



## The Suffrage of Elvira

*V.S. Naipaul*

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## The Suffrage of Elvira V.S. Naipaul

In this book, an old, comically timid and absent-minded man, Surujpat Harbans, runs for office, aided by superstition, bribes, and an aggressive campaign.

## The Suffrage of Elvira Details

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Author : V.S. Naipaul

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## From Reader Review The Suffrage of Elvira for online ebook

### Judy says

Naipaul's second novel again takes place in Trinidad. It is a spoof on democracy and elections in a developing country.

Mr Surujpat Harbans is running for General Assembly as representative for the village of Elvira. Of course he doesn't live there but lives in the city. He is financing his own campaign and visits Elvira to line up his supporters. The villagers, in just four years of democracy, have figured out how to make money for themselves by offering various services to the candidate.

This makes for a hilarious story as Harbans is fleeced for everything from posters to a loudspeaking van and a final cavalcade of taxis on election eve. Then there are the niceties of the Hindu vote, the Muslim vote, the Negro vote and the Spanish vote, not to mention various necessary bribes. One of the funniest lines comes from a less wealthy candidate who proclaims that there ought to be a law about how much a candidate can spend on his own election campaign. This story is set in 1950!

Apparently Naipaul's humor turns to a more bitter cynicism in his later novels, which I have not read. So far, in *The Mystic Masseur* and in this one, he provides great entertainment and an inside look at the various peoples who make up post colonial life in Trinidad.

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### Carlos Rubens says

A prime demonstration of Sir Vidia's power with a novel permeated with humour. The tripartite Trinidadian society and their surprisingly happy co-existence, superstition and the mess around a democracy in its infancy make this work a gem of Postcolonial Literature. Characters are rich and some are even present in other works such as *Pundit Ganesh*, from the *Mystic Masseur*.

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### Renee says

hilarious, sad, insightful novel/commentary on the "democratic process" in the West Indies.

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### Aditya says

A hilarious black comedy of ne'er do wells in the vein of *A Confederacy of Dunces*. I cant say how much cultural inside-baseball you need to get this book, but being Indian American myself I was laughing more at nuances that I was reading into the work that Naipul may or may not have intended. His strong racial hand is still present here, but I say throw PC to the side for a bit and enjoy this bit of political satire. Hell, its not like this election makes any more sense than the USA in 2004.

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## Noah says

I read 10 books by Naipaul over the years and I'm a big fan. Unfortunately this one is by far the weakest. He tries to be funny, in vain.

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## Cbj says

I live in an Indian state where Hindus, Muslims and Christians are constantly pitted against each other during election time by various political parties. The multi-cultural society in Naipaul's novel, set in Elvira, a Caribbean island is not too different from the one in my home state. I could completely identify with the machinations and blatant vote bank politics of the "powers that be" (though in this novel, the leaders are as wretched as the people they attempt to lead).

A lot of people like Naipaul's early novels the best because they were funny and not as bleak as his later work. But even here, Naipaul is uncompromising. He is downright cruel in his portrayal of a people who seem to revel in their uninhibited display of moral repugnance and stupidity. Afterall, this is the society which he literally turned his back on, when he moved to England. He had said that if he stayed there, he would have committed suicide like one of his friends did. It was a society that had no place for a fine man like him.

Even in this comedic novel, Naipaul's prose is like a poisoned arrow that pierces your heart even though every single character is a total asshole who has no interest in democracy or a just society. But there is not a hint of sympathy or sentimentality (unlike say in *Magic Seeds* where Willie Chandran looks out of his window in England and contemplates quite sadly about the benignity of a tree). Naipaul once said that he has no interest in the emancipation of humanity and only wants to serve literature.

The ending, when a mob united by stupidity and jealousy, refuses a case of whiskey and instead demands the commissioning of Hindu, Muslim and Christian religious ceremonies was particularly affecting (you would know why if you live in Kerala).

Despite all the hilarity and colorful characters, a very depressing novel for me.

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## Diana says

The most accessible Naipaul book I have read. Not as deep as *Bend in the River*, but funny and worth a read. Also it's short.

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## Lobstergirl says

I want to read more Naipaul, but I couldn't get past p. 16 of this. I guess I'll hang on to it for a few more

years rather than toss it in the dumpster, because other reviewers seemed to like its slapstick comedic qualities quite a bit.

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### **Bert van der Vaart says**

3.72 is in fact exactly right. If you are interested in better understanding Trinidad or ex-colonialism or the limits of democratic reforms, this book is a highly tongue in cheek observation of how the first election in an inland and relatively out of the way county in Trinidad and Tobago. Working through various soi-disant representatives of the different communities in the county (Hindu, Muslim, Christian/African-origin, and Spanish) in the wake of independence from Britain, a relatively depressed owner of a distribution/trucking company decides/lets himself be talked into running for Legislative Councilman of this seemingly neglected province in the hinterlands of Trinidad and Tobago. The various people who are trying to take advantage of the electoral process, and the uncertain understanding of most of the local voters is very well--even painfully ironically--described. There seems to be a fundamental issue with the alignment of interests, versus individuals trying to maximize the candidate's perception as to their being able to deliver key wedges of electoral support. And by dint of spreading around some cash for variously implausible excuses, the winning candidate then promptly drives off to the capital city and tries to return to his district as little as possible--albeit the one time that is recounted when he does, in considerably better style. All in all, the crowds get increasingly interested in exacting something back--whether a crate of whisky or a casket and burial services--from their candidate/newly elected politician. A witty and, if dated, still interesting recounting of the very imperfect system that (local) democracy is. Well, perhaps not sooo dated and certainly not limited to this province in 1950's Trinidad and Tobago.

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### **Sam says**

Finally, finally finished this one. Some of the humour was lost on me, and it took me a while to get used to the patois it was written in. I suspect that if I'd have understood the patois more easily, I would have got into the story a bit quicker and may have "got" the humour better.

The ending was not as satisfying as I'd've hoped, but, it did tie up all of the loose ends.

Overall, it was okay.

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### **Joy Ramlogan says**

since I read this as a teenager, as part of the ritual of elections in Trinidad, I would re-read this book. Very few books like this satire are laugh till you cry in places. County Naparoni, the candidate and the plethora of Trininis are so real in places, that you wonder whether fiction imitates reality or vice versa. Mr. Naipaul our first and only (so far) Nobel Laureate for Literature is a master of voice - he uses standard english spelling with the tone and timing to replicate Trinidadian dialect. And what a ride it is, with his caustic eye and master crafting, political satire at its best.

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## **Joz1 says**

If you come from the islands, this book can not be put down.

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## **Moses Kilolo says**

Politics is indeed a dirty game. But this book is to make you know that it can be funny too. Naipul's intensely readable book, full of drama and raw humor, is perhaps the only book of its length that I've read in a day. (kuddos to me – building my focus, deepening my concentration.)

The story centers on the events that lead up to the election of one Mr. Surujpat Harbans to the Legislative council in one of Trinidad's counties. The politics played here are plagued by inexperienced ambition (in the case of Foam as a campaign manager), superstition where a dog is believed to be an obeah or an evil spirit – the child who brings him is fumigated -and such other trivialities such as greed and personal gain.

The candidates believe that the voters have to be bribed, and go ahead to openly do it, as well as the collaboration with their teams to subbotage those in the race with them. In the end, like in all cases, there are winner and losers, but Harbans win and subsequent celebrations are particularly marred by the very same voters. The celebrations, where whiskey is brought only to the committee, is ruined because the voters feel as the people who have put Harbans to power, they deserve the whiskey more. But the elections are over, so is their value in the thinking of Harbans and his committee. Angered, the people torch Harban's jaguar, - but its easily replaced by the insurance company.

By all means this is a fine novel and it did make me think there is nothing so repelling about intensely political writing after all. Some can be really funny – and uplifting, like this one is.

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## **Salvatore says**

Like a Trinidadian episode of *Veep*.

I like that we never get to hear the political views of those running. We just see the people involved in getting votes.

Also, the election in this novel seems very similar to those that occur in America. Hmm...

'This democracy is a damn funny thing.'

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## **Pascale says**

A lively comedy about an election in a backwater of Trinidad. For reasons that are never elucidated, taciturn Mr Harbans has decided to become an elected official, and to this effect he bribes all and sundry in his chosen constituency with money, liquor or empty promises. While the goldsmith Chittaranjan is easily bought with the dishonest promise of a marriage between their children, greedy tailor Baksh manages to

extort money first to give Harbans the Muslim vote, then to stand for election himself so as to ruin the chances of the black candidate, Preacher. On the other hand, Baksh's eldest son works diligently as campaign manager, in part to get his own back on his rival Lorkhoor who has become Preacher's campaign manager. This is very much Clochemerle in the tropics, and Naipaul has a ball making fun of the bigotry and superstition of villagers of all creeds and colors, but in the end he soft-pedals and makes everyone rather likable. A fun, short read, but pretty inconsequential.

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