



UNCERTAINTY AND CHAOS IN NAIPAUL'S A BEND IN THE RIVER

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Abstract

This paper aims to throw light on some post-colonial African countries, which are left with disorder and chaos. Naipaul is a Diaspora writer and writes about the endemic problems these societies are grappling with. Disoriented and fragmented post colonial Africans are enormously examined by an outsider. The novel highlights the roles of the natives in the nation building after the colony gets independence. Corruption, dearth of education, and greed are the main causes of the political and social chaos here. The youths of the country are organized and led by an autocrat, which gives way to war and chaos. The loss of culture and identity throws these people into 'no where' position. Naipaul's Africans are not efficiently equipped to tackle the emerging problems after independence.

Keywords: *post-colonial, Diaspora, political and social chaos, culture clash, identity crisis, etc*

Introduction:

Naipaul wrote *A Bend in the River* in year 1979. The novel is said to have some similarity to Conrad's *A Heart in the Darkness*. This novel divulges Naipaul's embarking upon new odyssey to the areas of the third world countries. In this novel, Naipaul does not mention the name of the county where the story is set. Naipaul is a minute critic of culture, tradition and customs and historical facts of the newly independent countries of Africa. The unnamed African country depicted in the novel, is situated in the depth of the black continent and achieved freedom from colonial powers recently. The dynamics of the power transfer from the European masters to the natives to build a new land with certainty and dignity is the prime observation of the author. Naipaul goes on to create a new perspective in which the contradictions of his own displaced community are viewed as symptoms of more general disorder. With historical concerns, author endeavours to explore the causes that leave the country and community with chaos. The scarcity of the resources and the instability in

government in these newly freed countries, do not assure any security on account of which man has to rely on his own personal strength and resources. Novel's very first lines draw attention to the struggle and conflict of the people perceived by Naipaul in the world of uncertainty and disorder. Naipaul writes:

The world is what it is; men who are nothing, who allow themselves to become nothing, have no place in it. (BR; 9)

Salim, an uneducated Indian youth who lived his life in Africa, is the narrator of the story. The racial and political tension, a sense of the encroaching disorders, corruption of the colonizer and the colonized are the problematized issues, which author reveals through the bitter experiences of the narrator. Salim's ancestors came from the East India and settled in a coastal town doing the trade silently. Naipaul being Diaspora writer prominently focuses his attention on forced Diaspora. Salim is not an aboriginal inhabitant watching the proceedings in this town at the bend in the river. He has travelled to this city from the coast in Peugeot through the arduous journey. The novel is a recording of his own impressions of Modern African province in which we find highlighted the "philosophy of belonging to oneself" is the key to the art of characters finding difficulty in the way of their existence. Salim becomes a trader in the central African town. The town had been once an Arab settlement and then built by the European. The resettlement of the town after demolitions by odd assailants becomes a metaphor for life in these nations. Now no Arab or European lives in this town. He purchases a shop from Nazruddin. Nazruddin is from a well established family, but one morning he sells all the stocks of bushes and sends his family to Uganda in search of new place and existence that may secure safety to his family.

This perception of Nazruddin gives wider scope to scrutinize the postcolonial question of culture clash in terms of dominated and subaltern cultures. When Salim gets to this town at the bend in the river, he feels the complexity of the place in the very outset. His struggle to adjust himself in place like this is full of contradictions. Salim says:

You can always get into these places. What is hard is to get out. That is private fight. Everybody has to find his own way. (BR; 10)

The narrator is very sensitive and Naipaul makes him tell the sense of lost in all the communities he meets. However, through Mustafa, Salim tries to make sense of the lost of his own community and its culture. Once Arabs were powerful, but Europeans overpowered them. Now Arabs:

Ceased to be driven on by the idea of their position in the world, and their energy was lost. They forgot who they were and where they had come from. (BR; 21)

This generates insecurity and worries Salim for his position in the world. It would be seen that in that position the assumption of civilization dilutes and connection between the old and the new becomes impossible pushing communities in perennial search for lost identity. Several native characters of the city at the bend in the river who have come out of the bushes after independence exhibit dearth of necessary skills to live a civilized life.

The first part of the novel is named as *The Second Rebellion*, which highlights the war on the slavery after independence in this part. However, the exuberant and buoyant youths of this town claim for their freedom from slavery. This is realization of the oppression, which they have been subjected to by colonialists. Naipaul feels that the people of Africa are themselves the cause of the destruction, due to lack of the efficiency in politics and technology after independence, which brings about chaos to these nations. Naipaul has been criticized many times by African scholars for being neo-colonialist and labeling them with indolence and incompetency. Naipaul through this novel diagnoses the dominant factors, which do not let the communities of African states enjoy the freedom in its real sense. The novel has many characters that are typically African and misguided by the new rulers.

Salim starts business with some prospective customers from the isolated villages. The accessibility of the villages to this city is only through small channels, which are infested with predatory reptiles and animals. Zabeth, a prospective customer of salim, is an old lady whose recurrent daring journey through these channels to purchase the things of basic necessity for her community people, poses certain questions about their precarious existence. The life in these places is fragmented both in terms of culture and space. Zabeth's understanding of the need of education is a realization of the state in which they are not well equipped with to fight the political and social chaos. Despite all such hardships, people of this place find themselves to be secured in forests. And when power is transferred to them, it generates disorders.

Postcolonial societies find themselves to be entangled with questions of culture and identity issues after their freedom. "Post-colonialism is concerned with what exists and happens after the end of colonial rule" (Dobie, 186). Zabeth wants her son Ferdinand to be educated under the guidance of Salim. Ferdinand's ignorance of manners of a society does not let him assimilate the values of this new town and he starts mixing up with Metty who is servant of Salim. Their indulgence in sex and wine gives us glimpse of this society. But with the passage of time Ferdinand starts feeling the difference between the native and the foreigners. Salim's teaching comes to an end, when Salim finds himself unable to satisfy the curiosity of Ferdinand. Salim is outsider here like 'the Americans', 'the Europeans', 'the white people', 'the Belgians' and is apprehensive of the danger, which might follow the knowledge of Ferdinand. Ferdinand's discussion with Salim about the future of Africa compels Salim to know what actually is passing through the mind of Ferdinand. Ferdinand asks:

Salim, what do you think of the future of Africa? (BR; 52)

Ferdinand's will to get education in America and shaping the future surprises Salim. There a contradiction between traditional and modern in the mind of Ferdinand. This town at the bend in the river experienced a war at the time of independence which appears inevitable again now when the trucks of tribal army start approaching to the town. War devastated this town at the time of independence. This army of tribes ones served Arabs and then Europeans as their servant and soldiers, and returned to the bushes after the war was over. This time they

are well organized under the leadership of a military man called President. Salim's calculation of army's necessity in the town shows him to be wrong as he thinks that army would act like a defensive mechanism to the trade. This postcolonial state in this town leads to chaos and uncertainty of existence because the army could repeat any time the history of independence. The future in these areas, which mimic modernity in terms of politics and technology without leaving the traditionality, drives them to the chaos. Narrator is worried about his people and friends living here for army can turn to the war any time. He says:

African had called up this war; they would suffer dreadfully, more than anybody else; but they could cope. They could run away again to their secret world and become lost on those worlds, as they had done before. (BR; 76)

Naipaul's narrator is a silent observer seeking security through this period of disorder for the first time after independence. He also analyses how Africans mimic the foreigner almost in every respect. Ferdinand and Metty spent their most of the time in the mimicry of foreigner following them in drinking and sex. They, however, do not like the advice of Salim at all. The rebels in the city and the presence of the white army to prevent rebels, takes a course of action that can aggravate the tension, which is not favourable to those who are Diaspora here. The condition of women and children is so pathetic that they have no security to live with in this area of darkness. In an account of an incident told by Ferdinand, we get to know how the tribal armies frequently visit the other tribal domain and on the pretext of searching the white people exploit the women. The unity among the tribal settlements is fragmented that is also the prominent cause of tension. It leads to the identity crisis also. This cause makes Salim sad and pessimistic. The upheaval comes to the city at the bend in the river following normalcy. The army of the people from the forest is lost in the forest or found abject in the streets of the town. Their energy is not channelized in constructive way and they are manipulated, filled with irrational patriotism without any clear aim. Narrator understands the possibility of danger in such places. Naipaul himself observed the critical condition of various layers of struggle in multicultural society where many nationalities co-exist. He puts his protagonists in the paradoxical junctures where they feel themselves beset with many post-colonial questions. They seek security in terms of identity and existence escaping from one place to another. The future of Africa after its independence, is seen in Ferdinand when he becomes serious knowing the real position of Africa. His transformation from innocent to experience, his inquisitiveness about the African and the foreigner, makes the narrator worried and leaves him (Salim) startled. Ferdinand's realization as an African adds restlessness in narrator who is here as a foreign.

After the rebellion is over the city at the bend in the river starts thriving. Narrator's knowledge about the city enables him to be wary of the occasional surge in form of rebellion that renders the natives and the foreigners shipwreck and destitute. Naipaul's minute observation of the third world countries, where order and certainty are mere intervals in the continuation of clashes is realistic. The death of an intellectual in rebellion teaches a lesson to the neutral protagonist:

The only message of his death was that we had to be careful ourselves and remember where we were. And oddly enough, by acting as we did, by putting our heads down and getting on with our work. (BR; 93)

The conflict between subaltern culture and western culture is projected through the narrator in the minute detail. The developmental phase in the lives of the people of such places adheres the perspective of Salim. Characters like Zabeth, Ferdinand and Metty have their own shifting mindsets. Foreigners have their own apprehensions. Naipaul's observation of Africa is like an outsider's. The main factors which affect the growth of these areas are lack of knowledge how to exploit resources, lack of efficient education system and racism.

But Naipaul ignores these factors responsible for this chaos. As **Singh** observes in 1969, however, to see an oppressed African and condemn her or him for being oppressed and hungry and saying that s/he allows her/himself to become nothing in the world, is not worth commenting upon. It is the essence of racism to say that Third World individuals are responsible for their misery. There is misery, oppression, and corruption in the Third World. But neocolonialism plays an extremely important role in creating an ideological justification for its irresponsibility for such diseases.

The city at the bend in the river after rebellion again fills with business activities. Foreigners just wait and focus on the restoration normalcy. But actually they are staying near volcano which can erupt any time. When it is the time of peace, business flourishes here. Mahesh, another Indian, has expanded his trade from small scale to large scale and his planning to import some items from Japan shows the favourable circumstances for trade. The arrival of the people from different tribes to the city for business purpose throws light on the conduciveness to business. Mahesh typifies the race of businessman that wants money and power and takes it back home. They are just like colonizers contributing nothing to the living condition of the aboriginals. Mahesh had business dealings with new army also. The organization of army and new constitution is maintained by a new powerful man called the president. Salim's analysis of the current circumstances makes him able to consider his place in this post-colonial city:

That was what we were like in those days. We felt that there was a treasure around us waiting to be picked up. It was the bush that gave us this feeling. During the empty, idle time we had been indifferent to the bush; during the days of the rebellion it had depressed us. Now it excited us - the unused earth, with the promise of the unused. We forgot that others had been here before us, and had felt like us. (BR; 102)

Salim's omniscient views project the never-ending dilemma of such places and his separation from his friends shows his continue desire for safer place and life. His meticulous inspection and recalling of the words by Nazruddin and others make him serious. After the rebellion, the president creates a new domain which has all modern infrastructures including hospitals, universities and polytechnics. This is again the period of rapid growth after the rebellion. Ferdinand's study in one of the government polytechnic shows the perspective for

future. The president hires resources from Europe. The people are enthusiastic and optimistic in this New Domain. Everything appears shiny in the domain of the president.

The third part of the novel is named The Big man and the fourth part is named Battle. Salim's calculation about the city in the third world countries proves right. All of the characters including Ferdinand start realizing the existential threat in The Big Man's domain. The Big man's autocratic nature fills him with a threat and he does not like anybody to be powerful like him. Zabeth's fear for Ferdinand's death by The Big Man shows the similar apprehension what we see in Salim. The Big man can get killed the educated youths like Ferdinand. What salim felt at the time of his arrival in this part, he sees the town in the same juncture now. The city is again in disorder and chaos witnessing the deaths of so many innocent people.

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