their kith and kin. Parkash describes the faulty system: “At an appointments board someone will jump and say, ‘I’ am sorry, I can’t interview the next candidate. He’s my brother-in –law. You must excuse me.” Perfectly nice and correct, but it is also an indication to the selection panel that the candidate in question is man’s brother- in –law.”(184) The charges of nepotism have become the talk of the day. It is rather painful that idealism has taken the back seat, and the politicians indulge in manipulative politics.

V.S. Naipaul attempts to demonstrate how regionalism as a tendency emerges in Indian politics. The regional issues create divisions in the Indian political set up as the clash of interests of different regions pose serious problems. Inter- state disputes may be seen as a consequence of regionalism and India as a nation stands shattered and divided. Naipaul describes the effects of regionalism on the Indian politics: “... in independent India, Bombay had found itself in the state of Maharashtra; and in mid 1960’s a regional movement had started. This movement wanted Maharashtra to be for Maharashtrian” (5) Shiv Sena has become politically powerful because it appeals to the Hindu sentiments. They have become powerful to the extent that even the police need their help. They run a government parallel to the elected government. It becomes evident from the description of the act of the police inspector who had come “that Sunday morning to ask for the Sena’s help with the local ‘Eve-teasing problem’.” (17) Sunil Khilnani believes that the politics of Shiv Sena was aimed at raising local and regional issues. He says that the Sena has succeeded in its “ability to develop a quotidian local politics with the local goals” (Khilnani 1984:141) The Shiv Sena formed in 1966 was entirely under the control of one family. Four out of eighteen members were from the family of Thackeray. It depicts the rising trend of dynastic politics in various political parties. National and regional parties in India are controlled and operated by kith and kin of political bigwigs. National interests get sacrificed for family hegemony. Personalities have gained prominence over principles in contemporary politics.

The politicians use the dons to serve their own political interests; the criminalization is on the rise. Political leaders attain political power, not by dint of their popularity but through manipulations and resorting to illegal ways, using money and muscle power thus dampening the democratic machinery. Critic Khilnani highlights how the politicians commit illegalities to attain power: The compulsion to win power publicly and legitimately has provoked unpicturesque illegalities, old and innovative –violence, corruption, and ‘booth capturing’. (Khilnani 1998: 158) The politicians use gangsters for their ulterior motives. In a conversation with Naipaul, Ajit describes how the Dons had “recently broken new ground: they had done a kidnapping for a political party.” (71) This shows how the politicians resort to all means in order to stay in power. The hijacking of the democratic institutions by forcible methods by the politicians has made the mockery of the democracy.

It is pertinent to mention here that the politics plays its role. The Muslims who form size-able part of the Indian populace have been able to get their own ‘Muslim personal law.’ The central government follows the policy of appeasement for the minorities. The national parties in India try to assume the secular image so that they remain acceptable to even the minorities. Minority communities have a vital role to play in the present political scenario. Rakesh Sinha writes: “In the ‘80’s as the role of mass vote banks became vital, the policy of appeasement became more pronounced. In 1983, a 15- point programme was announced by the Prime Minister which was basically a programme for Muslims.” (Sinha 2012: 11)

Surinder S. Jodha is of the view that communities and castes act as pressure groups. These pressure groups influence the governance agenda of ruling party at all levels starting from the local to the national level. Jodha is of the view that caste considerations have a pivotal role in the formation of political parties. Caste affiliations also tend to decide

the leadership issue and the programmes of the party. Jodha points out that the democratic process is extremely different “from the visions of those who laid the foundations and framed the constitution of India.” (Jayal Mehta 2010: 154)

With the regional interest of parties like D.M.K., the national interests and concerns takes the back seat. Today, a number of parties talk about more rights or autonomy to states- a tendency which is likely to kill the national consciousness and lead to interstate disputes. The D.M.K party advocated more autonomy to the states, as opposed to the policy of the government at the center which wants to keep more powers with it. Mr. Palani describes to Naipaul how the D.M.K, considered as secessionist movement had “become a party looking for regional autonomy.”(232) Naipaul shows how it became the political necessity of the D.M.K. party to make a compromise with the central government in order to remain in power and get concessions for the state. He describes how the D.M.K government “promise things from the center in Delhi-in return of which they want concessions locally... (235) Naipaul is of the view that in “the politics of alignment and realignment there were no principles or programmes. There were only enemies or allies.” (192)

The elections in Madras show how the political parties use posters, advertisements to highlight the political personalities. The role of media has attained significance to mould public opinion in one's favor. The domination of film stars in D.M.K. politics shows that a popular figure matters a lot to win people on your side by projecting them as leaders. Bal Thakeray publishes a magazine titled Marmik to highlight the issues which Shiv Sena raises for Maharastrians. Marmik magazine served as a foundation for Shiv Sena. Print media plays a decisive role for political organizations as it can mould the public opinion in their favor.

Naipaul portrays Gurtej singh as a representative of Sikh alienation. He is described as a staunch supporter of and a man of the inner circle of Bhinderanwale. He gives a detailed description of discrimination by central government against the Sikhs. He talks about the water dispute between Haryana and Punjab which proved fatal. ‘Dharam yudh’ agitation started from the Golden Temple was, in fact, a continuation of agitation which started, from Kapuri village in Punjab. The movement was to stop the S.Y.L canal construction, though it is a separate point of discussion that Akalis raised the water issue to garner the support of Punjabi farming community so as to derive political power. Naipaul portrays Gurtej Singh as a man rooted in his culture, history and religion. Gurtej Singh justifies his support for the Sikh agitation in Punjab. Gutej Singh does not have any political aspirations, but he fails to understand the hidden politics of the leaders he says: “.... Religious persecution... ‘And this is what made me support this agitation for justice in Punjab. It was more of an emotional identification with my people - in the days of Punjabi Suba , 1957 to 1960... (430)”

Naipaul is rather astonished to notice how Bhinderanwale, though not an educated man wins over an intellectual like Gurtej Singh on his side. This shows education is not essential qualification for becoming a religious or a political leader in India. Naipaul describes how the educated youth like Dalip joins the movement without any conviction. He gives unemployment as the main reason which resulted in the frustration among the young people. Naipaul shows how the family of Maharaja Patiala is believed to have been blessed by the Guru. The Sikhs believe that Maharaja Patiala family has the blessings of the sixth Guru of Sikhs that they will rule the territory which would extend to the river Jamuna. This shows how the religious beliefs influence the politics in India. Naipaul depicts how, Amarinder Singh, grandson of Maharaja Bhupinder Singh, was brought up in independent India, got education from famous Indian schools and later joined the army and then politics. Amarinder Singh's joining of politics shows that the family, which had a taste of power in the past, cannot remain without power.

To conclude, it may be said that the issues of caste, religion, language, and region form the basis of the dynamics of politics in India. The various political parties exploit these cards to garner support and to attain power. The clash of the

majority and the minority is due to the divisive politics of the parties. The politics has become the game of self- promotion in which corruption and nepotism get approval even from the masses. The use of coercion by the politicians makes the mockery of democracy. It seems that in politics, the personalities matter and the principles and issues have taken the back seat. The inter-state disputes are the result of a rising trend of regionalism. The people are becoming more and more regional in their approach and thus national consciousness is diminishing.

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