Chapter IX

Conclusion

Postcolonial Criticism is a set of theoretical and critical strategies used to examine the culture, literature, politics, and history, of former colonies. Post-colonial theory deals with the reading and writing of literature written in previously or currently colonised countries, or literature written in colonising countries which deals with colonisation or colonised peoples. It enables the examination of the relationship between colonisers and colonised in literature; and also examines whether a work is pro colonist or anti colonialist and why. It also helps to find out if the text reinforces or resists colonialist ideology. The post-colonial criticism helps to explore the dynamics of colonisation through literary works. Postcolonialism attempts to analyse the effect of empire, racism and exploitation. It challenges the long tradition of European imperial narratives. A postcolonial critic examines the relation between the coloniser and the colonised in literature, raising and attempting to answer various questions related to colonialist ideology.

V. S. Naipaul is an Indo-Trinidadian-British writer known for his novels focusing on the legacy of the British Empire’s colonialism. He has also written works of non-fiction, such as travel writing and essays. 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 Hawthorne Prize (1964), the W H 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).
Naipaul has earned a reputation as one of the most gifted prose stylists of the twentieth century as well as one of the most controversial critics of the effects of imperialism on the Third World. Employing a variety of literary forms, from short stories to essays to mixed-genre pieces that blend autobiography, fiction, and journalistic reporting, Naipaul describes the bitter legacy of Colonialism on personal and societal levels and presents a subtle and sensitive account of the agonising experiences of colonised people in his fiction.

The present work is a post colonial study of the select novels of V S Naipaul that has been pursued with reference to the following five novels: The Mystic Masseur(1957), In a Free State(1971), A Bend in the River(1979), Half a Life(2001) and Magic Seeds(2004).

Naipaul’s first novel The Mystic Masseur, set in colonial Trinidad and published in London in 1957, won the famous John Llewellyn Rhys prize in 1958. The novel aptly brings out Naipaul’s fragmented identity entrapped between two worlds through the protagonist Ganesh Ramsumair. The ambivalence in the sub-altern characters as reflected in the novel indeed reveals Naipaul’s own state of ambivalence regarding his own identity. Similar to many of his later novels, The Mystic Masseur(1957) is also autobiographical in approach. The novel has been analysed from the perspective of ambivalence.

Ganesh’s character like Naipaul is constantly in a state of ambivalence and drifts between Indian culture and European culture. The more he comes in contact with the colonizers the more his confidence in his Indian culture shakes and it leads to the disintegration of the native culture and he starts adopting western ways of life by his changing Indian name Ganesh to ‘Gareth’ in colonial school and to ‘G Ramsay
Muir’ during his visit to Britain for conference. His wearing the western attire of ‘lounge suit’ during a strike of September 1949, the dinner-jackets for official dinners at Government House and his impeccable English dressing during his Britain visit clearly marks his shift to western culture. When he moves away from the colonial domination to the rural places of Trinidad and takes up the profession of the mystic masseur, he is seen to be drawn to his Indian culture which is reflected in his taking up Indian attire of ‘dhoti’ ‘kurtah’ and ‘turban’, reciting Hindi slogans, adopting Hindu ways of life. Nevertheless, the colonial culture still allures him and he does not give up his western ways of living and indeed adopts a hybrid culture by becoming bilingual, wearing both Indian and western attire and building an Indo-Western house. However as he becomes an MLA and then an MBE, his ambivalence, the uncertainty of mind, the inbetweenness and the hanging between two cultures of Indian and British culminate in his final resolution for British culture and giving up Indian culture with Indian name, attire, language and the Indian style house of Fuente Grove and adopting the western culture and becoming a mimic man.

In a *Free State* was published in 1971. It won that year's Booker Prize. As the name depicts the story of the novel *In a Free State* is set in one of the recently independent countries of Africa like Uganda or Rwanda which is undergoing a severe political turmoil for power supremacy between the two tribes of Africa, the king and the president. The king is almost a mimic man with all his English thoughts, language and manners. His Englishness makes him consider himself as the next potential ruler for the country, for he thinks only someone like the English colonisers could replace them. He is shown following the western life style, manners and culture all his life just to please the English masters in order to gain their liking, and support, yet the English masters support the more powerful president for the next ruler. The African
like Peter, the Head boy, Timothy, the waiter, Carolus, the bar boy and other black Africans on the road succumbing to racism and their inferiority status blindly mimic the colonisers highlighting the underlying gap between the norm of civility presented by the European Enlightenment and its colonial imitation in distorted form.

The title *In a Free State* denotatively means a country free for self-governing but on connotative level it also means freedom from all forms of slavery be it psychological, social, spiritual, economical, and the like. Ironically Naipaul’s ‘free state’ does not grant any kind of freedom to its resident. All the residents appear to be enslaved by colonial hegemony. As the country has been freed recently so some of the Europeans are still present in the country counting their last days of expatriation in Africa. All the characters are seen to be the slave of some or other sort of colonial psychosis. The European characters are enslaved by Euro-centrism, while the non-European enslaved by intellectual colonialism are seen mimicking the European characters.

The slavish attitude indeed emanates from the writer’s own slavish mentality. He is a slave of European vision. His Eurocentric world view is the cause of his brutal and unsympathetic portrayal of Third World countries of Trinidad, India and Africa. Naipaul being a eurocentric writer does not seem to celebrate the independence of the country and presents the newly freed nation in its most chaotic state with its on-going violence for power between the African president and the king. Naipaul does not nurture any sympathy towards the Africans and presents them in the most passive forms. Even the powerful people like the president and the king have been reduced to the stature of mere mimic men who are trying to outdo each other to prove their worthiness as the next rulers of the country.
All the non-European characters like Peter, Timothy, Carolus, and the other African men and women are just shown to be without any sign of intelligence or self-assertion. They are presented as either docile people with their existence not more than vegetables or barbarous uncivilised people swearing their oaths of hatred. Naipaul uses many derogatory words for the Africans like savage, filthy people emitting foul smell, doing naked dance, eating dirt. In this respect he appears to be a racist like Conrad.

Moreover most of the European characters like Linda, colonel; Martin and at times even Bobby seem to have a staunch Eurocentric perspective. Naipaul through all the European characters tries to reinforce the colonial ideology of civilization mission. Bobby is the only character that stands in contrast to other European characters by having a sympathetic outlook towards the non Europeans. In this respect he reminds us of ‘Cyril Fielding’ the liberal humanist of Foster’s A Passage to India who tries to establish a friendly relation with the Indians but ironically all his endeavours end in futility and the passage which is symbolic of a friendly union between the colonizer and the colonised fails to establish. Similarly Bobby’s humanistic outlook turns out to be a mask that he wears to bait African boys to satisfy his sexual desires. Africa which once appeared life to him and which made him think ‘I see my life hear’ after being beaten by the president’s army men changes his mind and compels him to leave Africa for ever. Like Foster’s A Passage to India, a friendly passage is not established between the colonizer and the colonised and as Rudyard Kipling says “The Ballad of East and West”, ‘Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet’ the novel ends with a note of pessimism.

A Bend in the River has been analysed to find the post colonial themes in it. The novel was published in the year 1979 and ranked 83 on its list of the 100 best
English-language novels of the 20th century by the Modern Library in 1983. It is set in an unnamed African country and is narrated by Salim, a young man Indian Muslim shopkeeper of a small growing city in the country's remote interior. He is like Naipaul an observer and observes the changes occurring within the country with an outsider’s perspective. He lives in Indian community of traders on the east coast of Africa. He too like Naipaul is born into exile and feels separated with his Indian ancestry.

The novel reflects the Eurocentric vision of Naipaul. Through the character of Salim he reinforces the colonial ideologies. He shows the African people as mimic man, without civilization. Their act of nativism instead of uplifting them brings them back to their primitive stage. Through the character of the ‘‘Big Man’’ Naipaul shows that African lack any individual thinking and are only capable of mimicking the Europeans. The Africans are depicted as the dependent personalities. Even the ‘‘Big Man’’ is a dependent person. Instead of taking the country to new heights by following self-reliance, he seems to make them a dependent people.

Salim is shown as an outsider, though he has spent quite a long time in Africa but still Africa remains alien to him. He does not participate in any of the tribal wars and maintains a neutral stance. Naipaul seems to support colonialism and promotes his imperialist views by glorifying slavery.

*Half a Life* is a story set in India, Africa and Europe, to be more specifically, in London, Berlin and Portugal. Willie Chandra, the protagonist of the novel feels alienated in all the three settings and is seen jumping from one place to another to find the coherence of identity. The novel *Half a Life* is symptomatic of the effects of diaspora like alienation, identity crisis, cultural disintegration, hybridity, exile,
displacement, reconstructing imaginary homelands and escapist tendency which emanate from Naipaul’s own diasporic sensibility. Both Willie and Naipaul seem to suffer from perpetual alienation and exilic state.

Willie’s alienation that emanates with his birth in half Brahmin–half Dalit inheritance as well as anglicised middle name , continues to live with him as a part of his personality. The fragmented identity which compels him to leave India and move to London and then to Africa and Berlin persists till the very end of the novel. The diasporic movements instead of providing solace and coherence further aggravate his exilic status and make him suffer from cultural alienation in the host country and he feels rootless and disillusioned everywhere. The acculturation in the host country further displaces him from his native roots. Despite the acculturation and long stay, Willie still remains an outsider both in London and Africa. The alienation experienced sets him unending quest for home and identity and results in his escapist tendency.

All the insecurities of Willie’s character are indeed the reflection of Naipaul’s own rootlessness and fragmented identity. Willie shows a close resemblance with Naipaul’s life. Both Willie and Naipaul being diasporic people though are displaced from their native lands, yet the connection with their native lands does not end and it haunts them. Both Naipaul and Willie are seen to imagine their homelands in their fictional works while Naipaul makes Trinidad and India as the setting of his earlier novels, Willie also composes his stories in Indian background. Moreover both Naipaul and Willie have the desire to reinvent their past identity. While Naipaul reinvents it through his characters and setting in his writings, Willie reinvents it by creating a fictitious identity of the self.
Magic Seeds is a sequel to Naipaul’s 2001 novel Half a Life. The novel begins where the Half a life ends. It reflects a deepening understanding of Naipaul’s alienation from the three cultures Indian, Caribbean and British. He neither discards his Indian heritage, nor adjusts with the Caribbean and finally fails to merge with the metropolis of London. The failure to acknowledge has turned him into something of a permanent deracinates. The vision of the triple exile has found a new dimension in his Magic Seeds. Willie Chandran’s constant state of exile since his birth seems to become a part of his personality. The insecurities and alienation of fragmented identity and homelessness which began with his birth in the novel Half a Life seem to persist even in its sequel Magic Seeds.

While in Half a Life Willie is seen drifting from one place to another from India to London then to Africa and finally to Berlin due to his identity crisis and placelessness, in Magic Seeds the purposelessness of his existence becomes the source of his exilic state and displacement. The problem of identity crisis though to certain extent has been resolved with Willie’s acceptance of his identity of a free man but he still seem to struggle with the purposelessness of his service to the place of his work.

He does not seem to serve the purpose of guerrilla war in India and finally decides to leave by surrendering to the police, similarly in London he does not find solace working as an architect in Peter’s office. The novel ends with Willie still in search of purpose of his existence. ‘Big Man’

Willie’s search for existence is indeed the reflection of Naipaul’s own search for the real purpose of his existence. With Magic Seeds, though Naipaul seem to have
resolved his identity crisis by accepting the identity of a free man, but perhaps he still needs to find an end to the quest for purpose of his existence.

The study ended in myriad other ideas and questions that need analysis and study. The narrative style of Naipaul, with close attention to the stream of consciousness technique, deserves attention. The existential dilemma of his characters, and the immense amount of sadness they reflect is worth a deep study. Is this sadness always the diasporic dilemma or is it just the ultimate fate of man? A psychoanalytical study would be a rich endeavour. His characters are not happy, fun loving and simple, and so the quest for happiness is another area that deserves critical attention. Naipaul has also raised questions through the duality of his characters. They are the products of the forces of history, nation and religion. An important study can be attempted in this area.

Naipaul writes from the perspective of a free citizen, a world citizen. Yet his world is very different from the reality of other contemporary diasporic writers. His narrative is one of a world defined by wealth and power and the complexities that follow.

Naipaul’s oeuvre rests in the fact that his representation of reality questions and tests the limits of time and space. Place in itself is a very important term in postcolonial sentiments. Place or land was the target of the colonisers, and it was the loss of the homeland for the colonised. Place claimed, proclaimed and reclaimed is the main thread that links all postcolonial discourse. In Naipaul’s works his main characters are all exiled persons who keep on trying to find a place and to call it their own. Failure to achieve this end and get only temporary success adds to a distraught state of mind.
Time is an issue as Naipaul’s characters are victims of the history of imperialism. The past left a deep impact on all colonised people and post colonisation the people are left in a paradoxical love-hate state, where they are forced to reclaim their own rich past and emulate the modern culture of the coloniser. Over time, through insidious means and manipulations of the people through education, religion and economics, the imperialists manage to sabotage the sense of self, and pride of the colonised. Exploited by time and history the individual loses his power and will to put up a fight, and yields to the coloniser meekly. This critical mind set is reflected in Naipaul’s works.

Empirical knowledge is truth, and as readers of Naipaul, the lived reality and its representation as evidenced in his works underlines the contemporary global world situation. His works evoke empathy and understanding.

The diaspora is a reality for a large section of the world population today. The global world today is so well linked technically that there is constant exchange of information, business, political opinions, cultural exchanges and so on. In such a world, the word ‘diaspora’ gathers new meanings and connotations.

The postmodern age celebrates hybridity and multiculturalism. New art forms, music, literary texts define the world culture today. These happy manifestations of hybridity claim their sense of joy, and dance and move swiftly across genres and languages, across nations and cultures, across race, class and gender divides. Boundaries and borders dissolve in the world of art and culture. Time and space do not inhibit culture. The rich past is being rediscovered and appreciated and incorporated into the modern world of art. Art is futuristic.
The 21 century colonisers are the countries that are powerful economically and politically on the global front. International policies are often dictated by these countries. Third world countries, struggling through their internal issues of poverty and unemployment, often take politically wrong policy decisions and go deeper in the economic mire. Modern day capitalism is the key player in the world, and money is the chief coloniser. Post colonial countries have not been yet able to get rid of the stigma of the past, and they add to their own problems.

Caught within these issues, and his own mortality, man has to ultimately turn to the everlasting values propagated by liberal humanism. The predicament of man, who is a victim of circumstances beyond his control, is the subject matter of most literary works. Humanism is the most important theme in literature.

Naipaul’s characters are always caught in conflicts which are beyond their control. Colonised characters are victims of the power of historical events. In postcolonial literature the most important historical process was the phenomena of imperialism. Imperialism brought in oppression and exploitation through the abuse of power. The character traits and decisions of Naipaul’s characters are moulded by their lives in a postcolonial world. Readers can empathize as humanity itself is buffeted constantly by the windy forces of its time. Terms such as Mimicry, subaltern, ambivalence and a few others are used to describe the victims of imperialism. Naipaul’s characters and themes reflect the situation of this segment of humanity, and therefore they have a universal appeal.

Freedom and equality are the most important human rights. Imperialism ended freedom. The concepts of the Other, subaltern, marginalized, exile reflect this end of equality. This was followed by long drawn struggles and conflicts and attempts to end
these binaries through adjustments, seen in a study of history and historical situations. Trans-culturation, hybridity, syncreticism and synergy are terms that attempt to define a mingling of different people who are caught together in a place for long periods in history.

Post colonialism talks of the three stages through which the colonised move in an attempt to face the situation. They initially try to adapt to the changed situation; then at the next stage they adopt the ways of the coloniser; and in the final stage, they become adept at it. The empire writing back is a state of final development, and is reflected in postcolonial literature.

The 21st century reflects a state of syncretic synergy, and this is the only way in which civilization can progress. Syncretic Synergy shall be a positive and energetic force in the process of transculturation and lead to international culture. A world culture is a dream that is broken many a times by the nightmares caused by cultural and national conflicts today. Humanity has to learn to love and respect the essence of each individual, respect tradition, accept history and move forward towards building a world culture through transforming itself into world citizens.

This project is important as it makes an attempt to understand the contemporary human being. Art reflects reality and Naipaul’s vision offers many ways in which the world can be made a better place. His vision forces empathy and understanding of man. It is suggested that Naipaul’s works should be recommended as part of the syllabus at the high school level. The minds of impressionable teenagers can be moulded towards empathy and kindness. The future of the world is in the hands of the youth, and Naipaul’s vision can help shape their intellectual and emotional sensibilities. The hate crimes rampant in the world today could be
controlled to some extent if high school children can be shaped to view the world as their home.