

Chapter II

Travel Writings of V. S. Naipaul and Amitav Ghosh: A Critical Overview

Although there has been innumerable travel writings published till date, the extent and amount of critical works comprising all-inclusive discussions on the genre fall quite short of it except for a number of volumes where the genre of travel writing has been discussed in the context of various modern critical theories like post-colonialism, translation studies or feminism and other relevant genres such as anthropology or history in the last few decades. Thus while *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing* (2002), edited by Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs, tries to present a brief historical and critical analysis of the genre; Sara Mills' *Discourses of Difference* (1991) puts travel writing in the context of feminism; and Stephen Greenblatt's *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (1991) discusses the genre from the New Historist's point of view. But the post-colonial context in the genre of travel writing has remained most prominent in the recent times and works such as Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), *Tourists with Typewriters* (2000) by Holland and Huggan, *The Empire Writes Back* (1989) by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin or Mary Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes* (1992) have firmly established the relation between travel writing and post-colonial studies. Naturally, a comprehensive discussion of Naipaul and Ghosh as travel writers in the post-colonial context is very rare to find in this otherwise scant and still growing collection of the discussion of travel writing from the post-colonial point of view, except for a few stray references to Naipaul or Ghosh in the critics like Said, Ashcroft-Griffiths-Tiffin, or Holland and Huggan.

Said's *Orientalism*, that had situated travel writing in the post-colonial context firstly and famously, for example, finds Naipaul to reflect the eurocentric notions of imperial Europe in his writings, especially travel literature. While examining the construction and operations of Orientalism that was used by the imperial powers to justify their colonialism, Said observes that "many of the stereotypes of Islamic and Arabic sensuality, sloth, fatalism, cruelty, degradation and splendor, to be found in writers from John Buchan to V. S. Naipaul, have also been presuppositions underlying the adjoining field of academic Orientalism" (345). Later, in *Culture and*

Imperialism too he extends this observation on Naipaul as while discussing the legacy of Orientalism in the English literature, he finds that "Conrad is the precursor of the Western views of the Third World which one finds in the work of novelists as different as Graham Greene, V. S. Naipaul, and Robert Stone . . ." (xix). In the same book Said also tries to ascertain the nature of Naipaul's ambiguous relationship with imperialism and colonialism--that had already given rise to quite a severe debate following the publication of his travel books on India and a few Islamic countries -- with the aid of Seamus Deane's analysis of the colonial predicament in Yeats. Said finds that the same predicament is expressed "in V. S. Naipaul's representation of India, that of a culture indebted to the mother country for its own self and for a sense of 'Englishness' and yet turning towards the colony" in search of a national identity (275). Likewise, while Benita Parry finds Naipaul "interested in denigrating an entire continent [Africa]" (133); Pramod K. Nayar also notes that "In *The Middle Passage* (1969), a non-fiction travelogue covering five societies (British, French, Dutch, in the Caribbean, and South America), he is particularly harsh on the Caribbean's 'nationalism' . . . and modernity" (44).

C. L. Innes, on the other hand, discusses Naipaul as a representative of the generation of the writers who had emigrated to the post World War II England like Samuel Selvon, James Berry, Wilson Harris, Randolph Stow, and Salman Rushdie. As Innes observes, almost all these writers were engaged in both an exploration of a "new sense and consequence of location and identity in Britain" and also in continuing "the tradition of travel writing which was such a feature of colonialist writing, and still represents an important genre in contemporary British writing (190)". Innes also observes that unlike the Anglo-English travel writings that tried to establish the 'otherness' of the places travelled to and of the people encountered therein, these post-colonial British writers "often revisit and revision those places depicted by metropolitan travellers, or focus their travel writing on Britain and Europe." In this context, while Innes believes that "V. S. Naipaul is perhaps the preeminent example of a writer who alternates writings about his encounters with other cultures and places with the search for location within England and Englishness", he also points out the way travels to the Caribbean and India disappoint Naipaul as he finds these places politically/culturally "static and sterile" (190-191).

Ashcroft-Griffiths-Tiffin, however, observe that Naipaul is a representative post-colonial writer in his negating the myth of the centre, even though his perception is

deeply ambivalent: "Although Naipaul has one of the clearest visions of the nexus of power operating in the imperial-colonial world, he is paradoxically drawn to that centre even though he sees it constructing the 'periphery' as an area of nothingness." Thus, according to them, Naipaul "is simultaneously able to see that the 'reality', the 'truth', and 'order' of the centre is also an illusion." Nevertheless, in spite of this ambiguity in Naipaul's writings, these critics find him to be an inseparable and essential face of post-colonial literature, "such an ambivalence is by no means disabling, for it provides the tension out of which emerges a rich and incisive reconstruction of post-colonial experience" (89-90).

Beside these observations made by these post-colonial theorists on Naipaul, there are also the critical discussions on the genre of the travel writing in the post-colonial context where Naipaul once again seems to occupy a significant status. As for example, Steve Clark, while arguing against a post-colonial labeling of every travel book as an expression of imperial/colonial desires and operations in his introduction to *Travel Writing and Empire*, finds Naipaul to represent the travel writers who do not follow the traditional route of the imperial travelers in their journeys from the center to the margins in search of an otherness that can be colonized later. Rather, as Clark puts it, "The far-away places of the earth may presuppose a point from which they are defined and taxonomised. And yet in principle travel may be from the periphery to a stronger, if none the less exotic, culture — to the metropolitan centre: the post-war immigrant to London (Naipaul) . . ." Thus for Clark, Naipaul and travel writers like him remain unique in the way they negate the authority of a predetermined centre and home and thereby not only prevent us from a post-colonial analysis of every travel book but also indicate the versatility of the genre. "If the structural function of the journey is to uncover, bring into relation, there are potential reversals by which the authority of home may be suspended, even repudiated" (5).

David Taylor argues otherwise as in the same book he finds that Naipaul (who had been inspired by Conrad) had served as the model for a later Chatwin who beside displaying "an embittered perception of history", also exhibits a certain "elision of the basic fact of being-there, the economic privilege allowing the incursion of the western traveller" and thus renders the "effects of tessellation and mosaic not only disingenuous but even sinister in their artful incongruities" (208). Caren Kaplan, on the other hand, directly accuses Naipaul of joining the league of the travel writers who continue the traditionally imperialist practice of travel writing in their "travels through

a postcolonial construct of oppositional binaries" in their texts where "the 'Third World' is always located in a clearly defined periphery, the colonial relations have shifted from military/economic to cultural/economic, and stereotypes serve as explanatory legitimations of foreign policy" (84).

Holland and Huggan too find the travel writings of Naipaul to be modeled upon the imperialist paradigm of the nineteenth century travel writing, and most importantly, upon the novella *Heart of Darkness* by Conrad that has inspired many other travelogues beside those by Naipaul. As these critics note, in the fashion of Conrad's vision of Africa, Naipaul's travels too discover in Africa a zone where "history disappears; the landscape becomes sinisterly primeval; human figures become either hypersensual or abject; politics becomes anarchy; noncontinuous phenomena are sucked into an 'essential' stigmatized center. Travel into the Congo disfigures, becomes a form of dystopic transgression" (70).

Holland and Huggan, however, find Naipaul to be different from Conrad as unlike in the former writer where a European represents corruption, in Naipaul's "A New King for the Congo, Mobutu and the Nihilism of Africa" the endless corruption is shown to be manifested in black Africans. Furthermore, unlike Conrad, who characterized the Congo as mysteriously savage, Naipaul presents an Africa that is simply "primitive" and being unable to attain the blandishments of European civilization, has fallen victim to a neocolonial derangement. Moreover, the critics also accuse Naipaul of displaying the traditional practice of the travel writers of eroticizing their work through the act of "cultural voyeurism", although they believe the voyeurism in Naipaul, as most significantly expressed in his travel books on India, to be of a unique kind. They find Naipaul to cast himself in the role of a horrified spectator while reducing the squalor in India to a show intended to shock readers. "The voyeuristic fervor with which Naipaul documents this activity is matched by the moralism with which he denounces it - a combination often found in travel narratives, which are quick to register distaste for the 'degenerate' practices of other cultures, but are less inclined to recognize their enjoyment of the tawdriness those cultures display" (18-19). Thus, according to them Naipaul too is not immune from the common vice displayed by the genre of travel writing in its preference for exoticism that leads to voyeurism, and in its tendency to exhibit a certain moral superiority over the cultural 'other' that very often betrays a narrow ethnocentric outlook. Besides, as it appears to these critics, Naipaul is one of those travel writers whose writings "chart the tension

between the writers' compulsion to report the world they see and their often repressed desire to make the world conform to their preconception of it" (10).

Although Clark had praised the way Naipaul's travels from the periphery to the centre made them unique and anti-imperialist, Holland and Huggan view this marginal status of Naipaul in a different way as they note that Naipaul always positions himself "as a consciously liminal figure, wandering the margins of a continent that locks its doors against 'his kind'" with the sole desire "to capitalize on his marginality" (51). A. Sivanandan is more acerbic in his criticism of Naipaul and his travel writings as he accuses him of "selling out" while trying to become a complete Englishman and being co-opted by the former colonizers in this process: "For the moment 'they' accept you, you are finished, completed: the moment they adopt you, you have sold out, you have become the object of their history, you have no evidence apart from them". He goes as far as to add that "Even to lay claim to their language and render it more exquisite than they is an act of self-betrayal—because they re-claim you in their language" (qtd. in Kaplan 125).

However, there are other critics too who have come to believe that whether Naipaul exploits his marginal status or not, as far as his travel books are concerned, travel for Naipaul is never a pleasurable experience. In a way, as Holland and Huggan find it, for "V. S. Naipaul, travel—and the writing that springs from it—is something quite different. To be in transit, in Naipaul's work, is to be in a continual state of crisis" (42). Likewise, James Clifford, while categorizing the travel writers between the two groups on the basis of their vision of travel, finds that Naipaul belongs to the group of travel writers who have a negative vision of travel, as opposed to those having a positive outlook towards it. Thus instead of positively conceptualizing travel as "exploration, research, escape, transforming encounter", Naipaul in his travel writings appears to Clifford to negatively view travel as "transience, superficiality, tourism, exile, and rootlessness" (31).

Dennis Porter too in his *Haunted Journeys* has observed that Naipaul's travel writings are more or less shaped by a sense of 'originary displacement', a feeling that he has set out for a journey that is inappropriate for him both at the spatial and temporal levels. Thus although Naipaul has repeatedly lashed out against the tradition of 'imperial nostalgia' in his travel books on India and Africa, Porter finds him to fall victim to the same practice as he notes how Naipaul appears to position himself in his travel books between the bitterness of a shameful past that he refuses to accept and a

future that does not acknowledge his presence. Sara Suleri agrees, as she too notes how Naipaul's "writings lend expression to a dying generation. . . . In an arena of frantic change, Naipaul records a perspective that knows its time is done even before it has had the chance to be fully articulated" (150). Suleri believes that the rage and self-contempt in Naipaul's travel writings is more related to this romantic melancholy than to the squalor and nothingness of the places he travels to.

However, although works on Naipaul as a novelist against a general and post-colonial context are numerous such as *Critical Perspectives on V. S. Naipaul* (1977) edited by Robert Hammer, Peggy Nightingale's *Journey Through Darkness: The Writing of V. S. Naipaul* (1987), *V. S. Naipaul: A Materialistic Reading* (1988) by Selwyn Cudjoe, Timothy F. Weiss's *On the Margins: The Art of Exile in V. S. Naipaul* (1992), Judith Levy's *V. S. Naipaul: Displacement and Autobiography* (1995), Bruce King's *V. S. Naipaul* (2003), *Postcolonial Situation in the Novels of V. S. Naipaul* (2004) by Champa Rao Mohan; critical works on Naipaul as a travel writer are only a few— while they revolve around the same issues that shape the criticism on his fiction— such as Rob Nixon's *London Calling: V. S. Naipaul, Postcolonial Mandarin* (1992), and *Self and Colonial Desire: Travel Writings of V. S. Naipaul* (1993) by Wimal Dissanayake and Carmen Wickramagamage

Self and Colonial Desire: Travel Writings of V. S. Naipaul categorizes the genre of travel writing in three different types— Information Oriented, Experiential (Sentimentalizing), and Intellectual-Analytic— to put Naipaul primarily in the last category although the writers admit the existence of quite a large number of overlapping instances from the other two types in Naipaul's travel books. While these critics put Naipaul as a travel writer in the Intellectual-Analytic category— a "form of writing where the narrative emerges as a kind of intellectual social commentator" (5)— they find his travel books to be written in an extremely subjective mode and governed by his authorial voice that claims an acuity of observation and depth of analysis in its narration. Although the writers do not fail to admire his "well-trained and sensitive eye of the artist" that portray the landscapes of the foreign land and "His eye for the telling detail [that] is extended to his descriptions of the people too": they also note the "colonial gaze" that he employs while looking down on the same landscape and its inhabitants and studying/observing them as "primitive" or "backward" (84). As Dissanayake and Wickramagamage also note, while writing his travel books Naipaul gives more importance to the temporal journey (a historic and

diachronic journey into memory) than to the physical journey (a spatial and synchronic travel to the actual places) that makes his travel writings yet more unique as compared to the other travel writers.

Rob Nixon's *London Calling* also partly discusses the travel writings by Naipaul from the post-colonial angle as Nixon finds that Naipaul, while internalizing the eurocentric stereotypes that he "fails to interrogate and that, as a traveler, he allows to become his controlling preconceptions" (108), bears the legacy of the British travel writers from the Victorian era "even as he adapts the travel genre to the circumstances of a touristic, postcolonial world" (15). According to Nixon, Naipaul turns to the Victorian travel writing as his model for several reasons: the first reason appears to be Naipaul's growing up on nineteenth-century reading and his "anachronistic" schooling; the second reason is related to his insecurities as a writer that lead him to this famous era in the British literary tradition; the third reason is Naipaul's envy of the "superior tone" and "supreme imperial confidence" that the Victorian travel writers like Froude or Trollope could afford to exhibit; and the last, but according to Nixon the "pivotal", reason is Naipaul's sincere admiration of the way the Victorian travel writers had turned travel writing into a serious mode of political and moral commentary (50-51).

This last affinity, as Nixon finds, explains "one of the great contradictions in Naipaul's approach to travel writing: to take a society seriously has come, for him, to mean giving free rein to cultural and personal expressions of arrogance" (51). Nixon also analyses the way Naipaul exploits the hybridity of the genre of travel writing to present both a supposedly objective, ethnographical observation, and an authorial, subjective persona whose personal prejudices decide upon the cultural values of the place travelled to. And thus to Nixon, the metropolitan Naipaul as a travel writer "has contributed little to the tradition of inverted travelogues produced by Third Worlders or colonial subjects who have sought to write up the foreign peculiarities of Britain and United States" (57). Rather, as Nixon later points out, "while Naipaul has written extensively about the Caribbean, stressing the psychological legacy of colonialism and the persistence of mimicry, he has never documented (far less protested) the United States' economic and military subordination of the region" (140-141).

That Naipaul has been effectively exploiting the imperialistic techniques of travel writing is also noted by Nixon. "He focuses, rather idiosyncratically, less on the disruptive impact of colonialism and neocolonialism than on how these processes

shield people from responsibility by encouraging them to depend on the ideas and labor of others.” Moreover, “The more one reads Naipaul on this score, the more he appears to reinvent the myth of the lazy native” (135). Nixon, in fact, repeatedly accuses Naipaul of displaying a most biased, or in other words, an imperialistic outlook in his travel writings that appear to be predetermined in their observations while traveling: “Dividing cultures with Manichean rigidity, he assumes that there is virtually nothing of cultural worth outside the West.” As he adds further, “Behind this categorical rejection there are really two assumptions: first that the values of the globally marginalized and the ‘primitive’ are not even functionally valid in their own contexts and, second, that such cultures have nothing to offer the West” (115).

Timothy F. Weiss, in his *On the Margins*, however, views Naipaul’s travels and travel writings in a different way, while he refers to Naipaul’s essays in the 1950’s and the early 1960’s where Naipaul frequently expressed his need to travel, leaving England and London so that as a novelist he can “recharge his energies and reawaken his wonder” (208). As Weiss believes regarding this need of Naipaul, “Voyages divide the self, but at the same time they serve as recursive vehicles for its unification in a greater complexity or a syncretistic synthesis: only through the fracturing of the narrator’s identity can a synthesis or new construction of identity become possible” Thus, travel to Naipaul “signifies an openness to the stranger within and without, and the ‘adventure’ of writing itself” Besides, “The voyage becomes a metaphor for the author’s delving into his ancestral past . . . books about India develop from this theme of the journey of discovery. Naipaul’s fascination with voyages permeates his histories and social commentaries on the Caribbean and West Indies” Nevertheless, as Weiss echoes Clifford on Naipaul’s vision of travel, “the journeys he writes about are also problematic” because travel/voyage loses its ‘positive connotations’ and “equates negatively with enslavement, delusion, oppression of peoples, and the rape of the land” in the travel books by Naipaul (208-210).

Weiss also refuses the notion that Naipaul puts his marginality to rhetorical and political advantage, as he thinks the writer in exile is nowhere at home, “The exile experiences a *déchirement*, a splitting of self and world; for the colonial who has finally arrived in the metropolis, the land of his ambition, and is immediately estranged from it, memories replace dreams”. Weiss, in a way thus also refutes that Naipaul’s travel writings suffer from ‘imperial nostalgia’, as he finds that in Naipaul, “For the divided self of the exile, the past becomes more real than the present or the

, and the author thus writes books about the past, the past of the land of his ancestors and the past of colonies and empire: about Trinidad, the Caribbean and the West Indies, India, and other regions of the developing world" (204-205).

Weiss also disagrees with the critics who believe Naipaul's travel writings to exhibit a eurocentric, imperialist outlook. Thus he remarks that "on the surface a travel book, social study, and history, *The Middle Passage* is also a kind of autobiography of exile" on the in/famous first travel book by Naipaul that Weiss claims to have "a positive, deromanticizing effect" that breaks down "Western, stereotyped images of the Caribbean as a tropical paradise" (77). Likewise, he also has a different view of Naipaul's highly controversial travel book, *Among the Believers*, based on his 'Islamic journeys' that he finds to be "not about Islam, but about cultural collisions, about Third World peoples' responses to change. It is about people becoming strangers to themselves and their responses to this new strangeness within" (158). Responding to the criticism of Naipaul's acerbic attacks on the developing countries in his travel books, Weiss observes that his critique of developing societies "cuts in two directions: it is an attack on ideologies advocating a return to the past, at the same time it is a commentary on the author's attitudes towards his own past and his sense of the future . . . a break with the past, yet a constant recollection of it in other places - Asia, Africa, North and South America" (219).

Although Weiss admits that "In certain of his writings about developing societies, Naipaul has dealt in stereotyped categorizations and created a closed, egocentric persona, neurotic at times, at times paranoid": he argues that it would be reductive to examine Naipaul's travel writings solely on the basis of the nature and expression of the author's persona and his way of interaction with the people he encounters during his journeys. Rather, Weiss believes that Naipaul has "gained insights from his insider's-outsider's perspective" even though this insight at times may appear to be "an unilluminating attack" on the cultural 'other' to some of his readers. Thus, as Weiss puts it, "Naipaul's works are valuable not because they consistently show communication (between the author and peoples of other cultures and societies), but because they powerfully record cultural shocks and collisions" (219). Moreover, Weiss also finds that the later travel writings by Naipaul display a "new pluralism in the exile's vision . . . a new pluralism in that the author, as Trinidadian, has always

appreciated the values of a cosmopolitan, multicultural, and multiracial society" that was absent in his early travel writings (223).

Bruce King too agrees with Weiss as he says, "While it is true that Naipaul's early travel books can appear written by someone who feels superior, his later journeys reveal someone who talks to people, listens to what they say, and who records what he has experienced" (202). Although Naipaul's travel writings are in/famous for their offering an analysis of the societies and cultures in the post-colonial world, King believes that the most impressive characteristic of these books is "the fullness of life they convey, the sense of people and places". Naipaul's travel books, according to King, are primarily like an eventful novel as the author presents the characters, the places, and the events in a way that is unpredictable, surprising, honest, and realistic "He has taken a traditional literary kind with a long history, the travel book, the book of voyages . . . and reinvented it for the postcolonial era, a time when modern communications and easy transportation demand instant reports from foreign places undergoing social, political and cultural revolutions" (166-167).

Thus, according to King, Naipaul has been realistically presenting the societies and cultures visited by him in front of the wider world in his travel writings even though he is being castigated for his truthful observations. "the contemporary travel book is addressed to the modern world which needs to understand what is actually happening in societies beyond such vague generalizations as globalization, postcolonial and culture clash or such totalizing classifications as Third World or Islam" (177)

Besides, as King finds it, Naipaul's travel writings are also based on his past experiences and emotions along with his present socio-political or cultural observations during a journey. "He writes often about the conditions of India and the Indian diaspora, of which he is a part. He sees his travels as analogous to those of the diaspora as displaced Indians journey through the modern world attempting to create a home elsewhere and as they revise their history to explain their own predicament" (16).

In the context of the controversies that Naipaul's travel writings have given rise to, King believes that it is primarily Naipaul's unbiased observations and his inability to hide his honesty behind clever rhetoric that are responsible for such a reception of his travel writings, such as in *The Middle Passage* "Many of the problems raised by Naipaul are still relevant; but as they were expressed without the usual rhetoric of black-white conflict, victimization and cultural assertion, they became

uncomfortable” (56-57). We can also quote Evelyn Waugh in this context who thinks that in *The Middle Passage*, Naipaul has shown “that he is free of delusion about independence and representative government for his native land” (qtd. in French 212).

King also negates the idea that Naipaul represents the affluent, white, Western male travelers in his travel writings that inevitably display traces of imperialist world view. Rather, as King argues, unlike the ‘sophisticated’ British travel writers in the colonial era, who wrote about “exotic foreign places and the shocking ways of the rich” in their imperialist travelogues; Naipaul “travels, often using uncomfortable transport and worrying about his expenses, through a world of troubled, economically dependent independent nations, the new ‘exotic’ places for The West, observing the way those in power treat each other” (98). Thus, King finds in Naipaul’s travel writings a truthful portrayal of the chaos and confusions of our post-colonial world and a new outlook towards the West: “In his recognition of how British imperialism made possible the creation of a modern India we might find a clue about how to see the role of European imperial history, the Western canon of literature and the place of European ideas in contemporary multicultural societies” (150-151).

Sudha Rai, in her ‘V. S. Naipaul: A Study in Expatriate Sensibility’ argues that Naipaul’s castigation of the India he travels to actually reflects his deep emotional response to the country and not any kind of indifference or malice as frequently viewed by other critics. According to her, because of the complex amalgamation of the ‘Hindu self’ and the ‘Western self’ in his life and experiences, Naipaul applies these dual cultural norms in his travels to India, measuring the country both by the Hindu norms of Karma, Dharma, and Moksha and by the Western norm of individuality and freedom in his travelogues. In Manjit Indar Singh too there are some occasional remarks on Naipaul’s travel writing, some of these on a positive note as when he finds that “Naipaul’s travel literature, always transparent in its contrasts and contradictions between society, culture, history, religion and their relationship to modernization in the post-imperial phase brings out the worst possible illusion and gaffe the people are caught up in” (172-173).

Except these books, there are occasional articles in anthologies or literary journals that take up the travel books by Naipaul to observe the nature and effect of his travel writing, discussed mostly from a post-colonial angle. Thus, of the nine articles in *V. S. Naipaul: Fiction and Travel Writing* (2002) edited by Rajeshwar Mittapalli and Michael Hensen, only two can be considered as critical discussions on his travel

itings or on the combination of fiction and travelogue in his writings. In one of these articles, Serafín Roldán-Santiago, in his 'V. S. Naipaul's Vulcanisation of Travel and Fiction Paradigms', detects three formal aspects in Naipaul's travel writings: first, the Naipaulian assumptions or logistics that are always eurocentric and take shape during the process of the writer's 're-invention'/'representation' of his travel experience from the memory of the actual travel as well as the travel notes and journals. Thus, as he observes, "This 'representation' is a cultural product that is 'determined' by dominant ideology and worldview. What Naipaul 'saw' and observed in his travel experience is not totally represented in his travel narratives; it is a very critical selection of a reality that reflects a Naipaulian idea or perspective, a set of assumptions" (80). The second aspect that the writer notes in Naipaul's travel writings is his narrative authority that establishes his travel narratives as an 'objective reality' by "a) giving an eye-witness experience, b) demonstrating an acuity of observations, c) employing analytical skills, and d) offering us a very readable and pleasing narrative" (81). Thirdly, as the writer notes, Naipaul employs particular 'travel writing strategies' that combine journalistic techniques: ethnographic reporting that includes landscape, geographic and human observation; historical research and perspective; autobiographical elements and philosophical inquiry (82-83). Serafín Roldán-Santiago believes that all these travel writing strategies have influenced the fictions of Naipaul while the themes, imagery and tone of his fiction have also penetrated his travelogues.

In another article in the same anthology, 'Better Simply to Endure: Naipaul's Travels without Humour', Emilienne Baneth-Nouailhetas criticizes the practice of describing Naipaul's travel books, especially *The Middle Passage* and *An Area of Darkness*, as 'funny' or 'hilarious'. As the writer believes, because of the fact that Naipaul's travel writings are aimed at "demonstrating a predetermined point that Naipaul's capacity for humour all but vanishes" (123). Rather, as the critic observes, "V. S. Naipaul never attempts to feign the emotional detachment that is the first stage of actual humour. On the contrary, as has also been frequently noted, Naipaul gives way to indignation or rage in his travel writing in such a way that the reader feels bullied into taking sides" (129). The writer also claims that Naipaul's travel writings are firmly anchored in the British literary tradition while they unmistakably exhibit a certain eurocentrism. As for example she points out that in *An Area of Darkness* "for all his reference to his Trinidadian childhood, V. S. Naipaul's references of normality, which he uses to underline the incongruity of Indian practices, are all, at least,

Western” (118). As she finds, this cultural positioning by Naipaul is also aided by his use of language: “the travel books have a clearly ontological function for Naipaul, who in finding his traveller’s voice also defines his identity”. And as she adds, this identity that Naipaul tries to establish in his travel books is undoubtedly an English one: “First, by underlining the incongruity of certain expressions or situations the narrator uses irony to signal his own Eurocentrism and Englishness. Later, the same pinpointing of the incongruous is used to enhance the narrator’s purported double cultural competence” (121).

In the introduction to *V. S. Naipaul: An Anthology of Recent Criticism*, Purabi Panwar notes that Naipaul’s travel writings such as *An Area of Darkness* are governed by his “characteristic tendency to pick out selective details, and wrap them up with over-generalizations and over-statements”: while his travelogues based on his Islamic journeys, “though marked by flashes of brilliant prose and exciting delineation of people, events and situations, in the main stay provocative and controversial when they are not doctored and lop-sided” (17-21). Hiren Gohain, too, in his ‘The Post-Colonial Confusion and V. S. Naipaul’ negates the claims of objectivity by Naipaul and his admirers in his travel writings and rather claims that the writer “‘discovers what he himself puts first” (145). Farrukh Dhondy however, in his ‘Speaking in Tongues’ highly praises *An Area of Darkness* as “It was a beginning. It was a brown man, albeit from abroad, trying to see India without nationalist spectacles, without guilt, almost without ideology” (qtd. in King 202). On the other hand, Chandra Chatterjee in ‘The Process of Re-Location in *An Area of Darkness*’ argues that “Naipaul’s world-view strikes an ambivalent relationship with his experiences in India” in this travel book where “emotions of tenderness and pleasure vie with the zeal and short-sightedness of a colonialist” (93).

Amitav Ghosh, however, in his ‘Naipaul and the Nobel’ relates Naipaul’s ‘derision’ on India to his personal anguish and torment rather than to a eurocentric outlook, “the target of Naipaul’s rage is none other than himself and his own past. His derision stems not from what he sees in India but rather from his disillusionment with the myths of his uprooted ancestors”. However, as Ghosh also adds, “But these books did indeed mark a decisive turn in his work. After this he would never again look at life outside the West on its own terms: India, the Caribbean and Africa would become faded backdrops on which to project a vision of the West, England in particular”. Thus, Ghosh comes to believe that after Naipaul took up travel writing, “the richly

textured islands of his early work would disappear, to be replaced by a series of largely interchangeable caricatures of societies depicted as 'half-made' in comparison with Europe" that in turn made his travelogues immensely popular in the West where he was "canonized for his indictment of the 'Third World'. It is a measure of his influence that in the West today, travel writers are taken seriously only to the degree to which they are able to replicate the familiar Naipaulean tone of derision" (par. 4).

While Khushwant Singh has expressed his wholesome praise for Naipaul's travel literature; C. D. Narasimhaiah accuses Naipaul of distorting the facts about India and Trinidad in his travel writings (Das 151). Nissim Ezekiel too criticizes Naipaul for his "mode of argument, his falsifying examples" in his travel books on India that he finds to present distorted and one-sided observations: "My quarrel with Mr. Naipaul . . . is not because of these condemnatory judgments of his, so fiercely, so blazingly expressed. My quarrel is that Mr. Naipaul is so often uninvolved and unconcerned." Besides, "He writes exclusively from the point of view of his own dilemma, his temperamental alienation from his mixed background, his choice and his escape" (qtd in Das 157).

James Wood, in his "Wounded And Wounder: V. S. Naipaul's empire", tries to explain the ambiguity in Naipaul with reference to Ashis Nandy's analysis of Kipling "The Indian social theorist Ashis Nandy writes of the two voices in Kipling, which have been called the saxophone and the oboe. The first is the hard, militaristic, imperialist writer, and the second is the Kipling infused with Indianness, with admiration for the subcontinent's cultures". And as Wood finds, "Naipaul has a saxophone and an oboe, too, a hard sound and a softer one. These two sides could be called the Wounder and the Wounded" (par. 1).

Joseph O'Neill, in his "Man Without a Country: V. S. Naipaul and the artistic rewards of statelessness" refutes the accusations that Naipaul's reportage in his travel writing is methodologically flawed, because as he argues, Naipaul is not "an ethnologist or a professional historian and does not hold himself out as one". He also disagrees with the view that Naipaul's "work evinces racist neo-colonialism", because as he finds, while "Naipaul certainly does not shrink from asserting that the imperial project had some constructive consequences", the "references to the horrors and failings of colonization are extensive" too in his writings (par. 4-5). Besides these observations, however, any comprehensive critical work on travel writing in the

novels of Naipaul is almost absent except a few rare articles on a few particular novels by Naipaul as the one by Serafín Roldán-Santiago.

Critical works on Amitav Ghosh are also quite substantial in number though they are fewer than the amount of works on the Nobel winner Naipaul, while there is absolutely no critical work, except a few articles or partial discussions, that exclusively deals with his travel writings. The books like *Amitav Ghosh: A Critical Study* (2003) by Shubha Tiwari, *The Novels of Amitav Ghosh* (1999) edited by R. K. Dhawan, *Amitav Ghosh: A Critical Companion* (2003) edited by Tabish Khair, *Amitav Ghosh: Critical Perspectives* (2005) edited by Brinda Bose, *Amitav Ghosh* (2005) by John C. Hawley, *Amitav Ghosh: Critical Essays* (2009) edited by Bibhash Choudhry, *Amitav Ghosh* (2010) by Anshuman A. Mondal analyze the works of Ghosh from various perspectives, but mostly from the post-colonial angle.

Of the few articles on Amitav Ghosh's travel writings, Andrea Durante, in her 'The Suave Steps of Memory and Rebirth: *Dancing in Cambodia, Stories in Stones, At Large in Burma*' notes the subtle "Indianness" that characterizes the book. Besides, according to her, as "the overall anthropological and narrative experience of Ghosh as a writer, [is] oriented to the exploration and analysis of the interconnections between Eastern and Western cultures", in this travelogue too Ghosh attempts to find the reasons behind the undeniable attraction that the young people from the Third World feel for the "development and progress models" exactly opposite to their cultural universe (103). Meenakshi Mukherjee too notes this element of "Indianness" in the text, "for the Indian reader, the author's family connections in Burma, the chance meeting at the edge of a Cambodian minefield with a Bangladeshi Sergeant who had an ancestral district with Ghosh, and the encounter with a guerrilla fighter originally called Mahinder Singh, in the forests of eastern Burma"—all of these "provide points of intersection with our history" (qtd. in Durante 103).

Durante also notes the variety of perspectives and thematic levels that the travel book can be analyzed with, "it may be considered as the narration of a series of encounters, but also as a collection of old and contemporary travel accounts, and even as a narrative essay on the 'victims of history' or as an anti-colonial manifesto" (103). But most importantly and interestingly, Durante also situates the travel book within the context of the post-colonial travel writing that immediately indicates a significant difference between Naipaul and Ghosh as travel writers. As she observes regarding the Karenni people, a warrior tribe fighting a tragic and fatal battle for their autonomy

in Burma, they “became one of the many forgotten people of the postcolonial world, remembered for the ‘giraffe women’, reduced to a ticketed attraction for tourists”. Moreover, she also notes how in this regard “Amitav Ghosh, with his peculiar anti-colonial gaze, echoing Edward W. Said’s theories on the Western creation of the image of the East” goes on to narrate the way tourism has transformed the camps of the Karenni warriors with all their histories of oppression and displacement into a touristic attraction—something that the Western visitors could admire as an ideal example of ‘rural simplicity’ and ‘Asian innocence’ (113).

Shubha Tiwari too points out another significant aspect in *Dancing in Cambodia* regarding the depiction of female dancers in the Cambodian royal ballet troupe who had accompanied King Sisowath of Cambodia in 1906 when he had gone on an extensive visit to Marseilles in France. “The colonized situation of dancers is sensitively portrayed. Their excitement and joy at visiting the ‘superior’ land on one hand and their inferiority complex and anxiety on the other have been described in a very delicate fashion.” Moreover, “When he describes these dancers there is no sexual undertone as might be expected. There is nothing erotic in his vision” (69). This observation can once again remind us of the instance that had led Holland and Huggan to accuse Naipaul of “cultural voyeurism” that still remains one of the major shortcomings of the genre as the travel writers are often found to “eroticize their work through the act of cultural voyeurism” where at times “sex itself is the subject” (Holland and Huggan 18). Besides this, Tiwari also discovers that in *Dancing in Cambodia*, which she regards as “an answer to all questions regarding Pol Pot’s regime of isolation” (71), Ghosh is “conscious of the double standards adopted by erstwhile colonizers and developed nations. In theory they support democracy, freedom of speech and liberty for people of all races, but for political and economic gain support dictatorial and terrorism inclined regimes” (80-81).

Salil Tripathi too finds *Dancing in Cambodia* to be a significant travel book. While he commends Ghosh for his textual craftsmanship and vision of history in this book—“Ghosh picks up the thread of Sisowath’s visit to France, and with rare ingenuity and empathetic understanding of modern Cambodian history, places it in the context of the return of civil society in Cambodia” (42)—he also notes Ghosh’s ability to search for the human face of history. “Travelling through the countryside with mine-diffusing sappers, Ghosh seeks out people whose memory plays tricks. They want to forget an immediate past but who yearn to remember, a more ancient past: they are

fighting the tendency to forget everything" (42). However, it is the larger social, political and cultural contexts where Tripathi finds the significance of a travel book like this one by Ghosh remains of utmost importance:

The wounds in Cambodia are still fresh and raw, and documenting oral histories is a monumental task. It is reassuring to know that writers like Ghosh are reading the Pol Pot years with new, or different, eyes. They link strands that may remain oblivious to the journalist in a hurry and are possibly peripheral to the concerns of historians who want to count the dead and the tortured. But they weave a pattern that shows that the society's tapestry is far more complex: one that we are only beginning to understand. (43)

Taya Zinkin too commends Ghosh for his "proficiency in portraying the strife and harsh living conditions in past and present-day Burma and Cambodia" in a travel book "of such evocative scholarship and empathy" (par. 2); while Tuomas Huttunen observes regarding Ghosh's non-fiction that "The metaphor of journey, or travel, which is a popular one in Ghosh's writings, is used to great effect in the narration to examine the typical issues which concern Ghosh beginning with subaltern destinies leading to colonial injustices – going through the large and small ironies of history" (82)

Besides, Huttunen also notes that Ghosh in general uses similar strategies in his fiction and in his travel writings by "juxtaposing and interweaving lives of 'small', or alternatively 'real-life', people against the canvas of large historical development". Thus as he observes in this regard, "Ghosh's engagement with the human condition, backed up by its larger global preconditions comes through as a style which manages to hold together a global, ecumenical perspective" while focusing on "highly individual, often contested or marginalized histories, such as those of King Sisowath and Pol Pot, or that of Aung San Suu Kyi, and so forth" (84). Consequently, like Meenakshi Mukherjee who finds that in *Dancing in Cambodia*, the "novelist's grasp of the personal lives of individuals" enables him to transform the "aseptic enumeration of facts and statistics into a moving human account" (qtd. in Duranti 103); Huttunen too notes that Ghosh's skills as "both story-teller and sensitive interpreter of historical and political developments is revealed" in the way his non-fiction narratives and most importantly his travel writings "effectively counterpoise vignettes of human drama that occur in distinctive locales against epic backdrops

that adumbrate global issues of capitalized ‘History’, without taking away the significance from either” (84).

Ghosh’s observation on his own work may also prove interesting in here as when during an interview, after being asked whether like Naipaul he too believes that his books are enough to know him as a person, he answers,

I think I am very different from Naipaul. He has never written anything but autobiography. I think autobiography works in very different ways. One way is where you write about yourself, and I don’t think I ever do that. Another way is where you write about things you have seen and the people you have met and I think I do that a lot.” (Ghosh Interview “Amitav Ghosh”)

Although Ghosh says this in the context of his and Naipaul’s work as a whole, it may as well be applied in the context of their travel writings.

There are also occasional references to the presence of travel writing in Ghosh’s novels in these books mentioned above, though these are fewer when compared with those in the case of Naipaul. Shirley Chew, for example, compares *Antique* to what Richard Kerridge calls the ‘quest literature’ as Ghosh’s tracking of Ben Yiju and his Slave in the novel might remind one of the elusive quests by Peter Matthiessen for the snow leopard or Rick Bass for the grizzly bears (106).

Even then, the references to the element of travel writing in the fictions by Ghosh are mostly taken up by his critics as a way to point out the essentially post-colonial hybridity in his texts. As for example, Hawley thinks that *Antique* is “a new genre, something that blends an anthropological record with a travelogue, a diary, and perhaps some imagined sections” (89) and Roma Chatterji agrees, as she finds that in this novel Ghosh “discards his identity as an anthropologist and becomes a traveler journeying across time and space . . . *In an Antique Land* reads like a travelogue in part, in part like a *quissa* (allegorical tale)” (100). Padmini Mongia also points out the hybrid nature of *Antique* to claim that “the melding of these genres within a single work allows the formal limits of each to confound and challenge the others. The result—an amalgamated text—offers a distinct form of travel writing that might best be called postcolonial” (78).

There are also critical reflections on Ghosh’s metaphorical travel in his fiction as an author that in turn opens up the vista of meaningful cultural exchange among his protagonists: as Samir Dayal finds that in *Antique* “the author, presenting himself as a traveller in the intercultural border zones, interstitially between the West and the non-

West but also in-between modernity and other times. compels us to rethink diaspora, cultural mixture or cultural intercourse, and indeed hybridity itself" (qtd. in Hawley 100). As Brinda Bose also says, "Ghosh's humane historian travels between cultures, and negotiates what has now come to be called the 'third space' in social studies" thus redefining the role of 'the diasporized cultures' (19).

The characteristic combination of spatial and temporal travels in Ghosh is also pointed out by Padmini Mongia, "Ghosh's travels across geographical space and chronological time offer a counterpoint to his travels across the borders and boundaries of disciplines. He thereby poses a post-colonial challenge to the already slippery categories of travel writing, anthropology, and history" (88). However, as already mentioned, exclusive criticism on Ghosh as a travel writer is almost non-existent except some occasional, passing references to Ghosh's travel writings in general by some critics such as the observation by Brinda Bose who remarks that Ghosh's travel books offer "acute insights into lands and their histories, geographies and politics as a travel-writer who also happens to be an anthropologist" (28).

Moreover, though there are a number of books available where both Ghosh and Naipaul are included in the context of Indian Writing in English such as *Away: The Indian Writer as an Expatriate* (2003) edited by Amitav Kumar and *Contemporary Indian Writers in English: Critical Perceptions* (2005) edited by N. D. R. Chandra there is no such known critical work where there is an exclusively comparative study of these writers from any perspective, let alone the nature of travel writing in their novels. The internet also does not provide any such matter though there are individual materials on travel writing (such as <http://www.Studiesintravelwriting.com>), on Naipaul (such as <http://www.scholars.nus.edu>), and on Ghosh (such as <http://www.amitavghosh.com>). Needless to add, therefore, the comparative research on the nature of travel writing in the novels of V. S. Naipaul and Amitav Ghosh from the post-colonial point of view bears my own assumptions and discussions while these will be particularly based on theories incorporated in the prototypical texts by the famous exponents of post-colonial study such as Said, Ashcroft-Griffiths-Tiffin, Bhaba, Clifford and Pratt.