



DISORIENTATION OF SELF IN SOCIAL SITUATIONS IN V.S.NAIPAUL'S A BEND IN THE RIVER

Kamble Sachin Gundurao

Assistant Professor,
Arts and Commerce College,
Vaduj, Satara. (Maharashtra)

Dr. S. I. Noorani

Associate Professor and Head,
Minalben Mehta College,
Pachagani, Satara.

The meaning of self, disoriented self and the causes of the disorientation of self. A dictionary meaning of 'self' is 'a person as an individual or his essential individual nature.' Some scholars use this word to refer to an existence. This is an area of study of psychology. The systematic study of psychology began with Aristotle's 'De Anima' which gave an elucidation of the concept of 'soul' and 'Mind'. Sigmund Freud, pioneer of 'Psychoanalytic Criticism' gave a model of the mind as having three functional aspects; 'id' which incorporates libidinal and other desires, 'the superego', which is internalization of standards of morality and propriety and third is 'the ego' which tries as best it can negotiate the conflicts between the insatiable demands of id, the impossible stringent requirement of superego and the limited possibilities of gratification offered by the world of "reality". A dictionary meaning of 'mind' is the part of person that enables us to be aware of things, to think and to feel. It is an ability to think and reason, without which one cannot think and cannot do anything.

The word 'self' is used to mean a whole series of a person's inner, mental status. Carl Jung says that it is an archetype which develops during middle age and represents the reconciliations of opposites and the fusion of the conscious and unconscious. It is the centre of personality keeping stability and equilibrium. It doesn't develop until the other aspects of personality are developed and individuated.

According to C. Rogers, "self is a portion of the personality that consists perception of 'I' or 'Me' and develops out of organism's interaction with the environment. It strives for consistency, introspects the values of the others which may be perceived in a distorted way and changes as a result of maturation and learning." A famous psychoanalyst Adler says that it is a subjective system which makes experience meaningful for the individual and seeks experience which will fulfill the person's life-style. It gives meaning to the life, creating the goal as well as helping to fulfill it.

Heinz Kohut has proposed the concept of the self in *'The Analysis of the Self (1971)*. Kohut says that the 'self' becomes an autonomous principle of motivation, integrating the drives and accords its own programme of realization. For Kohut, the self is something very much different from intra psychic entities like the ego, superego and id. He says that the development of the self-starts with 'nuclear self' which gradually transforms into a cohesive and mature self.

By taking all these views into consideration, a general conclusion could be that the 'self' is awareness about our own existence. If we are talking about disoriented self, and then



there should be united self. An original or unified self can be possible only when there would be equilibrium of the conscious and the unconscious. It gives stable mind and stable life. If there would not be a fusion of the conscious and the unconscious, self gets divided and balance is not achieved.

Naipaul's characters suffer a very painful, unproductive past. It could not create anything. Their future is confused and present is full of uncertainties. So the characters are disoriented. The inner world of dreams and outer world of socio-economic and political problems stretches the gap between original and ideal self. So an ideal self is not achieved and thus results in a stress, tension and anxiety. The characters get trapped in an exile, loneliness and schizophrenia. The typical post-colonial characters of Naipaul suffer from displacement, rootlessness and frustration. So they get disoriented on physical, social, familial, economic, political, intellectual, psychological, moral and cultural levels and all these disorientations lead the character to fragment at the centre of its existence, that is, 'the self', which can be called 'disoriented self'.

The post-colonial Naipaulian characters do not have capacity to integrate contradictory aspects and tendencies into a coherent sense and view of themselves, in 'Mature' self, this is only possible at the price of repression of important wishes and possibilities for personal development. These characters lacked the capacity to establish coherent- self-concept. Instead, they adopt what could be called a 'Post-modernist' stance towards their life. Instead of repression, their means of defense consists in a temporal splitting of the self that excludes past and future as dimensions of object constancy, bonding, commitment, responsibility and guilt.

The disorientation avoids the necessity of tolerating ambiguity and uncertainty of interpersonal relationships. The price consists in a chronic feeling of inner emptiness by the inability to integrate past and future into the present and to establish a coherent sense of identity. Now we will lead to discuss 'Disoriented Self' depicted in Naipaul's novel *A Bend in the River* for this research paper.

In the present novel, Naipaul writes about political, social and cultural tensions and dimensions which are created and inherited from the colonial past. All these tensions are still firmly rooted in the society. So the society itself is disoriented. Naipaul says that in post-colonial situations each one is reduced to a political being. So the social situation is described in terms of 'Power Politics' which is between the individuals and sexes. Here Naipaul deals with the themes of slavery, violence and independence. He questions many assumptions of the world: the racial and political tensions, the disorganization of the society due to the disorder, the exploitation of the colonized by the colonizers and above all the disorientation of self-caused by these factors.

Naipaul reveals the reality of a newly independent African state. There is a group of people who occupy a small town at the bend in the river. These are a few Belgians, some Greeks, Italians and Indians living a "stripped, Robinson Crusoe kind of existence".(P.31) Naipaul shows the town and its society is disorganized, barbaric and chaotic as the Isabellian society of '*The Mimic Men*'.



In the present story, whatever little Salim knows about his community and past is from books written by Europeans. Salim realizes that without Europeans “their entire past would have been washed away.” (P.18) interestingly one thing should be noted that colonizers are reformers, history makers and at the same time exploiters and oppressors. Salim, having developed the habit of conscious self-assessment because of his western education, realizes that his community has fallen behind. He awakens to the oppressed position of his community in the coast. Salim’s first disorientation on social grounds comes when he realizes that the minority communities are exploited, oppressed and persuaded by masters. Naipaul says that it is a bitter reality of all colonial and post-colonial societies. Even Indar, his East Indian Hindu friend arrives at the same insight. He tells Salim: “we are washed up here, you know to be in Africa you have to be strong. We are not strong. We don’t even have a flag.”(P.24) Salim comes to know that his community itself is shattered and disintegrated. He never finds his “place” in it. He feels rootless and displaced as an ancestral crisis, so in a panic mood he says:

“We never asked why; we never recorded. We felt in our bones that we were a very old people; but we seemed to have no means of gauging the passing of time. Neither my father not grandfather could put dates to their stories. Not because they had forgotten or were confused, the past was simply the past.”(P.77)

From generations to generations, Salim and his family has been suffering from this spacelessness and uprootedness. To overcome on this crisis the ultimate step is taken by Indar and Salim, Indar revolves to leave for England and Salim decides to make a new beginning elsewhere. Naipaul minutely observes the dilemma of the post colonials that they always have to shift from place to place for the sake of better future and security.

Salim breaks from his family only to get a stable job offered by Nazaruddin. But when Salim arrives, he finds the town destroyed in the tribal war. Salim is disappointed to see the ruins speak of “The depth of that African rage, the wish to destroy, regardless of the consequences.”(P.32) It disturbs Salim to see the ruined suburb near the rapids, valuable real estate only recently being reclaimed by the bush. In the midst of ruins, which looked like dead civilization, Salim feels like “.....a ghost, not from the past, but from the future.” (P.32-33) Salim once again gets stranded in earlier condition of spacelessness and baselessness. He realizes that there can be no fresh beginning anywhere. Naipaul has pointed the very truth that this time disorientation is not due to past but from ruined future. Salim even loses his temper and balance when he comes to know that he cannot return to his coast because his family too has to scatter somewhere and Metty, a family slave is sent to stay with him. The social disturbances fracture the dream world of Salim and his family even gets disturbed.

During the second rebellion, the town at the bend in the river is destroyed because it is a reminder of “the intruders who had ruled in it and formed it....” (P.72) The Liberation Army seeks to overthrow the Bigman’s regime and revive the old ways. To achieve this seek to wipe out “everybody who can read and write, who ever put on a jacket and tie.....all the masters and all the servants.”(P.284) This violence brings loneliness and insecurity of life for the expatriates and immigrants. Naipaul observes that decolonization is always violent. So the



post-colonials have to suffer from blood-shed, lack of sympathy, exile and extreme alienation.

Father Huisamans' brutal killing is a proof of the fact. To Salim and the others, father Huisamans' death comes as a warning that they have to be very careful and remember that they are in Africa. The uncertainty of life, insecurity, and violent end of life lead all these post-colonial characters to feel an absurdity of life due to their inability to go back and even forward. They are trapped in the ultimate crux of 'to be or not to be'. Salim suffers from placeness and a sense of insecurity.

However, Father Huisamans' prediction comes true that 'there would always be a settlement at the bend in the river.' (P.69) His optimistic view towards Africa comes true, but a westernized Africa emerges out again as mimicry of white men. This second rebellion proves to be a hopeless affair. The town is not only re-established but it begins to grow under the regime of the Big Man.

"All kinds of projects were started. Various government departments came to life again, and the town at last became a place that could be made to work. We already had the steamer service, now the art field was recommissioned and extended, to take the jets from the capital (and to thy in soldiers)... We even began to get a new telephone system. It was far too elaborate for our needs, but it was what the Big Man in the capital wanted for us." (P.94)

Naipaul critically examines that these developmental schemes are not the needs of common man, but they are being deceived by the rich and hypocrites under the name of developments. The basic necessities, requirements are not fulfilled but stupendous projects or schemes like 'state domain' are started. Being built on the ruins, it is the Big man's miracle carrying the message that "Africans had become modern men who built in concrete and glass and sat in cushioned chairs covered in imitation velvet." (P.108). This is again an imitation of colonizers. These imitations remind the colonial stage which was the "past" but now again as a 'present' for post-colonials. It is ironical that no one knows what the 'Domain' is being built for? And it is only after its completion that a use is found. The building of "Domain" incorporated polytechnic college, a modern form and residence for intellectuals. Big man tries to modernize the old Africa which is always visible beneath the surface décor of the new. But the utmost tragedy comes when the Africans could not identify themselves with this new, modern African consciousness. For them mystery and peace lie in the bush. Salim nostalgically recalls;

"during the days of the rebellion I had the sharpest sense of the beauty of the river and the forest, and had promised myself that when the peace came I would expose myself to it, learn it, and possess that beauty." (P.103)

Salim feels sad at the loss of the magic and mystery of the place, which comes with freedom. Naipaul observes that freedom and developments bring unrelatedness and sense of non-attachment to the post colonials like Salim. All these things force post colonials to the greater disorientation in the social context.

Nazruddin's 'letter brings more disturbing news. Racial troubles break out in Uganda as well and Nazaruddin has had to shift his family again. Nazaruddin's plan to move out of Africa and go to Canada, makes it clear that no African country is free from troubles and violence. Naipaul again examines that the post-colonial characters are constantly moving



from land to land just to save their lives, and so at the inner level everyone is frightened and disoriented. The socio-political situations bring an extreme stress on the relationship of Salim and Yvette. The relation breaks in the disgusting manner as Salim's spitting on the Yvette. The social frustrations affect individual and individual frustrations affect social life. Salim cannot escape from this sordid reality. Salim expresses his hopelessness:

“I had my first dream about myself, the beginning of the decay of the man I had known myself to be. I had visions of beggary decrepitude, the man not of Africa lost in Africa, no longer with strength or purpose to hold his own....”(P.184)

Naipaul examines that the disorganized and disordered society of the town at the bend in the river does not provide any chance of any kind of fulfillment. Yvette, Raymond, Mahesh, Salim and Indar are all outsiders floating and lost without any definite identity and existence. Salim's closest friend Indar, who is now well settled, also is a frustrated being when he says to Salim:

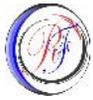
“It isn't easy to turn your back on the past. It isn't something you can decide to do just like that. It is something you have to arm yourself for, or grief will ambush and destroy you”.(P.148)

Naipaul says that it is ultimate fates of the post-colonial characters that their past always lead them to their destruction and frustration.

We see that Salim, in search of better future decides to go London. But disillusionment and rootlessness in London again make him a displaced and placeless being. Salim is totally an exiled being like Ralph Singh in *The Mimic Men* who comes to London for better settlement. Salim never feels as a settled being but always a scattered one in different worlds. Europe, which has ruled Salim's world since his childhood even, presents a different picture altogether. Salim does not identify himself with London and says: “It was something shrunken, mean and forbidding”.(P.238) Actually Salim has come to London from Africa for relief and rescue from the hopelessness. But in London also he becomes confused and furthermore his capacities, his expectations, his identity remains divided. All these things lead him to the utmost tragedy that he feels himself as ‘faceless and selfless’ in London.

Naipaul says that there is no safe place for the post-colonials where they can feel their ‘united self’. The problems like homelessness, rootlessness, placelessness, exile, loneliness, barrenness in relationships, insecurity of life and a sense of broken self-lead all the post-colonial characters to disorientation of their selves. The socio-economic and political problems are making this problem more critical. In this entire crux, there is no chance for self-development. All dreams of being settled physically and mentally get shattered. And so disorientation remains an ultimate destination of the post-colonial characters.

Naipaul successfully delineates the complexities of modern life of the post-colonials. Ferdinand represents the modern Africans who have been picked out from bush life, only to be placed in a more vulnerable position in the civilized jungle of the town, which provides no sanctuary or protection. Through Indar and Salim Naipaul portrays the plight of the displaced exiles that have nowhere to go, nowhere a sole place, and so only disorientation. Raymond and Yvette demonstrate that in the new dynamic power, everyone is in a marginal position. No one is a safe being though they rich, white or employed in the society like Africa. Naipaul's vision “we can only carry on” offers little hope to the Third World societies that



have been maimed beyond repair. Through his characters and places, he puts forward the view that displacement, alienation, frustration, fragmentation and disorientation are the universal predicaments in the post-war world and one must learn to live with these ultimate truths. Salim decides to rejoin the world but expresses his disorientation:

“The world is what it is; men who are nothing, who allow themselves to be nothing, have no place in it.”(P.9)

In these opening sentences of the novel, Salim shows his indifference to world and his own life. Due to internal fractures of society and of post-colonials’ mentality, native liberation movements fail to play a positive role in the formation of an authentic society and Third World consciousness. In Naipaul’s terms, the solution is at the individual level through self-decolonization, that is, by overcoming the colonial mentality of idleness and irresponsibility. Naipaul finally speaks of the Third World societies through Ferdinand in the last scene of Salim’s escape:

“You mustn’t think its bad just for you. It’s bad for everybody. That’s the terrible thing. It’s bad for prosper; bad for the man they gave your shop to, bad for everybody. Nobody’s going anywhere. We are all going to hell, and everyman knows this in his bones. We’re being killed. Nothing has any meaning. That is why everyone is frantic. Everyone wants to make his money and run away, but where? That is what driving people mad are. They feel they’re losing the place they can run back to...nowhere is safe now.”(P.281-82)

Salim and other young characters are the representatives of the third world youngsters. The Third World societies with their incurable problems are leading the whole young generation to the disorientation of self in social senses. Salim, because of his acquired habit of self – appraisal, knows where exactly he stands, and this insight makes him take the positive step of rejoining the world. The novel ends without any positive conclusion about Africa and Africans who are now in the dilemma at the land of bush. The dilemma is nothing but uncertainty of existence and so disorientation of self.

WORKS CITED

1. Naipaul, V.S, 1980, *A Bend in the River*, Harmondsworth, Penguin.
2. Abrams, M.H, 2004, *The Glossary of Literary Terms*, 7th edition, holt, Rinehart and Winston.
3. Cudjoe, Selwyn, 1988, *V.S.Naipaul: A Materialist Reading*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst.
4. Fanon, Frantz, 1967, “*The Wretched of the Earth*”, trans. by Constance Farrington, Harmondsworth: Penguin, P.27
5. Fanon, Frantz, 1986, *Black Skin White Masks*, trans. by Charles Lammarkmann, London: Pluto.
6. Hariharan, Geeta, 10-23, 2001, *The Ignoble Politics of Naipaul’s Nobel*, Frontline, P.70
7. Hermassi, Elbaki, 1980, *The Third World Reassessed*, Berkeley: University of California, P.167
8. Kamra, Shashi, 1990, *The Novels of V.S.Naipaul*, New Delhi: Prestige, P.123