

Transnational Spatial Study of V.S. Naipaul's Postcolonial Narratives

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Abstract: Literature in postmodern era has a close connection with the concept of space. Physical place in which the story or the event evolves in literature is regarded as concept of space. The writer of literary works tries to give new interpretation by combining a place of a real world with imaginary space. Postcolonial narratives are a fertile ground for spatial analysis. In the context of colonial settlement, migration and globalization, transnational space provides a multidimensional approach to examine how space is depicted in literature. Space can be divided into constructed binaries such as own and other. The other space is the space of colonization. In transnationalism, the bipolar becomes multipolar because of one's connections with more than two countries. Transnational space is not a natural space. It has to be negotiated between contradictions of nationalities. Face to face contact with contradiction of the postcolonial world by the uprooted populations of Naipaul's ancestors from India and their contestation of the new spatial order, forms the basis for this study. It tries to examine writer's reflection in his narratives based on his transnational connections with different countries.

Keywords: Space, Place, Transnational Space, Postcolonial Spatiality, Naipaul.

INTRODUCTION

Traditional notion of space as a passive place was challenged by proposing theories that unified physical, social and mental conception of space. Henry Lefebvre's English translation of his pioneering work created a new interest in the study of space and influenced the generation of postmodern thinkers like Edward Soja, Bertrand Whestpal. Spatial studies dominated the literary arena due to the globalisation of the modern world. The study of space in modern literary fiction benefits the current transnational connections of writers and readers.

TRANSNATIONAL SPACES

Transnational spaces had been portrayed by writers as spaces of others. They include places of colonial encounters by which people were geographically and historically separated. They come into contact with each other and establish conflict and negotiation. Integral role of place play a very important role. The aim of Geo-criticism according to Tally is to explore real and the imagined geographies [1]. Considering the geography of imagination, the writer had to question the very notion of other place in thinking on unknown space. A writer of his time and place can only imagine the place through the collective representations of the place brought to him through various texts or experience of the past. What is striking there was how the past knowledge fit in modern

observation to prove that the world correspond to the knowledge the writer have of it. It here prove to be no more of discovery but confirmation of sources.

POSTCOLONIAL SPATIALITY

Postcolonial studies broad emphasised themes are identity, cross cultural contact, migration and displacement. Theorists like Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Soja's spatial thinking has played an integral role in postcolonial studies. Taking into consideration the relationship between humans and their various environments, Whestpal attempted to establish a new field of literary studies focussed on geocentric approach to literature [2].

V.S. Naipaul is one such writer who was born in Trinidad to Indian parents now lives in London. His connection with their countries formed the basis of his literary narratives. His spatial encounter with different countries through his writings enabled him to find a particular representational space for himself. He uses his novels to examine the emerging colonial societies to synthesise the inner space and outer space. The conflict in Naipaul's writing became the clash between Eastern and Western Space of the world. His first and foremost connection took place with the Caribbean island. The island with the population of Indians as indentured labourers added another dominance of hegemony. Naipaul's ancestors from East India worked in

sugarcane fields and remained separated from major African groups. As a result Indians were able to preserve their private space with their customs and traditions. This transnational setup created a challenge to Naipaul and his family to adapt to the alien spatial environment. In *The Overcrowded Baracoon*, Naipaul has articulated on this societal space that shaped his writing:

Superficially, because of the multitude of races Trinidad may seem complex, but to anyone who knows it, it is a simple colonial philistine society... It might also be that in a society without traditions, without patterns, everyman finds it easier "to be himself" whatever the reason, this determination of people to be themselves, to cherish their eccentricities, to reveal themselves one makes them easy material for the writer [3].

CHANGING SOCIAL SPACE

The new social space of Trinidad was well structured in *A House for Mr. Biswas* [4] reflected the changing condition of his society and his age and represented every colonial person caught up in the transitional space. The novel is located in the geography of Trinidad, Naipaul's birth place. But the family followed the religion of their native, the Hinduism. The head of the family was Tulsis and the house they lived was Hanuman House. It represented the external symbol of their inner space. Though Biswas was associated with Tulsis's ordered world by marriage he was of new generation, therefore opposed to that of Tulsis.

Biswas wanted to try his mettle in the new social space on his own, but he was unable to fit into the changing social space. He tried all his luck to fit into the new world of Trinidad and atleast a small place of his own, a house. The breakup of Hanuman House also became complete when the Tulsis shifted to the city, the Port of Spain. The changing social space did not spare even such an ordered place of the Tulsis. In this alien space, the Tulsis were unable to function in an ordered manner. Unable to understand the new social space and without their familiar place, the Hanuman House to protect, Individuals began to prepare and fight for oneself in a new space. Alienation that was generated by the new spatial order lead Biswas to face his society and question his place in it. Unable to reconcile with changing physical place of the present he attempted to act of writing to unify his social being. In the end of the novel, old social space of them which they have taken from India must give way to new social space of Trinidad. Not only Biswas but also his family became the victim between two spatial orders.

A House for Mr. Biswas anchored Naipaul's capacity to capture the transition nature of the social space and the transition of East Indian Space which forge through new spatial order. Lefebvre on writing of space explained that the writers respond to the anxiety about the alternative condition of space in which they live. Trinidad was an alternative space of Naipaul, the novel's negotiations of space of realism works on national and transnational placement. His engagement with the transnational space helps the reader to determine the boundaries of the text, self and nation.

Naipaul explored the geographical borders brought about by globalisation and characterized the space of transnational identities. Indian life lived in Trinidad, the Hindu Gods erected in front of their house and prayers and rituals was performed in native culture in the present time and place. The East Indian's distance from their Indian native location marked the geographical and civilizational difference. *A House for Mr. Biswas* [2] belong to a single national tradition but inhabit the space of the transnational and make it a place of their representation. The impossible space was turned into familiar places. Maria Koundoura rightly pointed out on her reflections of space and place, "We live in spaces and occupy places, placed thoroughly by ordering principle of states, of narratives of our own knowledge of things and of our selves" [5]. *A House for Mr. Biswas* completed the first phase of Naipaul's writing. This gave a much more systematic representation of Caribbean space. But he has not formulated his unambiguous relationship to his social space and himself.

CONTEMPORARY MODERN SPACE

An Area of Darkness his first trilogy on India, the land of his ancestors further elaborated this contradictory response. This novel was an honest account of Naipaul's anguished search into his past for roots and his self and his examination of the physical place of India. He dwelled into the Eastern World and thereby revealed his ambivalent relationship to both Trinidad and Indian spatial order. His journey to India marked his relationship to the place in *An Area of Darkness*: "India had in a special way been the background of my childhood. It was a country from which my grandfather came, a country never physically described and therefore never real, a country out in the void beyond the dot of Trinidad; and from it our journey had been final [6].

A House for Mr. Biswas examined the East Indian's life in Trinidad and *An Area of Darkness* in turn dealt with confirmation of how Trinidad Indian's life in India was. India reminded the author that he was an outsider in England where he lives at present. He writes in *An Area of Darkness* "I was lost. London was not the centre of the world. I had been misled; but

there was nowhere else to go". At the same time, Naipaul was unable to identify with the social place of India and could not relate to the landscape which was very different from Trinidad and England, the transnational spatial association of him. The geographical distance between the three countries and their cultures and time made him realize that "three generations and a lost language lay between us" [7].

CONCLUSION

Naipaul went to the village where his grandfather was born to make sense with his past. But it remained an area of darkness and found that he could not penetrate into the space of his ancestors. His response to India was similar to his response to Trinidad. He attempted to come out of the ambivalence of these two places and reconcile with his connections with the places and confessed in *Area of Darkness* that India "was a journey that ought not to have been made; it broke my life into two". Naipaul was made a prisoner of these places, one kept him the prisoner of the past the other was break out of the past into a contemporary western spatial order. To unravel the place of his origin he made a series of journey with more narratives on India to develop his association with the place, but ended with a futile exercise. The direct exposure to the physical place of India revealed the denied part of real place. His mental makeup determined more of western living space rather than actual place. Naipaul attempt to articulate with the physical place and the space of the two countries made him prove to the world his transnational connections and hence his inability to associate with either of the places proves the plight of the modern man of the globalised world.

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