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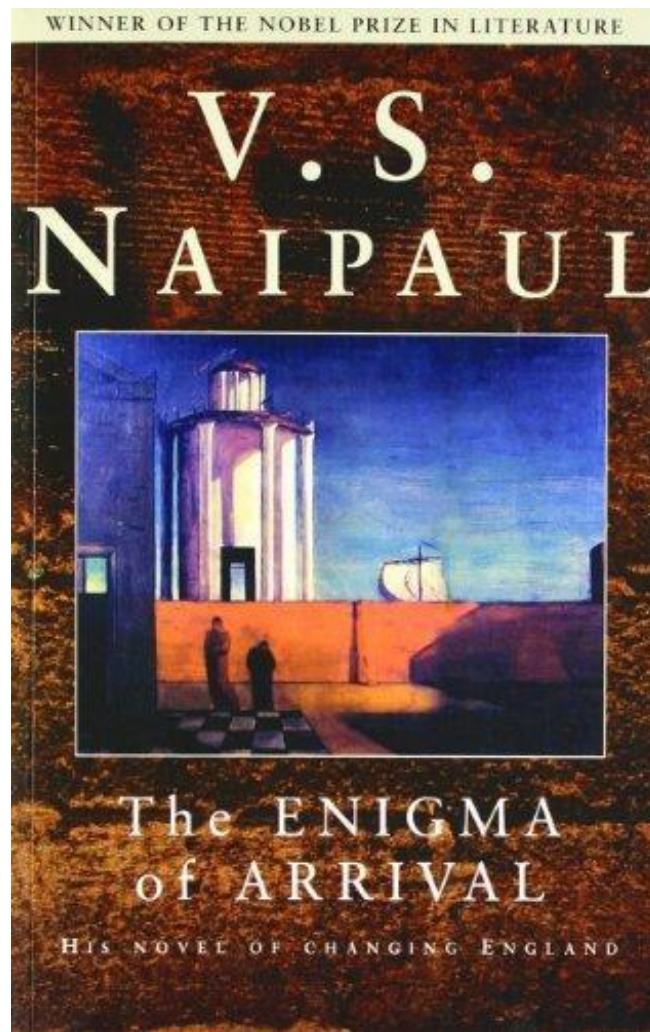
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Search for Self:  
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V. S. Naipaul's *The Enigma Of Arrival*

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Search for Self: Recovery of Wholeness and Integrity in V. S. Naipaul's *The Enigma Of Arrival*

## Abstract

As the term "wholeness" refers to the state of forming a complete and harmonious whole, a special definition appears when it comes to the area of Diaspora. Here the need for wholeness describes the need of wholeness and harmony in mind, body, and spirit. This is evident in almost all diasporic literature all over the world. 'A search for home' through the experience gathered from a land and life away from his/her homeland. The diasporic writers always live in the living memory of homeland, thus in a cultural dilemma. While they write they feel the healing process and thus reach a mental and spiritual wholeness. Diaspora itself can be explicated as the journey through one's self to attain this wholeness of mind, body, and spirit.

Throughout the novel, *The Enigma of Arrival*, V.S. Naipaul (the title borrowed from a Giorgio de Chirico painting) draws a clear picture of his cultural identity crisis and recovery of wholeness and integrity attained by a journey throughout England. The story describes the mystery of many things, such as death and rebirth, gaining of wisdom and calm insight through complex narrative. Highly autobiographical in nature, the work deals with the enigma in recovering himself through a journey which appears as a metaphor of his own life. Thus the intent here is to look upon the reformation of narrator's consciousness which brought about by the act of migration; and thereby analyzing his unending "enigma" in attaining "the spiritual wholeness" through arrival and departure.

**Keywords:** V. S. Naipaul, *The Enigma of Arrival* Diaspora, identity, self, wholeness

## Quest for Identity Revelation

Identity of human beings living in the modern world is defined through the role one play in the socio-political contextual experiences which places on them. Thus, one will be known as a doctor, a teacher, an engineer, a writer, a politician, and so on. But any of these descriptions will not help one to find who are they and what their self is. Quest for identity revelation or self-knowledge is innate in every human being; hence it is an archetypal and universal motif in the literature of all ages and genres all over the world. An individual's quest of identity and sense of

self is neither completely conscious nor unconscious, it ends up with attaining a personal view of life and world which could make existence meaningful and give a sense of belonging to man.

There came one and knocked at the door of beloved.

And a voice asked: "Who is there?"

He answered: "It is I".

"Go hence!" returned the voice; "There is no room for me and thee".

The door was shut. Then came the lover second time and knocked, again the voice asked: "Who is there?"

He answered: "It is Thou".

"Enter" said the voice, "For I am within." (Mawlānā Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī (d. 1273))

### **Looking-Glass Self**

Famous Sociologist C. H. Cooley proposed the idea of 'looking-glass self', which points out that we acquire our sense of 'self' by seeing our 'self' reflected in other people's attitude and behavior towards us and by imagining what they think of us. For acquiring the 'self' other people serve as a kind of mirror or glass. It is like seeing our self in the mirror which is partly our own creation. Only through people's words and actions we come to see our own self. Cooley states it as "self and society is twin born" (Calhoun, et.al. 120).

G.H. Mead, an American philosopher, sociologist and psychologist, thought in a different way. He says that only certain people could influence our perception of self only during certain period of life, and the way others influence us changes across the life span. And like in Piaget's *Egocentrism* Mead also described three stages of this perception in one's growth from childhood to adolescence: Preparatory stage, Play stage and Game stage. In which preparatory stage is mere imitation, while play stage is a kind of pretend play and role taking, and in game stage things are totally different, he referred it to as related to generalized other or society as whole and through multiple roles. By the time one reaches game stage they starts to understand that other people must also have opinions about them.

### **Identity – a Psycho-social Concept**

Identity is an intrinsically psycho-social concept implying the recognition of one's existence or at least a trait of it which relates him with his group, his class, his race, his profession, his religion or his country. Although it has multitudinous temporal and spatial connotations, identity is defined generally as "who or what somebody is". The term is derived from the French word 'identité', which has its etymological roots in the Latin noun 'identitas'; meaning "sameness". Expressing one's creativity, quest for spiritual enlightenment, pursuit of knowledge, and the desire to give or positively transform society is self-actualization. "Self-actualization" is a psychological term introduced by the German neurologist and psychiatrist theorist Kurt Goldstein for the motive to realize one's full potential.

### **V. S. Naipaul and Identity**

Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul, commonly known as V. S. Naipaul, a Trinidadian writer, is a descendant of indentured laborers shipped from India and he always tells stories which show the readers' selves and reality they live in. The turmoil of decolonization forced so many people over the whole world to re-examine their identity and wear identities which fit their geographical location. The problem of self and identity has been a conundrum for every exiled community—be it forced exile or immigration—in the sociological perspective. The post imperial era always points out the problem regarding social and cultural identity crisis among the decolonized communities. Diasporic writers always search for their lost identity; they are caught in the clutches of uprooted origin. The cultural dislocation resulted by the geographical displacement can be found in almost every work of these genre. Naipaul, being one of the victims of dislocation and rootlessness both geographical and cultural, formed his self through his voyages. On his travels he was exploring the real meaning of culture and history. V.S. Naipaul once said of himself as "I am the writer from nowhere". In fact, he is of Indian origin and born at Caribbean Islands and formed himself at the British. He is a produce of British Empire, the cultural dislocation starting from his ancestral origin left him a feeling of exile where ever he goes. Like a gypsy he wanders the world finding himself a place to fit in or rather to heal his feeling of dislocation.

### **Life-style of Gypsies**

Gypsies tend to be always in search of spiritual wholeness of themselves which is the real home of a human soul. They are called very differently in Indian language, “Khanabadosh”, in which *khana* means “home” and *badosh* means “on your shoulder”. It is very beautiful to think that one’s home is always on his shoulders, wherever he goes he takes his home there, otherwise wherever he go he is at home. Khanabadoshes are real seekers; they are in search of self. And they have a sudden revelation of this self and find the whole existence is their home.

### ***Enigma of the Arrival***

In his novel, *Enigma of the Arrival*, V.S. Naipaul, is himself a seeker; kahanabadosh, in search of his self, which is his real home. For many years he thought of writing a book inspired by a surrealistic painting of the same name which he found in the cottage and learned more about the early paintings of an Italian painter Giorgio de Chirico from ‘The Little Library of Art’. He caught attention on the painting named *The Enigma of Arrival*, which is indirectly and poetically referred to something from his own life experiences. Naipaul describes the scene in the picture as, “the scene is of desolation and mystery; it speaks of the mystery of arrival. It spoke to me of that, as it had spoken to Apollinaire.”(p.106) (Apollinaire was the poet who gave names to the paintings of Giorgio.) Having the idea of writing (as a free ride of the imagination) long time in his mind, he carries out journeys to India, South America and Africa. Throughout the book he describes about his arrivals and departures at many places and his enigmatic mental journey of becoming a writer. His major problem of writing a book with this painting in mind was to “set up fictional scaffolding”. For this to happen he travelled, grew out of what he was, and modified his idea and finally this novel was born. He describes about it in the same book as: “Every exploration, every book, added to my knowledge, qualified my earlier idea of myself and the world” (p.168). Being a diasporic writer, he always felt a certain detachment and alienation in all the places he travelled and always he spoke about this deep despair about the country of his origin and its remnants of colonialism. He migrated from one place to another with an instable mind.

### **Finely Woven Chapters**

Though this book, *'The Enigma of Arrival'* is finely woven in five chapters such as, Jack's Garden, The Journey, Ivy, Rooks and the Ceremony of the Farewell; the whole novel is a story of separation of the author from his home land and from himself and recovery of the missing home and self through a series of journeys. The journey carried out here is not only a voyage from the British Colony of Trinidad to the ancient countryside of England, but it is peregrination from one state of mind to another in search of his identity and self. It is pictured as a singular journey of the writer for the invention of himself and trying to find his place in the world. The story revolves around a period of nearly thirty-five years beginning with the narrator's first journey from his home in Trinidad in 1950 at the age of eighteen to take up a scholarship at Oxford University, with a preconceived idea and decision to become a writer.

### **A Boy, Traveling to be a Writer**

Without recognizing it, he never accumulates his experiences to his writing during his stay at the cottage "Jack's Garden" in Wiltshire. The novel indulges us mainly to Waldenshaw, an English countryside in Wiltshire, where the narrator, V.S. Naipaul himself, lives for ten years at a cottage near Stonehenge. "A boy, traveling to be a writer", coming from Trinidad Naipaul is rather unwary and unaware of his life and experiences in totally new surroundings. This novel is virtually a slice of auto biography as he stated, "The story had become more personal; my journey, the writer's journey". Although the novel is labeled "A Novel in Five Sections", this narrative is drawn directly from his own life and work.

### **A Series of Journeys - Arrivals and Departures**

His life in this novel has been a series of journeys- arrivals and departures- trying to find his place and his way in the world. In the second chapter of this novel which is labeled as 'The Journey', Naipaul recollects the experience of traveling to New York as he takes out his pencil for writing he says: "When you licked the pencil the color became bright; dry, the color was dull. I had bought the pad and the pencil because I was traveling to become a writer, and I had to start." (106). Naipaul's travel was a mission to capture each and every subtle experience which lead him to recover himself as a writer, which he was troubling to find out at that time. Journey



is always a recurring motif in literature from Bible to the medieval Christian mystics. The adventurous journey carried out by the hero and returning home triumphant occurs in almost all mythologies around the world. Naipaul stated himself about writing this book as “about the writer and the land.” Through writing Naipaul arrived at revelation of himself and the world, which he had brought through his journeys, which is metaphor of his own life.

### **Finding His Place**

Living for about twenty years in England unable to satisfy his urge to be a writer he gets mentally exhausted and had nightmares in which he feels that his head seems to be exploding to death which had been brought on by intellectual fatigue. Naipaul melancholically lays loneliness, vulnerability and even anxieties of life, which is the testament of a man, who has impassively willed himself to endure disappointment, alienation, change and grief. They are great assets for a writer for his writing but burden for a human being. With this state of depressed mind, he moves to Wiltshire and lives in a cottage in Waldenshaw. He lives there in ‘Jack’s Garden’ which he describes as ‘a garden full of life and subtleness’ for about ten years. In the second chapter, ‘*The Journey*’ he reflects his experiences, thoughts and change of the perception on people, places and nature when he first set foot in England. Living there he had a cultural change, hence experienced a rebirth. During his returned stay in the same cottage which he stayed before, at his adulthood he finds peace by absorbing the contours of the landscape and learned to appreciate the changes brought to it by the changing seasons. Since he considered it as a rebirth all those perception was new to him, like a child learning a second language. Through his everyday walks which can be described as a spiritual pilgrimage, he slowly transforms his “raw nerves” and puts them its right place with right ideas and anew life grows within him.

### **Ivy**

Throughout the narrative he does a ‘looking-glass self’. This is explained further in the third chapter ‘*Ivy*’, through the description of the experiences with the landlord, Jack and the gardener Pitton, and hopefully relates all these scenes to the understanding that how culture creates each man to what he is today and how important a true home can lead to someone's well

being; moreover he analyses his own life, by throwing back the memories of the days of failure in his life as a human being and writer. After a long period of his wandering the split between him as a man and writer is healed. Later he explained about this as “The writer, the observer that is scrupulously myself. The minute other people are in the picture, that is where the fictive element comes in.”

### **Catalysts for the Recovery of His Self**

V. S. Naipaul uses the characters in the novel like his neighbors in Waldenshaw, a village near Salisbury in the southern English county of Wiltshire, as catalysts for the recovery of his self. He peels back secured shield of memory, sparing himself nothing, revealing the mistakes and lacuna of own life as a writer and as a human himself. Naipaul demonstrates this in small dramatic incidents like the death of a cottager Jack (Jack even remains as a strong presence of eternity throughout the novel even after his death.), the firing of an estate's gardener Pitton, death and Hindu religious cremation ceremonies of his sister and description of another writer in the novel Alan. This discursive and melancholically ruminative book narrates series of soul-healing events through the writer's extra ordinary memories. V. S. Naipaul brilliantly pictures intensively nuanced observations of the natural surrounding where he lives and his own interior landscape; he demonstrates how experience from the outer world is transmogrified after much uncertainty and pang into a beautiful work of literature.

### **Suppressed Selves Buried Within**

Everybody has a variety of suppressed selves buried within. The lived-in experiences and surroundings it rooted in force them to reassess their identity. They find their identity exiled in a displaced geographical area. Quest for wholeness and urge for integration to the alien culture put them in between. The internal dilemma of the displaced individuals acted as a base for Diasporic literature. VS Naipaul's Indian ancestry and Caribbean upbringing gave him a mixed cultural base. But he spent major part of his youth in Britain, trying to be an Englishman in full. Further it displaced him and his feeling of in between which grew stronger. The novel portrays the author's journey, to become a writer, metaphorically to establish the search for wholeness in identity. The



attempts to integrate to the host culture and depart from base culture prove futile. The novel forms the life of the author or the life of the author form the novel. They are inseparable.

“There is no ‘real’ me—a tiny homunculus hidden beneath layers of frozen feelings.... It is not an isolated ‘object,’ a ghost locked in a machine or a mere consciousness located within the body... You are inextricably enmeshed in the web of meanings shaped by the psycho-culture that you helped to form and that, in turn, helps to form you.” (Daniel Yankelovich, in *New Rules: Searching for Self-fulfillment in a World Turned Upside Down*)

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