



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 3. Issue.3.,2016 (July-Sept.)



INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

SPEAKING THE CULTURE: A POSTCOLONIAL STUDY IN V.S. NAIPAUL'S
"A HOUSE FOR Mr. BISWAS"

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ABSTRACT

The question of Alienation is much a relevant issue in this globalised postcolonial world. Migration and exchanges of culture forms a new identity. Often people face devastating challenge in identifying their self and psyche. They form certain basic questions in their mind like who am i? what is home to me? What is my language? These are some of the primary interrogation that must be answered in order to retain a psychological balance of society.

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"We pretended to be real, to be learning, to be preparing ourselves for life, we mimic men of the new world, one unknown corner of it, with all its remainder of the corruption, that came so quickly to the new." (The Mimic Men-V.S. Naipaul)

I propose to analyze the alienation theme of V.S. Naipaul's "A House for Mr. Biswas" with an angle from cultural criticism which questions traditional value hierarchies and takes a cross disciplinary approach to works traditionally marginalized by aesthetic ideology of white European males or females. Instead of more attention to canon, cultural studies examine works by minority working ethnic groups and post-colonial writer, and the products of the folks, urban and mass culture, Popular literature, soaps, opera, rocks, rap music, cartoons, professionals, wrestling, food etc.----all within the domain of cultural criticism. I am focusing on it particularly as it concerns questioning the ways western cultural tradition expressed in literature defines itself partly by shifting the voices of oppressed groups or even by demonizing those groups. I will focus on how literary tradition was constructed against oppositional literary identities as alienation and how different communities of readers might interpret the same text differently due to varied value system of cultural conflict. V.S. Naipaul reflects, "Suppose that at one word I could just disappear from this room, what could remain to speak of me? A few clothes, a few books. The shouts and thumps in the hall would continue; the puja would be done; in the morning the Tulsi store would open its door."

V.S. Naipaul is a prolific Writer of fiction, stories and commentaries on contemporary events. Similarly writing on the ethnics and racial kaleidoscope of Caribbean are enormous. Naipaul is a multi-layered international writer and the question of his identity crops up because of his immigrant background and the displacement it caused. This 'unhousedness' could be seen as a problem that had haunted him all his life but it is also his strength, providing him with a detached and ruthless precision that marks his vision as well as his prose. Naipaul's attitude to culture has always been progressive. It is the Third- World's blind mimicry of the

West that he cannot stomach. He lashes out at the short comings of Third-World societies, which have their roots in their traditional has always regretted the lack of a native tradition in Trinidad quite frequently in his writings. He records this agony in the words: "The English language was mine, the tradition was not". Literary critic Manjit Inder Singh has drawn attention to the fact that, none of the [Novelist's] figures are allowed authenticity or a place in the landscape he inhabits". Indeed, Naipaul sees a necessarily fleeting and absurd wish in them to cross barriers erected by the limitations of colonized culture that in the end can only lead to a falsity of purpose, supplemented or aggravated by a consciousness of unimportance. Also, in his first published novel "Mystic Masseur", distinguished by its alienation from the larger society, the community of Mystic Masseur, shows the socio-cultural openness to other cultural influences, which is typical of the African communities in the West Indies. The novel takes place entirely within an East Indian community in transition from feudalism to capitalism.

"A House for Mr. Biswas", V.S. Naipaul's breakthrough novel, presents a graphic account of everyday happening with a close examination which demands a comprehensive personal illumination or vision as it defines cultural aspects in a new way. It juxtaposes cultural and Political aspects as a symbol of alienate experience which can be re interpreted but his own remark which is quite relevant to this context who thought that the withdrawal of the colonial power will cause chaos and shall make alienation anima deeper and are caught between mother land and father culture.

"The West Indies are so completely a creation of Empire that the withdrawal of empire is almost without meaning."

The novel sets in Trinidad----- a land of multicultural and multiracial peoples and planes. It constitutes of Indians, Negros, Christians, Converts and all other people belonging to different religion and Nations like most of the other characters or protagonists of the novel. Mr. Biswas also belong to the Indian community of Trinidad and reveals the impact of western culture and creolization in their manner. They formed a kind of separation due to geographic dislocation from the centre and presents a wounded kind of civilization. The vivid description of the typical Caribbean society and cross culture of various races which we come across while reading the text in A Biswas hints to a precarious situation.

It says...

"But at night gruff, intimate whispers came through the partitions, reminding Mr. Biswas that he lived in a crowded city. The other tenants are all negroes."

It can also be noted that the female attendant of the Hanuman house was a negro woman named miss Blackie and there was a Chinese woman named Mrs. Seeung at Arwacas, Where Mr. Biswas used to spend sometimes at her café. A compact diverse race presented in the novel includes the Muslim solicitor named F.Z. Ghani, who had issued birth certificate to Mr. Biswas., the Presbyterian family of Dorothy, Tulsis daughter in law and the Jewish refugee doctor of Tulsis. Much wider categories which reflect processes of politically motivated uprooting and moving of populations, Voluntary migration, global communications and transport. It has acquired a broad semantic domain and now encompasses a motley array of groups such as political refugees, alien residents, guest workers, immigrants, expellees, ethnic and racial minorities, and overseas communities. As a young boy in Trinidad, Naipaul used to find the profoundly Brahmin modes of life in his home disheartening and embarrassing. The early initiation into the highly pious and ritualistic way of a typical Brahmin life has left its mark on this third generation Indian expatriate making him intolerant and impatient. It leads him to say rather helplessly about the culture and life in Trinidad:

"It still horrifies me that people should put out food for animals on plates they themselves use, as it horrified me at school to see boys sharing plates, local iced lollies, as it horrified me to see women sipping from ladles with which they stir their pots".

Just as the Indian attitude towards the overseas Indian has changed, overseas Indians have changed in the way in which they perceive India. In the Post Independent Era, Indians living abroad were cut off from homelands, and the main part of information about India, came from the Western press and its coverage of events and developments in India. The western newspapers carried images of draught, floods, earthquake and communal

riots, all types of natural and manmade disasters and scarcity of resources. The writer describes Hanuman house as alien white fortress which reminds us of white colonial rulers who used to exploit the colonized people.

“The daughters and their children swept and washed and cooked and served in the store. The husbands under Seth’s supervision, worked on tulsis land, looked after Tulsis animals, and their names served in the store. In return they were given food, shelter and a little money, their children were looked after; and they were treated with respect by people outside because they were connected with Tulsis family. Their names were forgotten, they became Tulsis.”

The forced blend of traditional culture and newly acquired western lifestyle confirms the corruption, a legacy of the colonial period. It reveals the tension of living in a borrowed hybridized culture and its resultant consequences.

“On Sunday before examination week he was bathed by Mrs. Tulsis in water consecrated by Hari, the soles of his feet were soaked in lavender water; he was made to drink a glass of Guinness stout; and he left Hanuman house, a figure of awe, laden with crucifix, sacred threads and beads, a mysterious sachet, a number of curious armlets, consecrated coins and a lime in each trouser pocket.”

The novel thus being potent enough in itself, signifies a lot more than it narrates in the true location of cultural fashion evolving in the middle of the nineteenth century. It squeezes out the essential implications of all the aspects of an individual who falls prey to the lost generation of western culture, heavily burdened with wastage of isolationist fears, corruption and disenchantment.

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