

## A Study of Post-Colonial Identity in Select Works of V.S. Naipaul

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### Abstract

**In the realm of postcolonial discourses the name of V. S. Naipaul is a dazzling star like other great postcolonial critics. This critical paper is an attempt at examining systematically the study of post-colonial entity in V. S. Naipaul's famous novels A House for Mr. Biswas, A Bend in the River and An Enigma of Arrival. It also endeavors critically to explore how the three novels are fraught with the issues of identity crisis as the major characters of these works crave for finding a niche for them in the world to asseverate their existences and entities. The minds of these characters oscillate between two incompatible cultures and ethnicities prevailing in that time. Researchers and critics endeavor to examine the variegated threads of identity to reknit the story more substantial and to make radical its worldwide demands. The term identity and the related connotative significance are presented in the discussion as well as the several literary implications of identity having a little alteration in its meaning. Many postcolonial diaspora writers and their relevant literary creations have been projected here to carry through advanced ideas, discourses on the theme of post-colonial identity, its trauma and aftermath. V. S. Naipaul's achieved vacuum of women writers by contesting their ideas and their inclination in stirring up the passions of audience consolidated his recognition in the literary world, has been evaluated and examined. It has been analyzed how in these novels, the major characters attempt in claiming their position in the environment that is replete with obstacles and difficulties in actual life and as a result, the ambience of the three works pose a kind of cultural conflict to render the life's voyage further convoluted and difficult to survive in hostile world .**

**Key words: postcolonial, diaspora, identity, culture, discourse.**

"A recurrent motif in the identity quest of Naipaul's characters is flight". (Gerhard Stilz, 2007 p.49). With the research article, an honest attempt has been made at examining the sphere of literary analysis on diaspora writer V. S. Naipaul. The focus has been projected on the theme of identity in an embracing way in his seminal novels: A House for Mr. Biswas(1961), A Bend in the Rive(1979) and An Enigma of Arrival (1987). The issue of identity could be systematized in diverse levels as it is a comprehensive area, however, it is necessary to dodge it being loose-fitting. It can appear in the shape of caste related, religious, personal, national, sociological, genealogical, ethnic, native, international ,inter-personal identity. Although it is the prime subject, the purview of this area is endless. That is the matter why the research is attempted to render the theme of identity as multifaceted, and in this scope each kind of identity will be under analysis and not only personal, interpersonal as well as national identity. Tony Morrison, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Bill Ashcroft, Edward Said, Graham Holderness, C.T Mohanty, Martin Heidegger, Albert Camus, Jean Paul Sartre , Derrida and so on are the greatest thinkers related with the theme. These critics are the proponents of identity, without mentioning them if we discuss on identity, the relevant theme will go to vain. If one concentrate on the works of Shyam Selvadurai, Vikram Seth, Salman Rushdie, Franz Fanon, Gayatri Spivak, Mariama Ba, Jhumpa Lahiri, Audre Lorde, Jean Rhys, Nawal El Saadawi, Naguib Mahfouz, Ngugi Thiong'o, Dorris Lessing, Chimamanda Adiche, Meena Alexander, R K Narayan, Raja Rao, Alice Walker, Urbashi Butalia, Mohan Rakesh, Sandra Gilbert, Bhabani Bhattacharjee and many more names strike straightly into the mind of readers. The works such as Arrow of God, Heart of Darkness, Half of a Yellow Sun, Funny Boy, Wide Sargasso Sea, The Poisonwood Bible, Funny Boy, The Inheritance of Loss, The earth of Mankind, Disgrace, A Passage to India, Devil on the Cross, Voices in the City; Nervous Conditions, The Crucible, The Color Purple, Waiting for the Barbarians, Beloved, Untouchable, No Longer at Ease, Alia's Grace, Persepolis, The Stranger, The Grain of Wheat, Americannah, The English Teacher, The Guide, Kanthapura, The Ministry of Utmost Happiness, The Tempest, So Long a Letter,

Wizard of the Crow, A Fine Balance, Lotusland; Interpreter of Maladies, Brick Lane, A Small Place, The Bridge of Beyond etc., directly or indirectly, all are fraught with the theme of identity to some extent. The theme of identity would be asymmetrical if one does not go through the pages of these relevant literary creations. Only with detailed analysis of these books including the cultural and other thematic concerns, we will be able to imbibe the authentic entity of identity. Keeping all these books and their writers in importance, the research paper tries at best to find new avenues and contexts to give an expansive spectrum of further research on V. S. Naipaul and his works. In the year 1950, Naipaul earned his eminence as a prolific novelist on the skill of his first written works with *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961). Around 1960 and 1970 his narratives triggered controversies for his writings and opinions on post-colonial issues in the Caribbean islands, Trinidad and Tobago, Africa and Indian subcontinent. He was awarded critical appreciation with his famous novel, *A House for Mr. Biswas*, it depicts an attempt of an immigrant to asseverate his identity and self-independence. Naipaul's other narratives too elucidate similar context but, to some extent, in austere and critical intonation. The archetypal characteristics of fragmentation and isolation of postcolonial contexts have been explained in his several works. Following an agitated disintegration, he attempted to end his life; however, fortunately, he was saved. While studying at Oxford University he came across Patricia Hale. Naipaul married her in the year 1995. Patricia Hale died the same year due to cancer. Thereafter he tied marital knot with Nadira Khannum Alvi, a divorcee news reporter from Pakistan. He was awarded John Llewellyn Rhys Prize in 1958. Naipaul's novels, his plethora of pleasant short fictions were awarded Somerset Maugham Prize. In 1963 he received the Hawthorn Prize. In 1968 he won the W. H. Smith Literary Award. He received the Booker Prize for outstanding novel. *A House for Mr. Biswas* is a novel of quest for existence and piece of land by the protagonist Mr. Biswas. The setting of *A Bend in the River* is Africa. *The Enigma of Arrival* is an intimate story of Naipul's staying in Britain. One of his novels is a previously speculative account which blends fictional and non-fictional elements in a historic depiction of Caribbean world. *Half a Life* experiments the fabulous adventurous account of Willie Chandran from India in England after war. Naipaul's non-fictional books encompass many books on Indian themes. Naipaul had been also recognized with the British Cohen Literature Prize from tin 1993. He was awarded prestigious doctorate degree from Cambridge University, UK and Colombia University, US; and prestigious awards from Cambridge, London and Oxford University. His writings are well recognized for a disputable book about India: *A Million Mutinies Now* (1990). He has been, no doubt, really a celebrated author in the realm of the post-colonial Indian Diaspora history. Although the quest for identity is old question, and many researches have been executed on this subject, nevertheless, a small number of much significant threads of identity are still untold in his literature. Before we start talking over it elaborately, it is important to discuss what truly identity as a term implies. On the basis of Dictionary of Miriam Webster, identity implies 'similarity of necessary or specific person in various situations', 'distinct characteristics or identity of an individual', 'the provision of being similar with something depicted or described'. On the basis of Free Online Dictionary, 'identity is the manifest entity of a man considered as an enduring personality'. The incipience of the subject identity is Middle French term 'Identitee', from Late Latin 'Identiate'. 'Identitaa's may be from Latin 'Identideem', repeatedly contradiction of 'idem et idem' in a literal way 'same as same'. The earliest imagined application of identity is assumed in late sixteenth century. Karl Marx was of the opinion that identity was sense of self; it was a kind of a social and economic location. Collected from another material that identity was not the knowledge of individual that decides his/her entity but on the hand it was their social existence that fixes his/her identity. Sigmund Freud opined that identity was not fixed or logical but an ongoing conflicted war between id and ego, conscious and subconscious mind. The moral entity should be displayed through genealogy to be a historic structure. To him the self was a Dionysian will to power. A Fijian Indian literary author and ex-diplomat, Dr. S P Nandan, says about identity in his seminal poem *The Loneliness of Island*. He has intricately related modernism, loss of identity and disillusionment. Famous philosopher John Locke included his part *Of Identity and Diversity* that imparts his idea of identity, later he added personal identity to the subsequent version. Locke's explanation of personal identity is planted in a normal definition of identity. In his normal definition of identity he differentiated among the characteristics of atoms, mass of atoms and living objects. The self-concept of Descartes projected conception of modernity and self-identity. On the other hand self-concept of Jean Paul Sartre focuses the traits of postmodern self, analyzing the likeness and differences between the duo, Descartes and Jean Paul Sartre. Sartre explores how selfhood in the post-modern setting could be perceived unexpectedly. In an enterprise to shatter the binary perceived frameworks that represent reciprocities

between unlike ethnicities in his *The Location of Culture* (1994) Homi K Bhabha illustrated the concept 'third space' as a realm where innumerable personalities could be mediated. Naipaul is an exquisite figure in the history of English literature. He wrote several books which, to a great extent, are concerned with Indian theme and background. *A House for Mr. Biswas*, *India: A Wounded Civilization*, *A Bend in the River*, *The Enigma of Arrival*, *The Mimic Men*, *In a Free State* these books are all connected with, more or less, with several types of identity. V.S Naipaul is a quite scrupulous artist, well sensitive about the necessity of past in the literary realm. His standpoint is solely on the variegated kinds of identity issue. He authentically carries out the network of identity throughout various characters in various conditions. Naipaul's way of describing Indians is uniformly needful. One more indispensable facet of his constructive scheme of his works is particularly, the congruence by divergence of characters. He is considered, without any doubt, a herald of Indian culture and identity. Further he is an important proponent of art of fiction where he assembles meticulously mysticism, realism, existence of many cultures, Hinduism, modern elements, traditional elements and so on to impart an entire expression to his passions that cherish for identity and independence. *A House for Mr. Biswas* is a nice novel about Mr. Mohun Biswas. He undergoes different types of injustices and mishaps. According to Champa Rao Mohan *A House for Mr. Biswas* was an excellent work which dealt with subject of alienation, disappointment and castigation into a colonized world which turns austere and indifferent towards the longing of the main character Mr. Biswas (C R Mohan, 2004; 01). The mentioned home in the story could be viewed as the main emblem of independence from injustice and domination and a symbol of wish for self-satisfaction or self-realization. Mohun, the protagonist, has been married not only with Shama alone but with Shama's entire family as well as with Shama's house; in the house the specific names of daughters' husbands or son-in-laws are disregarded and they are imagined to be like Tulsis. Mohun, the central character in the story, and the subsequent issues are intricately connected with his activities. He is a, kind of, miserable individual and experiences his journey of life since his unpropitious birth with a surplus finger, a kind of physical deformity. He undergoes innumerable humiliations. His formal studies are scarce, that hardly might be called completed. The death of his father, the breaking down of the family, the destitution of his mother and his sorrowful poverty-ridden childhood experience depict true ghastly story of oppression, agony or dejection. When Mohun comes across and harbored feelings for her out of love with Shama, he is acclimatized to the grumbling homestead leaving their existences in the gloomy underbrush of so-called joint household. However, Mr. Biswas the main unconvincing dissident revokes this acclimatization. His professional career is, likewise, replete with turmoil and misfortune. Once in the narrative, while talking with Govind, the son-in-law, he is suggested by him (Govind) to take a job in Tulsis Estate, but strikingly Mohun straightforwardly revolts, 'Give up sign painting? And my independence? No boy. My Motto is: paddle your own canoe...So you say. But these people are bloodsuckers, man. Rather than work for them, I would catch crab or sell coconut' (HFMB108). It is the reason Mohun Biswas senses extremely isolated from the society and surroundings into which he lives. He holds various professions with a driver, sub overseer, and a clerk in government office and in addition to a newspaper reporter. The author recollects his personal experiences with his mother's shared household and after that begins to write the book. Critic Champa Rao Mohan argues, "Many incidents and events in *A House for Mr. Biswas* have an exact parallel in Naipaul's own life. The character of Mr. Biswas is modeled on Naipaul's father" (Champa Rao Mohan, 2004;14). "In *A House for Mr. Biswas*, the story is portrayed through a series of homes which symbolize Mr. Biswas' personal identity. Mr. Biswas was trapped in the clutches of Tulsidom. He has dream of his own house. The house of his dream is highly symbolic. It is an archetypal symbol, which connotes stability and permanence, something solid in life" (2004, p.05). He intermittently faces hindrances, new challenges and even fiascos in his constant attempts. From the very beginning, his life has been complicated and full of agony. When his father drowns and dies suddenly, Mohun Biswas and his members of family had to recourse to their well-off relations. According to Cudjoe Selwyn Reginald, famous Trinidadian scholar and critic, "Mr. Biswas entered the world of Tulsis unaware that his romantic ego would be crushed by a hierarchical order that did not allow for the expression of the individuality" (Cudjoe 1988; 54). This too underlines the issue of deprivation, identity crisis including traumatic life. It ought to be deemed into consideration the setting and milieu into which the plot occurs is quite a serious matter of caste and awareness of class. Mohun Biswas has never earned any chance to establish a consciousness of self. He himself discovers his soul into conditions that render him perceive devoid of power. He is, at all times, in conditions where he has people surround him and instruct him what to do. He never possesses any personal or inner strength or choice. He realizes that

with lump sum of cash and properties a man seems to have more respect and dignity in society. Truth to tell, a home is an emblem that conveys one's capability to effectuate a self-identification and achieve individual strength to rein hold of his familial life. Though Mohun Biswas is a common person having no extraordinary powers, the novelist has succeeded in gifting him a hero like attribution. Considering from different point of views he is a paradigmatic image in the fact that he incarnates a global motif of the quest for self-identity and value in hazardous life in line with the existential thinkers. He struggles to retain his freedom and feels self-assured that life would ultimately relent to him with its bunch of spices, fragrance adventures, and passion. The endeavor in achieving the proprietorship of the home, projected to a lesser extent in the story becomes mania and purpose of his life. The factor of precariousness and deficit of assurance help out take Mrohun Biswas in a kind and compassionate man along with a type of universal figure whose conflict of identity and alienation become a kind of eternal tale. While in his 46 years, he has always fought to find and interpret his consciousness of self but all efforts went in vain. The novel arouses elegantly an everyman's search of self-sufficiency against the context of post-colonial Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Biswas is not any ridiculous stock character. In spite of being deceived by economic, societal and cultural agents. He tries his level best to get rid of the agonies of ill-fated life. He interprets his views to his son at the time of the collapsing of Green Vale while Anand inquires of him in a mesmerized manner, "Who are you?" Mr. Biswas replied, "I am just somebody. Nobody at all. I am just a man you know" (HFMB 291). Gerhard Stilz contends that, "Singh desires, like Biswas, a house that he cannot obtain, since he only has a birthright to the ground of his father but not to that of his mother...Singh spends a lot of time with his mother's family but, in scenes like this, his cousin lets him know that he will never be accepted by this part of family" (Gerhard Stilz 49). Mohun, the main character, made several efforts to make a house of his own which will provide peace, and pacification, serenity to the inhabitant. The house also signifies the import of power, dignity, respect and wealth. It is to a great extent a symbol of achievement. It also represents the dreams, lovable aspirations and it is connected with his futural perspectives that will maintain his spirit until his death. The theme of Hinduism is the primary recurrent theme of the book *A House for Mr. Biswas*. Among the several main castes Brahminism or class of priest is taken into account the supreme class and this is the religion to which Mohun belonged to. Various kinds of Hindu people are described in the narrative where Mohun with his family consume non-veg food during the death of his father, "The food was unsalted and as soon as he began to chew Mr. Biswas felt he was eating raw flesh and the nauseous saliva filled his mouth again" (HFMB 33). At another aspect, Brahmins who are Hindu are regarded complete vegetarian and eat meat/fish/egg are violating the codes or traditions of Hindu religion. Having Brahmin identity is an instance of eminent prestige. The novelist has shown in the narrative where Mohun goes to a boy to the house of Tara and he is esteemed highly as a Brahmin man and is indulged. He is clad in a neat white dhoti, he is pampered with an offer of money and new dress is gifted to him. According to Cudjoe, "*A House for Mr. Biswas* must also be seen as a product of Naipaul's Hindu sensibility. The Hindu epic the Ramayana adds a philosophical dimension to the text." (Cudjoe 51). The altar of gods, bowls and ingredients of worshipping, for example, vessels and lights signify religious rituals that conducted at house. Familial worship and prayer make use of fire for ablutions, water is used for ablution, offerings of food or Prasad, incense, flowers and many ingredients too are used for ablutions. The worship is performed at a definite time which is, during sunrise, midday or at evening. Customary Hindu ethnic wears sacred threads, castes or communities, white marks on brow and on certain occasions marks on hands, arms or other part of the body; collectively these convey about Hindu religion. Many religious ceremonies, also, are observed in occasions such as: during birth, initiation, marriage and at the time of death. The village is encompassed with bad auspices. Even the birth of Mohun Biswas, the ominous way, during midnight, having extra fingers, prophecy of his becoming libertine and worthless for his hugely gaped tooth- all these specify various conventional and firm astronomic age-old belief of Hindu people who are not only conscious about caste and religion for being Hindu but also vigilant of future of their next generations. It is absorbing to observe that the novelist has established his firm opinion about novel. His techniques and styles are slightly unusual from that of Joseph Conrad. Conrad tried merely to elaborate, in theorizing and moralizing on an incident instead of allowing an event to explain the occurrences. He had been too much engrossed with facts, so there is scarce opportunity for critics or readers get access to the main action of the narrative.

In his copacetic book *A Bend in the River* Naipaul depicts the account of an Indian man Salim, a Muslim storekeeper. The plot takes place in Zaire, Africa, at present in Congo in the reign of Mebuto

Seko during the later part of 1960 and 1970. The narrative discusses interesting issues such as racial and cultural freedom of Africa and Europe, the cultural hegemony and domination of ideology on a person's identity and the complications of African nationhood after emancipation from colonial Belgian reign, "The world is what it is; men who are nothing who allow themselves to become nothing, have no place in it" (BR, p.01). The book wrestles with significant post-colonial topics in a dauntless way for that the novelist has been equally appreciated and harshly censured. The narrative begins in the colonized provinces and the time of Africa where Naipaul has insistently perused his way culturally and economically. Tribal war intimidates and attempts to emancipate Africa from every side. Africa has been fragmented and reknitted in an identical way to the contender. Readers can observe Africa losing its worth of treasures and the terror of war wraps the entire province, the setting of the novel. Salim who lives on the eastern coast of African continent, goes out to build a life at a tiny countryside at a curve in a river in remote regions of African continent. He arrived here after the age old slave trail, just when the region had achieved freedom in the year 1963. The protagonist addresses Africa his own house in the following words, "Africa was my home, had been the home of my family for centuries" (BR 12). The city, Salim lived, was in tottering condition with dilapidated economical situation and barely sufficient foodstuff and corps for masses. Still Salim lived there and developed a trade. Once day at an event, Indar tells him, "We're washed up here, you know. To be in Africa you have to be strong. We are not strong" (BR 12). Metty as a family servant joined his family and makes friendship with a couple, Shobha, her husband Mahesh. Salim tries to guide a Bush lively son of a woman, Ferdinand. Although Salim was born in Africa he perceives the trauma of a stranger or alienated into a caste-ridden society, to some extent, because of his Arabic background that embodies an extensive part of African continent. Salim is dispassionate about the pains of serfdom or slavery. In home Salim keeps slaves but provides them the opportunity to be free. Still the obedient slaves remain with him. He does not participate in any slave revolt. It is not his hatred for African people that he maintains slaves but his affection for what he realizes that the slaves are his own men and provides them opportunities to proceed and develop in life. Ultimately, slavery custom is uplifted and a black person, half soldier, half tribal later has been elected the president. Valuation of property rises high and Salim discovers himself earning the prosperity which he craved for heavily. When the years passed on the newly elected president of the country invested money into establishing universities and places where the wealthy white men can stay. To the background of the story there are the armies and the horrors of the war. Salim involves in a short amorous but fierce relationship with a married white woman, later he is seized by local cops for involvement in smuggling of ivory. Ferdinand, in final section of the plot, tells Salim while he enquires of his mom, "She's given up the business. And you must do that too. You must go. You must go right away. There is nothing here for you. They've taken you into jail now" (BR 319). At the end, it might be said that Salim was a stranger in all sections that he inhabited. Being spectator, Salim is in a place to speculate and investigate the issues of identity far better than other characters. This skill haplessly dooms him more towards margin of society.

The Enigma of Arrival is a story about a person, a would be author who belongs to Trinidad, his name is Jack, and goes to stay, as Naipaul also went in his life, in a lonely place at Wiltshire. This is a personal account and the titular portion carries the terms 'a novel'. The story presents a realistic picture of psychological perspective of a man who had highly dignified the importance of the psyche above all other aspects. The theme is the consciousness of the narrator, his reconstruction after the decision of migrating to other place. The interesting tale of Jack, the main character, and his nice garden are described beautifully. The episode of Brenda, the country wife, hankered after excessively from her loveliness and Les, her husband, who killed her (his wife) after her return, is depicted in a queer way. In The Enigma of Arrival the writer illustrates the time when he would stay in a hut in the Wiltshire valley, "I felt the coming together of England and India as a violation" (AD 201). The author recounts Stephen Tennant, the sunset in Stonehenge. He observes the alterations in the territory and the change in season with a guiltless eye, as if an infant has been watching these phenomena never seen before. His existence in this ill-fated territory is piece of bigger historic action that has taken him from Trinidad to the interior nook of Wiltshire. Therefore, here the writer's own persona is projected while he stayed being tenant at Wiltshire. Naipaul is a celebrated figure who possessed innumerable fictional and non-fictional books to his reputation that made him star in no time. In present time too V.S Naipaul's influence is at action and like India: A Million Mutinies Now (1990) appeared a center of debate in literary world. Once in a literary interview he was questioned whether he thought of any living author of his equal, he answered that, "I don't think so". Naipaul realized that female authors were rather of different perspective. Further he replied that he was much creative than any woman

author who ever existed. Women authors, according to Naipaul, are crippled by emotions and sentiments to a parochial perspective of the world. Even famous Victorian female writer Jane Austen is not flatly appreciated, of Austen he opined that she could not probably shared her emotional aspirations of the world. Naipaul opined moreover that he would peruse a page or three, and he would smoothly assert if the work belonged to a male or female author. That was the reason Naipaul becomes center of attraction in the literary discourses across the world nowadays also as he was in 2001 when he was awarded the coveted Nobel Prize. The furies of women writers have made him noticeable and center of controversy over and over. In short, to work and study on such an eminent writer is truly a copacetic and marvelous experience as he is, in any event, distinct from other literary figures, if not the best.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, it is not an exaggeration that it is V. S. Naipaul's fortune, excellent presentation, weaving of plot, portrayal of colorful characters, engaging narrative technique and his fantastic lucid stance that make him the distinguished novelist throughout India and the world. It is indispensable to reevaluate Naipaul's attitude towards postcolonial identity while examining his novels. His texts, approximately, are nothing but a quest for autonomy and self; struggle to get out of claustrophobia, a war for identity, for existence and an articulation against repression, injustice and victimization. V S Naipaul has hived up his heritage inside him and carved in shape of splendid novels where home/dwelling place possesses more signification than merely place for living as Gerhard Stilz argues that, "A house is a place in space but also in society" (Territorial Terrors 47).

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