Abstract

The present research works is an inquiry into the major themes and literary style of V.S. Naipaul and Salman Rushdie. It is also an inquiry into V.S. Naipaul’s fiction as an experiential recreation of the third world consciousness as it emerges into an anguished awareness of ‘unimportance’ in the modern world. Today Naipaul stands as the master of the novel, a creative craftsman of such surpassing talent that Britain’s leading literary critic, V.S. Pritchett, calls him “the greatest living writer in the English language. He (Naipaul) is viewed as a satirist who provides unnecessarily ridiculous appearance to his characters. His literary style is examined segmentally: the value of the absence or presence of a narrator in his individual works and the uses of irony and satire as distancing devices as well as expression of personal distaste. Besides, there is a tendency to interpret and justify such criticism in terms of Naipaul’s own pronouncements over a number of years without tearing them as part of a body of literary thought and criticism.

As observed by me, in the novels so far studied, Naipaul has followed recognizable patterns of the tradition of the novel, staying close to the novel of sensibility. He has regulated the distance between the protagonist, narrator, author and reader to ensure that the dominant vision of each novel is that of the narrator, leaving the novels open-ended. Though, there are dramatic and literary resolutions in the lives of the protagonist and the narrator, respectively, in each novel—the latter arriving at a centre of stillness, however temporary. Naipaul, by depicting the narrator as the controlling agent of the novel, suggests other stories with different narrators and different endings.

This study attempts to demarcate the literary fields within which Naipaul as a writer and visionary has developed. The values of the Western literary tradition within which he is situation are recoverable. The anguish over the Lack of tradition expressed in literary terms is the expression of a deeper existential loss which is irrecoverable and irreplaceable.
Often the last four decades Naipaul’s oeuvre has grown into some sort of a literary odyssey, quite like what its author has called his ‘journey without maps’. Before, during, and after his many journeys Naipaul has made both overt and covert observations on nations, cultures, races and communities, which have forced world-wide attention. His books of course testify to his powers as a shrewd delineator of people, situations and settings. As result, Naipaul has roused not only much controversy and provocation but bitter hostility and resentment too. All along his writing career till date, he has drawn a formidable array of admirers and detractors. Many of his books are poker-faced, instilled with strong streaks of satire and ironic turns of the screw. Naipaul clearly entrenches a dispiriting sense of life here as an umbrella term for the Caribbean life and culture in general, and the disaffecting Trinidad as a metaphor for it all.

Besides it, the present research work is also an inquiry into the themes of major works of Salman Rushdie as well. For well over a quarter century Salman Rushdie has been an impressive presence on the world literary scene. Starting with *Grimus* (1975) he has published eight novels, the latest being *Fury* (2001). Despite their relatively small number, the impact Rushdie’s novels have had on common readers and critics alike are profound. His novel *Midnight’s children* (1981) gave a new direction and orientation to fiction all over the world. The intellectual, intercultural and inter-textual richness of this novel, and indeed of every other novel of Rushdie’s, teases the readers and challenges them to comprehend and come to grips with them. His books create tension, induce anticipation, and evoke conflicting emotions between (and within) the readers. With each new novel Rushdie initiates a fresh discussion and debate which compels the scholars and readers to re-evaluate every so often.

Rushdie has been a much discussed author, and a great number of critical studies have already appeared. But what happened in 1988-89 was something unprecedented in the history of English literature. With the publication of *The Satanic Verses* in 1988 the discussion of Rushdie went beyond the realms of literary criticism.
This book inaugurated what has come to be known as the “Rushdie Affair”, and highly polemical view began to be expressed.

The present research work contains seven chapters in all. The introductory chapter presents the outline of the different themes and theories of V.S. Naipaul and Salman Rushdie. It also explains their position as post-colonial contemporary writers, their age, birth, parentage, influences and the literary background that shaped them as the writers with a unique expatriate sensibility. In this chapter an attempt has also been made to present the factors responsible for the inculcation of the typical diasporic ambivalence in both the writers. The definitions and interpretations of the Key terms such as colonial, post-colonial, diaspora, imperialism and ambivalence has been discussed in detail in this chapter. The second chapter presents the review of related literature. In the last few decades the concept of ‘themes’ of both the above said writers has emerged as a popular subject for recorders and researchers. It evoked the interest of scholars and researchers to explore this branch of knowledge. In this regard, a number of books, articles and papers have tried to locate the themes of both these writers. This chapter contains 40-50 studies about the work done on Naipaul and Rushdie.

The next chapter entitled ‘Treatment of major Themes’ presents the thematic study of Naipaul’s The Mystic Masseur (1957) and Rushdie’s The Midnight’s children (1981). The first three novels demonstrate Naipaul’s remarkable ability to understand and analyze the idiosyncrasies of the multiethnic, multisocial culture of Trinidad. On the other hand, migration-losing one country for another, diaspora and alienation are the great themes of Salman Rushdie.

It chapter IV of the research works two major novels of their next phases are analyzed to underline the shift in novelists’ treatment of diasporic concern and a unique expatriate sensibility. The novels under study in this chapter are: The Mimic Men (1967) and Shame (1984) by V.S. Naipaul and Salman Rushdie respectively. In the novel The Mimic Men, Ralph Singh, an exiled colonial minister and an autobiographical character
to some extent, undergoes the destiny of being a redundant and retired symbol. In the novel the narrative of Ralph’s alienation, rootlessness and homelessness problematises this project. Rushdie’s *Shame* is about life in Pakistan; but the author states that the country mentioned in the story is not Pakistan. In fact, *Shame* is “a fictionalized picture of the ideas of Rushdie about Pakistan.”

The *Vth* Chapter of the research work deals with the themes and literary style of *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961) by V.S. Naipaul and *The Moor’s Last Singh* (1995) by Salman Rushdie. The novel ‘*A House for Mr. Biswas*’ is considered to be Naipaul’s masterpiece which explains the story of the search for identity of an Indian Brahmin residing in Trinidad. It is a beautiful and excellently written tragic-comedy of Naipaul in which the protagonist gives an expression of rootlessness, alienation and having loss of identity to a great extent.

Chapter *VIth* of the thesis primarily focuses on the homeland diasporic aspects. The theme of diasporic ambivalence is one of the major themes of both the writers. For the diaspora, there is always a natural issue of returning to the original land homeland and this natural desire may well become a perpetual and utopian longing, on the other hand, struck alliance with co-ethnic members in the host-land may lead these people to turn their back on the reality of the country in which now they are living. This chapter also focuses on the fact that how both the expatriate writers nourish India in their imagination. The last chapter of the research work is devoted to summing up the various findings of the present work. It sums up the various themes, like cultural clash, dislocation, alienation, diasporic ambivalence, homelessness etc. it has brought into sharp focus the underlying difference in the themes of both the writers.

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