

Post Colonial Identity in the selected novels of V.S. Naipaul a Critical Study

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Abstract

V. S. Naipaul's work as a novelist, travel writer, and journalist provides a case study for examining the evolution of the links between realist form and the global imagination over a 60-year span. Naipaul's identity has been portrayed as incomplete and totally hybrid, as it is the result of a mix of cultures: Indian, Caribbean, English, Diasporic, postcolonial, and colonial. These and other labels have had a significant and lasting impact on Naipaul's mental state of being, raising the question of his identity or position of belonging in today's aware intellectual world. In Naipaul's works, there has always been a sense of diaspora and estrangement. This research paper examines Naipaul as a product of the World of literature, whose literary path has been one of admitting his belongingness and location, as well as a crisis of cultural identity, using the junction of 'diasporic' and 'postcolonial' theories. It is to give a more differentiated and definitive picture of V. S. Naipaul as an "epitome" of colonial and postcolonial identity, such as the intersection of identities inside one identity.

Keywords: Post Colonialism, Identity crisis, Estrangement, Exile, Post Colonial Novel etc..

INTRODUCTION

Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul was born on August 17, 1932, in the small Trinidadian town of Chaguanas, to an Indian Brahmin family. His grandpa came to Trinidad as an indentured labourer from Benares (Varanasi) in Uttar Pradesh (India). Seepersad Naipaul, his father, was a Trinidad Guardian correspondent who also authored a collection of short tales about various themes of captivity and alienation, which are also themes in his son's fiction. After receiving a scholarship to Oxford University, he moved to the United Kingdom in 1950. Since then, he has established himself as a postcolonial writer. In 2001, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. A House for Mr. Biswas (1961), A Bend in the River (1979), and India: A Million Mutinies Now (1990), Beyond Belief: Islamic Excursions among the Converted Peoples (1998), and A Wounded Civilization are only a few of his great literary masterpieces (1977). In 1971, he won the Booker Prize for his moving work in a free state. He was a well-known writer of the modern age whose writings dealt with colonialism, identity crises, and civilizations.

Over the course of fifty years, he authored over thirty books. In 1955, he married Patricia Anne Hale, who became his reader, editor, and critic. His works all shared a common topic of post-colonial identity and experience. In the post-colonial age, everyone of his characters in the storey went through some sort of identity problem. And the novels did a fantastic job of capturing that emotion. In one of his novels, Half a Life, V. S. Naipaul expresses the sentiment of his protagonist by saying:

"..Once again, Willie finds himself in a predicament. He feels, I don't know where I am. I don't think I can pick my way back. I don't ever want this view to become familiar. I must not unpack. I must never behave as though I am staying." [1]

Maliha Naipaul and Nadir Naipaul are two of Naipaul's children from a previous marriage. In *The World Is What It Is: The Authorized Biography of V.S. Naipaul*, Patrick French, an unofficial editor for Naipaul, has depicted a troubled and misplaced personal life of V. S. Naipaul who strives for identity (2008).

Naipaul was denied a PIO card (Person of Indian Origin) in July 2010 due to a lack of documents proving his Indian ancestry. The world recognises and respects Naipaul's Indian ancestry, but the government placed suspicions on him rather than feeling proud that the Nobel Prize-winning writer requested a PIO card.

"Naipaul's Pakistani wife Nadira had approached the Indian high commission in London recently for a PIO card for the author. Nadira, however, was completely taken aback when unfazed mission officials told her that the author could get the card only if he produced documents to prove that his ancestors lived in India or more specifically Gorakhpur in eastern Uttar Pradesh where Naipaul's maternal father is said to have lived."2

Critical Analysis on the Post – colonial identity from the novels of a House for Mr Biswas, the Mimic Men Despite the alienating consequences of colonialism, the entire range of Naipaul's writing, which has aspects of high comedy and tragic sadness, has been inextricably identified with his own quest for identity, meaning, home, and community. Through these lines, V. Naipaul wishes to

attract the attention of his readers to the fact that no matter how much time a person spends in a new nation, the question of his or her identity persists. The new area may be very accommodating, and the culture may welcome people from all walks of life, but the battle within your head will continue, and that is unavoidable. The protagonists in his novel struggle with identity issues and are always on the lookout for their true storey of origin, which is a never-ending quest for their original land, people, and culture. According to Ms. Vaishnavi's research on V. S. Naipaul's novel *A House for Mr. Biswas*,

“Naipaul has conveyed that the struggles face by the man actually moulds him to reach his dream. Mr. Biswas mostly lives in a series of houses that either does not belong to him or are houses unworthy of the name. Each of the houses he lived is an attempt of solving a problem and each is a wrong answer in a different way. Author projected the character of Mr. Biswas as smart and funny but also often petulant, mean and unsympathetic.” [1]

In V. S. Naipaul's works, the heroes are always on a quest to find their origins while pursuing their aspirations. They toil away in a strange land where they have lived for the majority of their life. But, even after such a lengthy trip through life, they are always aware of a missing link in their identity and yearn to discover it. V. S. Naipaul's work captures the quest and restlessness of his characters that have lost their homeland and have thrived in a strange nation since the beginning of their lives.

V. S. Naipaul was a firsthand witness to the transition from the colonial to the postcolonial era in Britain, and he detailed his observations through his fictional characters. His characters are a living manifestation of his creative imagination, representing his post-colonial existence. Dr. Ashok Chaskar stated in his research:

“V.S. Naipaul has used fiction not only as a way of chronicling life but also as an instrument of analysis and clarification of the reality... some of Naipaul's recurring themes of the collusion of cultures and ambiguities in human adjustment: the colonial situation which reduces a sense of alienation: and the motives within the individual which create the structure of human relationships unique to the colonial or postcolonial society”. [2]

His ability to bring the events of society to life via his characters in his novels was praised all around the world. In the late twentieth century, his literary works became historical, and he received international recognition for his significant contribution to society through his creative works. His endeavour to educate his readers on the identity crisis and its effects on people's minds is commendable, and it was relatable to many people experiencing it at the time. His works made individuals feel safe in the knowledge that they are not alone, which is a frequent feeling for those who have moved to a new country.

He explained in his writings that your home is more than simply a place to sleep; it also identifies your identity and origin. And for migrants who leave their ancestral home and migrate to a new nation to start a new life, their identity must be rebuilt from the ground up.

V. S. Naipaul emphasises that his work is more than a work of fiction; it is a reflection of his views of society. All of his characters are based on true stories he has encountered in his life. Mr. Naipaul writes in his book *The Mimic Men*:

“I paid Mr. Shylock three guineas a week for a tall, multi-mirrored, book shape room with a coffin-like wardrobe . . . I thought Mr. Shylock looked distinguished like a lawyer or business person or politicians. He had the habit of strolling the bot of his ear inclining his head to listen. I thought the gesture was attractive; I copy it.” [4]

His characters were continuously trying to figure out who they were. While searching for it, people attempt a variety of things to discover which ones are most compatible with their personality and strive to incorporate the most of them. Sometimes, in the process of forging their identity, they made rash decisions that they afterwards regretted.

Ralph Singh depicts various features of a "prototypical colonial persona" [2] in *The Mimic Men*, which is sometimes confused with the prejudiced and heterogeneous culture he has absorbed. Ralph's identity is a significant issue for him, as seen by his imitating European or Western perspectives on several parts of life. His self-identification is diametrically opposed to how the rest of the Western world sees him. He has abandoned his home, family, and sense of self-identity by following in the footsteps of colonialists.

He married an Englishwoman and had his formal education in the United Kingdom. His assimilation of Western culture has had a negative impact on his life; it has separated him from his cultural roots, therefore violating his forefathers' traditional ideals. His personal being has been scattered as a result of his estrangement from his identity, resulting in fragility and degeneration of his inner being.

The Identity of the Protagonist, Ganesh Ramsumair – A School Teacher

In 1957, Naipaul released *The Mystic Masseur*, which was his first literary work. In this work, Naipaul follows Ganesh Ramsumair, who lives on an imagined island in Trinidad, and who rises through a series of failures as a teacher, a writer, and a masseur to become a ruthless politician, and ultimately a disillusioned Member of the British Empire, or M.B.E. His entire life is made up of his own labours and difficulties as a conscientious and devious person who has a possibility of succeeding. He embodies

all of the attributes that are necessary and most appropriate for someone who wishes to stand out in society.

Ganesh Ramsumair, an East Indian immigrant, was a failed schoolteacher who was struggling to find his footing in life. Mr. Stewart, whom he encounters during his hardships and wanderings, alters his future and leads him down the path of mysticism. Ganesh pays a daily visit to his father's friend Ramlogan's residence, where he eats. He marries Leela, his bashful daughter who despises hearing lies. Ganesh returns to Fuente Grove after his marriage and attempts to establish a cultural institute there. As a voracious reader, he creates books, stimulates the mind, and establishes a reputation throughout Trinidad. Ganesh earns his reputation as a mystic by treating a black youngster. Despite the fact that there is no mention of the incident in the press, his fame spreads throughout the island within two weeks, and many go to seek his blessings.

Ganesh then decides to extend his wings by confronting Pundit Narayan Chandrashekar and assuming control of The Hindu Organization, paving the path for him to be elevated to the prestigious position of Member of the Legislative Assembly, or M.B.E. As a result, his entire existence is a quest for recognition and identity. The first lines of the novel are as follows:

"Later he was to be famous and honoured throughout the South Caribbean; he was to be a hero of the people and after that, a British representative at Lake Success. But when I met him he was still a struggling masseur, at a time when masseurs were ten a penny in Trinidad" 3

From the novel the Suffrage of Elvira Surajpat Harbans
The Suffrage of Elvira, published in 1958, depicted primarily an election scenario, with a campaign by a Trinidadian Hindu named Mr. Surajpat Harbans, a PWD contractor and the owner of a quarry and transport service, to gain election as a candidate from Elvira in Trinidad, which he eventually succeeded.

The plot of the work is complicated and sophisticated. Harbans runs for office and appeases Chittaranjan in order to control Hindu votes; in order to get Muslim votes, he must placate Baksh and manage to steal Negro votes from his opponent, the Preacher. The novel makes use of the common people's innate greed and hypocrisy—"suffrage" denotes a selfish opportunity for personal gain to the people of Elvira. Naipaul portrays:

"They were crazily mixed up in Elvira, everybody, Hindu, Muslims and Christians owned a Bible... Hindus and Muslims celebrated Christmas and Easter. The Spaniards and some of the Negroes celebrated the Hindu festival of lights" 4

Democracy has arrived in Elvira thanks to the success of Surajpat. However, the arrival of democracy also comes with its recognition of its flaws. Democracy, according to Harbans, is a curious thing. It turns the great guy into a poor man and the poor man into a great man. He has become a beggar as a result of democracy since he is begging for votes. As a result, Naipaul depicts the issues that arise as a result of democracy's expansion into a multi-racial, multi-cultural, and multi-religious territory.

Mr. Stone and Knights Companion (1963) is a distinctively English novel in which Naipaul shifts his setting from the West Indies to England. This novel features only English characters and focuses on the themes of isolation and the protagonist's search for regeneration in the face of degradation and extinction. Mr. Richard Stone, the principal character, is a middle-aged man who has accomplished little in his life and is now worried about his impending retirement from his job as a librarian at a huge commercial corporation. Mr. Stone's residence is portrayed as chilly, dark, and lonely towards the beginning of the storey, reflecting the gloom, anxiety, loneliness, and emptiness of his life.

"The 62 year-old Mr. Stone's establishment, his ritualistic bachelor existence, his awkwardness in social gatherings, his undemanding and unimaginative office life and his hallucinatory moments in the underground station, are described in some detail to convey this loneliness." 5

He marries his maid, Miss. Millington, despite being a confirmed bachelor. Mr. Stone has a concept for a 'knight's companion,' a group of persons who travel into society to investigate pensioner issues. The Knights Companion is thus Naipaul's idea, expanded out by Whymper, and is intended to provide companionship and a social outlet for the retired, emphasising the quality of human resilience. Despite physical anguish and defeat, Mr. Stone eventually rises above his circumstances, owning a property in England like Mr. Biswas.

Short stories set in Washington and London complement and generalize In A Free State (1971), but the novella's major body is set in an undisclosed African country. The fiction includes a prologue and epilogue, as well as two short stories and a novella, which is a small novel. To meet the needs of the material and thematic concern, Naipaul deftly blended genres such as short story, travel writing, and novella. In A Free State, Naipaul depicted the world's shifting circumstances.

This novel is about an uncomfortable journey taken by exiles, expatriates, and tourists from many countries and cultures that are experiencing feelings of rootlessness and homelessness. We meet Indians, Africans, Americans, Chinese, Egyptians, Germans, and others in the novel. V. S. Naipaul portrays the situation of modern man and his country, which has lost its meaning and is unfixed, in this

work. As a result, the protagonist of this novella thinks himself a global citizen.

A Bend In The River (1979) by VS Naipaul is set in a francophone African state and depicts the personal relationships of a narrator named Salim, an Indian Muslim, with a large number of other characters, including his relationship with Metty, the son of one of the family's slaves; his relationship with Mahesh and Shobha, a self-absorbed Indian couple; with Zabeth, a small merchant and magician, and her son Ferdinand, who becomes commissioner.

The novel's title relates to a village in Africa that is located on a river bend far from the capital city. Salim, the narrator, who runs a little company, becomes a merchant in a village on the river's bend and travels a long way to the continent's core with Metty. Europeans constructed this settlement. They had gone there in search of gold and silver, and they stayed until the colonial rule ended. The tale follows Salim as he purchases a small business and settles himself in a French-speaking Central African country. Salim travels to England at the end of the novel. As he goes to England, he depicts himself as a figure of modern man, describing his mobility, displacement, and changing life. He declares:

"I was in Africa one day. I was in Europe in next morning. It was more than travelling fast. It was like being in two places at once. I woke up in London with little bits of Africa on me like the Airport tax ticket ... Both places were real; both places were unreal."⁹

The Enigma of Arrival (1987), a five-part novel, attempts to track Naipaul's attempts to find his own voice, as well as his ordeal and development as a writer. With his residency in a village near Salisbury, his boyhood days in Trinidad, education in England, a developing profession as a writer, and stories of journeys made by him, the first person narrator in The Enigma of Arrival strongly resembles Naipaul himself.

This work is a wonderful oscillation between the narrator's voice and the author's voice, and it is a synthesis of fact, fiction, and non-fiction. The work depicts a single person's trip from one location to another, from a newly established colony to the ancient English countryside, and from one state of mind to another. The protagonist or narrator's presence in the English countryside is motivated by a desire to provide meaning to his long-held self-esteem and position. His loneliness in the English countryside, on the other hand, plagues him with feelings of melancholy, rootlessness, and nothingness. He describes the sources of his various types of pain and illness in his writings:

"In the most unlikely way, at an advanced age, in a foreign country I was to find myself in tune with a landscape in a

way that I had never been in Trinidad or India (both sources of different kinds of pain)." ¹⁰

When Naipaul sees Jack's house and garden, he realizes how little his existence is. He finds it impossible to shake his despair in such a horrible circumstance. But then a miracle occurred, and his efforts and reflections flowered into magnificent flowers, and his creativity began to spread in all directions, from Trinidadians to Africans, South Americans and Indians to the darkest corners of the Third World.

After An Area of Darkness (1964), Naipaul made a triumphant return to India with Half a Life (2001) and its sequel Magic Seeds (2004). Half a Life (2001), a semi-autobiographical work, examines the lives of people of mixed origin in the countries of India, England, and Portugal in Africa, as well as their battle to define their identities. Exile, according to Naipaul, is a feeling of uncertainty and worry caused by living half a life.

Half a Life is told in three parts: the first in London, where a father's choices and attitudes have a significant impact on his son's life; the second in London, where the narrator portrays the challenges of launching into a career as a writer; and the third in Portuguese-Africa, where the narrator portrays the ambivalences of half a life, i.e. life under a colonial regime. They describe the storey of the protagonist, Willie Somerset Chandran, a Brahmin boy with a Harijan mother.

The text's frequent use of letters emphasises the protagonist's intimate interactions with other characters such as Somerset Maugham, Willie's sister Sarojini, and Ana, a Portuguese-African lady whom Willie Chandran marries. Through the protagonist Willie Chandran, Naipaul transposes numerous autobiographical elements. Both of them suffer from cultural plantation sickness. He re-enacts and illustrates the anguish and struggle of immigrants in a strange land's wilderness. Willie considers his sense of disconnection and the misery of being a non-entity:

"I don't know where I am. I don't think I can pick up my way back. I don't ever want this view to become familiar. I must not unpack. I must never behave as though I am staying."¹¹

As a result, Half a Life tells the narrative of a race searching for a familiar face in the time and space mirror.

CONCLUSION

The Nobel Laureate of Indian descent, Sir Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul, occupies a good and prominent position in the kaleidoscope of twenty-first-century writers. He is a prolific writer, has demonstrated his mastery in a wide range of non-fictional writings, including travelogues, history books, essays, book reviews, and articles for newspapers and magazines, in addition to

fictional works. Naipaul has distinguished himself as a direct delineator of the gruesome maladies of the people of Third World Nations, and his fictional and non-fictional worlds present a topographic picture of the immigrant in the modern world, i.e. their disintegration, displacement, exile, loss of values, and search for identity.

These displaced people, like the author, suffer from existential misery and a never-ending search for home. Being an exiled Diaspora-writer from Trinidad's enslaved Indian population, Naipaul made England his self-proclaimed home at the start of his career, but as he grew into a literary titan in the twenty-first century, India has become his second home. His works deftly portray the colonial as well as postcolonial situations of immigrants through the eyes of a brilliant luminary.

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