

**POST- INDEPENDENT SYMPTOMS OF RISING
AUTHORITARIANISM: AN ANALYSIS OF THE NOVEL *A BEND IN
THE RIVER* BY V. S. NAIPAUL**

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Modern history records events where authoritarianism (or totalitarianism) exploited the conditions within democracy for its own possible ascension. Authoritarianism has slowly risen from within a ‘refined’ symbolic background as an agent-instrument of historical Will, absorbing all the rational (hence civilized) content constructed under liberalism, to an elevated stance of a demonic executioner. Within this premise, the totalitarian leader takes the shape of an object-incarnation of a Master Signifier (S1); a super-egotistical Will that takes on itself the ‘responsibility’ of producing historical necessity with cannibalistic cruelty. Subsequently, the presentation of the totalitarian leader and his unconditional authority demand nothing but submission under an irrational banner that denotes that ‘one should obey the King because he is the King’.

This irrationality as a symptom can be detected in almost all forms of global totalitarian developments; from the Nazi regime through Stalinism to the Asian and African dictators. What is obvious in all this is that a clear gap exists between the symbolic authority of the classical Master and the ‘irrational power’ operating on its own, under totalitarianism rejecting any reality outside its superego. The perception of authoritarianism in this manner could be articulated as a symptom, and ‘this madness’ that commands *jouissance* (enjoyment) in the violation of Law itself ends in obscenity, while fast integrating the subject, unconsciously demanding it to share the same symptom.

V.S. Naipaul’s novel *A Bend in the River* provides a sound empirical example through the observatory eyes of an outsider, displaying the systematic development of the said ‘totalitarian symptom’ and its propagation in a post-independent context. By means of content analysis, this paper intends to analyze the novel by theoretical explanations of the Frankfurt School, Hannah Arendt and Slavoj Zizek on political philosophy, to identify how Naipaul’s novel can be read as a classic political text that displays the rise of totalitarianism. The discussion extends to illustrate how this symptom as a universal phenomenon can be plausibly detected in certain political strategies adopted in post-independent Sri Lanka.