

Diaspora: The Different Aspects in V.S. Naipaul's Novels

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Abstract

His novels are replete with the metaphors of homelessness and represent the divided selves of the shipwrecked Diaspora who have got trapped into the elusive realities of the alien territory. Here, the book traces the shifting paradigms of Diasporas' ambivalence in the novels of V.S. Naipaul who happens to be considered a literary sojourner dispassionately handling all the intricacies of displacement. However, the concepts of globalization, de-territorialization and multiculturalism might have trivialized the Diasporas' debates but the present study attempts to resuscitate and sustain the charm of the subject by exploring the uncharted territories of Nobel Laureate's fictional representation.

Keywords: *Diaspora, Friction Work, Novel Discussion.*

Introduction

In 2001, Naipaul was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. He has been awarded numerous other literary prizes, including the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize (1958), the Somerset Maugham Award (1960), the Hawthornden Prize (1964), the WH Smith Literary Award (1968), the Booker Prize (1971), the Jerusalem Prize (1983) and the David Cohen Prize for a lifetime's achievement in British Literature (1993).

J. M. Coetzee, writing in The New York Review of Books in 2001, described Naipaul as "a master of modern English prose". In 2008, The Times ranked Naipaul seventh on their list of "the 50 greatest British writers since 1945".

His supporters often perceive him as offering a mordant critique of many left-liberal pieties while his detractors, such as cultural critic Edward Said and Derek Walcott accuse him of being a neo-colonial apologist. He has also excoriated Tony Blair as a "pirate" at the head of "a socialist revolution", a man who was "destroying the idea of civilization in this country" and had created "a plebeian culture".

In his book dealing with the influence of Islam on non-Arab Muslims, *Beyond Belief: Islamic excursions among the converted peoples*, Naipaul state the following about Islam:

The cruelty of Islamic fundamentalism is that it allows to only one people—the Arabs, the original people of the Prophet—a past, and sacred places, pilgrimages and earth reverences. These sacred Arab places have to be the sacred places of all the converted peoples. Converted peoples have to strip themselves of their past; of converted peoples nothing is required but the purest faith (if such a thing can be arrived at), Islam, submission. It is the most uncompromising kind of imperialism.

In March 2002, Salman Rushdie denounced Naipaul for supporting the RSS, VHP and BJP led Indian government on the anti-Muslim 2002 Gujarat riots: Rushdie said Naipaul was "a fellow traveler of fascism and [he] disgraces the Nobel award".

Naipaul is a strict vegetarian.

Naipaul attracted media controversy with statements about women he made in a May 2011 interview at the Royal Geographic Society, expressing his view that women's writing was inferior to men's, and that there was no female writer whom he would consider his equal. Naipaul stated that women's writing was "quite different", reflecting women's "sentimentality, the narrow view of the world". He had previously criticized leading female Indian authors writing about the legacy of colonialism for the "banality" of their work.

He was elected a Foreign Honorary Member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1990. In 1993 Naipaul was awarded the British David Cohen Prize for Literature.

In 1998 a controversial memoir by Naipaul's sometime protégé Paul Theroux was published. The book provides a personal, though occasionally caustic portrait of Naipaul. The memoir, entitled *Sir Vidia's Shadow*, was precipitated by a falling-out between the two men a few years earlier. Theroux supposedly blamed Naipaul's second wife, Nadira Naipaul, for driving the two apart.

In 2002, Kris Rampersad released *Finding A Place*, a ground breaking study that gives context to much of Naipaul's perspectives on colonialism, the Caribbean and Trinidad and Tobago, placing his writings within the context of some 200 years' gestation in Trinidad and its peculiar social, economic, political and literary evolution. She argues that the society's complex oral and literary antecedents propelled his acclamation as a 20th century Lord of the English language and that his, and his predecessors including his father Seepersad Naipaul, legislator/authors as F.E.M Hosein, Dennis Mahabir, and near contemporaries as

Samuel Selvon and Ismith Khan's early experiences of journalism on the island influenced their leanings towards expanding the literary tradition in social realism tradition. Naipaul himself credited this work in a meeting with Rampersad on his visit to Trinidad in 2007, acknowledging that *Finding a Place* revealed aspects of writings by his father. In early 2007, V. S. Naipaul made a long-awaited return to his homeland of Trinidad. He urged citizens to shrug off the notions of "Indian" and "African" and to concentrate on being "Trinidadian". In 2008, writer Patrick French released the first authorized biography of Naipaul, which was serialized in *The Daily Telegraph*.

Fiction Work

- The Mystic Masseur – (1957) (film Version: *The Mystic Masseur* (2001))
- The Suffrage of Elvira – (1958)
- Miguel Street – (1959)
- A House for Mr Biswas – (1961)
- Mr. Stone and the Knights companion – (1963)
- The Mimic Men – (1967)
- A Flag on the Island – (1967)
- In a Free State – (1971): Booker prize
- Guerrillas – (1975)
- A Bend in the River – (1979)
- Finding the Centre – (1984)
- The Enigma of Arrival – (1987)
- A Way in the World – (1994)
- Half a Life – (2001)
- Magic Seeds – (2004)

Diaspora as Social Form

The first meaning which can be derived from contemporary literature is the most common; hence this section rehearses many well known connotations. 'The Diaspora' was of course, at one time, a concept referring almost exclusively to the experiences of Jews, invoking their traumatic exile from an historical homeland and dispersal throughout many lands. With this experience as reference, connotations of a 'Diaspora' situation were usually rather negative

as they were associated with forced displacement, victimization, alienation, loss. Along with this archetype went a dream of return. These traits eventually led by association to the term's application toward populations such as Armenians and Africans.

Novel Discussion

A House for Mr Biswas

It is a 1961 novel by V. S. Naipaul, significant as Naipaul's first work to achieve acclaim worldwide. It is the story of Mohun Biswas, an Indo-Trinidadian who continually strives for success and mostly fails, who marries into the Tulsi family only to find himself dominated by it, and who finally sets the goal of owning his own house. Drawing some elements from the life of Naipaul's father, the work is primarily a sharply-drawn look at life that uses postcolonial perspectives to view a vanished colonial world.

In 1998, the Modern Library ranked *A House for Mr Biswas* number 72 on its list of the 100 best English-language novels of the 20th century. Time magazine included the novel in its "TIME 100 Best English-language Novels from 1923 to 2005".

Plot

Mohun Biswas is born in rural Trinidad to parents of Indian origin. His birth is considered inauspicious as he is born "in the wrong way" and with an extra finger. A pundit prophesies that the newly born Mr Biswas "will be a lecher and a spendthrift. Possibly a liar as well", and that he will "eat up his mother and father". The pundit further advises that the boy be kept "away from trees and water. Particularly water". A few years later, Mohun leads a neighbour's calf, which he is tending, to a stream. The boy, who has never seen water "in its natural form", becomes distracted watching the fish and allows the calf to wander off. Mohun hides in fear of punishment. His father, believing his son to be in the water, drowns in an attempt to save him, thus in part fulfilling the pundit's prophecy. This leads to the dissolution of Mr Biswas's family. His

sister is sent to live with a wealthy aunt and uncle, Tara and Ajodha, while Mr Biswas, his mother, and two older brothers go to live with other relatives.

Mr Biswas is withdrawn prematurely from school and apprenticed to a pundit, but is cast out on bad terms. Ajodha then puts him in the care of his alcoholic and abusive brother Bhandat which also comes to a bad result. Finally, Mr Biswas now becoming a young man decides to set out to make his own fortune. He encounters a friend from his days of attending school who helps him get into the business of sign-writing. While on the job, Mr Biswas attempts to romance a client's daughter and his advances are misinterpreted as a wedding proposal. He is drawn into a marriage which he does not have the nerve to stop and becomes a member of the Tulsi household.

With the Tulsis, Mr Biswas becomes very unhappy with his wife Shama and her overbearing family, which bears a slight resemblance to the Capildeo family into which Naipaul's father married. He is usually at odds with the Tulsis and his struggle for economic independence from the oppressive household drives the plot. The Tulsi family (and the big decaying house they live in) represents the traditional communal world, the way life is lived, not only among the Hindu immigrants of Trinidad but throughout Africa and Asia as well. Mr Biswas is offered a place in it, a subordinate place to be sure, but a place that's guaranteed and from which advancement is possible. But Mr Biswas rejects that. He is, without realizing it or thinking it through but through deep and indelible instinct, a modern man. He wants to BE, to exist as something in his own right, to build something he can call his own. That is something the Tulsis cannot deal with, and that is why their world—though that traditional world, like the old Tulsi house which is its synecdoche, is collapsing—conspires to drag him down. Nevertheless, despite his poor education, Mr Biswas becomes a journalist, has four children with Shama, and attempts (more than once, with varying levels of success) to

build a house that he can call his own. He becomes obsessed with the notion of owning his own house, and it becomes a symbol of his independence and merit.

Half a Life

It is a 2001 novel by Nobel laureate V. S. Naipaul published by Alfred A. Knopf. The novel is set in India, Africa and Europe (London, Berlin and Portugal). Half a Life was long listed for the Man Booker prize (2001).

Plot

Willie Somerset Chandran is the son of a Brahmin father and a Dalit mother. His father gave him his middle name as homage to the English writer Somerset Maugham who had visited the father in the temple where the father was living under a vow of silence. Having come to despise his father, Willie leaves India to go to 1950s London to study. There he leads a life as a poor immigrant and later he writes a book of short stories and manages to publish it.

Willie receives a letter from Ana, a mixed Portuguese and black African girl, who admires his book, and they arrange to meet. They fall in love and Willie follows her to her country (an unnamed Portuguese colony in Africa, presumably Mozambique). Meanwhile Willie's sister Sarojini marries a German and moves to Berlin. The novel ends with Willie having moved to his sister's place in Berlin after his 18 year stay in Africa.

Half a Life is a precursor to Naipaul's 2004 novel Magic Seeds which starts with Willie in Berlin.

A Flag on the Island

Written by V.S. Naipaul, and first published by André Deutsch in 1967, and then again by Penguin Books in 1969, A Flag on the Island is a collection of short stories, including outtakes from previous novels such as "The Enemy", from Miguel Street and pieces published in periodicals in England or the United States.

Plot

The book is composed of a series of short stories, followed by a much longer one, the title story, "A Flag on the Island". The book is dedicated to Diana Athill.

- My Aunt Gold Teeth
- The Raffle
- A Christmas Story
- The Mourners
- The Night Watchman's Occurrence Book
- The Enemy
- Greenie and Yellow
- The Perfect Tenants
- The Heart
- The Baker's Story
- A Flag on the Island

In this story, Naipaul uses the character of Vahishka Jameela, an elderly woman in the narrator's neighborhood often called "Aunt Gold Teeth" due to her gold teeth, to showcase the idea that British colonials have helped many natives of Trinidad. In the story, Aunt Gold Teeth loses her job as a receptionist after refusing to clean up her boss' son's vomit when the latter got drunk and threw up all over the office floor. She subsequently is forced to become a maid for a rich and influential British family (the Whites) in the neighborhood. Mr. White is the political adviser to the British governor, and when he discovers the reason Vahishka was fired from her last job, he immediately demands that she be hired back or compensated. The story ends with Vahishka receiving her compensation from her former boss and being invited to live at the house of the Whites.

Conclusions

Naipaul was born into a Diasporas community, easily characterized by Safran's definition. The way he has chosen to use that background as a writer is something rather different. Instead of drawing heavily on memories of the homeland

and the collective identity, he has made his difference into a distinction, and turned his alienation into an abiding preoccupation.

Naipaul was born in 1932 in the British colony of Trinidad, descended from Indian indentured laborers brought to work the island's sugar plantations following the abolition of slavery. The indenture system was, of course, little better than slavery and many of the Indian families in rural Trinidad were desperately poor, with little education. Nevertheless, a few of Naipaul's forebears were more fortunate or resourceful than the majority, sufficiently so that Naipaul, though his immediate family was not economically secure during his childhood, was able to develop his academic potential and escape the narrow world of Trinidad by winning a scholarship to study at Oxford University. He thus became doubly Diasporas'; since leaving Trinidad in 1950 he has lived mainly in England.

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