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Paradox of freedom in the novels of V. S. Naipaul

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Abstract

In addition to upsetting the cultural ties of the colonized people, colonization also led to their uprooting and displacement. There was a massive transplantation of population between the colonies which separated the colonized from their native lands and forced them to accommodate themselves in alien surroundings. This shift of population between the colonies was a deliberate measure taken to make the colonial societies heterogeneous, as homogeneous ones could have caused a political threat to the colonizers. This mixing up of various peoples created grave problems both at the individual and social levels. The intense alienation and sense of homelessness that such colonized individuals experience maybe ascribed to their displacement in the alien environment.

Keywords: Paradox, freedom, novels

Introduction

Cultural colonization accomplished what military conquest alone could not have achieved for the colonizers. It paved its way into the minds of the colonised and made them complaisant victims. This colonization of the minds maimed the psyche of the colonized in a severe way. It robbed them of all originality and instead, instilled in them a dependency complex. The crippling effect of this complex manifests itself in the post independence period in the inability of the former colonized people to stand independently on their own and in their continuing dependence on the West for ideas and technology. Intellectual as well as financial dependence of the third world countries on the west has made them vulnerable to neo-colonialism.

It is apparent that colonialism was a lot more than near military conquest. It was a “cultural project of control” that displaced traditional cultures and left a deep scar on the psyche of the colonized people who found them in the excruciating state of betweenness. For not only were they denied of their own culture, but were given only a partial admittance into the mother culture. According to Ashish Nanda, “modern colonialism colonizes mind in addition to two bodies and it releases courses within the colonial societies to alter their cultural priorities once for all. In the process it helps generalise the concept of the modern West from a geographical and temporal entity to a psychological category. The West is now everywhere, within the West and outside, in structures and in minds”.

The Problem

As Ania Loomba writes, “Colonialism restructured the economy of colonized countries, drawing them into a complex relationship with their own so that there was a flow of human and natural resources between colonized and colonial countries. Therefore no part of the globe remains untouched by it. Economic exploitation happens to be the least significant feature of the larger crisis that are the aftermath of the colonial encounter. Naipaul spent his life in West Indies and he knew the bitter reality about colonial rule. His novels have been studied in relation to the presentation of the postcolonial situation and fall into two phases of Naipaul's literary career. The first four novels that fall into the first phase of Naipaul's literary career draw mainly on Naipaul's boyhood experiences and hence the autobiographical element predominates. The works belonging to the second phase draw on Naipaul's travel writing and are analytical in approach. In these works, he quests for a meaning beyond the aesthetics.

As Naipaul claims, the first four novels especially *A House for Mr Biswas* are intentionally personal to him. These novels were the outcome of his efforts to come to terms with his own

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displacement and understand his place in the world. To Naipaul, writing is an activity that leads to self discovery. The act of recording his ancestry helped him in establishing his home identity by imposing and order on his jumbled experiences. His major concern in these novels is the disintegration of the East Indian community and the themes of mimicry; and identity crisis emerge out of it.

We note that the Western education created a duality in the lives of the East Indians. This duality is clearly evident in the character of Ganesh who follows the traditional profession of a mystic but wears Western clothes and makes use of Western science for the spiritual cure of his clients. The cultural disintegration of the East Indians takes place gradually through a process of seepage and makes itself apparent in their dress codes, their food habits and their customs. Ganesh's dress contradicts his profession. The same is true of Dhaniram the pundit in *Elvira*. In the case of language too, we see that Hindi has been so completely replaced by English that the East Indians use English even while performing traditional rituals. In the novel *A House for Mr Biswas*, when Hari, the family pundit dies there is no one to take his place as the younger generations have received western education and lack the training necessary to become a pundit. As there is no one to take Hari's place, Mrs Tulsi's faith yields and she starts following Christian religious rituals.

The Argument

As we know that peoples were displaced from native lands to other countries. Due to displacement of population, once identity is lost, it is lost forever and cannot be retrieved. Displaced colonials of the earlier novels cherished England as the land of opportunities and escape to England meant and escape from all miseries. But in *Mimic*, London is exposed for what it is- a mirage, a mere illusion- and the "promised land" turns out to be equally fraudulent.

In the novels written in the post independence period Naipaul surfaces as a novel of post imperial crisis. His despair is effectively conveyed in the grim and humorous tone of the novels. Naipaul's vision of the world becomes progressively bleak and the tone accordingly becomes more and more grim. *Mimic Men*, *A Flag on the Island* and *In a Free State* portray newly independent countries. The themes of alienation homelessness and mimicry preoccupy Naipaul throughout this novels. The upcoming novels are connected with the previous ones. The interrelation and continuity of things between mimic and the preceding novels becomes immediately apparent. While the displaced colonials of the earlier novels cherished England as the land of opportunities and escape to England meant an escape from all miseries, in *Mimic* however, London is exposed for what it is- a mirage, a mere illusion- and the "promised land" turns out to be equally fraudulent. In *Mimic Men* Naipaul can be identified with the character Ralph Singh and thus the novel can be termed as a fictional autobiography, in which Singh, a political exile in London meditates on the fragments which form his life. Singh's memoirs come to increase parts. In the first part Singh records his disillusionment with London, his marriage with Sandra, an English girl, their return to Isabella followed by Singh's rise in business finally the breakdown of his marriage. In the second part Singh reverts back to his childhood while in the final section of the novel he gives an account of his political career. His frank account of his childhood reveals the materialistic nature of the

society of Isabella, where it is considered a disgrace to be poor. Singh's father was school teacher and so Singh prefers to lay claim to his mother's family only because they are among the richest in the island. In Isabella, even children dual lives and are borne down by secrets. Singh's childhood is burdened with secrets he longs to get rid of. The duality is introduced into their lives because in Isabella, as in any colonial society, the school and the home remain to separate hemispheres. In school every boy lived with a fantasy of his own and concealed the real life of the home. That is why, Hok, one of Singh's classmates, ignores his mother on one occasion when he is with his classmates. When he is exposed, he breaks down in tears and Singh provides the reasons that it was because of blackness of his mother and his expulsion from the private hemisphere of fantasy where lay his true life. The pressure that a colonial society exerts on the psyche of even small boys is expressed through the episode. It is the colonial education that leads them to deny the reality around them. Singh too fashions his own fantasies in which he imagines that he is a shipwrecked chieftain on an unknown shore. He starts calling himself Ralph, rejecting his real name Ranjit, a change of name would make him a different person. This becomes one of his heavy secrets and keep him in a constant fear of discovery at home. Such instances provide an adequate commentary on the society which drives even children to such acts of deception. Thus we can say that hiding one's reality has become a typical malady of the colonized people and hence the only alternative left to the colonial who is their reality is mimicry.

In the matter of relationships he experiences either triumph or humiliation but never the "mutual acceptance". Here we witness extent to which colonialism has even the most apolitical of all relationships- the relationship between the sexes. This testifies that in the colonial ethos every relationship is reduced to the colonial binary of Domination and Subordination. Men like Singh are the products of colonialism, both at the psychological and spiritual levels. Naipaul also conveys the idea that identity feeble entity for colonials. Amalgamation of the races has created such an atmosphere in the estates that concept of nationalisation seems and impossibility.

In the novel *A Flag on Island* Frankie the narrator protagonist finds himself on the Caribbean Island when his ship is forced to dock because of a threatened hurricane. As Frankie goes into the island, he sees that though the island now has a flag of its own, its people have become even more unreal than before because they now strive to live up to the tourists image of themselves. Political independence has not released them from their psychological bondage to the coloniser's culture and they continue to live dual lives. Thus we can say that Naipaul, in his works, probes into the paradoxical nature of freedom which instead of liberating the colonial subjects only makes them the casualties of that freedom.

Conclusion

This critical inspection is founded on Naipaul's campaign against all colonial powers because of the appositeness Naipaul's motives put up on the coeval society. His works throw light on the postcolonial and post-imperial realities that have shaped the coeval society and thus render important perceptivity relating to them. It is expected that Naipaul's novels may lead to better understanding of the

problems that face the post imperial generations. It is evident from the novels of Naipaul that the freedom which the colonial countries have achieved is a fake one. The consequences and impediments that occurred after independence have not been cushy to tackle with. It is also a matter to ruminate whether we are really independent or not. What we have accomplished is only a situation of illusion. What we have achieved is no more than the value of cipher. Colonialism has broken the spine of so many countries and cultures. Self-confidence of the aborigines has vanished away and they have started imitating the Western culture's way of living. They have lost all the sense of Identity and self-respect. In the Third World countries like India, people prefer the use of imported items from America and Europe and it shows their superiority over those who use homemade products. Parameters of superiority and inferiority, good and bad, and all such binary oppositions are determined by the touchstone method by comparing them with the western discourse. Thus we can conclude that Naipaul has apparently and absolutely portrayed the aftermaths of postcolonialism and the kind of freedom which is in fact no more than slavery in disguise. And this slavery in disguise can be wiped away only and only when the "minds will be without fear and heads will be held high".

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