

International Journal of Scientific Research and Reviews

Manifestation of Despotism in the Colonial and Post-Colonial Era with Reference to the Works of V. S. Naipaul

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ABSTRACT

Oppression, despotism and suppression is a phenomenon that has been the consistent feature of human civilization and has always breathed, in some form or the other, from the very establishment of human civilization and therefore has been the lived reality of a plenty of human populace. Rapacity and desire for power gives rise to a tendency to frame rules that interest the framers of these rules. A research of the social norms common today, points to the progression of a world order where there is prejudice leading to oppression towards a certain sections of the human population. This repression can arise from dissimilarity in caste, religion, region or even gender. The order of the society is drafted by the powerful social groups to favor their own. Some of these rules slowly take the form of norms, social conventions, customs, traditions and practices. These, then, become so entrenched in the system, that the very idea of questioning them is considered a blasphemous. This has led to the formation of a society where oppression of certain sections of society is so deep rooted in the minds of the members of the social group, that neither the oppressor nor the oppressed notice any wrong doing on anyone's part. An ordinary demonstration of this trend can be witnessed in the emergence and progression of the caste system in India; refutation of rights of education, and decision making to the members of the female gender is prevalent in almost all the parts of the world.

KEYWORDS: Post-colonial theory; oppression; colonialisme; conflict; power; Imperialism

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INTRODUCTION: COLONIALISM AND POST-COLONIALISM

The history of colonialism has been violent, savage and bloody. Since the discovery of the Caribbean islands in 15th century, the natives were abused physically, mentally and economically by the ferocious Spanish, French and British imperial powers. The British imperialists brought poor labourers from India, China and other Asian countries for the farm-work in the sugar- cane estates. It has resulted in homelessness, rootlessness, hybridity and loss of socio-cultural ethics. The political powers obligated labours with imperial education but with a lack of political rights. The word 'Imperialism' originated from the Latin word 'Imperium' meaning rule, power, domination and empire. Imperialism annihilated 'the other', 'the oppressed', economically, physically and above all psychologically. Imperialism is a term that is often used in coexistence with colonialism as a synonym. The colonized during the colonization and de-colonization had been required to live with that fractured and shattered awareness. The narrative of exile, migration, mimicry, hybridity, the quandary and laceration of the divided figures originally begin from the post- colonial studies. The post-colonial theories and perspective speaks about ambivalence, hybridity, mimicry, socio-ethnic loss and socio-political unreality.

The term post-colonialism is enormous in its magnitude and is related to cultural studies, political and ethnic nationalism and various other disciplines of social sciences. Hence it is defined by different literary critics in various different ways. The spelling of the term post-colonialism or post colonialism has also become a topic of debate among the critics; they explore the importance of "post" and whether there should be a hyphen (-) after "post" or not. In this context, Bill Ashcroft writes in *The Empire Writes Back*, "the hyphen in the postcolonial is a particular form of 'space clearing' gesture, a political notation which in a very great deal, says about the materiality of political oppression" (198). They emphasize that the hyphen, in the term post-colonialism, is an alternative force for rehabilitation and rejuvenation of post-colonial societies. A Marxist, post-colonial critic, Aijaz Ahmad, examines power with the age old dissension between hierarchy and equality. With issues like class struggle and identity, he studies postmodernism and post colonialism. Commenting on the term 'post' in one of his lectures, "*Postcolonial Theory and the 'Post-' Condition*", he writes: "prefix 'post' in this term not only consumes the generalized 'post-' condition but contains within it a sense of that ending, even if that sense of endings produces in most of them not a sense of loss but a feeling of euphoria" (364). Bill Ashcroft and Gareth Griffiths defined the term postcolonial as:

“Postcolonial’ had a clearly chronological meaning in designation of the post -Independence period. However, from the late 1970, the term has been used by literary critics to discuss the various cultural effects of colonization. The term has subsequently been widely used to signify the political linguistic and cultural experiences of societies that were former European colonies.’”

OPPRESSION IT’S ESTABLISHMENT, UNDERSTANDING AND WORKING

Oppression is a term that does not lend itself to an all inclusive and comprehensive explanation. Its meaning differs from person to person depending on their theories, ideologies, beliefs, social and economic milieu. It has been explained in various different ways by many psychologists and sociologists and the focus and scope of the term alters accordingly. When we study these explanations, we note that some of them have some similar outlook, but still they differ from each other in numerous ways. Edward Said in his book *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) analysis the process that was used to control the desired culture in the colonies. The ideological belief of white supremacy and the lowly position of the native culture was accepted, and as a result, not only the colonizer, but also the colonized started trusting the innate supremacy of the white European culture. This method was both successful, as well as invisible with the result that it was never questioned and its damaging effects remained concealed to both the oppressor and the oppressed. The task of oppression had become embodied in the colonial context. Naipaul in his novels has described the dangerous effects of this form of manifested subordination that prevents the former colonial to escape from subtler psychological colonization. It is a major cause for the disruption and slow progress being seen in the post-colonial Africa and Asia that is the backdrop in many of Naipaul’s novels.

While trying to understand and examine types and causes of oppression and despotism we need to understand that there is no single reason or cause that can be identified as the chief reason for oppression. Marilyn Frye in her book *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory* (1983) comes up with the famous birdcage theory of oppression. Although this theory essentially deals with gender oppression, it is equally relevant to the other forms of oppression as well. She say or rather explain show, oppression cannot be caused by a single identifiable reason. There are miscellaneous factors that lead to oppression. For Frantz Fanon, race is the primary cause of oppression. For Marxists, it is the exploitative capitalist system that is the foremost cause of oppression. John Stuart Mill examines that the discriminatory legal and social laws are to be the principal cause of oppression. For him, refutation of legal rights and a predisposed legal system is the defining cause of oppression. In his celebrated essay *The Subjection of Women* (1869), explains how oppression is systematically embodied into the social tissue.

Oppression as we understand is a comprehensive and complex thing and it is in no way possible to incorporate all schools of thought. Consequently, an effort has been made to include the broad brackets that emerge on the examination of the different theories of oppression. The focus is to connect these with the colonial, post-colonial, patriarchal, economically exploitative and a casteist world that Naipaul portrays in his novel.

OUTLOOK OF V. S. NAIPAUL THROUGH HIS BODY OF WORKS

Sir Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul writer of Indian descent more specifically known as a Caribbean writer. His novels are set in emerging countries and are known for their fatalistic and cynical tone, often named as "suppressed histories." He was awarded Nobel Prize for literature in 2001. He is one of the leading English writers of third world. Naipaul in his works does not consciously explicate oppression or delve into its dynamics. He is against the process of oversimplification or glorification of the oppressed and poor. Naipaul reckons the macro-micro, as well as overt and covert outlook of the power dynamics at play in the personal space and public space, in the emergence and continuation of oppressive practices in the community.

We in his works can divide the oppressed into two categories based on their understanding of their situation. Some people are conscious of their oppression while others have no understanding of the organized and well-directed dynamics behind the oppression. The amount of awareness also varies. It can be restricted to just an identification of their oppression with no comprehension of the reasons behind it. Internalized oppression appears to be a leading tool, as well as cause for the continuation of oppression. Further we also realise that Culture, tradition, and religion play a massive role in extending manifested oppression by becoming agents that justify the differential status of various social groups. Oppression once manifested gets incorporated in the minds and psyche of an oppressed. Gender, race, and caste based oppression, emerge as the leading examples where the victims have been co-opted in the process of their own oppression.

The present study briefly examines the process of oppression and resistance in the following works of Naipaul, *A House for Mr Biswas* (1961), *The Mimic Men* (1967), *A Bend in the River* (1979) and *Magic Seeds* (2004) in reference to the post-colonial theory. The champion supporters of this theory are Edward Said, Frantz Fanon, Bill Ashcroft, Helen Tiffin and Aijaz Ahmad. The post-colonial theory looks at colonialism regarding strategies of representation of the native, the epistemological, feminisation, marginalisation and dehumanization of the native. Its chief aims are to access the psychological effects of colonialism on both the colonizer and the colonized. Post-colonial theory originated in the mid-twentieth century texts of Franz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*

(1952), *The Wretched of Earth* (1963). Aime Cesaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (1955). Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conception of Orient* (1978), Homi k.Bhabha, *Nation and Narration* (1990) Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In other Worlds: Essays in cultural Politics* (1988),(1988),Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory; Classes Nations Literature* (1992) and Bill Ashcroft ,*The Empire Writes Back; Theory and practice in postcolonial literature* (1989).

Naipaul in his writings aesthetically projects the individuals' endeavour to escape his\her fate. Another characteristic that emerges is the absence of awareness of history and ancestry by all the imperialist powers. This, according to him, is an edge that the Europeans have over the others. It has resulted in a controlled telling of the native's tale. For him, this leads to continuation of oppression by keeping the myth of the superior white ruler alive in the mi psyche of the native colonized. Whether it is Mr Biswas's grandparents in *A House for Mr Biswas*, or the ancestors of Salim in *A Bend in the River*, or Willie's ancestors in *Half a Life*, all of them are ignorant of their history in a solid sense. There is a vague idea of the past no written record of events exists. This lack of awareness is a quality typical of the oppressed class.

A House for Mr Biswas portrays a universe where women are not educated and are financially dependent and hence powerless. Mr Biswas's mother Bipti, his sister Dehuti, the Tulsi daughters both married and widowed all come under this category. Shama his wife is knowledgeable but vulnerable. Naipaul pictures the patriarchal nature of the Indian genesis society. The problematic relationship between the two genders is depicted through the dysfunctional marital relationships universal among the dwellers of Hanuman House. Mohun and Shama share a relationship of mistrust while residing in the Tulsi household. Her sister Chinta is physically abused by her husband Govind. The other sisters also recite with pleasure the story of undergoing physical ruthlessness by their husbands. The relationship of inter-personal violence is received and encouraged as a rule with the wife and children being the sufferers of systematic violence. The Tulsi daughters are all elder to the brothers, but defer to them at all times. They are not given their due share in the property and are at the charity of their husbands or brothers.

In *Half a life* and *Magic Seeds*, Willie along with his father have been reckoned as people who are not willing to take control of their life. Willie's father dies a failure while Willie is able to accept the fact that he is accountable for the life choices that he makes and no one else can be held responsible for them. In this novel Naipaul contrasts two points of views in the English setting. Marcus is depicted as a person who has outlived many revolutions and civil wars. Naipaul here very clearly adopts the belief that if you have clearly defined substantial goals and work towards achieving them, you are bound to be successful. Both Willie and Marcus have been the victims of

similar circumstances though in different geographical settings but both have dealt with them differently. Willie has been led by others with no idea or objective to define his life goals as compared to Marcus whose goal in life however preposterous, of having a pure white grandchild was unwavering. He knew what he wanted exactly and is finally successful in achieving his life's dream.

Naipaul's agitation with the intellectual and cultural parasitism and the mimicry of the West is an authoritative concern in many of his novels. In the novel *A Bend in the River*, he shows the post-colonial Africa where the new government is establishing a poor copy of the west in its towns and universities as represented by the Domain. He introduces this to be a disease common to the ex-colonial association of the post-imperial period. The Indian universities in *Magic Seeds* are a caricature to the western theory and education system. No genuine and native ideology is being permitted to be developed. Economic bondage with the production system and the factories just repackaging foreign products in *The Mimic Men* is a portrayal of the incapability of the native best to do anything more than mimicking the west. There is no entrepreneurial expertise that has been sanctioned to be matured by the imperialist powers in the colonies. The native can be no more than a representation of the imperialist powers even in the post-colonial world. Repercussion of the colonial rule which has plundered the native of their capabilities.

Naipaul's novel also depicts the slow and steady erosion of the Indian culture which is symbolized by the loss of Hindi. The children of Mr Biswas are portrayed as having limited understanding of the language. Indian rituals and customs have also got reduced to nothing but formalities. In this novel the writer shows how an individual can escape from his oppressive situation through enterprising approach. Education and individual action are two factors that are presented as a way out of the cycle of oppression.

Naipaul is censorious of the new age political figures that preoccupy the post-colonial landscape. In *The Mimic Men* he shows insatiable entrepreneur who make politics their occupation after the nation gains independence. On one hand Naipaul is judgemental of the post-independence political freedom he is equally critical of the colonial powers. The colonial governments have caused so much damage to the social fabric of the colonized nations, that no political security is possible post-independence. Naipaul holds the colonial system accountable for the political de-stability of the neo-independent states. Naipaul also points to the destructing role played by academicians, pseudo-revolutionaries, unfounded historians, politicians and non-native experts on the colonial subject in the post-colonial set-up. For Naipaul oppression is not limited to the physical domain, oppression is the denial, refutation of individual freedom and hence is a major concern in his novels.

CONCLUSION

Naipaul mirrors the sphere he lives in. He strongly believes that issues, people or causes cannot be inserted into neat classification and the reason of human suffering may have an economic dynamic but that is not the only dynamic. The reality is more composite and minimising it into neat causes is something that gives a prejudice and faulty understanding of the problem. His belief in the ability of an individual to free himself/herself from subjugation is commendable. He explains how this can be achieved by either total dismissal of the social norms and enslavement that tie an individual down by determining the expected behaviour and limiting the scope of the individual.

The classification of characters in Naipaul's novels majorly consists of conventional, needy and uneducated ignorant people from the Indian subcontinent. They can either be first generation emigrants as represented by the character of Mr Biswas's maternal grandfather in *A House for Mr Biswas* or poor peasants like his father. The indigent Indian peasants that Willie confronts in the villages of India in *Magic Seeds* or the people of low caste whom the senior Chandra and his ancestors feed off in *Half a Life* are also shown as people who tend to hold destiny and fate responsible for their condition and accept it as their lot. Oppression and tyranny is impervious, insurmountable. The study of Naipaul's novels reveals the emergence of certain clear and definite patterns of oppression and resistance.

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