

NAIPAUL'S QUEST FOR ROOTS, IDENTITY AND ORDER IN THE NOVELS WITH THE THIRD WORLD SETTING; A HOUSE FOR MR. BISWAS AND THE MYSTIC MASSEUR

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ABSTRACT

Literature is the chronicle of man's attempts to make a sense of external reality ever since man came to imbibe the sensitivity to perceive in incompatibility between the forces within and without. According to this perspective novel is the most obvious literary form. Here the individual is pitted inexorably against the large social reality at a particular juncture of history and the novel, in a way, becomes the saga of individual efforts to comprehend and adjust to the larger reality.

The three cycles of historical romances, social, and political realism, and psychological case studies are followed more or less uniformly in all literatures including Indian English literature.

The Indian novelists in English have chosen themes and situations that have relevance all over the country or even the world. These themes are not many, since there is a variety of social structure, values, conventions and customs in different parts of India.

The Indian English fiction of the post-independence era is free from social and political overtones and there is a shift of interest to the individual and self-identification.

Literature is the product of a writer's reaction of life, the writer himself belongs to a production of the conditions of life around him consciously or unconsciously. All literature articulates the spirit of the time which is an accretion of all the political, social, cultural and religious characteristics of a particular age. Intrigued by the existential question like 'Who am I?' baffled by complex situations, the writer sets out to understand his roots.

INTRODUCTION

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The quest of self-realization has been there since the very dawn of the creation, more precisely since man attains consciousness. Man wants to unravel the mystery of the self and has attempted to realize it through various modes. All religions and philosophic thoughts are attempted at the realization of the self. This quest is central not only to philosophy and religion but to literature too.

A bulk of contemporary literature deals with an individual search for 'the self' in the ruthless society. An individual develops a social identity or a self-definition which conforms how he conceptualizes and evaluates himself. For each individual this identity including unique aspects such as his name family, occupation, racial trait, culture and nation.

V.S. Naipaul's (1932) novels reveal an intense yearning to realize the self identity and roots' what gives unity to his work is the theme of searching his roots and identity. The main concern of my dissertation is to explore this thematic unity in his novels.

The Mystic Masseur (1957) tells the story of a man called Pundit Ganesh Ramsumair belonging to Trinidad. He rises through a series of failure as a teacher, writer and masseur to become a successful politician and then ultimately a disillusioned M.B.E. It is a record of Naipaul's creative encounter with his time and place in the life he knew best. It reveals his understanding of the local sense and his capacity to reinforce it with comic irony.

The Miguel Street (1959) posits the futility and meaninglessness of genuine human endeavor. It portrays a gallery of the inhabitants of an urban slum in Trinidad.

A House for Mr. Biswas (1961) traces the story of a man's struggling to make something valuable out of a circumscribed and mediocre existence. It is an individual search for identity and his struggle to arrive at authentic selfhood. It can be seen as the struggle of a man not naturally rebellious, but in whom rebellion is inspired by the forces of ritual, myth, and customs.

The Mimic Men (1967) deals with one, Ralph Singh, who is suspended between the island of his birth and the cosmopolitan world, and who sees his life in terms of play-acting, disorder and isolation. It seeks to show the inherent conflicts. It foregrounds the loss of inherent in such fragmented realities. The main conflict in the text is the conflict of originary identity. The action of the story takes place on an imaginary island situated in the Caribbean.

An Area of Darkness (1964) is a record of Naipaul's travels in India. Naipaul has wished to settle down in country of his origin but he found the conditions prevalent in this country to be most disgusting and gave up this intention just as he had previously decided not to live in Trinidad permanently.

Guerrillas (1975) deals with a Caribbean island after its achievement of freedom. Social and political unrest create tension, and circumstances render life hollow and aimless. The characters abuse each other with more violence than in any of Naipaul's previous works. It is also extremely depressing book. But it is also an extremely stimulating.

A Bend in the River (1979) gives us an account of the personal relationships of an Indian Muslim called Salim with a large number of other characters in this book.

The setting of the story, in this novel is a French-speaking African State. Besides tracing the personal relationship, the novel also depicts the changes which take place in the life of the nation, through the efforts of its, president who takes new initiatives. The novel is predominantly pessimistic.

Naipaul regards the search for the roots as one the impelling force of the human life. The world which he portrays in his novels is a world involving the instance struggle for identity of the tragic lives.

The present study aims at analyzing Naipaul's quest for roots, identity and order in the novels with the Third World setting; *A House for Mr. Biswas* and *The Mystic Masseur*. While the focus is on Naipaul's creative writing, in tracing the historical and psychological causes of the disorder and futility. The examples have drawn from his prose works, which reveal Naipaul's quest for roots in the left by colonialism.

This research is a study of V.S. Naipaul's fictional work as a sensitive record of the human situation in societies in middle passage where individuals are affected by the loss of the past and exposed to future-shock. Employing the form as a tool of social enquiry well as a means of cultural clarification and discovery, Naipaul presents his characters as people in search of society trying to create those contexts and roles that are capable of giving them identity, freedom and order. Placed in an unheroic world of dereliction, disturbance and exhaustion, they consistently seek to overcome the disorder in the public world as well as the distress in their private worlds by straining after the single creative act that might compensate for their disabilities in their mimetic, solipsistic, wounded cultures, The public status that Pundit Ganesh achieves and the house that Mr. Biswas builds are the symbolic gestures made by individuals who are in flight from the uncertainties of their own position and are at the same time engaged in measuring their own painful emergence into autonomy, status and self-differentiation.

QUEST FOR THE ROOT

Vidiadhar Surajpersad Naipaul (1932) is a prolific Indian English novelist and expatriate writer, enjoys a unique position. He can at one and the same time be a prophet, soothsayer, and doom watcher. He was born in Trinidad and educated in Oxford in England. He married an English lady and presently lives in England. Having born in Trinidad his personality has developed within the Indian cultural ethos. There is in his novel a display of influence of intercultural forces. In his works there is a Search for roots and self identity. His perspective and analytical mind contributes to the tragic vision and subsequent search for authentic self in his novels.

Naipaul articulates the quest for self in a conscious social context. Protagonist like Dandekar in *A Silence of Desire* is incapable of understanding any search for his authentic being because of his westernized intellectual approach. The notion of self identification belongs to the realm of becoming rather than being. Roots are an integral part of the individual consciousness but it is not the mere sum total of such consciousness. The idea of identity is linked the image of roots which succors the sense of one's identity. In the case of migrant writers, a journey back to the country one's ancestor came from holds the key to some answers about their own identity. For Naipaul's fathers his new home in the west was an eternally temporary feeling because he kept hoping that at some time he would be able to go back to his village. It was a lost of world which Naipaul recapitulates with his writer's imagination. It is this process of discovery, the very act of re-location that Naipaul goes through in his three travel accounts of India. Naipaul's visit to India will be another way of rewriting the nation for himself.

Naipaul's quest is not truly an Indian one i.e. it is not a quest that an India would undertake as he/she is ensconced in a rich cultural mythology that gives a sense to every one's place which most people accept in a normal course of life or are frustrated by its limitation, but learn to accept it as part of the 'Tension of living'¹. Naipaul's quest is an accidental mind's attempt to know India.

Naipaul is of Indian heritage, but was not born there but rather on the Caribbean island of Trinidad. Neither Trinidad, the country of his birth nor England and country that nurtured him by providing him education and conducive atmosphere for blossoming as a writer engages his sensibility as the post independent India his ancestral land. Naipaul travel from the colonial and post colonial West Indies to the post independent and post-colonial India. His own values imbibed on the material plane are western and are more inclined to individual identity, individual freedom, freedom of the physical and intellectual self, and not so much to the spiritual self.

In his reformulation in the 90's he sees himself not as a descendant of a colonized victim but a sympathetic individual reviewing his earlier stance and delving deeper into the ultimate values of the people who make the nation.

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