

CULTURAL HYBRIDITY AND MULTICULTURALISM IN V. S. NAIPAUL'S NOVEL

Prof. Rinku Vajjnath Rukke

*Shri. Tulshiramji Jadhao, Arts And Science College
 Washim.*

Abstract:

Thinking through notions of homelessness and exile, this study aims to explore how V.S. Naipaul engages with questions of the construction of self and the world after empire, as represented in his novels. His texts not only map the mobility of the writer traversing vast geographical and cultural terrains as a testament to his nomadic existence, but also follow the writer's experimentation with the novel genre. Drawing on postcolonial theory, modernist literary poetics, and aspects of critical and postmodern theory, this study illuminates the position of the migrant figure in a liminal space, a space that unsettles the authorising claims of Enlightenment thought and disrupts teleological narrative structures and coherent, homogenous constructions of the self.

Key Words:

Cultural hybridity, erstamenet, double consciousness, diasporic, to hegemonies, Anticolonial, Rootlessness

Sir V. S. Naipaul's fictional and nonfictional writings deal with the problems of diasporic, colonial, post-colonial and Third World societies. He has candidly written about alienation, displacement, homelessness, identity crisis, power, freedom and frustration of diasporic people. The present paper attempts to discuss homelessness and displacement in his novel.

What emerges is the contiguity of the postcolonial, the modern and the modernist subject. This study engages with the concepts of "double consciousness" and "entanglements" to foreground the complex web and often conflicting temporalities, discourses and cultural assemblages affecting postcolonial subjectivities and unsettling narratives of origin and authenticity. While Naipaul seeks to address questions of postcolonial identity, his oeuvre is simultaneously entangled within the Anglophone literary tradition. The texts in this study foreground the convergence of the politics of writing and the politics of subjectivity. Through continuous re-writing of the self, the past and history, Naipaul focuses on the fragmentary, the partiality of knowledge and the obscurity of the

present to evince the continuous renewal of subjectivities. His narratives enact deep feelings of despair and melancholy that attend the migrant position in the current age of mass migrations, technological advancement, militarism, and essentialised ethnocentrism and cultural constructions. In his poetics of exile, he endorses the particular over the universal. His commitment to a "politics of difference" underscores the texts in this study and serves to foreground Naipaul's position of otherness.

Displacement, whether forced or self-imposed, is in many ways a calamity. An important point to note is that writers in their displaced existence generally tend to excel in their work, as if the changed atmosphere acts as a stimulant for them. V. S. Naipaul's character Mohun Biswas from *A House for Mr. Biswas* is an example of an individual who is generations away from his original homeland but his heritage gives him a consciousness of his past. He becomes itinerant specimen of the outsider, the unhoused, for the world to see. Naipaul portrays men that who cannot construct a coherent self and the reason for this malady lie deep in the pattern of subordination and existential split suffered by them under a system that recognized no difference, humanly or culturally in its ruthless drive to hegemonies everything.

These writings in dislocated circumstances are often termed as exile literature. The word "exile" has negative connotations but if the self-exile of a Byron is considered, then the response to that very word becomes ambivalent. If a holistic view of the word "exile" is taken, the definition would include migrant writers and non-resident writers and even gallivanting writers who roam about for better pastures to graze and fill their oeuvre. World literature has an abundance of writers whose writings have prospered while they were in exile. Although it would be preposterous to assume the vice-versa that exiled writers would not have prospered had they not been in exile, the fact in the former statement cannot be denied. Cultural theorists and literary critics are all alike in this view.

The effect that exile has, not on the writers' work, but on the writers themselves seems apparently paradoxical at first. Exile appears both as a liberating experience as well as a shocking experience. The paradox is apparent because it is just a manifestation of the tension that keeps the strings attached and taut between the writer's place of origin and the place of exile. Whatever may be the geographical location of the exiled writer, in the mental landscape the writer is forever enmeshed among the strings attached to poles that pull in opposite directions. The only way the writer can rescue oneself from the tautness of the enmeshing strings is by writing or by other forms of artistic expression. The relief is only a temporary condition for no writer's work is so sharp a wedge that can snap the strings that history-makers have woven. Even if a writer consciously tries to justify one end, simultaneously, but unconsciously, there arises a longing for the other. Therein lies the fascination of exile literature. Prominent in exile literature are the works of writers who were made to flee their countries by oppressive regimes.

A sense of nostalgia and pain accompany a migrant's thought of home. Boundaries between countries are falling away in some ways and rising up in others. Due to increased economic opportunities in the west, a large community of Indians inhabit in most of the important cities in Europe and US. They also maintain strong ties with their parent nation.

The unavoidable diasporic angle to the definition of a nation has its own privileges. Indians from Britain, France, Canada, US and the middle-east challenge and complement those essentialising narratives by which India as a nation can be so easily but flatly defined. Anticolonial nationalism should broaden its focus to include the views of an open-minded global community. In today's post-colonial world the construction of nation is incomplete unless the voice of its diasporic citizens is part its conceptual framework. The identity of the Indian nation has to involve multifarious voices of its resident citizens and the influence of new environments from which its emigrant population begin to write about home, and in the process define their nation from their own perspectives.

The opening up of the world during colonial rule resulted in many Indians migrating to the west for economic and academic reasons. Second category comes from the middle and upper class families who go to the west to study and often take up jobs there. Migrations from the home land were seldom

fall-outs of economic necessity of their generations. The Indo-English migrant writers were all products of the colonial-historical context. Hence migration creates the desire for home and hence creates the feeling of homesickness or homelessness the rejection of home or the longing for home become motivating factors in writing. Home can only have meaning once one experiences a level of displacement from it.

With the rise of the American superpower and the decline of the British Empire in the twentieth century, the world experienced mass migration, expatriation and varieties of exiles, which have given different shapes to individual and national cultures. The Third World literature of the twentieth century written by the expatriates expressed the predicament of the Diaspora with its marked features. They contributed to the expansion of the expatriate literature and also deal with their exiled status, nomadic travels, displacement, alienation, and homelessness. An expatriate is one who lives in foreign but feels the social and cultural void of exile.

Naipaul is entirely alienated and hence a citizen of nowhere and everywhere. His fictional world is the real testimony of his painful expatriate experiences and his quest for identity. Paul Theroux endorses Naipaul the rhetoric of displacement:

He ranks among transplanted people who can claim no country as their own. They travel because they belong nowhere; they cannot settle, they are constantly moving ..., Rootlessness is their condition; . . . their homelessness is a source of particular pain, for as with all travelers, they asked, "Where are you from?" and no simple answer is possible: all landscapes are alien.¹

The sense of alienation, displacement and exile is prevalent in the contemporary literature. V. S. Naipaul, the master novelist and expatriate literary circumnavigator, is preoccupied with the varieties of migration, dislocation, alienation, exile, the idea of being unanchored and displaced and the enigma of disorienting experience in the explosive and the disconcerting realities of the modern world. He is a nomadic intellectual giant in the arena of Third World and eternally an outsider - an Indian in West Indies and a West Indian in England. Being a Brahmin nomad he recognizes his Hindu self and as a writer he suffers from the agony of alienation

but tries to establish his identity by converting experiences into heart-rending novels on the tradition and culture of India, Trinidad and England. He declares that London is his commercial center but he considers himself a refugee there due to the sense of his marginality. V. S. Naipaul, is considered as a mouthpiece of displacement, rootlessness, alienation and exile.

Displacement and complexities prevalent in the life of expatriates have emerged as a major theme in the 20th century authors. Modern literature abounds in alienated individuals. It reflects the general disillusionment that hassles the two post war generations and the deep spiritual isolation felt by men in a universe. V.S Naipaul, the first Nobel Prize winner of 21st century has become spokesman of emigrants. He delineates the Indian immigrants' dilemma, his problems and plights in a fast changing world. Naipaul's fictional works are projections of the worlds he contained within himself, the memories of Trinidad and its rootless milieu lost between their past and their present. These protagonists are linked to each other and to their progenitor to pursue truths about themselves and their worlds.

Mr. Biswas wants to be a free man. His struggle symbolizes both his freedom from the oppressive world of Tulsis and the West Indians' quest for freedom from colonial subjugation. His life is a symbol of the colonized societies as he was flogged, duped, thwarted, cheated, maligned, robbed, humiliated, frustrated, disappointed and frightened. But rather than cursing the fate, Mr. Biswas seems to accept the challenge. His freedom was over, and it had been false. The past could not be ignored: It was never counterfeit: he carried it within himself. He knew that Trinidad conceived only unsuccessful stories and aborted ambition.

In the *Mimic Men*, an attempt has been made to magnify the condition of expatriates in a displaced world. Naipaul is, in a way, confessional in his exploration and analysis of the woes and problems of an expatriate. There is a ring of genuineness and authenticity in the depiction of the protagonist's sense of restlessness, alienation and his search for rooted order and stable values. The *Mimic Men* reflects a deepening understanding of Naipaul's

alienation from the three cultures Indian, Caribbean and British. He neither rejects his Indian heritage, nor adjusts with the Caribbean and finally fails to reconcile with the metropolis of London. The failure to acknowledge has turned him into something of a permanent deracine. The vision of the triple exile has found a new dimension in his *The Mimic Men*. The theme of *The Mimic Men*, like that of Eliot's poem *The Hollow Men* is corruption – corruption of the body politic and corruption of the individual human soul. The drama of his life which brought success to Ralph Singh also becomes the instrument of his failure. The novel moves towards a goal that is goallessness.

Naipaul's *Half a Life* (2002) also revisits his favourite themes of exile and alienation, but with a very significant difference. This time he takes up a protagonist born in pre – independence India and the first part of the novel is about Indian life in a provincial town. The snapping of roots and the bewilderment of Willie Chandran in the Bohemian West where he is in exile are typical Naipaul situations. However, Chandran gets a modicum of security with the help of a West Indian Immigrant-Percy Cato, who is a floater between three worlds of Africa, America and Europe. Naipaul is surprisingly candid about Chandran's loss of virginity and his sexual escapades in London.

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