

Allegory in the works of V.S. Naipaul

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Abstract

V.S. Naipaul has been one of the most versatile and outstanding Indian writers in the modern era. His writings are a reflection of all the modern and day to day happenings in the Indian society. His fictions ask us to remove the fancy spectacles and look at the reality faced by the modern world. His work is majorly centered on Trinidad and its recurring atmosphere. His novels have inspired many writers to take up writing not as a hobby but as a duty which they have to fulfill towards the society and its people.

Keywords: V.S. Naipaul, allegory, modernism, realism, melancholy

“...Naipaul has become Sir V S Naipaul, an extremely famous and, it must be said, very talented writer whose novels and nonfiction (mostly travel books) have established his reputation as one of the truly celebrated, justly well-known figures in world literature today.” (Edward Said)

“There are three great trade routes along which the Naipaul controversies steer. The first is his depiction of India....Islam is the second controversy....The third controversy is the most bitter: that in his travel books about the Caribbean, and Africa, Naipaul has written about black people in ways no white man could ever have got away with.” (Arvind Adiga) (1)

According to Cambridge Dictionary allegory is, “a story, play, poem, picture, or other work in which the characters and events represent particular qualities or ideas that relate to morals, religion, or politics.” There is heavy use of allegory in the works of V.S. Naipaul. For instance, if we observe *The Mystic Masseur* written by V.S. Naipaul, we will find that there are various allegories in the novel. The first allegory is that of an evil father in law who is a carrier of death in the novel as his main work is of a cremator and funeral director. He loses his integrity in defeating Ganesh as a taxi owner.

The second allegory is of a moody and difficult wife. Nothing can be more difficult if the spouse is constantly frustrated and irritating. Ganesh is very tired of his wife and gives his father extra money so that he can get rid of her. Leela is good at judging the characters of other people and she knows that Ganesh is a fraud but still likes it when he earns money and brings it home. The third allegory is of a dirty politician where Ganesh realizes that he has exploited the poor and needy and in this process, he has become a politician. The story of the accidental birth of a politician is blended with religious authority making the public vulnerable to the events happening around.

Naipaul has revealed about himself when he received the Nobel Prize in Stockholm and was asked to give an acceptance speech. His speech is as follows:

"I said earlier that everything about me is in my books. I will go further now. I will say I am the sum of my books. Each book intuitively sensed and, in the case of fiction, intuitively worked out. Stands on what has gone before, and grows out of it. I feel that at any stage of my literary career it could have been said that the last book contained all the others.

It's been like this because of my background. My background is at once exceedingly simple and exceedingly confused. I was born in Trinidad. It is a small island in the mouth of the great Orinoco river of Venezuela. So Trinidad is not strictly of South America, and not strictly of the Caribbean. It was developed as a New World

plantation colony, and when I was born in 1932 it had a population of about 400,000. Of this, about 150,000 were Indians, Hindus and Muslims, nearly all of peasant origin, and nearly all from the Gangetic plain."

Despite being an Indian, he was born and brought up in Trinidad, a land far away from his homeland because of which we always find that melancholic tone in his works. He was someone who always felt alienated despite living between his peers and the alienated feeling occurs in his works repeatedly. In *The House for Mr Biswas*, we see that the lead protagonist Mr Biswas is a man who is unable to accommodate in his present surroundings which shows us the search of an outcast in a hostile universe. It was very difficult for East Indians in Trinidad to have a sense of place and self. Naipaul finds it very difficult to define the word home. The word home for him is related to his identity and his works always emphasize displacement, search and identity.

The fictitious writings of Naipaul have references to the culture he has been through. First is his birthplace, Trinidad, second is his ancestral place India and third is the place where he got educated, that is Britain. Naipaul said,

"The English Language was mine, the tradition was not." (2)

The displacement problem can be seen in his novel *A House for Mr Biswas*. Mr Biswas is the real-life portrayal of Naipaul's father who is caught between the three cultures. It also focuses on Naipaul's cultural dislocation and displacement. A strong vision of identity destruction of Naipaul due to geographical displacement can be observed in the novel *In a Free State*. The story revolves around a protagonist who tries to reach a 'free state'. In *The Enigma of Arrival*, Naipaul yet again comes to being with his cultural displacement and dislocation.

".....a rootlessness which matches his own, is equally what Naipaul has discovered in Mr. Stone," in *Mr Stone and the Knights Companion*.

Most of the novels of Naipaul besides having allegories also move around rootlessness, alienation and displacement which gives them a unique taste and style as compared to other novelists who were writing in that era. William Walsh has written about V.S. Naipaul in his book as follows:

"Themes to him assume the forms of action and ideas appeal to him only in so far as they satisfy him, as per Henry James, "the appetite for the illustrational." His vision is his own, unenergized by contemporary social clichés or political routines. He is engaged with the stresses and strains we recognize as crucial in our experience now. His writing is nervous and present. This, together with the mixture in him of creeds, cultures and continents, with his expatriate career, his being able to practice an art in and of totally dissimilar worlds, all gives him a peculiarly contemporary quality." (3)

Besides allegory, we also find that V.S. Naipaul makes extensive use of symbols and motifs in his novels. If we observe *A House for Mr Biswas*, we observe that Hanuman House is used as a symbol of dependence and humiliation for Mohun Biswas. His in-laws belong to a rich family in Trinidad and marry off their daughters to high-class and unemployed men so that the men getting married look after the family business without getting any money. They are provided food and accommodation but are considered to be liabilities to the family as they have to provide all the necessities for their livelihood. This is realized by Mohun and he starts hating the house as it is a symbol of dependence for future sons-in-law of the house.

If we discuss about other symbols from the same novel, there is a yellow typewriter. The typewriter is the symbol of Mohun who wants to rise and shine in his career. In this regard, he keeps on changing many jobs so that he can realize what he has to do at the end. He wants to write but could not do so because of lack of resources. His stories start with a man aged thirty-three having four children and Meeta a young and void heroine. Though these stories start with joy, but they always leave Mohun depressed. The typewriter is later painted yellow by Mohun with all the other furniture in the house. The typewriter remains idle for long and symbolizes Mohun's need for writing being lowered down by the need to run his family. A hat stand is also used as a symbol in the novel as Mohun's family do not own or wear any hats but has kept the stand only to show that they can afford to buy hats. The hat stand is a symbol of the social status of many immigrant Indian families.

One of the important motifs used in *A House for Mr Biswas* is a house. Mohun has been living in different houses some good and some which had leaky roofs and his desire to have a house symbolizes his need to make a mark for himself in the world. He came to the world completely unplanned and created unnecessary trouble for everyone around him. He did not even do anything. He was just born in an unlucky hour due to which he was considered inauspicious. His life is said to be unnecessary and a burden on his parents. He wants to die in a place which he can rightfully call his home and where he will not have to sacrifice his life and comfort for someone else.

We also observe that a Japanese Tea Set is used as a symbol in the novel. When Shama leaves Hanuman House with Mohun, she is given this tea set as a parting gift from her family. Though it is a very dear gift to her, the reality is that the tea set has been kept unsold in the shop for a very long time. The tea set shows the lack of emotions the family has for Shama. Though she is a daughter, her existence is not worth celebrating. The family departs from her in the cheapest way they can.

As observed by Robert Boyers, "Naipaul is our primary novelist of disorder and breakdown." (4)

A major part of Naipaul's work is set in the independent states of the Caribbean and America and offers a negative view of life. The people who are living in these places cannot establish order. Naipaul in his first novel *Miguel Street* highlights the condition of disorder in Port of Spain, Trinidad. Boyers says that Naipaul, "Seems more interested in a spiritual or psychological state than in the machinery of action." (5)

Naipaul makes use of psychological as well as the spiritual state to portray the conditions of escape and disorder. "To be born on an island like Isabella.....was to be born to disorder." (6). Violence is another tool which we find being used judiciously in the novels of V.S. Naipaul. The violence in his stories is not only physical but also intellectual. The violence is an obstacle against self-realization. The violence is shown in the novels with a sole purpose to violate the society's integrity. The violence ends up becoming a big circle in which Naipaul's characters are also caught and this takes them from submission state to raise their voice against such atrocities.

If we go by the social, cultural and political background Naipaul's characters evolve as antagonists in all their forms which is the basis of every relationship. Violence and antagonism can be found abundantly in *Miguel Street*. Various characters fight for status recognition on the street in the novel.

Besides that, we find that Naipaul always defies third world spirit. Naipaul represents societies which have newly emerged from colonialism. He describes how a society functions after post-colonial order. Though these colonies gain an independent status after a long fight against imperialism these Third World Nations still face many problems like political, social and economic. The major damage is done on the mindset of colonized people with a smooth process of cultural colonization.

V.S. Naipaul is majorly known as a West Indian Novelist having colonial experience. He as a post-colonial novelist focuses on major themes related to the problems of colonized people. He acts as an interpreter and observer of the ex-colonies and brings out the drawbacks of these societies. In his novels including *A Bend in the River*, *In a Free State*, *The Mimic Men*, *Guerrillas* etc. these themes gain universality and present and observe alienation and fragmentation which is a universal predicament of man in modern society. Some of the reputed Third World critics emphasize mainly on Naipaul's development as a creative artist who always picks up issues which are related to the Third World. His works highlight post-imperial and post-colonial realities which have shaped modern societies and given some very important observations related to them. Naipaul's novels help us in understanding the problems which have been faced by the post-imperial or post-colonial generations. He has contributed a lot in highlighting the problems faced by the society in which he lived.

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