



Research Paper

African Culture and What's Left of It Today: A Study of V.S. Naipaul's *The Masque of Africa: Glimpses of African Belief*

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ABSTRACT: *The world often discusses the history and cultures of lost and surviving civilisations of the world. Yet, very few ponder over what was Africa and what happened to it ; what was Africa like before it as colonized. This paper discusses the richness and diversity of what once was a beautiful continent with innumerable races of people living together in harmony. We shall know how the Arabs and the English found their way here and forever changed the future of Africa. Now, with almost no written records of their history and culture, Africans are finding themselves on the edge of living life as people with no roots or converting to other religions, through the analysis of the book written by V.S. Naipaul.*

KEYWORDS: *African Culture, Decolonization, Ancestral Worship, Traditional African Religion*

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Journeying into the unknown is a pursuit that has always enticed humans. Men, since times eternal, have travelled thousands of miles to discover new areas for a variety of reasons, including curiosity, diplomatic missions, and spiritual fulfilment. They travelled and recorded what they saw, with some jotting down only the pleasant aspects of the region, while others focused on the conditions and landscape in their own, unfiltered words. They returned home with their impressions and published them in what are now known as travelogues. Fa Hein, Huen Sang, Tavernier, Bernier, Marco Polo, Ibn Batuta, and Alberuni are just a few of the many travel authors who have produced travelogues throughout history. Aldous Huxley, Graham Greene, George Orwell, Paul Theroux, and V.S. Naipaul are some of the most well-known modern travel writers.

Since they present a true description of what the author saw and experienced, descriptive travelogues contribute much to the knowledge of a location, its people, culture, society, and developments. Travellers who travel in the neighbourhood, among people of all socioeconomic backgrounds, present the true picture of a place. When transportation was expensive and difficult, such as when people travelled by ships or horses, which took a lot of time, money, and energy, everyone relied on the reports of these travellers to learn about what else the Earth was home to other than their own land. Travelogues can include poems, short stories, essays, and letters. Yet, it is not advisable to rely only on travelogues for information because they are based on the author's personal interpretations of various events and observations. What is interesting and appealing to one person may not be acceptable to another.

The element of discovery—both of the self as well as the world—is found profoundly in the non-fiction works of Sir Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul. Trinidad saw the birth of this celebrated author on August 17, 1932. Naipaul's efforts earned him a scholarship at Oxford. His upbringing made him come face to face with all the struggles and trials of human life, and this is what influenced his travel writings. His sympathy and understanding of the life of third world countries led him to walk through the lanes of India and Africa. "He wrote from the point of view of somebody who grew up outside privileged society and took that vision to Latin America and Africa, as well as India, which his ancestors left as indentured labourers in the 19th century, but where the modern Oxford-educated lad felt an utterly anticlimactic sense of alienation" (O'Yeah).

Decolonization was in full swing at the time. People were gradually freeing themselves from the shackles of colonisation, both in terms of their lands and their minds. Individual identities, cultures, and religions were all being rewritten. This was the ideal time for a writer like Naipaul to take the risk of putting down all that he observed and thought about. This tendency garnered him a lot of flak and insults, yet his works are still admired for their realism. His travel essays depict the grim realities of third-world countries and how

they suffered and have changed as a result of foreign invasions, colonisation, trade and globalisation. According to Agyemang and Nyamekye, "Globalisation does not permit any religion to be an island to itself. Indigenous cultures all over the world bear the brunt of a consequent of globalisation—religious pluralism" (1).

When Naipaul revisited Africa, forty-two years after his first visit in 1966, he wished to write a book on African belief. He stepped foot in Uganda, Nigeria, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Gabon, and finally, South Africa. As he walked through what little was left of the native African culture surrounded by the rest of Africa, which was now replicating Europe and the Arab world, full of buildings, pavements, buses, and with churches and mosques at every nook and corner, Naipaul noted down whatever his mind could perceive. Africa was no longer Africa; it was a hub of different religions and faiths. He could see only glimpses of the traditional African culture, as hinted in the title of his work.

Today, the world sees Africa as a destitute continent where people live in huts, eat mud cookies, and have no access to basic services. When one thinks of India, one is reminded of its rich history, and the same goes with other civilisations like the Greek, Roman, and the Maya. When one thinks of Africa, however, he is unaware of its history and indigenous culture. The myth about Africa is that it doesn't have a history, which could be due to a lack of written documents regarding its history and culture. They had their own way of life, which was entwined with nature, deities, ancestral worship, taboos, totems, and superstitions. In the contemporary sense, they were primitive. "Primitive in this connection means, categorically, 'backward', 'rude', or 'uncouth'. This notion seems to have been buttressed by what the Western Europeans saw on their arrival on the west coast of the African continent" (4-5).

When Europeans came to Africa, a community that subsided on forest hunting stood in their way. The locals worshipped trees and the spirits of the dead. The variation in skin colour had a significant impact too. According to Christopher N. Ibenwa, "Furthermore, in traditional African society, instruments of social control include: taboos, swearing of oath, making of blood pact, trial by ordeal, oracles, vows, secret societies, and the meticulous observation of customs and traditions" (150). "The sad aspect of the problem is," as Agyeman and Nyamekye argued, "that the nature of the religion makes it difficult to understand it. The difficulty seems to come from the fact that its propagation is carried out by living it rather than preaching it. Its followers are more preoccupied with its practice than with its theory. Even in rituals where religion was present, it (religion) was not central as the focus was on the purpose of the ritual but not religion" (5).

However, the indigenous African religion is one of the oldest in the world. It is a mix of different cultures from various countries, but some common practices bind them together. "Religion makes the most absolute claim in the life, hopes and aspirations, fears and joys of the average African person" (IKWUAGWU 14). Their lives are surrounded by a number of customs and rituals. "In African traditional societies, there was a deeply rooted belief in the continuity of life, a life after death and a "community of interest between the living and the dead and the generation yet unborn. There was also a general belief that God who created the community, created a set of supernatural and spiritual forces capable of intervening in life in the physical world. He therefore set up divine- beings- divinities and ancestors to police it" (Ugwukah and Ohaja 22). Belief in their history and the power of the spirits also depends on tales from the past. These tales are passed down orally from generation to generation.

According to John S. Mbiti, "There are more similarities than differences in all traditional African religions" (100-101). They have various beliefs, customs, and rituals, but they are all linked by their love and respect for nature, their belief in ancestral worship, and their use of sacrificial rites to placate the Gods they serve. Amidst various religions worshipping various Gods, the traditional African religion lives. David Livingstone, who was a British physician and an explorer of Africa, discovered and named Lake Victoria. When D. Livingstone visited Africa, he couldn't help but exclaim that, "They had vast cities, great and elaborate works of art, and were the most successful of agriculturists. Noted for their skill in the management of the practical affairs of life, they also paid profound attention to the most abstruse questions of religion; and it was a people of Africa, the Egyptians, who first announced belief in the resurrection of the body and the immortality of the soul" (18).

Africans believe in a single God who is both the creator of the universe and the most merciful. For them, the spirits of their ancestors serve as a link to God. "He averts calamities, supplies rain, provides fertility, and assures rich harvest and security from evil forces" (Igwegbe 47). He is who the ancestors serve while being served by living men. In the African culture, the ancestors are revered as perfect beings. Not everyone can attain the status of an ancestor. Only those who lead a noble and honest life can become ancestors. This motivates people to lead a good life so that they can be worshipped after their death. Onwumere A. IKWUAGWU concluded, "Thus, God is held to be too remote in the African Traditional Religion and absent from the daily lives of the people. In an atmosphere of this nature, the cult of spirits is revered and substituted for God. Good and evil, salvation and deliverance, all rested in the hands of the ancestors" (29).

However, these rituals, customs, and tales were never documented. The African culture solely survives on the oral practice of passing information to the younger generation. The knowledge is remembered and

transferred to the children, who then carry on the tradition. "This religion, with its doctrine, liturgy, rituals values are documented and preserved in various ways, namely in signs, symbols, music and dances, prayers, ejaculations, proverbs and riddles, customs and beliefs, names of persons and places, rituals and festivals, shrines, sacred places, works of arts" (22).

Although it was difficult to introduce the Africans to the new religions at first, it was inevitable because some of them started questioning their own culture because of its colossal rituals and complicated practices. They later adopted the new religions. The foreigners, who couldn't understand this religion, wanted to reform it as the Africans, with their pagan methods of living, seemed backward to them. John Hanning Speke, an African explorer who is said to have discovered the source of the river Nile and mentioned many times by Naipaul in his travelogue thought the same about Africa as other modern travellers. "Could a government be formed for them like ours in India, they would be saved; but without it, I fear there is very little chance; for at present the African neither can help himself nor will he be helped about by others, because his country is in such a constant state of turmoil, he has too much anxiety on hand looking out for his food to think of anything else" (Speke).

Globalisation also had an effect. Nature was pushed to the second place. The focus was shifted towards development. People lost everything they cherished and revered. Foreign invasions, colonisation, and unfair trades have all influenced Africa's culture. Some converted, and those who did not, suffered hardships and were destitute. Indigenous African spirituality today is increasingly falling out of favour. "The bottom line then is that

Africans who still wholly practice African indigenous religions are only about 10 percent of the African population, a fraction of what it used to be only a century ago, when indigenous religions dominated most of the continent" (Olupona).

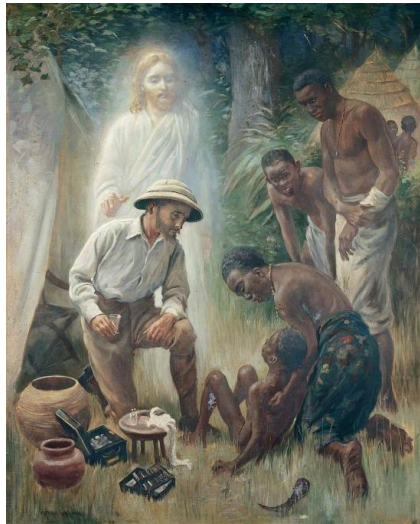


Fig. 1. "A Medical Missionary Attending to a Sick African" (Copping).

V.S. Naipaul witnessed the beauty of this continent and its culture not only through its eyes but through the stories of its inhabitants as well. What is commendable, though, is that these inhabitants belong to different religions and statuses. Some are still indigenous Africans while some are converted. Some miss their old religion and some regard it only as mere past. Their stories give a picture of how a modern-day African thinks. Through the words of Naipaul, the reader goes through the various emotions of love, belonging, home sickness, confusion, and anger.

When Naipaul arrived in Uganda, he realised that this country, as well as all of Africa, is more than meets the eye. Uganda, an equatorial country in Africa, encompasses the four major lakes of East Africa, namely Lake Albert, Lake Edward, Lake Victoria, and Lake Kyoga. "Uganda was first explored by Europeans as well as Arab traders in 1844. An Anglo-German agreement of 1890 declared it to be in the British sphere of influence in Africa, and the Imperial British East Africa Company was chartered to develop the area" (Uganda). To the modern man, it was a sight to behold. "When they first arrived there, it was not an unusual sight to see the men of different tribes, on the hill-sides that form the face of the 'crater', fighting battles-royal with their spears and shields; and even to this day, they, without their arms, sometimes have hot contests, by pelting one another with sticks and stones" (Speke 14).

Apart from the Europeanisation of even the lakes, the hotels, international restaurants, modern pavements, with a number of churches and mosques which are inescapable from the human eye, in stark contrast to the still prevailing belief systems and an African individual's everyday turmoil to find out his true identity, one gets a pretty fair idea of what Uganda used to be and what it has become. The bewilderment with which

these people live their lives attracts people from all over the world, who come with curious eyes to see what it's like to live in a world of clashing beliefs and new developments that have a history of making people question their own culture. "The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart" (Achebe). This is what drew Naipaul to Uganda in 1966, when he masterfully documented his views and thoughts about the country.

"There was no view at some stage of the city and the green hills for which Kampala used to be famous" (Naipaul 3). The old pathways were now replaced with modern roads, and houses with iron roofs and residential buildings were scattered here and there. This is what Naipaul noticed when he visited Kampala, the capital city of Uganda. This city saw the arrival of Arab traders who were looking for slaves and ivory in the 1840s, followed by two British explorers, John Hanning Speke and Henry M. Stanley, who arrived here in 1862 and 1875, respectively. For his knowledge of Mutesa, the then-King (or Kabaka) of Buganda (Uganda), Naipaul primarily depends on the observations of these two explorers.

Modernisation does not always imply the development of a society that was previously backward and unorganised. This can be seen not only in India but also in Africa, and it has been eloquently captured by Naipaul. He claims, based on Speke's findings, that while Mutesa was enthralled by the firearms, compass, and other tools Speke brought with him, Mutesa's Bagandan people were no less organised or skillful. They had the expertise and ability to build straight roadways and had an organised army and fleet capable of launching effective attacks. They produced their own weaponry and were practically professionals in the construction of grass-roofed houses, as evidenced by the famed Kasubi tombs.

"Its unusual scale and outstanding details bear witness to the creative genius of Baganda, and as a masterpiece of form and craftsmanship, it is an exceptional surviving example of an architectural style developed by the powerful Buganda Kingdom since the 13th Century" (Tombs of Bugandan Kings at Kasubi). Today, the Kasubi tombs remain a testament to the Africans' mastery of skills and creativity. They were used as burial grounds for Buganda's Kabakas (kings) and some of the royal folk, and they still exist, along with all the rituals which were to be followed by the family of the Kabakas.

There is no doubt that, despite their grandeur, ancient religions and cultures followed several rites that are now questioned in the modern world. Almost every primitive culture's history is littered with examples and events of sacrifices, hefty rituals, and innumerable superstitions which are unreasonable to the modern man. Africa is no exception. This is stated throughout Naipaul's work. There were sets of regulations with consequences, and there were solutions for everything, challenging them would have enraged the ancestors, so everyone conducted their lives in accordance with the norms, which somehow ensured peace. "The land of the living was not far removed from the domain of the ancestors. There was coming and going between them" (Achebe). Their lives started with rituals and ended with them too. As a result, civilization ran smoothly. Everyone had a role to play, and they all played it well.

Their unwavering trust and dedication to their Kabaka, as well as their belief in their culture and traditions, served as a unifying force that kept their kingdom at the pinnacle. The Bugandan people, however, had no other way of remembering their magnificent history than to transmit it down orally. It is a well-known fact that anything passed down orally over generations becomes muddled and distorted with each passing generation. The Bugandans' dedication and patriotism were easily swept away by invading religions due to a lack of scripts, words that would've always reminded their generations of their valiant forefathers. "To belong to either was to be part of a great world faith, approved and organised, with a great literature and famous solid buildings; the temptation to look away from the much smaller thing, of grass, that was one's own was great" (Naipaul 40).

When a person or a group of people are oblivious of their own history and are interwoven with their culture through superstitions and costly rituals, they become easy prey for anyone who holds a different belief. When one is continuously reminded of his culture and religion as a collection of over-glorification of predecessors and with no definitive answers, one begins to wander and drift away from what he has believed in since birth. What happens after has been explained by Naipaul through Susan's story, "so much part of the colonial experience, which was not pleasant. When a person or race comes and imposes on you, it takes away everything, and it is a vicious thing to do. Much as I think the West and modernity is a good thing, it did take away our culture and civilisation, and even if it is gentle, it does make us doubt our roots" (Naipaul 32).

What transpired next altered Uganda's status as a wonderland of culture and innovation. Mutesa, intrigued by Christianity and its march towards modernity, renounced Islam and, after thirteen years, urged H.M. Stanley to assist him in bringing missionaries to Uganda. When Naipaul was perplexed by Speke's observation that the Africans were attracted to foreign religions, he was told that the reason for their fascination with Islam and Christianity was that both of them promised an afterlife, the answer to the famous human curiosity of what is the purpose of this life and what happens after death. The arrival of another foreign religion along with its impacts on the native African culture has been beautifully explained by Naipaul: "Foreign

religion, to go by the competing ecclesiastical buildings on the hilltops, was like an applied and contagious illness, curing nothing, giving no final answers, keeping everyone in a state of nerves, fighting wrong battles, narrowing themind." (Naipaul 6).

Nigeria, another country in Africa, had a similar story. It lies to the west of Africa and harbours the Atlantic Ocean to its south. Its indigenous religion is the Yoruba religion.

Orunmila, a Yoruba grand priest, occupies the highest position in this religion. They believe in reincarnation inside the family, which means that their ancestors are reborn and never leave their families. Their unwavering faith in their religion instilled terror in them as well. In almost every pagan religion and culture, there is a punishment for every mistake committed. This prevented people from heading astray and made sure that they stayed within the religious and societal norms. Undoubtedly, this was noticed by Naipaul when he first visited Nigeria.

Naipaul addresses Nigeria and Africa as a whole as polygamous, with frequent yelling and conflicts within almost every household. But in the present day, he notes that apart from the Muslim community, Nigeria is no longer polygamous and he states the reason for this. When the Scottish traveller, Mungo Park, visited West

Africa, he mentioned Mumbo Jumbo in his book, *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa*. In order to take control over the household conflicts and establish dominance, "In such cases, the interposition of Mumbo Jumbo is called in, and is always decisive. This strange minister of justice (who is supposed to be either the husband himself, or some person instructed by him), disguised in the dress that has been mentioned, and armed with the rod of public authority, announces his coming (whenever his services are required) by loud and dismal screams in the woods near the town" (Park).



Fig. 2. "Mumbo Jumbo" (Park)

What happens after has been explained by Naipaul as, "... and then Mumbo Jumbo declares who the offending woman is. She is seized, stripped naked, tied to a post, and flogged until dawn by Mumbo Jumbo with his stick. The villagers shout with pleasure; they mock the woman and show her no mercy" (Naipaul 89). This, combined with costly rites, unexplained sacrifices, and a lack of cultural unity and pride, may be one of the reasons why Nigerians have turned away from their indigenous culture and toward other religions.

Naipaul's story of Adesina brilliantly depicts the stories of such individuals and families. Adesina was a typical African man whose father converted to Catholicism before converting to Islam. His younger brother became a Christian, but his older brother remained a member of African society. It is rather agonising how a person is divided between several beliefs, constantly admonished for being biased and unsure of his own identity. Adesina's story speaks to anybody who is attracted to the new yet struggles to let go of the past. Naipaul's writing has a strong concentration on African cultural figures, such as rulers, religious counsellors, and even saints. It's ironic that most of them are found in the chapter: Sacred Places.

Naipaul talks about Oba, the name by which the traditional kings of Lagos are addressed. They are not monarchs and hold no political power, but instead serve as advisors to the people of Lagos. They are a medium for politicians and powerful men to gain the support of the locals. During Adesina's day, most men had religious counsellors, soothsayers, or what they called Babalawos. People frequently sought the advice of babalawos when they were disturbed by current problems and the uncertainty of the future. People bowed down to them because they had absolute authority. As power corrupts the soul, Naipaul exposes them as people who preyed on the befuddled and the terrified, draining them of all their money in exchange for the solutions to their problems. Here, Naipaul focuses on Africans' unwavering faith in what they perceived as the Supreme, which some may claim was nothing more than blind faith.

Africans find themselves really close to nature. They believe that they are living at the mercy of nature itself. Hence, numerous stories and folklore have been connected to trees and rivers so as to maintain the connection, respect, and harmony towards nature. Naipaul observed it too when he went to shrines and sacred groves, which still hold meaning in the hearts of the locals, even after several attempts to be destroyed by foreigners. After all, such places, people, and beliefs are what make a community. Their destruction would mean the destruction of faith, as proved by history. Faith leads to myths and superstitions too. People in Nigeria who diligently believe in them get offended when someone refers to their beliefs as Juju, a word used to describe the traditional African culture as containing only rituals, totems, and spells.

Africa is still very diverse and the same is observed by Naipaul, who exclaims that the north of Nigeria, with a Muslim majority, is a peaceful land as people know their dos and don'ts. There is little to no conflict. But then, even the greatest of monuments and cultures have their own challenges to overcome. The north of Nigeria is no different. The theme of uncomprehensible rituals continues as Naipaul exclaims the rules of the harem: "The most important of these was the separation of women from their children" (Naipaul 148). It is difficult to make someone move away from what he and his ancestors have believed for hundreds of years. As a result, when foreign religions arrived, they found it incredibly difficult to convert the natives at first. People were afraid that joining a new religion would mean abandoning their own culture, which wouldn't go unpunished by the Gods and ancestors. "Diviners and medicine men reported that the divinities were angry because of the new religion and warned that nobody should join the missionaries. Others refused to embrace the new religion because they thought that the missionaries wanted to destroy their culture" (Okeke et al. 4).

When Naipaul reached Ghana, another country in Africa, he first met the people of Ashanti. For them, as Naipaul observed, the central focus was on their own community and people. They built houses close to each other and lived in their own bubble. "The religion of the Ashanti people is very much different as they believe that animals, plants, and trees have soul along with that also believe in fairies and witches" (Bray). The Ashanti people, too, had their own sets of rituals and rules that they lived by. But the Gaa religion, also found in Ghana, was way different from Ashanti. It was too intrusive. Its followers lived their lives accompanied by crippling anxiety about making a mistake that would anger the ancestors.

Every action of theirs had a meaning attached to it. There was a predefined way of doing things. Even sneezing had different meanings. One aspect that Naipaul observed was that none of them worshipped God. For them, God had much better things to do than keep an eye on them. Hence, their faith and worship were devoted to the spirits and their ancestors, whom they believed to be a medium through which they could reach God. These spirits and ancestors ruled over them and were the policy-makers of their society.

Yet, even the Gaa religion wasn't immune from taboos and sacrifices. Here too, people and priests lived according to a set of rules. The priests couldn't cover their soles as they believed that it would break their connection with the Earth. They did not have a king. The chief priest acted as both the king and the advisor. But when the concept of money and getting rich got popular with the advent of other religions, they started taking advantage of the common man and charging a hefty amount of money from them even for breaking a small taboo. And thus, religion became business. For Ghana too, the story of their dying culture was similar to those of Uganda and Nigeria. "Traditional religion in Ghana is dying slowly. It started to die when the Europeans and Muslims came and saw us as pagans. Their superior technology killed us. We have witches who fly in the air. But when we saw aircraft we came to abhor what was our culture. I think the modern African is in a very difficult situation. He should look at it and modify it. He should not condemn it" (Naipaul 164).

The impact of urbanisation can be best seen in the Ivory Coast. When Naipaul arrived here and learned about the King, he was not surprised to learn of Houphoué-Boigny's intriguing and mythical life history. The popular belief among the natives was that on the suggestion of a famous Shaman or witch doctor, he volunteered to be sliced up and boiled in a cauldron in order to gain more power. Then he ascended to become Ivory Coast's most powerful king. This story was exclusively for believers; for others with opposing views, it was nonsensical and too mystical to be genuine. Invasions, commerce, and urbanisation all had an effect on this land. Houphoué, being the most powerful and still unsatisfied, immersed himself in magic, most likely in search of additional power. That is the thing about magic. In the wrong hands and with a few sacrifices, one can get their dreams fulfilled, ignoring the impact they will have on society. Houphoué let the French gain control of his property while he was occupied with magic, and they drained the Ivory Coast of all its beauty. The botanical gardens had devolved into a tangle of bushes. Their livestock, which had previously lived in peace, were suddenly being dispatched to slaughterhouses.

The Ivory Coast, which got its name from its large population of ivory-producing elephants, was suddenly devoid of them. Elephant teeth were exported in large quantities for use in the manufacture of furniture and jewellery. Just like the folks living in snow-clad land eat wild fruits and the people living near the sea eat aquatic animals, the people of the Ivory Coast also included in their diets what was given to them by nature in abundance. They only took the things that wouldn't affect nature severely, thereby ensuring harmony. Ivory Coast had up to six to seven million bats. "At evening's twilight, the skies over Abidjan's business quarter are

darkened by bats squeaking their way between buildings, flying across Ivory Coast's economic hub in the tens of thousands. The scene has long been a feature of the city's Plateau district—in the dying embers of the sun, the beating of innumerable little wings almost drowns out the traffic noise" (Esnault and Kone). These bats make up one of the most well-liked cuisines of the people of Ivory Coast. Later, the world learned that this popular cuisine was to blame for the Ebola virus outbreak in Africa.



Fig. 3. "Birds are only one type of animal sacrifice. Goats, cows, donkeys, even dogs, are also offered" (In).

When Naipaul arrived in Gabon, he instantly realised that the forest was everything to the people of this region. Every action they took was inextricably linked to the forest. It was their refuge and supplier, and its trees guided them through the trials of daily life. Every element of the forest had significance for them, just as all basic human and natural behaviours had significance for the Gaa people. "The forest is impregnated with vital principles; from these, either by initiation or by inheritance, an individual may appropriate the spiritual power (*kulu*) that will assist him by blessing his various endeavors" (Pygmy Religions). The locals were well aware that they were invading this territory. The forest contained its own universe, consisting of creatures and trees that coexisted together. The locals were well aware that this was the land of the animals. They weren't supposed to be here in the first place. As a result, they only took what they needed from the forest and, in exchange for shelter and food, they treated it as if it were a deity. Naipaul was told that they explained to the trees the reasons for their actions when they were cutting their branches. The trees, they believed, had a soul just like them. "The new religions, Islam and Christianity, are just on the top. Inside us is the forest" (Naipaul 217).

And, as one might expect from a primitive culture, the forests had their own stories, which were taken as facts by those who believed them and as myth and folklore by those who didn't. They saw the forest as a deity because they believed that God was too busy for them. They worshipped their forefathers as Gods and never buried them. Their bones were kept and fed rum while they sought advice. To keep in touch with the ancestors, there was a ceremony, which is still performed, known as Initiation. Eating a herb called Eboga, which creates hallucinations, is part of this process. They believed that the individual who ate this herb was transported to another dimension, where he met his forefathers. They then informed him of his errors and the consequences, while the individual in question sought recommendations, counsel, and blessings. Naipaul, a non-believer, explains the scientific reason behind it, "And (since we can hallucinate only about what we expect), local people could be sent on a dream journey to meet their ancestors in the other world (Naipaul 177).

It was used in Gabon to treat a variety of ailments. "Today, by some estimates, there are more than 100 mostly rural communities throughout Gabon that continue to practice Bwiti in its various forms. Bwiti is an animist ritual culture that incorporates iboga into healing and ritual practices, such as the passage from youth to adulthood and other important life transitions (e.g., assuming a leadership role or recovering from extreme grief)" (Dickinson 50). However, as the rest of the world became aware of it, the research was formalized, and it was proven that this substance, dubbed methadone, could help addicts. "...America has a patent and is making millions from it." (Naipaul 230). When the process of Initiation took place, the people celebrated it. They painted their bodies and danced to the sound of drums. Naipaul had the opportunity to see this ceremony, but only after paying a hefty amount of money. Culture here, again, had become a business.

The Pigmies, also known as the short people, were the first to discover this herb and its properties, which they then shared with the other tribes. They were and still are referred to as the masters of the forest, or at least the section of the forest that has survived. They were the initial settlers and were well-versed in the forest's workings. They were aware of its beauty as well as the secrets it held. They also did a fantastic job of safeguarding it. They helped individuals by curing ailments and giving advice. They recognised and accepted the direction in which the world was heading. They stayed in the forest at first, sheltering themselves with palm

leaves. They eventually evolved and began to construct huts. The elderly stayed apart, but their offspring were introduced to the new, modern world. "You see, the master knew that the world had changed, and the pigmies would need their own people to be a bridge to the new world" (Naipaul 239).

"The earliest known reference to a Pygmy—a "dancing dwarf of the god from the land of spirits"—is found in a letter written around 2276 B.C. by Pharaoh Pepi II to the leader of an Egyptian trade expedition up the Nile. In the *Iliad*, Homer invoked mythical warfare between Pygmies and a flock of cranes to describe the intensity of a charge by the Trojan army. In the fifth century B.C., the Greek historian Herodotus wrote of a Persian explorer who saw "dwarfish people, who used clothing made from the palm tree" at a spot along the West African coast." (Raffaele). To escape extinction, pigmies have now travelled deeper into the forest. Modernity and urbanisation are destroying not only the trees but also the culture that reveres them. The outcome is the Lope National Park. The remnant woodland was given the designation "Lope National Park" under the pretence of safeguarding the local species. The forest is now acknowledged as a section of the well-known park. African society was torn down with the advent and growth of the number of churches. The number of churches was higher than the number of shrines. The walls of churches, in contrast to the natural shrines and sacred places, were an irony in themselves. Nature was being replaced by concrete. And the worst part of it all is that the new generations of nature-worshippers now went to church.

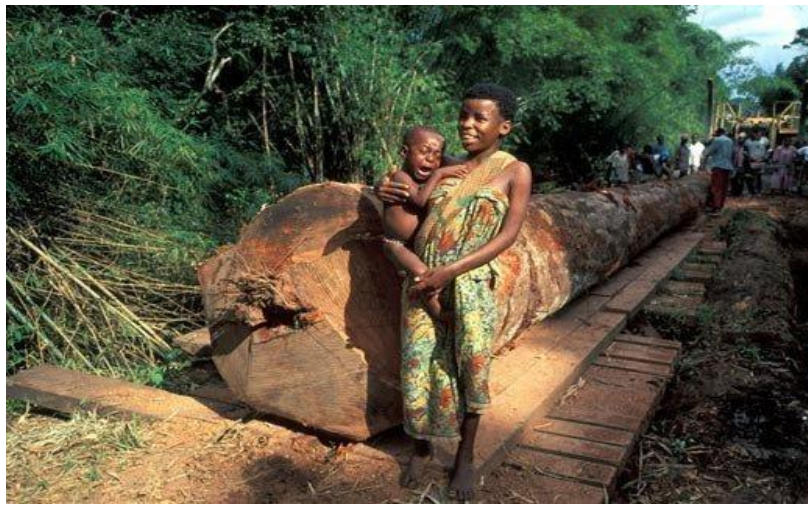


Fig. 4. "A Mossapola Pygmy woman and baby by a small bridge. Loggers are moving a hard wood trunk towards the lorry that will transport the wood into Cameroon and to Douala, the nearest port" (Raffaele).

Naipaul viewed South Africa from the viewpoint of a modern city. He paints a portrait of a post-apartheid country and the impact of its harsh history. Following the abolition of slavery, the South African government opened its doors to all those who had fled this country during its dark times. Then came the arrival of hordes of people returning home to South Africa, bringing their poverty with them. People began to live in slum areas, on the sides of roads, with the minimal necessities of life as a result of the abrupt growth in population. Poverty was evident everywhere. Desperate people broke into the apartments and took up residence on the balconies. This resulted in instability, both economically and in terms of societal harmony.

When Naipaul approached the market, he was instantly enveloped by an intolerable odour, for which he gave the following explanation: "And then we were in the realm of awfulness: animal body parts laid out neatly on a kind of platform." (Naipaul 282). Vendors sold animal jaws and ribs. Horse and deer heads were displayed, and guinea pigs were placed within cages as a showpiece, soon to be sold out and butchered. All of this was not just for the sake of eating. South Africa was likewise not exempt from the traditional African religion's practice of sacrifices. Guinea pig blood was mainly intended for drinking, on the orders of a witch doctor. However, the witch doctors sought more than just money in exchange for cures. For their part in the cure, they frequently demanded specific herbs and roots. Poor people flocked to these witch doctors to get themselves or their families cured, and in exchange for money, they were given some blood or herbs that the witch doctor promised would cure them. They sacrificed cattle and cows, allowing them to scream in the hopes that their ancestors would hear them. Accompanying Naipaul in the market was Fatima, his guide and arranger, who told him that she was coloured, which meant that she was of a mixed race, and she suffered because of it. Fatima is a symbol of mixed-race people and their attempts to integrate into society. They are still viewed as misfits by whites who do not accept them because they are dark or have curly hair, and by Africans who do not accept them because they have foreign blood in their veins.

In search of acceptance, for a sense of belonging, Fatima travelled worldwide to find a place, a

community, where she would be accepted. The Hindu community, who were adamant about learning who she was and where she came from, rejected her. After learning of her mixed race, they didn't trust her and eventually let her go. Fatima then went to Mecca in search of spiritual guidance but came back empty-handed. A person of mixed race could not be trusted, as though the person had been tainted and was impure. No one, not the Whites, the Blacks, the Muslims, or the Hindus, accepted them. Naipaul explained his inner thoughts about this when he said, "But rather like Fatima looking for identity, I felt stymied in South Africa and saw that here race was all in all; that race ran as deep as religion elsewhere" (Naipaul 288).

Even when slavery was abolished, little changed, save those white people, including those who were born here, lived in constant fear. They were afraid that even a single remark or action would enrage the Blacks, who were steadily increasing in number. Because of their history, everyone favoured them now, and some took this as an advantage. Yet, there were still some White people who considered themselves the superior ones, and Naipaul explains this through the story of Gandhiji, who, when reached South Africa, became a part of racial prejudice due to his nationality and later wrote about it in his autobiography: "I began to think of my duty. Should I fight for my rights or go back to India, or should I go on to Pretoria without minding the insults, and return to India after finishing the case? It would be cowardice to run back to India without fulfilling my obligation. The hardship to which I was subjected was superficial only a symptom of the deep disease of colour prejudice. I should try, if possible, to root out the disease and suffer hardships in the process. Redress for wrongs I should seek only to the extent that would be necessary for the removal of the colour prejudice" (Gandhi 58).

Even if it was no longer a slave country, South Africa had nothing new to offer. People had become lazy, preferring to be labelled as slaves and live a boring existence. Without respect for its culture or history, South Africa was now just recognised for this one thing. People were unconcerned about development and moving on. They were obsessed with slavery and how their forefathers lived during that time and chose to remain inside the bubble of the past. Suddenly, apartheid was the dominant issue in every novel. Naipaul observed this too and wrote, "...that without apartheid, there was no further cause for South Africa in the world, nothing for its writers to explore, nothing to attract attention, no true motive for loss or tragedy. Was there not some deeper, more universal motif, apart from the obviousness of apartheid?" (Naipaul 301).

Yet, the feeling of homesickness was present too. The people here also knew that they were raising anglophone children, who now host the famous twenty-first birthday parties and sing songs at funerals. They have been cut off from their culture and have no respect for it.

Many of them believed, as shared by Naipaul, held a different view of Mandela. For them, their freedom came at the cost of sacrifice. They believed that prison defeated the fighter in Mandela: "... the Mandela who went in was a revolutionary, and the Mandela who came out was preaching peace and compromise" (Naipaul 316). Today, South Africa stands tall with modern buildings, roads, malls, and parks. Yet, it hides a wounded and forgotten culture, which resides in small lanes, shops, and in the hearts of old men who have failed to fit into modern society.

Beyond a shadow of doubt, the traditional African religion and culture, though diverse, had its beauty and flaws. These people lived on the basic minimum yet were rich in culture. There was a place for everyone, for different people, for animals, for nature and even the dead. Everything was interlinked. In contrast to the West's rising fixation on science and neglect of nature, they lived in harmony with the flora and fauna. Humans are making scientific advances in practically every field today, which is wreaking havoc on the environment. Trees are being razed, rivers are being emptied, glaciers are melting, and the number of endangered plant and animal species is on the rise. Gone are the days when humans revered and appreciated the value of nature.

Traditional African Religion values rituals and customs just as much as religion. Rituals are present in every stage of life, from conception to death. Ignorance of even one rite is said to have severe consequences. Ancestral rage can wreak havoc on a person's health, and lead to poverty, and even death. The African way of life is most influenced by the deceased. Their ultimate purpose is to please their ancestors. In the daily lives of Africans, their ancestors serve as mentors, advisors, and judges. Ancestral veneration gives people a reason to live a good life based on values and ethics. It might also be claimed that, while they think their ancestors are their guides, the African community is always fearful of them. They believe that a single action of theirs will enrage the ancestors and that this will have a significant impact on their existence. As a result, people revere their ancestors not only out of love and respect but also out of terror.

This religion of symbols, totems, and folktales was incomprehensible to the people of other religions. They had the desire to change it and make it modern like them. Their ways of worshipping and practising religion certainly had a drastic effect on the indigenous religion. More and more people converted and forgot about their culture. The communities that had lived in peace and harmony were now divided. The pigmies lost their homes. The number of witch doctors was reduced drastically after the introduction of modern medicine. Modern education lured them, and they forgot about their cultural education and customs. The poor African didn't know where to build his hut among tall modern buildings made of concrete.

But their efforts also led to the lessening of sacrifices in the name of religion and other barbaric rituals.

They brought with them modernity, tall buildings, schools, malls, modern and scientific education; and machinery. The African economy surely improved after their their arrival. So, it will not be wise to blame modernity and modern religions for destroying Africa.

Today, traditional religion in Africa is being choked with new scientific and religious advancements. It is becoming difficult for the average African man to keep up with the modernising world while remaining in touch with his roots. It is more difficult because his indigenous religion comprises certain rituals and practices that are unexplainable to the modern world, which views them as barbaric and brutal. Their practice of human and animal sacrifice is one of the most targeted practices of modern man. Yet it still survives. In the remotest of places, in the dark shadows of the jungles, in the scorching sun, eating what nature provides, they still exist and keep their culture alive. It is believed that to preserve their culture, Africans must accept and adapt to modernity. They should start documenting their history, customs, and rituals. This will prevent their tales and beliefs from getting lost between words passed down to successive generations. If mankind survives, and they dig out the remnants of this rich culture, the scripts and monuments will tell the tale of a culture that survived thousands of years.

African writers are giving their contribution and presenting the world with a lesser-known view of Africa, what it was and what it has endured. Writers like Chinua Achebe, Ben Okri, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie are the pioneers in African writing who portray the scenes of African everyday life as well as the inner turmoil of Africans. Today, the world may learn and benefit greatly from the African culture. During a time when one of the most pressing problems is climate change, Africans teach us that we owe everything to nature and that we should regard it as if it were a deity, a partner we rely on for survival. The Africans' experience teaches us that nothing in this world is permanent and that if we value something, we must treasure and defend it because time favours no one. It is also suggested that if Africans are to survive, they should begin incorporating their culture and rituals into the education curriculum so that today's students can learn about their heritage apart from the world's and take pride in how their ancestors suffered so that they could be alive today. Their narrative of loss, grief, and survival never fails to move the hearts of those who read it. If the pigmies, who are mocked for their diminutive stature, can survive in a forest and live a life of generosity and love, helping anyone they can, then so can we.

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