



Identity Crisis in V.S. Naipaul's *A Bend in The River*

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Abstract:

The themes of alienation and identity quest were one of the major themes when it comes to writers of the 20th century, no matter which genre they belonged. They usually used their abilities and techniques to criticize the society, emphasizing the idea of dehumanizing men that came with industrialism, blaming it for the alienation of the individual from society. V.S. Naipaul among many other writers, was also concerned with the notion of enslaving the working class by capitalists, and the effect it had, depriving them and giving them the feeling of low self-esteem. V. S. Naipaul, a novelist of 20th century dealing in Diaspora, represents these literary traits through his works. 'A Bend in the River' is one such novel which best represents the Diaspora displacement and the psychological problems created due to these. The violence caused at the protagonist's home town, and his yearning for peace strengthens this polarity. The longing to be there where it was impossible to be, induces the element of magic and fantasy. Struggle for Existence- Darwin's theory of 'struggle for yearning' and 'Survival of the Fittest' best applies to the protagonist Salim's constant struggle.

Key Words:

Alienation, emphasizing, capitalists, displacement, yearning, survival, fittest, constant, struggle.

Introduction:

Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul, is commonly known as V. S. Naipaul. He is undoubtedly, one of the most significant novelists of the twentieth century. V.S. Naipaul is a Trinidadian writer of Indian descent best known for novels *A House for Mr. Biswas*, *A Bend in the River* and *A Way in the World*. His novels, set in developing countries, are known for their pessimistic and cynical tone, often referred to as "suppressed histories." He received the Nobel Prize in 2001 for his novel *Half a Life*, a story about an Indian immigrant to England and Africa. Rootlessness and alienation form the dominant themes of Naipaul's best novels. Alienation and identity-crisis pursued him like the Greek and became his obsessive themes when he chose the career of a freelance writer. V. S. Naipaul's *A Bend in the River* charts the picture of decolonization and its aftermath in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Though the place remains anonymous in the novel, the events that the novel refers to, make it obvious to the readers that the novel is set in post-independent Congo. The novel portrays characters from different strata of society struck in the newly decolonized world of Congo. The novel is narrated by Salim, an Indian Muslim shopkeeper, living in a small city. The story revolves around some of the important events in Salim's life projecting his identity crisis and inner conflicts due to the rapid changes that are taking place in his "homeland", Congo. Along with Salim and other characters' lives, the novel deals with the national issues in Congo and shows how the individual lives are affected by the economic and political changes in the country.

Sense of Identity:

Identity is a feeling of being uncertain and confusion in which a person's sense of identity becomes insecure, typically due to a change in their expected aims or role in society. It is shaped as a result of a collaboration of social and personal experiences a person endures during the course of his/her life. Identity is a multilayered constituent of human experience. Identity is a very intriguing concept both in psychology and literature. Many modern literary texts revolve around this concept. A number of themes in literature center on identity. An identity crisis is a period of serious personal questioning where the individual makes an effort to determine one's own values and sense of direction. Identity is confined to man, his reason and freedom of the self in a society.

‘A Bend in the River’ is one such novel which best represents the Diaspora displacement and the psychological problems created due to these. A Bend in the River is the story of an Arab-African man, Salim, and his journey through the rule of Mobutu Sese Meko of Zaire. Salim's family is of Indian descent and has lived on the eastern coast of Africa for generations. The novel best represents the emergence of the third world, a power to fight against the colonial power in the quest of its own identity. Aware of the country's growing unrest, Salim becomes unsure of the future of his family in that area. He buys a store in the interior of the country. The town is a natural market point by a bend in the river. Salim, the protagonist of the novel himself is the product of diverse identity. The family had a past connection with India but an Afro-Arab identity at present. The protagonist's indigenous culture in itself is the reflection of the cultures that either shaped his personality directly or existed dormant within creating an indirect impact.

Quest for Lost Identity and Individuality:

The subsequent force applied as the total sum of opposite forces, decides the way of life of these victims caught within the cultural blades. Salim's tale is the long tale of sufferings and struggle in quest for lost identity and individuality. He runs a store at the interior part of the town, waiting for the revolution to subside and peace to restore. This indicates the optimism and positivity of his attitude. Regrettably, the situation worsens and Salim's hometown is destroyed. A relentless sense of loss thus chases him all over his life.

A strong polarity of emotions is mostly found in the Diaspora novels and this novel is no exception to this. The violence caused at the protagonist's home town, and his yearning for peace strengthens this polarity. The longing to be there where it was impossible to be, induces the element of magic and fantasy. The woman who buys merchandise from him was able to swiftly move even in the forbidden regions causes envy and surprise for him and he provides it a dimension of magic

Dormant Rage- Salim falls in love with the wife of an officer in the service of the Governor who builds a huge complex at the outskirts of the town. As the revolution threatens more and the tension is built, Salim behaves rudely with his beloved and beats her ferociously, this act proves the impotent rage of a helpless fellow finding an easiest victim at hand to be punished.

Salim's Migration:

As the upheaval gets more vicious, Salim leaves for England. The inner strife at times suffocates so much as to compel an individual to seek peace at any cost. Salim's Migration is the expression of this suffocation. However, change of place was an impermanent escape from the situation. Salim's return brings him even sever news of undertaking of his property by the Government. This was a rude shock persuading feeling of being displaced in him. Salim now more determined struggles hard and begins business in gold and ivory and tries to extract as much money as possible and is caught and jailed. The miserable condition of the prisoners and children inside proves the supremacy of the colonial vigor. The political chaos and anxiety thus create unpredictability and ambiguity. Salim who was bailed out by one of his friends was counselled to leave the place at an earliest. While absconding the situation, the vessel is attacked by the militants and all get slaughtered except Salim. He anyhow survives and migrates alone to yet another place in quest for identity. The novel closes at this point demonstrating a persistent struggle.

Struggle for Existence:

Darwin's theory of 'struggle for Existence' and 'Survival of the Fittest' best applies to Salim's constant struggle. The only difference being that though victims of Diaspora survive, their survival is not beyond the existential value. It is confined only up to getting the bare subsistence. They remain confined to the base of the Maslow's pyramid of hierarchy and never reach to self-actualization. Maslow's pyramid intends that physiological needs, followed by safety and security needs are common to all the mortals. As one moves upwards, towards the top, the quest for identity finds varied expressions. Unfortunately, this pursuit of 'self-identity' remains a persistent and everlasting dream for the aliens that rarely comes true. Humanity with its refined characteristics such as aesthetic pleasure, literary satisfaction, appreciation, self-explorationist, remain a far cry for these. The whole of their lives is enwrapped into the shroud of misery, misgiving, identity crisis and a never-ending struggle investigative for the distinctiveness and individuality.

Identity Crisis is a permanent feature for Salim. Loss of land, loss of people and loss of identity all together induced uncertainty and insecurity in him. His escapism is evident through his journey to England and his last voyage for exploring a new world of his choice and imagination. The novel is not anti-post-colonial rather it entails a systematic attempt of that nation towards liberty and freedom. It is a step ahead towards the modern world. However, identity crisis makes the protagonist feel as a man of 'nowhere'. For

him the 'things have already fallen apart'. The significance of the novel lies in its universal demand. It tells the story of the struggle of any country that overwhelms the peculiarities and appears triumphantly.

Modern Psychological Phenomenon:

Nostalgia is a universal and psychological phenomenon that always exists within. Modern period has provided it varied angles due to ever changing social, political and cultural situations. It has accelerated the life momentum and has increased the opportunities to interact. The reflection of the change in society can be traced in the contemporary literature. Diaspora, forced or willing has intensified nostalgia in modern literature. It has increased the complexity of the modern literature due to its deep probe into psychology of the characters. Post-colonial literature mostly reflects this trend. Changing identities is the severe issue arising out of Diaspora. The whole of the life span of its victims is spent in accommodating themselves according to the fast-changing social scenario. The greatest harm is thus done to one's own identity. Adjustment overpowers one so much so as to deprive him of his indigenous character. The cultural clash thus ends in identity crisis.

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