

Returning to the Past from the Postcolonial Trauma: Evidence from V.S. Naipaul

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This study investigates the postcolonial condition of returning to the past as a symptomatic alternative to escape from the traumatic experience of the colonial drama. The evidence for the above phenomenon can be derived from V.S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* (1967), *Among the Believers* (2003) and *A Bend in the River* (1979) where the 'hurt ego' of the postcolonial subject seeks the psychological comfort of tradition against modern secularism. The textual analysis of those texts shows that the nostalgia for re-actualizing the past takes a totalitarian turn in both *Among the Believers* and *A Bend in the River*, when postcolonial rulers deviate from universal democratic values and embrace the discourse of the tradition in order to heal the hurt postcolonial ego. However, though they deny the western lifeworld and poetically turn to Islamic faith, according to Naipaul, there are queues in Pakistan to migrate to America for a better life escaping from the failure of decolonization. This paradox becomes evident when those who become physically 'de-territorialized' from the postcolonial world to advanced nations, desire to return to their former territories. Ralph Singh in *The Mimic Men* shows the embarrassing truth that he does not belong to any territory; the native Caribbean or new metropolitan London and becomes a psychological cripple. Similarly, characters such as Prasajo, Shafi and Sitor in *Among the Believers* show the same symptom when they are not fully detached from their origin and psychologically live like 'natives' wherever they go. A character such as Sitor in Indonesia finds his ultimate psychological comfort in discovering the lost code of his nativity which was initially destroyed by the colonizers who later re-emerge in a spectral presence to re-discover it for him. Naipaul detects that this recovery of native essence finally heals the hurt soul of the postcolonial subject. The attempt to re-actualize the nostalgia of the pre-colonial lifeworld that is confirmed by the above code is evidenced by Naipaul through a political symptom of totalitarianism in *A Bend in the River*. Synchronizing the evidence in the above three texts, this paper concludes that no psychological stability is possible for the postcolonial man unless if he chooses to do the 'impossible' in achieving more innovative goals to become 'more master than master'.

Keywords: V.S. Naipaul, historical nostalgia, totalitarianism, postcolonial situation