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ALIENATION AND PROBLEM OF IDENTITY IN THE MAJOR NOVELS OF V.S. NAIPAUL

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ABSTRACT



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A House for Mr. Biswas deals with a theme of deeper significance, the theme of selfhood where an individual quests for identity and struggles to acquire a personal place for which the "House" stands as an evocative symbol all through. The possibility of acquiring a personal place in the New World is suggestive of a fragile hope. In this novel, Naipaul also expresses a hope for the developing a unity or a kind of bond among the people in this world. Soon after this, in *The Mimic Men*, we find that hope gives way to utter despair and hopelessness. Naipaul, in fact, launches the act of purgation of his system of all dreams of possibility in his non-fictional work *An Area of Darkness*. We may, in actuality in his non-fictional work. We may, in actuality find this of purgation taking roars towards the ending of *A house for Mr. Biswas* itself where Naipaul links the show corruption of Mr. Biswas's aging body with the cycle of darkness and decay in the new world, indicating his own grouping towards a deeper, yet more cynical view of the displaced individual's relation of the world. The question he raises at the end can be summarized thus: what can a personal vision amount to in the large chaos of the new world? The question is one that requires a reorientation of perspective, a different, larger view of the whole subject migration and its aftermath, which brings with it question of identity and footlessness, culture difference and assimilation.

KEYWORDS: Identity, Alienation, Culture, Home, Quest, Immigrant, Exile, Rootlessness

INTRODUCTION

V.S. Naipaul, as an expatriate writer, enjoys a unique position. He can at one and the same time is a prophet, soothsayer and doom watcher and tell unpalatable truth. He Seen through the creeds, and countries – the postcolonial societies – and strips them of their pretences and defense mechanisms by means of irony and prophecy.

If there were one writer with whom Naipaul could find a literary kinship it would be

Conrad. He shares with Conrad a literary from and his many concerns- his feeling for lost souls, lost countries, and a vision of the world's half –made societies as planes which continuously made and unmade themselves, where there was no goal. It is this Conradian vision which becomes central to Naipaul as he begins to comment on various postcolonial societies. His books on India reveal this as he directs his cold, critical gaze on the country and to mores and customs and culture.

V.S. Naipaul a third generation immigrant from a "branch of Dubes" of a Brahmin village of Uttar Pradesh in India, is caught up in a tension between the mythical and historical realities about Hinduism – "a vaguer sense of caste, a horror of the unclean" Play a decisive role when the adult Naipaul confronts the living India of the twentieth century.

Hysteria had been my reaction, and a brutality dictated by a new awareness of myself as a whole human being and a determination touched with fear, to remain what I was; it mattered through whose eyes I was seeing the East; there had as yet been no time for this type of self assessment (A.D.13)

Self-analysis and self – monitoring of responses ensure them him incessantly as he moves through the area of darkness. The book *An Area of Darkness* thus records the failure of his attempts to come to terms with it. During his stay in India Naipaul realized that racial similarities had no meaning and that his Trinidadian upbringing and western education had rendered him a colonial without a country, an international man, a product of an empire that had withdrawn. The book, in a way, comes handy to purge his soul of India.

In the latter book *India: A Wounded Civilization* Naipaul adopts a pragmatic approach to prove his point on the postcolonial society. What he seeks and hears around in India, he relates to men who reflect or transmit culture, to concepts, and assumptions such as "Dharma" and "Karma" at the back of the Hindu attitude. He finds Gandhi and R.K. Narayan as more or less representing the old morality, and Vijay Tendulkar and U.R. Ananthamurthy as reflecting the inadequacy "new morality," whereby individuals realizing the inadequacy of post myths strike out on their own. Naipaul says, in the "Foreword" India is for me a difficult country. It isn't my home and cannot be my home, and yet I cannot reject it or be indifferent to it. Thus the spiritual fix in which he finds himself while he is face to face with India is not of divided Loyalties but of divided energies. This is what Naipaul says of Gandhi in *An Area of Darkness*:

[Gandhi] emerged a colonial blend of East and West, Hindu and Christian. Gandhi never loses the critical, comparing South

Africa eye, he ne never rhapsodizes ... sanitation was linked to caste to callousness, inefficiency and hopelessly divided country, division to weakness, weakness to foreign rule. This is what Gandhi saw, and no one purely of Indian could have seen it. It needed the straight simple vision of the West. (73-74)

This acquires a new significance once we juxtapose it with what Naipaul says in *India: A Million Mutinies Now*, his third book on India, where he likens himself to Gandhi:

Growing up in far off Trinidad, I had no idea of class or region, none of the supports and cushions of people in India. Like Gandhi among the immigrant Indians of south Africa, and for much the same reasons, I have developed instead the idea of the kinship of Indian, the idea of the family of India, And in my attempt to come to terms with history, my criticism, my bewilderment and sorrow, was turned inward, focusing on the civilization and the social organization that had given to little protection. It is "complex fate" of being an Indian in a mixed, colonial Trinidad that is responsible for his final achievement. As Darshansingh Maini points out, "without such a troubled heritage, he could be practically a disaffected a disaffected and disengaged intellectual converting his self-hatred into an occupational play and Living on in transparent hauteur in the manner of our own inimitable Nirad Chaudhur.

As a West Indian novelist, Naipaul is placed in an ambiguous situation which results in a characteristic complexity of feeling in his attitude to human experience. The Indian background from which he comes is submerged in a mixed culture whose other components is equally croded and twisted, and it exercises an oppressive hold on people's sentiments. The West Indian and East Indian cultures are products of cultural displacement oppressed by a sense of dereliction. The absence of any well-defined traditions promotes or necessitates such pragmatic qualities as cleverness, resourcefulness, common sense, and manipulation of people and circumstances. The need to survive becomes the immediate requirement of the individuals, and all of Naipaul's characters turn out

to be experts in what art of surviving at all odds. Naipaul is very much interested in what happens to individuals in a colonial ethos. It is in tracing the rites of passage through which these individuals have to pass that Naipaul the ironist surfaces. One of the major themes of Naipaul's work is the colonial artist discovering his own artistic potentialities. For a West Indian writer who is disinherited by all traditions and at the same time exposed to all traditions, the problem of becoming a writer is in itself an assertion, of independence and identity. Living is in borrowed culture, the west Indian, more the most, needs writers to tell him who he is and where he stands. Naipaul's work is in sense as implicit biography of his departure from the constructive foreclosed background of the Caribbean island to the large. Though he happens to be concerned with the portrayal of the predicament of the postcolonial individual, his portrayals very often tend to be representative of the predicament of the universal modern man. From a regional artist, we find Naipaul evolving in to a writer of universal humanity.

A House for Mr. Biswas traces the story of a man's struggle to make something valuable out of a circumscribed and mediocre existence. It is a struggle symbolized by the by the hero's efforts to own house, which in a way, is to own his life. Out of this simple plot, Naipaul creates an epic novel, densely populated, rich in variety and in the end powerfully tragic.

The concluding lines of the prologue to the novel sum up, in a nut-shell, what the novel is actually about: "How terrible it would have been at this time, to be without it... to have lived without even attempting to lay claim to one's portion of the earth; to have lived and died as one had been born, unnecessary and unaccommodated. The words very clearly suggest that it is novel about the necessity to establish one's individuality in a society, which has no rule or pattern. The "House become a symbol of order and identity. It affirms the importance of such values as independence, individuality, intellectual of such interests, creativity, and a degree of freedom from human complicity.

A House for Mr. Biswas has variously been described as "comic epic" and "a tragic-comedy". But it indeed is a "West Indian epic". The novel

shows how Naipaul has accepted the challenge, one that the addresses to all West Indians. He seeks here the same absolution as does Walcott. They will absolve us, perhaps, if we begin again from what we have always known, nothing." Naipaul probably takes up his own words that Trinidad was "unimportant, uncreative, cynical" as a challenge and produces this great novel. And the protagonist Mr. Biswas's talk in the novel happens to be to create something of his own, out of nothing. And here, Naipaul comes out with the most important work of West Indian literature which, according to Bruce King, is a more profound work of art than the usual fictional celebrations of national achievement and history. The life of Biswas being the story of an Indian immigrant's dilemma, it depicts the exile's desire to strike roots and attain an authentic selfhood. In the process, the novel reveals the ethnic and social history of a communities by the larger socio-cultural forces, even while its accent is on a journey the inner voids and worlds of Biswas.

Naipaul wrote *A House for Mr. Biswas* - a movingly autobiographical at the time of doubts and disillusionment regarding the autobiographical mode. This had in fact given him his initial confidence. As he says in his autobiography.

The ways of my fantasy, the process of creation, remained mysterious to me. For everything that we false or did not work and had to be discarded. I felt that I alone was responsible.... The English of French writer of my age had grown up in a world that was more or less explained. He wrote against a background of knowledge. I could not be a writer in the same way, because to be a colonial, as I was, was to be spared knowledge. It was to be live in an intellectually restricted world; it was to accept those restrictions. And the restrictions could become attractive.

In a passage which appears towards the end of *A House for Mr. Biswas* it is not hard to see Naipaul the man merging his identity with his narrator. It is quite apt that the central character, Mr. Biawas, whose life-long ambition is the ownership of a house must find himself inescapably trapped within his newly bought house. This indicates the failure and defeat implicit in every kind of fulfillment. The "house" in the novel becomes a kind of inverted fictional

embodiment of Naipaul's own personal need for change and escape.

CONCLUSION

Up to A House for Mr. Biswas Naipaul trying to find himself, identifying his home and his own identity, the one a mirror for the other. The life of its protagonist Biswas is the story of the Indian immigrant's dilemma. It depicts the exile's desire to strike roots and attain an authentication selfhood. In the process, it also reveals the ethnic and social history of a community showing how communities are shaped by large socio-cultural forces. But this is done by taking us through the inner world of Biswas. In the *Mimic Men*, he makes an attempt to re-adjust his perspective to that of the exile who looks outward instead of homeward, the free man who imposes order on his freedom by giving it the form of memories. This adjustment to the condition of an exile from the place is completed in *In a Free State* which suggests Naipaul's own condition of permanent exile alienated from home. And after this work, the setting is always alien, man being portrayed as an urban guerrilla and even the Trinidad *Guerrillas* is a foreign landscape. Finally, the home which Salim builds in *A Bend in the River* is Africa, no home at all.

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