

Identity crisis in the works of V. S. Naipaul

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ABSTRACT

Post colonial era has seen a lot of migrations where people move to different states or even countries leaving everything behind of their origin. Their identity in this case becomes limited by their name and all the stories of their ancestors are left behind. They try to fit in the new place and while adapting to the new culture and traditions, they miss out on their own age old customs. Over a period of time this adaption to the new place creates the identity crisis in an individual which becomes a matter of concern as it impacts the mental well-being of a person.

The feeling of identity crisis is highly emotional and then starts the curiosity to know more about the actual story of origin and native place in an individual going through this phase. In modern era, countries are more accepting and accommodating to people from different cultures, race and ethnicity. However, it is the individual's fight with his or her mental anxiety to know and understand about their real identity. This paper talks about the same feelings that protagonists in V. S. Naipaul works go through.

Keywords: *Identity Crisis, British Writers, Indian Origin, Colonialism, Culture*

Vidiyadhar Surajprasad (VS) Naipaul (1932-2018) was born in Trinidad. He migrated to Britain in the year 1950 after winning scholarship for Oxford University. Since then he has been emerging as a writer of post colonial era. He was awarded Nobel Prize in 2001 in Literature. He is the author of amazing literary works which includes *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961), *A Bend in the River* (1979), *India: A Million Mutinies Now* (1990), *Beyond Belief: Islamic Excursions among the Converted Peoples* (1998) and *A Wounded Civilization* (1977). He also won Booker Prize in 1971 for his inspiring novel *In a free state*. He was one of the most followed writers of the modern era whose works revolved around colonialism, identity crisis and cultures.

He published more than thirty books over fifty years. He married Patricia Anne Hale in 1955 who became the reader, editor and critic of his writings. His novels had a common theme around identity crisis and colonial experience. All his heroes in the novel used to face some identity crisis in the post colonial era. And the novels beautifully captured that feeling. V. S. Naipaul mentions the sentiment of his protagonist in one of his novel *Half a Life* by saying:

“..Once again, Willie finds himself in a predicament. He feels, I don't know where I am. I don't think I can pick my way back. I don't ever want this view to become familiar. I must not unpack. I must never behave as though I am staying.” [1]

V. Naipaul wants to draw the attention of his readers through these lines and want them to know that no matter how much time a person spends in the new land, the question about his or her identity remains there. New place might be very accommodating and the culture might be accepting people from all the regions but the fight goes on within your mind and that is unavoidable. The heroes of his novel face such identity crisis and keep on looking for their real story of origin and this hunt for their original land and people and culture is a never ending affair. In her research on V. S. Naipaul's work *A House for Mr. Biswas*, Ms. Vaishnavi says that:

“Naipaul has conveyed that the struggles face by the man actually moulds him to reach his dream. Mr. Biswas mostly lives in a series of houses that either does not belong to him or are houses unworthy of the name. Each of the houses he lived is an attempt of solving a problem and each is a wrong answer in a different way. Author projected the character of Mr. Biswas as smart and funny but also often petulant, mean and unsympathetic.” [1]

The protagonists in V. S. Naipaul's novels are always in a journey of reaching their dreams while looking for their origin. They work hard in the foreign soil where they have spent most of their lives. But even after this long journey of life, they always feel some missing link to their identity and want to find that missing link. In his work V. S. Naipaul has captured that hunt and that restlessness of his heroes who have lost their origin land and are flourishing in a foreign land from the begging of their life.

V. S. Naipaul was the live observer of the change of colonial era in Britain and has talked about his observation in detail through his fictional characters. His characters are a live manifestation of his creative mind depicting his experience in the post colonial world. In his research Dr. Ashok Chaskar quoted that:

"V.S. Naipaul has used fiction not only as a way of chronicling life but also as an instrument of analysis and clarification of the reality... some of Naipaul's recurring themes of the collusion of cultures and ambiguities in human adjustment: the colonial situation which reduces a sense of alienation; and the motives within the individual which create the structure of human relationships unique to the colonial or postcolonial society". [2]

His art of bringing the happenings of society live with his characters in his novel was well appreciated all over the world. His literary works became historical in the late twentieth century which won him international awards for this great contribution to the society through his literature works. His effort of making his readers aware about the identity crisis and its impact on people's mind is phenomenal and was relatable to many people facing that during that era. His books made people feel comfortable about the fact that they are not alone and this is a common feeling for people migrated to a new land.

His prominent work and strong characters of his novel brought a revolution in the literature world. His work and contribution was studied widely by the researchers and writers from different parts of the world. In his analysis writer Bijendar Singh said that.

"...V. S. Naipaul's serendipity and his writing skills which make him the prominent author across the world. It is worthwhile to reconsider his stance on postcolonial identity while reading his texts. His works, more or less, are nothing but a struggle for self, a fight for right and a voice against suppression and exploitation. He has stashed his legacy inside him and poured it in the form of brilliant works where house has more significance than only a place". [3]

With his writings he described that your house is not just a place for stay, it rather defines your identity and origin. And for the migrants who leave behind their ancestral home and move to a new land to build their life again from the scratch, the identity needs to be built again.

V. S. Naipaul explains that his work is not just a fiction; it is an expression of his observations in the society. All his characters are born from the real stories that he had experienced in his life. In his work, *The Mimic Men*, Mr. Naipaul says that:

"I paid Mr. Shylock three guineas a week for a tall, multi-mirrored, book shape room with a coffin-like wardrobe . . . I thought Mr. Shylock looked distinguished like a lawyer or business person or politicians. He had the habit of strolling the bot of his ear inclining his head to listen. I thought the gesture was attractive; I copy it." [4]

His characters were always in a hunt for establishing their identity. While looking for that, they try different things and see which is relatable for their personality and try to adopt the most of them. The effort for defining their identity sometimes involved silly decisions which they preferred to change later.

V. S. Naipaul through his works depict a very genuine problem of identity crisis common amongst the migrants in the post colonial era and his work captures the details of that problem through beautifully carved stories. In the starting he was nervous in bringing up that problem but later he managed to use comic in his work to explain the important topic of discussion of that era. Researchers commented on Naipaul's work and said that:

"... Naipaul is a creative artist who picks up issues relating to the Third World. His works throw light on the Post-colonial and post- imperial realities that have shaped the contemporary societies and

provides important insights relating to them. Naipaul's novels lead to a better understanding of the problems that are faced by the post- imperial generations." [5]

His contribution to express the problems of post colonial era was considered to be a sincere and honest effort to highlight the existing challenges, make people aware about it and a collaborated effort to solve it.

V. S. Naipaul's work was scrutinised by the various committees and he was appreciated for keeping the history alive through his literary works. Researcher Prama Saha in her analysis on Naipaul's work says that:

"Naipaul in his novel, very beautifully presents how a person runs for a house. He beautifully presents the importance of house in one's life. House is not only a matter of shelter in life but a prominent need of one's life. It becomes an emblem of personal identity within the world of alienation. And this very identity is a matter of existence for the displaced people. "[6]

The writer has always attempted to express the importance of a house in one's life. He has highlighted the point that a house is not just a shelter but a place of abode for one's identity and origin. He expresses the closeness of his characters to their house and calls it the personal identity creator in a life. Mr. V. S. Naipaul in his book *The Mimic Men* said that:

"...in fact, I already knew a little. Soon I was to know more. His distinction was vague but acknowledged by all. The teachers handled him with care. Uniformed servants, one male, and one female, brought his lunch to school in a basket and spread it on a white tablecloth on his desk." [8]

He explains that a person's childhood memories shape his or her personality and act as a major contributor to the identity. He travelled all over the world to gain more depth in his characters and writings and his travel writings including *India: A Million Mutinies Now* became very popular in 1990s.

V. S Naipaul's experience over decades and his sharp observations of the changing society is hard to forget even after his demise. His creative style of expressing the identity crisis in his novels is an asset to the literature and history. His characters will always remain live in the minds of his readers and so would his work. In his book *A Bend in the River*, he states that:

"The world is what it is; men who are nothing, who allow themselves to become nothing, have no place in it ". [9]

He explains that the confidence and self love would only allow you to solve the problem of identity crisis. He states that to make people accept you as who you are, the effort has to start from you. Then only you would be able to make others believe in your identity.

He was awarded the title of a modern prophet because of his clear and honest writing style with creativity about the modern era problems. He changed the way fictions were written during those times and brought a wonderful mix of fiction and reality through his writings. In his book *A way in the world*, writer V. S. Naipaul says that:

"..As year by year the labourer tills, his wonted glebe or lops the glades, and year by year our memory fades, from all the circles of the hills." [9]

V. S. Naipaul would always remain in the favourite list for researchers and analysts who would study the work of this magnificent writer. He has left a mark in the world of literature and the modern society which will always be remembered.

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