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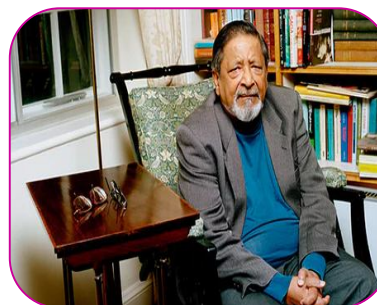
AGONIES OF PROTAGONISTS ENVISIONED IN V.S. NAIPAUL'S SELECTED NOVELS

Dr. P. Satheeshkumar

Guest Lecturer , Department of Physical Education ,
Bharathidasan University , Tiruchirappalli.

ABSTRACT

Literature is the mirror of social reality. The literary works of V. S. Naipaul are closely connected with his real life experience. V. S. Naipaul belongs to the marginalized and so intended to make a voice for his ethnic identity from the margin to the center through his literature. V. S. Naipaul is considered as a mouthpiece of displacement, rootlessness, alienation and exile. This study revealed the sufferings of marginalized characters for the objective of an identity, alienation, rootlessness, lack of a sense of belonging and cultural isolation articulated in the V.S. Naipaul's selected novels, "A house for Mr. Biswas (1961), The Mimic Men (1967), Half a Life (2001) and Magic seeds (2004)". In 'A house for Mr. Biswas', the life story of Mr. Biswas and the struggles of the East Indian immigrants in Trinidad to become a part of the national community was recorded. In Mimic Men, Ralph Singh feels himself alienated but "his acceptance of himself as he is trying to understand but not trying to become the other". In Half a life and Magical seeds, Willie represents the fragmented cultures and displaced populations. Altogether, Naipaul explored the fate of doomed individuals from the point of view that all characters suffer from rootlessness, loneliness and longing for home and belongingness.



KEY WORDS – mirror of social reality , mouthpiece of displacement, rootlessness, alienation.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid globalization has changed human outlook over caste, creed and colour, but, still the voice of marginalized and the oppressed is totally obscured in the world around. Many of the postcolonial writers and theorists have confronted the marginalization of the elite or dominant classes in postcolonial cultures and societies. A British writer of Indian origin, Sir Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul, the descendant from east India is one among them, who is regarded as a representative of a marginalized people, those were deprived of socio-economic opportunities for their sustenance and they are victims of social, cultural, and political exclusion. He was the Indian artist who has explored successfully in the field of travelogues in his literary works. Naipaul is considered as the leading novelist of the English speaking Caribbean, and is the winner of the Nobel Prize in literature in 2001. V.S. Naipaul is well known for his comic early novels established in Trinidad and Tobago. He has published more than thirty books, both of fiction and nonfiction. His novels concern not only with the questions of identity, rootlessness, cultural difference and displacement brought about by migration but also, with his own dilemmas as an expatriate about self-survival, home and the psychological and political aspects of alienation.

Over some fifty years, Naipaul's keen sense of observation comes into the marginal section of society. Literature is the mirror of social reality and it is factual in the literary works of Naipaul's as his works are either closely connected with his real life experience, or served as his autobiography. This reflected that V. S. Naipaul also belongs to the marginalized and so intended to make a voice for his ethnic identity from the margin to the center through his literature. As a multilayered international writer, born in the West Indies Trinidadian Brahmin family descended from the Eastern India, educated and accommodated in London, V. S. Naipaul, is considered as a mouthpiece of displacement, rootlessness, alienation and exile. The problem of his identity breeds due to his immigrant background and these themes i.e. displacement, alienation and exile cropped up in his writing. He is an expatriate by choice who chooses to alienate him from the countries, cultural identities and communities, within which he goes. He regards the entire world is a foreign soil for himself. He always suffers from a basic homelessness, though he has his own home in England. He is the man to whom every country is as his native one, to whom the entire world is as a distant land.

Life in exile is the chief trademark in the fictional world of V S. Naipaul. He thinks exile as a status to the marginal people who struggle to discover their identities. This study revealed the sufferings of marginalized characters for the objective of an identity, alienation, rootlessness, lack of a sense of belonging and cultural isolation articulated in the V.S. Naipaul's selected novel's, "A house for Mr. Biswas (1961), The Mimic Men (1967), Half a Life (2001) and Magic seeds (2004). Naipaul's characters depicted in these novels are delineated as living under great stress and tension, painfully aware of personal failures and fearing the loss of status and identity in their immediate surroundings. In K.H. Kunjo Singh's words, "Although his characters have freedom as their goal, choice as their weapon and self as the agent of experience, they have no fixed nature or reality with which to identify themselves with their environment"(251).

A HOUSE FOR MR. BISWAS (1961):

This novel exemplifies the sufferings of the protagonist, Mr. Biswas with the complications of isolation, frustration and negation in the different phases of his life. He struggles to realm his own identity in an alien environment and tries to imitate a dependable selfhood. The protagonist, Biswas is a Trinidadian Indian was born in a country village that was surrounded by ill omens. His birth is considered 'inauspicious' as he is born with an extra finger and a pundit prophesies him that Biswas will be a lecher and a spendthrift who will 'eat up his mother and father'. This unfurls his marginalization started with his birth. After Biswas father's death, he withdrawn from school and apprenticed to a pundit, but is cast out on bad terms.

The various places which Mr. Biswas meets have all their drawbacks and finally for the purpose of livelihood, he himself decided, "I am going to get a job on my own and I am going to get my own house too" (HFMB 67). This statement is a key to the entire narrative of the novel because, henceforth getting his own job and house becomes the motive of the life of Mr. Biswas. The prophecy pursues him like an evil spirit and drags him towards his complete bewilderedness at Hanuman House of Mrs. Tulsi. Mr. Biswas was not willing to live as a slave in Hanuman House. Mrs. Tulsi shelters only those who are docile and obedient. Mr. Biswas is more educated than her other sons- in-law. Therefore, he is not able to survive in that atmosphere. He tries to assimilate in Hanuman House but he is failed at every stage. He becomes completely isolated man in the crowd and the solitary rebelist against the traditional system filled with terrible myths, customs and rituals.

Mr. Biswas feels uneasy in the religious and cultural atmosphere of the Hanuman House. Mr. Biswas is an East Indian who desires to break from his Hindu heritage but has difficulty in assimilating himself into Western culture. On one hand he cannot mix and mingle with the Tulsis submerging his identity in the Tulsi culture and on the other hand he has not the right resources and courage enough for coming out of the trap in which he finds himself entangled. In Hanumans house, there were differences of opinion and ideology created wide gap between them and he used to feel himself all alone in that large family—even Shama, his wife, would not share his problems. The indifference of Shama intensified his alienation. He felt himself as an unwanted and unnecessary man in Tulsi clan.

Mr. Biswas' only desire was to live according to the desire of his heart but he had neither money, nor job, so he felt enormous pressure on him "to become a Tulsi" (99), to merge his identity into the Tulsidom. Yet with his unflinching spirit, he somehow managed his calm and even the worst circumstances could not break him down. Every effort of Mr. Biswas to become self-dependent was curbed down mercilessly. Biswas was then, compelled to work at the estate at Green Vale. Away from his family it was a kind of exile for Mohun Biswas who had to stay here in the company of antagonized labourers. Here he remained in such a pathetic condition that at times he undergoes a strange mindset and once at the time of this fury, when his wife Shama sent a message that she was bringing the children there for a few days, he immediately indulged in all kinds of negative thoughts. It was his sense of alienation that motivated him to search for a house. House was a great need in his life, as it becomes a symbol of personal identity, solace, self-respect and independence, the elements he was deprived of throughout his life.

Ultimately when he purchased a house at Sikkim Street, it brought an end to his constant struggle. This house, though heavily loaned, yet here he was not at the mercy of anybody, rather he was his own master. He experienced the sense of belongingness for the first time in his life. It evoked sense of security in him and strengthened his decaying relationship with the family. Here, he "found himself in his own house, on his own half lot of land, his own portion of earth"(2). It was an end of his exile and alienation, now he was perfectly at peace and at last died gracefully in own house. In spite of his struggles to own a house, the metaphoric interpretation make Mr. Biswas as a round character rather than a smart character. Bruce King comments that Biswas brings the image of King Lear of Shakespeare. Both were related in their characteristics of being a feel of loneliness in the world because of their foolishness and unprotected nature.

THE MIMIC MEN (1967):

Ralph Singh, the narrator of "The Mimic Men", is a forty-year-old expatriate minister who lives in exile in London. By writing his memoirs, Singh tries to execute order on his life, recreate his identity and get rid of the crippling sense of dislocation and displacement. As a child, Singh responds to his sense of abandonment by dreaming of India, the homeland and of his origin. He reads books on Asiatic and Persian Aryans and dreams of horsemen who look for their leader ("The Mimic Men", 98). He creates an ideal and heroic past which is in conflict with the real-life condition in Isabella. He is completely shocked when his father sacrifices Tamango, the race horse, although he is aware of the symbolic significance of such an act in Hindu tradition. Although, Singh idealizes his Hindu past and culture, he is in fact unable to understand Hinduism and thus, as Theme has observed, when the horse is killed, the ideal past collapses and the concrete experience shocks the child.

Another striking aspect of Singh's childhood is his deep sense of geographic and historic displacement. By this, I mean that Singh is of Indian descent living in the creolized Caribbean, which culturally, holds England and London as ideals. Therefore, he feels disconnected from the history that shapes his ethnicity (Indian history) and he is also disconnected from his present, for he is living in a society that sees itself as less real, less ideal, than distant England. This is most evident in Singh's comments about his schooling on Isabella: "Anything that touched on everyday life excited laughter when it was mentioned in the classroom: the name of a shop, the name of a street, the name of street-corner foods. The laughter denied our knowledge of these things to which after the hours of school we were to return... we who took apples to the teacher and wrote essays about visits to temperate farms".

In his room in a hotel in a London suburb Singh re-examines his life in the hope of achieving order, as the place in which he is born is associated with chaos. As he says: "to be born on an island like Isabella, an obscure New World transplantation, second-hand and barbarous, was to be born to disorder" ("The Mimic Men", 118). Singh does not find a complete solution to his psychological problems. Hence, his writing reflects moods of displacement, disillusionment, and sadness. Singh travelled to different places to overcome his feeling of isolation but he is aware of his "imminent homelessness" being alienated from his own society ("The Mimic Men", 249).

Singh's fantasies are constructed according to the Western formula which he has adopted from the heroic tales of Aryan war leaders and from British and European history books. These stories, and subsequently Singh's fantasies, are in the sphere of Western ideal narration. This type of narration contradicts Singh's actual every-day experiences and activities on Isabella. Singh tries to live in a fantasy world and deny the reality of the island, but fails, as that reality, which he confronts every day, mingles with his fantasies. These realities of fantasy and actuality are, to use Jameson's term, incommensurable. After leaving the island, Singh tries to create a meaningful relationship between him and the surrounding discourses by sensitively responding to various kinds of false identities which he thinks other people see in him. In other words, he tries to define himself through other people, to get rid of his fantasies and the feeling of aimlessness and disorder. Later he describes these attempts to find himself as "roles".

The end of *The Mimic Men*, then, leaves Singh with no final answers, no final solutions—only greater levels of self-awareness and compassion. And Naipaul clearly does not want us to extrapolate one universal truth or philosophy or remedy from Singh's story. Ralph's escape in the land of fantasy from Isabella which is a hollow society fails to give him recognition. It makes him to come in contact with Western culture which is more alien to him. His rejection of homeland its traditions and its culture in adopting culture of colonizers takes him away from the sense of being a man.

HALF A LIFE (2001) AND MAGIC SEEDS (2004):

Willie Chandran, a protagonist in the both the stories conflicted by alienation by social and cultural problems. During the course of his exile to the places he hasn't ever known, he encounters a great deal of problems of placelessness, selflessness and identity crisis. Willie was born to a Brahmin father and a Dalit mother. His father, Sunderland was born in the highest caste of India: Brahmin. In response to Gandhi's call, he married a woman at lower caste. Willie's father was meant to attend a professional school and to marry the daughter of his college principal. However, he decided to rebel against his Brahmin family by taking up with a black, low-caste girl. Since he did not love or even like the woman he had chosen, his home life was miserable. Willie's negative self-conception was caused by the feeling of oppression at his inferior status in the Hindu caste system. In Hinduism, the caste system played a crucial role in determining the social and economic status of people. They were socially alienated, distinguished and ranked into classes, and in each class, they were restricted to doing particular kinds of works.

Moreover, those who were born of mixed caste would suffer from social alienation; they would be branded as backward and restricted in acquiring rights and opportunities. Willie, born of the mixed paternity between a Brahmin standing at the top of society and a low-caste woman, had experience the pain of social alienation; he was categorized as backward and outcast from society. Situated in the lowest class of society, Willie underwent traumatic experiences from the caste system; including studying at a mission school of Christian missionaries because no school of any caste would accept him as a student.

Realizing that their two mixed-race children, Willie and Sarojini, had no future in India, the elder Chandran tried to obtain a college scholarship for his son by contacting English visitors to India with whom he had become casually acquainted, including the writer W. Somerset Maugham, for whom Willie was named. However, either his pleas were ignored or, as in Maugham's case, received a perfunctory response. Thus, they suffer because of cultural affiliation or estrangement thereby Willie asking his father why his middle name is Somerset, because his classmates make fun of it. The mixed sources of his names foreshadow his fate in the story. Willie feels rootlessness as the students make fun of him at school.

Through his English acquaintances, the father safeguards for Willie, a scholarship at an obscure teachers college in London. Upon arrival, Willie immediately discovers two devastating facts. First, his father's English friends really want nothing to do with him. Second, although well-schooled in English language and literature, Willie is worse off than a child in English society. He must learn the simplest things, such as how to make a request, and he constantly has to turn to encyclopedias to understand common bits of history and custom. He finds himself anchorless. His normal desires as a young man—his ambition and sexuality—have no reliable context for expression.

The protagonist 'Willie' moves from India to London and finally to Africa in the late 1950s, where he marries a Portuguese woman and appears to settle. *Magic Seeds* jumps ahead 18 years to Berlin, where Willie, six months after leaving his wife, now lives in a temporary, half and-half way" with his sister Sarojini, experiencing the listlessness that has plagued him since his youth. Willie's problem, as he sees it, is that he has always been someone on the outside for whom time passes fruitlessly by. He garners little sympathy from Sarojini, who berates him with diatribes condemning his colonial psychosis. She views Willie as a privileged man who has deliberately avoided taking on a meaningful life as a revolutionary. Emboldened by the criticism of Sarojini and the expiration of his visa, Willie left Berlin and "after more than twenty years, Willie saw India again. He had left India with very little money, the gift of his father; and he was going back with very little money, the gift of his sister." Willie joins a revolutionary group in India, sparking the most engaging part of *Magic Seeds*. Willie's experiences here are germane. At first, he sees the revolutionaries as people unwilling to let go of old ideas about home and country. But as he lives and fights with them, he notices that some guerrillas experience the same displacement as Willie, finding in their futile war a sense of purpose. Others are motivated by things as inane as sexual frustration, or as significant as childhood beatings or lifelong suffering due to the machinations of the upper classes. Eventually, Willie is captured and thrown into jail, where the prison routine provides relief from life as a jungle fighter. From there, Naipaul shifts Willie to England by luck, where he restarts his unfastened life working for an architectural magazine. His guerrilla experiences have jaundiced his view of the society in which he once maintained a static existence. By novel's end, Willie progresses toward finding himself at home in the world. "We talked about their oppression, but we were exploiting them all the time. Our ideas and words were more important than their lives" (Naipaul, 2004:167).

Culture alienation seems to be in Willie's blood. Then his restless soul yearns for an anchor. Half-ness of his personality, the incompleteness of his life for all of which moves with despise for his father and blames for the half-status that he has been accorded. Willie fails to see the dilemma of his father as a youth and also does not realize that his father has become victim to the circumstances. His father tried to create an image but lost his identity. By this I can conclude Willie remains a stranger and outsider in this country, just as in India and London; indeed, now he suffers an even greater sense of alienation. He does not want to stay here long: "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." (HL, 135) Willie is only one of the representatives among those immigrants who try their best to claim for their identity and sense of belonging. A magic seed is a hope. Willie is trying hard to find a "home" for his soul, and we common people, also, should try to get our sense of belonging.

CONCLUSION:

Literature is the reflection of people's social life. The life story of Mr. Biswas shows a self-respecting individual's rebellion against exploitation. Mr. Biswas' life records the struggles of the East Indian immigrants in Trinidad to become a part of the national community. It leads to exile, dispossession and various disillusionments. In *Mimic Men*, Ralph Singh feels himself alienated but "his acceptance of himself as he is trying to understand but not trying to become the other". The emptiness and hollowness of colonial set up compels people to pose as 'mimic men' but this 'mimicry' causes them a lot of loss. In *Half a Life* and *Magical Seeds*, Willie represents the fragmented cultures and displaced populations. The abortive revolution sown by the revolutionaries and also to the seed that will produce a raceless society, a new class of drifters' for whom 'Home' remains a utopian dream which is never realized. In all, Naipaul explores the fate of doomed individuals from the point of view of a comic outsider. All the characters suffer from rootlessness, loneliness and at the same time, while longing for home and belongingness, they oscillate between 'house' and 'home', straddle between native culture and modern culture, between tradition and modernity in a multicultural attitude.

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**Dr. P. Satheeshkumar**

Guest Lecturer , Department of Physical Education , Bharathidasan University , Tiruchirappalli.