

THE DILEMMA OF COMPLEX IDENTITY IN V.S. NAIPAUL'S WORKS

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Introduction

The works of V.S Naipaul, a renowned Nobel Prize-winning author, is an exhibition of diversely cultivated characters, dealing with inner and outer conflicts. The author's inclination to draw the lives of his characters in the backdrop of postcolonial upheavals in the political and societal sphere sets the tone for his works. The prominent themes used in his works are postcolonial conflicts, societal fragmentation, identity crisis, pessimism and the disconnection of desires and reality. In essence, the works of Naipaul such as *The Mimic*, *A House for Mr Biswas* and *Miguel Street* are important examples of characters sketched to portray turbulence of mind and soul.

The identities of his characters are not set against a conventional framework. Rather he portrays sets of individuals struggling to achieve their deepest desires. Selfish longing for fulfilling their desires, which may be outrageous against the backdrop of a world that moves against them, creates the dilemma of leading complexities. Contrarily, their drives for gaining a particular identity envisioned by them extend the threads of fragmentation. Thus, in the article, an exploration of the dilemma of complex identities in V.S Naipaul's works is presented by a thematic analysis of the prominent elements present in his works.

Separation and 'otherness' leading to identity crisis in V.S Naipaul's works

Naipaul, known for his realistic character sketches, explores the theme of separation and 'otherness' in his works widely. Especially in *A House for Mr Biswas*, the separation of 'self' and the process of 'othering' is made prominent by articulating the dissatisfaction of Mr/ Biswas in his wife's house. As stated by Barry (2020), the concept of 'self' and 'other', prominently seen in the psychoanalytic theory by Freud, defines the isolated individual in relation to society as he becomes aware of his position. Thus, the notion of subjectivity and objectivity gains awareness yet the line between these two cannot be defined absolutely, leading to alienation. Alienation is seen more prominently when the surrounding world of the individual establishes itself in stark contrast to the individuals' previously established notions about themselves. Thus, the protagonist Mr Biswas longing to belong to a modern world yet finding himself within a traditional community leads to alienation and separation.

Cultural identity also plays a significant part in Naipaul's works. Providing his characters with general human flaws and placing them in a postcolonial world conceptualises their cultural identity crisis. As articulated by Sugarman et al. (2018), systematic hate and violence based on cultural and racial identity create identity binaries. This rejects the layers of basic human feelings and emotions, classifying them as voiceless

representatives of a race. On the other hand, Jotangiya (2022) states that Naipaul reinterprets history, highlighting the struggles of marginalised individuals. These marginalised individuals such as Salim of *a Bend in the River* faced the dilemma of being treated as an 'outsider' in Africa where he had spent his childhood.

Further identity crisis solidified for Salim as his desire to stay in Africa was thwarted and he had to leave the country to survive the political turmoil against Indians in Africa. A critical note of diaspora is also present in this novel that creates ground for an identity crisis for Salim. As stated by Tripathi & Tripathi (2022), diasporic struggle to gain access to stability geographically and finding a root lost long ago impacts the mind of individuals. Migration to another country is presented by the author as the cause of a dilemma, where the characters are faced with both internal and external struggles to survive. Contrarily Khadka (2020) articulates that bridging the past and the present in Naipaul's works gives access to generational trauma and disconnection. As seen in *A House for Mr Biswas*, he remains unhappy because of his turbulent relationship with his father and later on his position as a father cannot be praised as ideal either. Thus, a repetitive cycle of separation and crisis emerges in Naipaul's works.

In *Miguel Street*, the author presents the story of seventeen characters, each struggling with their flawed identities. Each character shows vices and flaws, struggling to make their dreams come true yet their dreams are always met with pessimism. According to Singh (2015), the creation of identity is multi-layered and each layer is modified based on experiences. In *The Mimic Men*, the author portrays Ranjit Ralph Singh as an exile, separating himself from his roots. However, his identity crisis is evident in his desire to embody a European persona. Thus, he tries to discard his identity and assume a new one that will suit him better. Yet the strings of Indianness flash in his mind, restricting the fulfilment of his desires. Therefore, it can be stated that each character explored in this section provides an overview of how separation from others and finding subjectivity can lead to identity crises when inner dilemmas overpower natural identity formation.

The dilemma of complex identities in Naipaul's characters

The portrayal of characters that are inadvertently struggling to find a place in a world that stands against them, each work by Naipaul points to the reality of their lives. The tone of futility in his works is strongly embedded in his narratives. As he creates a place for marginalised people and voices their unheard histories, he also reminds the readers that these people are victims of their minds as

well. They are essentially trapped in their dilemmas, striving to gain access to a strong identity even though their cultural roots are often destroyed in a decolonised world. Contrarily, the complex identities present in his works further articulates the inability of individuals to break free from a political, cultural and social system that aims at subjugation above all.

The dilemma is strongly presented in *A House for Mr Biswas* where the protagonist always feels dissatisfied with his surroundings. However, his desire to become a modern man drives him to work against his fate. As stated by Prasad (2002), the theme of negativism and isolation is presented in the novel by Naipaul as a means to portray cultural clashes. The cultural clash creates complexities in the creation of a stable cultural identity without which Mr Mohan Biswas is left to feel frustrated with his existence. On the other hand, Prasad (2002) further states that the journey of the protagonist's life is full of disappointments as his endeavours are met with failure repeatedly. Yet Mohan Biswas refuses to give up on his dreams and conform to a culturally traditional way of life. His inability to accept his own culture indeed as an Indian and his desperate longing to become a mirror to an image painted by his previous colonisers leads to his frustration and isolation.

An existential crisis is met with the protagonist as he seeks to reinvent himself while

living in an environment that resides in stark contrast with his visions of living. Whether he was able to achieve his dreams fully is still questionable. Despite being able to build his own house and send his son to London, the quality of his life never truly improves to provide him with the satisfaction and happiness he had longed for. The theme of escapism is prominent in his works. His characters all seek to escape to a better and newer world. However, as Bhatt (2022) states, diaspora and immigration bear generational implications under turbulent political times. Escaping from one geographical location to the other is not an answer to finding a new identity. In *Miguel Street*, the author presents the story of Wordsworth, named after the world-renowned poet. He desires to escape from Miguel Street by writing poems yet he is described as a failed poet. Thus, his envisioned identity of a famous poet is left unfulfilled and he is forced to face the reality of his failure, creating complex identity issues.

In *The Mimic Men*, the author narrates the complicated character of Ralph Singh, describing the core issues of identity formation. As stated by Beinorius (2020), Frantz Fanon in his works on colonialism manifests the idea of mimicry. The colonised people strive to gain acceptance from their oppressors by becoming a version of them. In essence, the author of *The Mimic Men* explores the nuances of abandoning his own family and culture to become a transformed European man, mimicking western

sentiments and customs. On the other hand, the protagonist defies his identity as an Indian, leading to underlying tones of inferiority complexes. Thus, Ralph Singh is not able to accept himself fully without wanting to change himself. These notions of dilemma in V.S. Naipaul's works present the problematic existence of characters who constantly defy their cultural identity to assume a new one. Yet the new identity can never be accepted fully by others, thus always being treated as an outsider.

The dilemma is further solidified by the author as he forces his characters to face the reality of their futility. Salim in *A Bend in the River* fails to identify that the land he holds close to his heart will never allow him a proper place. Mr Mohan Biswas may never truly become part of the modern, sophisticated, westernised gentry. Ralph Singh can never truly embody the Western man as his origins limit him. In essence, it can be said that their inability to become what they sought to achieve since the beginning of the narrative fails to be realised as they fail to accept themselves. The turmoil in their minds and the challenges faced trying to assume a new identity is a futile quest indeed as it rejects the idea of 'self' and seeks to change it based on outer standards of the postcolonial world.

Realism and fiction for creating dilemma of complex identity

V.S. Naipaul's works have always involved the utilization of contradictions and

contrasts in his works. Contradictions can be said to be the trademark of Naipaul. V.S Naipaul's famous work *A House for Mr. Biwa's* is a great example of post-colonial literature. The works of V.S Naipaul has been seen to be closely associated with alienation or fragmentation that leads to exile of the characters.

The work of V.S Naipaul, *A House For Mr. Biwa's* is termed by critics as a work of art that focuses on the problems relating to the isolation and also the frustration and negation of the character (Jaisi et al. 2022 p. 63). This novel portrays Naipaul's potential in addressing the problems that are related to an individual's identity crisis. Naipaul takes a subjective approach in addressing the individual's identity collapse or the crisis that is being faced. Naipaul's achievement in the portrayal in postcolonial literature has been quite significant. Naipaul's achievements have brought him the attention of the critics and the public worldwide. Naipaul's works have been accepted by the public due to the gifts that Naipaul has as a writer. Naipaul's intricate eye for the details and the suppleness in his writings as well as his witty expressions has been accepted by the public of the West as well as the other English-speaking areas.

V.S Naipaul has been a unique figure in the history of English literature. The world Naipaul saw is certainly not a void or a mass of emptiness (Dharavath et al. 2018 p 58). The

world that is created by Naipaul is densely populated with phenomena both social and physical. The phenomenon that is recorded in the works of V.S Naipaul is recorded to be alive and, in some cases, brutal, and full of complexities and contradictions. The critics have found the works such as *A House for Mr. Biwa's* portrays a person's struggles that are faced in order to figure themselves out in such situations that require adaptation to a person's situations that require adaptation by the character in order to habituate the situation. The novel focuses on the situations that have been faced by the character and also their struggles in order to face the assertiveness that has been cast upon the characters in terms of the symbols that have been implicated by the story as well as the metaphors that has been utilized by the story.

The characters in the novels of V.S Naipaul have an efficient portrayal of the characters and protagonist in order of their sufferings that are faced by them in order to assert their personalities in terms of the struggles and the sufferings that has been faced by the narrator (Butt et al. 2022 p.67). These struggles and sufferings that are undertaken by the character re provided in order to assert the characters and the hardships that are faced by the characters. The struggles that are faced by the characters in the essay are represented with grave detail by V.S Naipaul, and this has been seen that the Diaspora of the identities and the

psychic trauma are considered the center of criticism in the novels.

The novels portray that the characters in the play have suffered the problems of displacement from their natives through the means of dislocation which has led to the state of footlessness and also the state of identity loss. In his novels the characters that are shown face the circumstances of isolation and disregard the circumstances of trauma that leads to the displacement of the character from the known premises. Though the description of the Hindu community has been provided by the author, V.S Naipaul in the works that has been published by him, the novelist has been seen to provide the newer conception of the home and the identity of the characters in a certain Diasporas perspective.

Relation between inner complexities and outer world in V.S. Naipaul's works

This has been noticed that the conceptualization of the topics that V.S Naipaul has explored the themes of postcolonial reference and also it is seen that the people living up the colonial setting have their own colonial and identical disorder have been explored thoroughly with reference to the themes and the topics that have been explored by the novel. The writings on the works of Naipaul have been critically evaluated and it has been figured out that the characters are being

investigated thoroughly by the identity crises and the characters of the people of the story are evaluated in the play. The question of survival has been popping up throughout the story which is A House for Mr. Biwa's by the author V.S Naipaul. This has been noticed that the novel focuses on the Hindu norms and the cultures that are related to the tradition and the qualities that represent the culture. \

The novels of V.S Naipaul are considered to be a characterial representation of the plot as well as the technical representation of the circumstances of the story that have been studied with post-colonial dependency. These references in colonial dependency are made by V.S Naipaul, in terms of dependency and also the terms of mockery and the parody that has been lodged by the works of V.S Naipaul... The characters that are introduced by the influence of V.S Naipaul are noticed to be read in the terms of the colonial dependency. The sentences of the novel A House For Mr. Biwa's provides the summary of the story of a person's psychological traumas that are encountered by a person in order to develop character of a person as per the reference of the future. In the novel of V.S Naipaul that has been named The Mimic Men has been portrayed by the improvement that has been made by the characters in the novel. The novel provides the reader with the freedom and the keenness that leads to the development of Ralph's character and the

decisions that he makes in order to fulfill any task that has to be undertaken by him.

The characters that are introduced by the play are not said to be readable in terms of their dependency on colonial literature. This influence in colonial literature has been noticed in terms of the mockery and the parody it establishes. The readers that are living in the Indian Subcontinent have been admiring the audience that V.S Naipaul has created through his works (Abide et al. 2022). This has also been noticed that the works of V.S Naipaul has influenced the living of the people that has been living in the post-colonial era and thus the outcome of the works of V.S Naipaul has influenced the struggle noticed in the post-colonial era (Alzouabi et al. 2021 p.408). This has been also explored by Naipaul's works the influence of the post-colonialism on the citizens that has been facing the oppression of the countries that are ruling the colonies (Adhakari et al. 2022 p. 493). he work of V.S Naipaul that forwards his attention to the colonial and the social as well as the psychological realism of the novel foreshadows the intensive character that has been noticed by the people that are reading the play.

Conclusion

The above mentioned works of V.S Naipaul has been stated to be having a great influence in the post-colonial literature and also the characters that has been shown in the play has been described with great detail. The

characters in the novels of V.S Naipaul has been given the freedom to make serious as well as comic reference that are in lieu of the post-colonial freedom struggle and the people that are shown to be under the effect of the freedom struggle are said to be described with great intricacy that leads to the total understanding of the characters that has been shown. Naipaul has also been termed to be a feminist as well as having the cultural influence that explores the historical and the special dimensions that the writings of V.S Naipaul are said to discover. Naipaul's works that are related to nonfictional literature are being disturbed by the nonfictional strategies that are discovered by the narrator in order to establish contrast.

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