

## Course correction – A complicated man

### V. S. Naipaul was among the greatest and most provocative writers of our times

Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul, who passed away at his London home on August 11 just six days short of his 86<sup>th</sup> birthday, will continue to challenge his readers and critics after death as he did in a writing career **spanning** more than five decades. It's the way with great writers, and Naipaul's claim to being among the greatest of them was settled long before he won the Nobel prize in 2001 – but he **defied** simple **appraisals** more than anybody else. To read Naipaul, to listen to him, to follow his life story, was to be **perpetually nudged** to **reassess** not just him, but also his subject matter and one's own view of the world. He once said, "All my work is really one. I am writing one big book." In that big book, he kept pushing back the **chronological** beginnings to understand how **colonialism** and migration shaped the modern world, and travelling ever wider to examine how post-colonial societies shape-shifted. It was an **endeavour** that started, and never **veered** too far, from his own biography. Born in Trinidad to parents of Indian origin, whose **forebears** had come to the West Indies as **indentured** labour, Naipaul was consumed by one ambition: to be a writer. It was, in large measure, acquired from his father, a journalist in Port of Spain struggling with the needs and **bickering** of a **sprawling** family and the lack of Intellectual where withal to realise his dream. His father's story would inspire Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961), part of an early life burst of brilliant fiction that began with *Miguel Street*, written when he was just out of Oxford University, and concluded in 1979 with *A Bend in the River*.

It was Naipaul's travels, however, that spanned the greater part of his writing life as he crafted his own way of seeing the world. He said in his Nobel lecture that as a child in Trinidad he felt himself "surrounded by areas of darkness", and these became his subjects. He travelled across continents, always with a theme in mind. He opened up lines of inquiry on identity and progress. His **unsparing** eye and spare, clear prose ensured that readers could not unseen what he saw, whether they were in agreement or not. He was criticised for depicting the developing world through an **imperial** filter; he was accused of Islamophobia in his travels in Muslim countries; he raised hackles with his India **trilogy** – *An Area of Darkness* (1964), *A Wounded Civilisation* (1977), *A Million Mutinies Now* (1990). But he **presciently** book marked the debates that coming events would spark. There was definitely low grade **bigotry** at play, and **misogyny**, too. Naipaul's writings are too important to be overlooked on account of his intolerance; equally, his opinions cannot be excused while understanding his literary **legacy**.

### WORD LIST

1. **Spanning** : (stretch over)  
Synonym : connect, cover, cross, extend, traverse, arch, bridge, ford, link, range, reach, vault.
2. **Defied** : (challenge, frustrate)  
Synonym : confront, disregard, elude, flout, ignore, mock, oppose, provoke, resist, ridicule, spurn, thwart, violate, withstand, baffle.
3. **Appraisal** : (Judgement, estimation)  
Synonym : assessment, evaluation, opinion, pricing, survey, valuation, estimate, rating, reckoning, stock
4. **Perpetually** : (enduringly)  
Synonym : constantly, endlessly, always, forever, continuously, everlastingly, permanently, unceasingly.
5. **Mudged** : (to be extremely drunk and saying things like ohmudgen!)  
Example : OMG, you were so mudged last night that you pissed your parents.
6. **Reassess** : (reconsider, think about again)  
Synonym : amend, reassess, re-evaluate, re-examine, rethink, review, revise.
7. **Chronological** : (in consecutive time)  
Synonym : historical, sequential, chronographic, classified, horological, chronologic
8. **Colonialism** : (manifest destiny)  
Synonym : expansionism, imperialism, neo-colonialism
9. **Endeavour** : (attempt to achieve something)  
Synonym : aim, effort, enterprise, struggle, undertaking, venture, exertion.
10. **Veered** : (change direction)  
Synonym : bend, deflect, depart, deviate, diverge, divert, drift, pivot, shift, skid, swerve, swing, twist, whirl.
11. **Forebears** : (ancestor)  
Synonym : forefather, forerunner, progenitor
12. **Indentured** : (obligated)  
Synonym : apprenticed, articulated, bound, contracted, enslaved
13. **Bickering** : (nastily argue)  
Synonym : disagree, quarrel, quibble, spar, squabble, wrangle, brawl.
14. **Sprawling** : (sit or lie spread out)  
Synonym : drape, flop, loll, lounge, ramble, recline, slouch, straggle.
15. **Unsparring** : (generous)  
Synonym : ruthless, abundant, extravagant
16. **Imperial** : (regal)  
Synonym : royal, stately, sovereign, domineering, kingly, lovably, magisterial, majestic
17. **Trilogy** : (three of something)  
Synonym : leash, set of three, ternion, threesome, Trey, triad, triangle.
18. **Prescient** : (having or showing knowledge of events before they take place)  
Synonym : prophetic, predictive, visionary, psychic, prognostic, far sighted.
19. **Bigotry** : (intolerance, prejudice)  
Synonym : bias, discrimination, fanaticism, injustice, racism, sexism, unfairness

20. **Misogyny** : (hatred of women)  
Synonym : sexism, discrimination, prejudice, objectification
21. **Legacy** : (inheritance, heritage)  
Synonym : estate, gift, tradition, bequest, birthright, devise, endowment.

\*\*\*\*\*

### Course correction – A welcome quietus

#### The Supreme Court finally ends unjustified curbs on Hadiya's personal freedom

Hadiya has at last won her freedom. The curious aspect of her case is that it took such a long time for the courts to acknowledge that the 25 year old woman from Kerala enjoys as much freedom of choice in her marriage as in her religious belief. The Kerala High Court had caused quite a **muddle** when it **annulled** her marriage **solely** on the **suspicion** that it was a ruse to scuttle habeas corpus proceedings before it. On her father's complaint that she had been **indoctrinated** and brainwashed into embracing Islam, and his fear that she was a victim of a movement to convert Hindu women and send them to overseas battle zones, the high court ordered her confinement in her parents' home. The Supreme Court's categorical ruling that the high court was wrong in invalidating a marriage under its writ jurisdiction constitutes a welcome end to the unjustified **curtailment** of her freedom of movement and her life choices. The **verdict**, for which detailed reasons are yet to be **pronounced**, restores the liberty of Ms. Hadiya, who chose to convert to Islam more than a year ago and later married a Muslim man. Last November, the **apex** court had freed her from her parents' custody and allowed her to complete her **internship** as part of a homoeopathy course she had taken up in Tamil Nadu. However, even this was somewhat unsatisfactory, as it appeared to be a compromised between being in parental custody and being allowed to live with her husband.

It is possible that her father, K.M. Asokan, was **gripped** by fear as her conversion came **amid** reports of **radical** groups recruiting young people on behalf of the Islamic State. The high court did not question her conversion, but suspected the **veracity** of her claim that she was married, as it happened in a day's break between hearings. However, these facts were not enough for the court to annul the marriage and label it a "sham". The court made odd observations on how a woman's marriage requires the involvement of her parents and that Ms. Hadiya was "at a vulnerable age". Even in the Supreme Court, Ms. Hadiya could explain to the judges that she stood by her marriage to Shafin Jahan only after other parties had advanced arguments on "indoctrination" and "**conspiracy**" and the National Investigation Agency had its say. Finally, the court has now given primacy to her view. The implications of her **ordeal** are disquieting: it is not difficult in this country to question the life choices of an adult woman by casting doubts on her volition and personal autonomy, and her freedom to choose her way of life can sometimes be judicially curtailed. While a lawful investigation into organised

recruitment by radical groups must not be impeded, courts should strive even harder to protect personal freedoms without being swayed by mere suspicion.

### WORD LIST

1. **Muddle** : (confused state)  
Synonym : ataxia, awkwardness, chaos, clutter, complexity, complication, confusion, difficulty, dilemma, disorder, hash, haze, mess.
2. **Annul** : (void an agreement)  
Synonym : abolish, abrogate, cancel, declare, delete, dissolve, invalidate, nullify, quash, reverse, revoke, undo, vacate
3. **Solely** : (only, alone)  
Synonym : completely, entirely, exclusively, individually, merely, purely, simply, totally, wholly
4. **Suspicion** : (doubt, hint, trace)  
Synonym : conjecture, cynicism, distrust, impression, jealousy, misgiving, mistrust, notion, skepticism, uncertainty, wariness.
5. **Scuttle** : (destroy)  
Synonym : abandon, sink, submerge
6. **Indoctrinated** : (convinced)  
Synonym : brainwashed, persuaded, programmed, educate, indoctrinate, convince, influence, instil
7. **Curtailement** : (decrease)  
Synonym : abbreviation, condensation, cutback, reduction, devaluation discount, rebate, degradation, minimization.
8. **Verdict** : (law judgement)  
Synonym : answer, award, conclusion, decision, decree, finding, opinion, ruling, sentence.
9. **Pronounced** : (distinct, evident)  
Synonym : clear-cut, conspicuous, decided, definite, marked, noticeable, obvious, unmistakable
10. **Apex** : (top, high point)  
Synonym : apogee, culmination, pinnacle, climax, crest, crown, height, maximum, peak, zenith, roof, summit.
11. **Internship** : (teaching fellowship) (teacher's assistantship)  
Synonym : graduate, fellowship
12. **Grip** : (hold tightly)  
Synonym : clutch, grasp, clasp, clinch, nab, seize, snag, snatch.
13. **Amid** : (middle)  
Synonym : amidst, among, amongst, between, during, mid, over, throughout
14. **Radical** : (fundamental, basic, deviating by extremes)  
Synonym : profound, basal, bottom, cardinal, constitutional, essential, native, natural, organic, original primary, primitive, foundational, inherent, innate.

15. **Veracity** : (truth)  
Synonym : accuracy, authenticity, credibility, fairness, genuineness, honesty, impartiality, integrity, probity, rectitude, rightness, sincerity, trustworthiness, truthfulness, actuality, exactness, reality
16. **Conspiracy** : (collusion in plan)  
Synonym : Plot, scheme, sedition, treason, cabal, connivance.
17. **Ordeal** : (trouble, suffering)  
Synonym : agony, anguish, calamity, difficulty, nightmare, torment, torture, trial

\*\*\*\*\*

### SOME IMPORTANT IDIOM AND PHRASES

1. Beat a dead horse  
**Example** – Do you think its' worth sending the reapplication to the company or I am beating a dead horse.  
**Meaning** – To waste time doing something that has already been attempted.
2. Left to his own devices  
**Example** – Sumit's father left to his own devices for the new project.  
**Meaning** – To allow you to decide for yourself what you do.
3. Shoestring budgets  
**Example** – The restaurant is running on a shoestring budget, so they can't afford more stuff.  
**Meaning** – Characterized by a small amount of money.
4. In the same boat  
**Example** – Suddenly Rohit was in the same boat as any other employees who had lost their job.  
**Meaning** – Experiencing the same situation or condition.
5. Keep one's word  
**Example** – Keeping one's word is necessary to the legal profession.  
**Meaning** – To do what you promise to do./To uphold one's promise.
6. Knocked over  
**Example** – I didn't mean to knock you over./The thief knocked over the television set from my house.  
**Meaning** – To push or strike someone or something./To steal something.
7. To catch a tartar  
**Example** – Our neighbor thought I would give up if my complaint had to go to the court. They will soon realize that they have caught a Tartar.  
**Meaning** – To deal with someone or something that proves unexpectedly troublesome or powerful.
8. To lose face  
**Example** – He denied that he made a mistake because he didn't want to lose his face.  
**Meaning** – To do something which makes other people stop respecting you.

9. In high spirits

**Example** – He was in high spirits when I met him in the office.

**Meaning** – In a cheerful mood.

10. Struck several bad patches

**Example** – He struck several bad patches before he made good.

**Meaning** – Had many professional difficulties.

11. A chip off the old block

**Example** – Truly he is a chip off the old block.

**Meaning** – Very similar to his father.

12. Bitten off more than one can chew

**Example** – Suresh has unknowingly bitten off more than he can chew.

**Meaning** – To take up a task which one may not be able to accomplish due to lack of ability.

13. The bare bones

**Example** – The bare bones of the conversation had been that he hated my performances in that project.

**Meaning** – The main point.

14. Takes no prisoners

**Example** – The Indian Army's order was to take no prisoners.

**Meaning** – To kill the enemy rather than seize them as prisoners.

15. Pandora's box

**Example** – Unfortunately, his decisions opens a Pandora's box of domestic violence.

**Meaning** – To do something that causes a lot of new problems that one did not expect.

16. The rank and file

**Example** – The party leadership seems to be losing the support of the rank and file.

**Meaning** – The ordinary members of an organization and not its leaders.

17. Once in a blue moon

**Example** – Once in a blue moon day, I get time to travel.

**Meaning** – Something that happens very rarely.

18. Beating around the bush

**Example** – The politician was beating around the bush when people demanded a reason for the scam.

**Meaning** – Avoiding the topic.

19. Chip on your shoulder

**Example** – He has a chip on his shoulder for being abandoned by his friends in school days.

**Meaning** – When someone is upset about something that happened a while ago.

20. A piece of cake

**Example** – Music is my piece of cake.

**Meaning** – Something that is easy to understand or do.

21. Blessing in disguise

**Example** – The course that I took was a blessing in disguise and I realize it now.

**Meaning** – Something good or useful that did not initially seem that way.

22. Come hell or high water

**Example** – I have decided that come hell or high water, I will finish my work.

**Meaning** – Possible obstacles in your path.

23. Taste of your own medicine

**Example** – Bad people will surely have a chance to taste their own medicine.

**Meaning** – When someone receives the same treatment, usually negative, that he/she gives to others.

24. Golden handshake

**Example** – It's better to offer a golden handshake to the aged employees.

**Meaning** – A big amount of money given to a person when he/she leaves a company or retires.

25. Apple of one's eye

**Example** – My mother is always an apple of my family's eye.

**Meaning** – Being cherished more than others are.

26. Feeling a bit under weather

**Example** – I am not going to gym today as I am feeling a bit under weather.

**Meaning** – Feeling slightly ill.

27. Mean business

**Example** – The border is surrounded by forces who mean business.

**Meaning** – Being serious/ dedicated.

28. The best of both worlds

**Example** – I had the best of both world since I worked as an ordinary member but got to learn from the leaders.

**Meaning** – The benefit of widely different situations, enjoyed at the same time.

29. Hear it on grapevine

**Example** – I heard it on grapevine that he has cheated the organization.

**Meaning** – To hear rumors about something or someone.

30. Can't judge a book by its cover

**Example** – It is wise not to judge a book by its cover.

**Meaning** – Can't judge something primarily by it's appearance./ Don't judge someone based on how the person looks like

Our greatest weakness lies in giving up.  
The most certain way to succeed is  
Always to try just one more time...