

Chapter 1

Salim's Migration and His Displaced Identity

Introduction

A Bend in the River by V.S. Naipaul's is one of the most celebrated novels with deep pathos, reflecting the crisis in the existence of diaspora people created by migration and political instability caused by colonial invasion. The book has a postcolonial African setting and deals with fluctuating identities of people in the post-colonial world where marginalized and frustrated groups seek for the sense of identity and meaning in life. In the novel, Salim is the representative character, who tries different moves for better existence. He is the protagonist and the focal person of analysis in this thesis. The protagonist is facing challenges and hardship to establish his own identity by competing with much abler people and by migrating from place to place. However, he never achieves his desired goal because of his limitless desire of better identity. This situation leads him to existential anxiety. Like Salim, people from different communities and nations migrate to new places by expecting better life and existence but they fail to achieve it. Therefore, the main argument of the thesis is that search for better existence through migration invites a lot of challenges and results in identity crisis.

The novel deals with alienation and fluctuation of identity. There is an extreme pessimism projected by Naipaul that is desired identity cannot be achieved through migration. The novel portrays characters from different strata of society in newly colonized world. The story revolves around some of the important events in Salim's life, projecting his identity crisis and inner conflicts due to the rapid changes that are taking place in his "homeland" Congo. The novel characterizes nihilism of the twentieth century and presents a picture of Africa with no positive changes but

European ideologies and beliefs fostering massacres in the country in the name of justice and equality.

The story in *A Bend in the River* is narrated by the protagonist himself. He is the focal person in the story. He stands for an individual who represents his/her own identity crisis on one hand, and the crisis of other immigrants' life in Africa on the other. In the novel, two stories are interwoven by Naipaul: one is a personal story and the other is a story of political conflicts and economic disaster, which has brought about a national crisis. The protagonist explores the situation of the uprooted people in their country where they have been living as Diasporas. He finds himself in such a situation, where he has not been able to establish safety and good image in the society, so he is in search of a safe place like home.

The novel opens with a statement of a sobering truth that the African people have suffered a lot due to colonization. Lack of material property and liberty has made their lives worse. Personal liberty and property rights of the Africans have been made limited for the material benefit of the colonizers and for cultural invasion. Common people's dream of a utopian future by achieving the lost freedom and happiness is in the hands of British colonizers, who always try to deprive the natives of their freedom and rights. Therefore, Salim's dreams of a utopian world have shattered because of the government's activities.

The story takes place in a town on the bend of a great river in African nation, which tries to get rid of British domination. Salim was born and grew up in the Indian Muslim society in the East African coastal area. His forefathers migrated there from India, so they are not the natives of Africa. Because of political riots, his family moves to the interior of Africa. The riots also spread in the interior as well, so he is looking for a safe escape. He now decides to come back to the coastal area.

Following the advice given by his family friend, Nazruddin, Salim wants to start new life, being an owner of a shop at the bend of the river. Nazruddin, who fears insecurity there, strives to be isolated from his society and tries to be away from his friends and community, so he moves to London with his family by selling his shop to Salim. Nazruddin is a weak minded, flexible person, and even simple circumstances in life can change his thoughts easily, however, he tries to move ahead in spite of some confusion about his own path.

Because of a violent uprising on the coast, Salim's family has dispersed. One of his servants, a young man called Ali, later named as Metty by the local people, lives with him, but later this servant becomes a good friend of Ferdinand and starts being involved in illegal act like smuggling, drinking and picking up local women in the city. So, Salim distances from Ali and develops his affinity with Indians especially, Mahesh, Shobha and Indar.

The local Africans Zabeth and her son Ferdinand, who are in regular touch with Salim, are his customers. Zabeth was a local business woman and trusts Salim. She brings information from the village which makes him know what's happening. She is traditional but acts as a bridge between traditional and modern people's life. She has lived the pure life of Africans but for her son, she wishes for something else. Zabeth wants Salim to keep an eye on Ferdinand and help the boy with English as he knows English and she thinks her son can also learn manners along with English language from him.

Later, the town comes back to normality gradually; business starts to grow and Salim becomes acquainted with a few non-African town people. Many educated people including Salim's childhood friend Indar, encourage Salim to progress in life, and accordingly, he also tries to go ahead. Meanwhile, he develops a romantic life

with Raymond's wife Yvette, but this relationship does not last long. The business boom does not continue for long. Because of political unrest, great business persons start to leave the coastal area, leaving behind whatever they have. As the political disorder appears in the town again, he is compelled to leave the community. Then he travels to London where he sees Nazruddin's daughter, with whom he has been in relation informally but relationship breaks- up in London by mutual agreement though Nazruddin wants to make Salim his son-in-law.

Salim has expected better life in England, but this is only his assumption of stupidity and incompetence. He always feels disappointed, understanding nothing, copying everything, and getting nothing. On the other hand, Salim thinks he has failed to lead the life he had been expecting in that town. He feels suffocated, alienated and imbalanced. Life remains undecided as he cannot become a part of the new system nor can he easily accept the old one. Looking at the chaos of Africa, he travels to London and promises to marry Najaruddhin's daughter Kareisha, a childhood friend, with whom he had an indirect relation. He quits the relationship on mutual agreement due to her rough manners. He feels rootlessness in London, and comes back to his hometown.

Radical changes have taken place on the bend of the river. Salim's shop has been captured by colonizers' state trustees. He suffers a great agony, but situation have been far away from his reach. Nothing has remained with him except disappointment.

He intends to start a new life, after the European colonizers have left Africa. People have been struggling for freedom, and the clashes between the colonizers and the natives are scattered over the recently re-established city. Being Manager Salim again chooses another difficult business, difficult in the sense that it is the illegal

business of ivory and gold. He is arrested but is saved from being imprisoned by a new diplomat named Ferdinand, whom Salim cared for his education earlier. He is Zabeth's son.

The main problem of the research is why the protagonist of the novel is not satisfied with what he has and he does, and what he gains by changing his locations and professions. On the basis of the problems, the study has proceeded with the objectives to explain why the protagonist is so movable geographically and professionally, and to describe his achievements. Existentialism, particularly the Sartrean view of existentialism, has been used as the tool of analysis.

Review of Literature

Different critics have analyzed *A Bend in the River* from different perspectives. The research on V.S. Naipaul is diversified and reached its climax after he won the Nobel Prize. Like other best English language novels of 20th century, *A Bend in the River* has invited a lot of critics of great interest. The criticism has been principally based on post-colonialism, feminism and comparative study. But this study will focus on the exploration on the quest of identity based on existential approach.

The novel was controversial due to its relentless depiction of Africa after independence, which gave the impression that Naipaul was against the third world. The colonial power no longer remained in Africa and, consequently, the immigrants have to face difficult situations.

Rob Nixon argues that Naipaul uses conditions of insecurity prevalent in the Third World Societies. The insecurity arises from "a weak sense of history" (131), they are partially modernized and are taught repeatedly, during the colonial time, that they cannot rely on themselves. Naipaul as a post-colonial novelist and locates his

novels in both colonial as well as ex-colonial societies and gives a perceptive problem inherent to his societies.

The novel presents female characters to have weak relationships with males. Helen Pyne Timothy's *Women and Sexuality in the later Novels of V.S Naipaul* has adopted the theory of feminism to illustrate that females are silenced and ill-treated. Naipaul's female characters are unattractive and roles are marginalized in his novel. Males define women as the humans only to fulfill males' desires (298-306).

As soon as *A Bend in the River* came out, many critics pointed out its similarities with Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. They thought Conrad inspired Naipaul's vision of colonization and later the inspiration turns his experience of loss of origin to creation. Love and marriage were always passive in his writing.

African people lived in two different situations at the same place - city as urban and village as remote. Bigman as a ruler regards his group as colonizers, and on the other hand, they see themselves as protectors of traditions. Fawzia Mustafa points out "the parallel tempts to search development of Ferdinand as the evolving 'new African man', serves to reinforce Naipaul's thesis of postcolonial mimicry" (142). People experience of being hybrid through the depiction of western culture and identity in land of immigrants where everyone dreams of creating own self.

Bruce King suggests "A *Bend in the River* is undoubtedly intended to be both metaphorical and realistic: the namelessness of the country makes it stand for most of the Third World Countries which are faced with the dilemma of choosing between their present and their traditional past" (3). The novel's depiction of the identity crisis of the people in their hometown is the striking aspect of the novel. People's hard effort turns to be futile and native land transfers as a lonely place.

A Bend in the River depicts Africa in its traditional form. Michael Gorra points

out that in Naipaul's work, "The opposition between civilization and bush is never as absolute as it seems" (46). It states about modern and traditional Africa. Africans get rid of physical domination but not intellectual one by westerner's. In the novel, the author does not think it necessary to emphasize the race issues.

Colonizers not only squeeze the physical resources but they also attack cultural aspects of the colonized. Dobie comments, "Colonizers not only physically conquer territories but also practice cultural colonization by replacing the practices and beliefs of native culture with their own values, governance, law and belief" (188). The colonized are affected by the culture imposed by the colonizers through movies, books and general social practices; the victimized cannot resist this.

Talking about the novelist's mastery over social reality and symbolism, Anthony Boxill puts, "Although the setting of *A Bend in the River* is created in great detail and Naipaul has succeeded in fashioning a teeming, living world; there is considerable evidence in the novel that the setting is intended as symbolic as well as realistic" (76). Metamorphically the novel symbolizes the fragile Africa and dehumanized Africans, an impact of British colonizers.

Similarly, Vincent Leitch views *A Bend in the River* from Chaos Theory, the theory related to behaviour of complex system with unpredictability. He expresses, "The analysis of postcolonial literature characteristically explores the complex interaction and antagonism between native, indigenous, "Pre-colonial" cultures and the imperial culture imposed on them" (26). Africans are intellectually weak and cannot reject the occupation of powerful western culture in hope of better life. They can't break down the situation because they are controlled by European rulers.

Salim is an experienced hand of destruction that has distorted his journey of life. Destruction and instability have contributed a lot to his pessimism about his

worldview and his own future. Bruce King, talking about the theme of the novel, states, "Salim's existentialist thoughts and comments concerning his own experience and that of other's lead us through this pessimistic journey from one cycle of destruction to another (134). It is natural that wars and destruction never bring positive results and are never favourable for humans.

After decolonization, people think that the problems will be solved as the colonizers go away. But the colonizers are replaced by bourgeoisie. Nationalistic ideas are quit off. Veena Singh, in her essay "Paradox of Freedom in *A Bend in the River*" observes:

Freedom lies in living consciousness to the essence of life, such a freedom cannot be imposed, it can be realized. In this freedom one frees oneself from the catastrophic idolatry and blindness to his historical and philosophical concepts, and misconceptions which bind a person to a false future or a statuesque present.... [But in this novel due to] corruption of consciousness.... [The freedom is paradoxical] The paradox lies in the fact that with approaching freedom comes the knowledge of non-existence [not illumination]. (123-124)

Freedom is a matter of personal feeling; it depends on how a person realizes about how free he/she is. Outside force cannot make a person feel free as this feeling should occur spontaneously.

The Europeans left Africa physically, but they have left a lot of their remains behind them. Their presence in Africa can be realized in different forms, such as in the form of military help, their encroachment on education, economy, cultural invasion, etc. Not only that, these colonizers establish the ruler of their favor and full independence is almost impossible. In such a situation, an individual's identity is in

crisis. So, there is a need to reshape the ideology of national leaders and intellectuals for a prosperous nation.

Israt Alam finds the novel *A Bend in the River* has as the struggle for power; she points out how the restless and lawless situation in Africa was created due to the quest for power:

Struggle for power is visible throughout the novel in *A Bend in the River*.

Everyone ran after power as they have seen what happens when someone does not have power. There we have seen political power, social power and eventually sexual power relationship. Salim feels power when he establishes a love affair with white Yvette. To him the feeling of being loved by a white woman can perhaps elevate his position from the 'Other' to the 'Self' and through this shifting he can be a powerful person like the Europeans....

The basis of this kind of relationship is thus to possess a superior position not emotion or absolute love. The "Big Man" had the power to control Africa but he also failed at the end because he gave false hope and treated people as his tools. The only power which prevailed throughout the whole novel was the European power and domination. (9)

Struggle for power is clearly visible. The Europeans struggled to capture power. The natives struggle to enjoy power, when one group sees some loopholes of the group in the power, there is some type of unrest to change the power users. In the novel, we see that struggle for power goes on as power is not a stable aspect to one group, but a shifting phenomenon.

The literature review done in this section shows that the novel *A Bend in The River* has been interpreted through various points of view. It invites the readers to feel the changes that occur in the life of the character after they happen to be in another's

land and fight for their identity. The particular objectives of the study are to explain the reasons why Salim migrates from place to place, and to describe the experiences he undergoes in the process of struggle for existence. The following chapters will be focused on these issues.

Organization of the Study

This thesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter is an introduction to the thesis. It sets the background of the study first. Then the statements of the problems, objectives and hypothesis are also part of this chapter. The chapter also contains the relevant literature with brief comments on them.

The second chapter focuses on the theoretical background of existentialism. It is the tool chosen for the study to show how crisis of identity is caused. The attempt to clarify the concept of existentialism is what this section is aimed for. It clarifies the factors that create an alternative world and imaginative community. This chapter also illustrates hybridity as the result of migration. Its main purpose is to define the perspective that is to be used while going through the events of the novel.

The chapter also analyses the novel *A Bend in the River* by using the existentialist perspective. The lines from the novel are taken for enriching the argument as proof. The existentialist phenomenon is highlighted and the efforts to exist in chaos are thoroughly studied in the thesis.

The third or the final chapter is the concluding part of the thesis. It summarizes the whole thesis with its main points. It also states how the argument put forward in the introduction has come to be proved.

Chapter 2

Salim and His Existential Anxiety

The novel *A Bend in the River* reflects its main character's struggle for better existence which he cannot achieve in spite of many attempts he has made for it. He experiences a lot of ups and downs in his life, but with no desired results. His dreams were to establish a good status in the society. In his attempts to materialize his dreams, he has struggled hard but each of his attempts suffers a failure. From the very beginning of the novel, the political upheavals and other unfavorable situations nip all his attempts for better life in the bud. He is in search of a desired life but his dreams shatter unexpectedly. Thus Salim, the protagonist, faces a lot of existential crises in search of his better identity. Therefore, an existential approach to the novel can best capture the essence of the text. The following section first discusses the existential approach in brief and then analyses the points in the text showing the protagonist's existential crisis. Jean Paul Sartre's view of existentialism is more pertinent for the analysis of the issue under study.

The Meaning and Concept of Existentialism

This philosophy focuses on individual existence, freedom and choice. It is the view that every human defines the meaning of life, and tries to make rational decisions despite existing in an irrational universe. It focuses on the issues of human existence, giving the sense that there is no meaning of purpose of existence. To hold the meaning of life, one must struggle for existence. Existentialism believes everyone is free and must take responsibility of the outcomes of their activities themselves. Action, freedom and decision are personal matters of humanity to choose. Existentialism was propounded by the 19th century philosophers Soren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche.

Existentialism has two different meanings depending on whether it is used in logic or philosophy. In logic it refers to the assertion of existence, but in philosophy, existentialism defines human condition, that is, his life, function and his relation to God. Thus, the philosophical aspect of the term is both physical (existence) and abstract (religion).

It is generally accepted that it was Soren Kierkegaard who first thought of and defined the term in his famous books *Fear and Trembling* (1843), *The Concept of Dread* (1844), and *Sickness Unto Death* (1848). Kierkegaard has connected this philosophy to religion. Cudjon states, "In these and other works Kierkegaard was for the most part restating and elaborating upon the belief that through God and in God man may find freedom from tension and discontent and therefore find peace of mind and spiritual serenity; an idea that had prevailed in much Christian thinking over many centuries" (251). Kierkegaard's claim seems to be true because when humans find themselves in some troubled situations, they surrender themselves to god, and it is also true that they find solace from it:

In Sartre's vision man is born into a kind of void (*le neant*), a mud (*le visqueux*). He has the liberty to remain in this mud and thus lead a passive, supine, acquiescent existence ..., in a 'semi-conscious' state and in which he is scarcely aware of himself. However, he may come out of his subjective, passive situation ... become increasingly aware of himself and, conceivably, experience *anguses*.... If so, he would then have a sense of the absurdity of his predicament and suffer despair. The energy deriving from his awareness would enable him to 'drag' himself out of the mud, and begin to exist. By exercising his power of choice he can give meaning to existence and the universe. Thus, in brief, the human being is obliged to make himself what he

is and has to be what he is. (252)

Sartrean opinion of existentialism is what we find in our real life. Nature gives birth and, after birth, when the person becomes conscious about himself/herself, there is the search of the way to live life. The decision that he/she makes and follows for his survival in this world is what determines his/her existence.

In existential philosophy, existence and essence are the two terms that are much discussed. When applied to humans, it simply means that without existence, we cannot give meaning to our life. Sartre further explains what he means to say that “existence precedes essence”. He posits:

We mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world — and defines himself afterwards. If man as the existentialist sees he is not definable, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself. Thus, there is no human nature, because there is no God to have a conception of it. Man simply is. Not that he is simply what he conceives himself to be, but he is what he wills, and as he conceives himself after already existing — as he wills to be after that leap towards existence. Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself. (3)

As said earlier, man defines himself because outer hand cannot determine what a person desires to be and to do in his life. For example, every parent wants their best to make their children very good persons, but some of them turn thieves, some murderers and some others professors. These parents’ instructions were not different to these children; they all got the same type of advice, but those children once they became conscious about their existence, they started to shape their lives on their own, and accordingly they act now.

Rogers has a very optimistic view of human nature. He believes that "the core of man's nature is essentially positive" (73), and that human beings are naturally growth oriented. They are freely motivated and guided by universal tendency. They are responsible for their acts and consequences, choosing or designing constructive future in a way. To Rogers, the human infant is an example of congruence and genuineness (73).

Connecting existential ideology is against Sartrean philosophy, but there are a lot of scholars who define existential philosophy connecting it with religion. Paul Tillich and May (1952) believe that religion can play a positive role in endowing life with meaning:

We define religion as the assumption that life has meaning. Religion, or lack of it, is shown not in some intellectual or verbal formulation but in one's total orientation to life. Religion is whatever the individuals take to be his ultimate concern. One's religious attitude is to be found at that point where he has conviction that there are values in human existence worth living and dying for. (180)

Religion shapes a person's way of thinking and activities as it teaches them that life has meaning and it is only obtained through religion. The view is that religion is what makes one exist in the world with some meaning. Not only that, humans take shelter under religion when they try to work out some solution in times of adversity.

Friedrich Nietzsche strongly criticizes the western philosophical tradition. He stands on the ground of Christianity, and discourages life. Supporting this concept, Jastein Garder in *Sophie's World* remarks "According to Nietzsche, both Christianity and traditional philosophy had turned away from the real world and pointed toward the world of ideas" (455). Nietzsche does not believe in the existence of God. He

holds a view that there is no authority to determine our fate. He says religions provide no truth because no god exists. God is dead and Christianity has become shelter for the weak and the feeble.

Albert Camus was a journalist, novelist and philosopher who advocated the absurdity of life. He differentiates human life to that of the mythical figure Sisyphus. As our life is a series of meaningless actions, Journey turns to death. It is not necessary to be judging externally. According to Camus, human future is different from each other. He evaluates modern man and his situation as:

A world that can be explained even with bad reason is a familiar world. But, on the other hand, in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land. This divorce between man his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the falling of absurdity. (13)

Camus believes that the world is alien and human existence is isolated. Camus reached the conclusion that if people's life is not guided, it turns out to be absurd. When the living man becomes absurd and futile, he becomes naturally filled with anxiety and hopelessness.

Hybridity and Immigrants' Identity Crisis

The issue of identity is something assumed to be fixed. Today's identities are not static but they are dynamic depending on culture. It is also progressive that never stops. It is an acquired thing which can be gained through efforts. According to Cherise Smith, the various theories that aim to define identity and its origin assume that identity is either a natural, innate quality of a person or socially and culturally constructed entity (8). Common to both of these school of thoughts is the question of

whether identity of a person is changeable, and whether people themselves can change their identity (Smith 8). Post Structuralism theorist, such as Derrida, Foucault and Althusser, believe that identity is formed by discourse and culture (Smith 8).

Identity is a series of representative's acts and socially mandated behaviors that an individual can be forced to continue. This is also what Bhabha claims:

Hybrid hyphenations emphasize the incommensurable elements- the stubborn chunks, as the basis of cultural identifications. What is at issue is the performative nature of those differential identities: the regulation and negotiation of those spaces that are continually-remaking the boundaries, exposing the limits of any claim to a singular or autonomous sign of difference- be it class, gender or race. (313)

Having vast ethnic variations, imperialism constructed the concept of binarism on the basis of race in the society. The white race and its cultural heritage have consistently marginalized the native black. Sense of isolation and displacement of culture made them to feel nostalgia to own origin.

Culture and identity crisis are the factors which make Salim feel alienated or dislocated. The original culture is often lost during the period of colonization by the colonizers' power. Physically and mentally people are marginalized from their own land, culture and rights, so they felt dislocated in their own space.

For Bhabha, hybridity is a situation that combines two or more cultures, especially during the period of colonialism. The colonized cannot be assimilated into the new culture so easily, nor can they continue their existing culture rigorously, and in this situation there is the birth of hybridity, which is the product of the colonial power. He asserts:

Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces

and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of dominating through disavowal (that is, the production of discriminatory identities that secure the 'pure' and original identity of authority). Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects. It displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination. (159)

Modern post-colonial studies also believe hybridity even permits a re-structuring and destabilization of power. Thus, hybridity can be seen not as a means of division to individualized identities but rather a means of re-imaging and interconnected collectivity.

Searching for self-existence has a positive role in life. It can guide us to search for freedom and self-awareness. To sum up, existentialists are obsessed with the meaning of life. They focus on the individual; though life is difficult and does not have universal value of existentialism. In the modern world, they attempt to find happiness through alienation, frustration and challenges. Hence, human beings are free and responsible for existence. All humanistic movements are focused on personal worth and growth potential.

Salim's Failure to Achieve Desired Existence

This thesis aims to analyze V.S. Naipaul's *A Bend in the River* in light of an existential anxiety of life. The major character, Salim, tries to create an alternative world for better existence by combining the experience of present and past, but suffers a failure. The main issue of the research is how Salim struggles for existence but fails to achieve desired goals in an alternative world.

Salim is torn with a conflict between traditional society and modern society that have generated many contradictions between characteristics of the present society

and post-colonial society. Hence, it creates conflict within the individuals in a society with the clash between 'modernism' and the 'traditionalism', and the old ways of life between the values of the western and of the native Africa. In such a dual situation, when individuals with their long tradition try to adapt themselves to the modern ideas, they feel shattered, alienated and unattached to any culture either traditional or modern.

In a postcolonial society, there is a mixture of native culture with foreign culture to create third culture. Following third culture makes people attach with both cultures. This situation gives birth to a new culture, that is, hybrid culture. Mass migration is one of the causes of hybrid culture.

Salim is evidently a failure to gain desired existence, and it is the impact of colonialism and his own impatience. He undergoes a chain of migrations: coastal area to the interior; from interior to the coastal area of Africa; then Africa to Europe, that is, London; from London to Africa, and finally from Africa to an unknown destination. All of these migrations are meant to find a better life, but none of them has been significant.

When he moves to London, his life in an alien soil finds it very difficult to regain the past culture and to adapt to the new. In the novel, Salim is in a state of being exiled in an attempt to journey to a better future. He feels exiled even in his native land along with vanishing culture due to colonialism, let alone in foreign soil. Salim, whose ancestors came to Africa first for trade describes the place: "The coast was not truly African. It was an Arab-Indian-Persian-Portuguese place"(13). The expression sounds like he feels at home during this stay in his birth place. The domination of immigrants is highlighted here.

Being a member of Muslim community, Salim has little education and

intellectual capacities. He is devoid of religious sensibility. He tries to revolt against his fate but time and again, his attempts usually turn into despair.

A successful entrepreneur Nazruddin sold ruined business to Salim, who rebuilds the store and starts business in some new way, but the business does not flourish. Unfortunately, like an exile, he is isolated and quits business. Salim is described as the one “who generally tends to occupy the middle ground between absorption in life and soaring above the cares of the earth” (18). He chooses to mix up with middle class people for biological survival and meaningless wandering.

Salim is an Indian but has never been to India. Since his birth, he has been paying lip service to Indian families when he felt identity crisis. He considers himself as an introducer of the place "But where was the good place? I could not say. I never thought constructively about it. I was waiting for some illumination to come to me, to guide to the good place and the 'life' I was still waiting for" (110). Understanding self and family members, realistic expectations and to discover the meaning of life, he wishes to return home. But he remembers "Home as something in my head. It was something I had lost" (107). It shows he has been so pessimistic about regaining his past status.

Salim concludes that he stands himself isolated to live his life full of discipline and rules. He feels as: "That was how we all felt, though we saw our lives as fluid, and we saw the other man or person as soldier. But in the town, where all was arbitrary ... all our lives were fluid. We, none of us had certainties of any kind ... In the end we could not say where we stood" (223). Salim clearly indicates that there is no meaning of life; there is no end of what mankind is doing; there is no meaningful product of life. Salim is completely aware of the uncertainty of life and arbitrary nature of people in town. The life of most all the characters is in uncertainty.

Ali Joined Salim after bloody riot. Salim, who expects that Ali's company will erase the feeling of loneliness in an alien town, is glad to welcome. He finds it strange to adopt Metty: "He had found his new life. However much he wished for it, he could not go back. He had shed the past" (123). Relationship with Metty, who indulges himself in wine and women, was not in a state of friendship.

When Salim is disturbed and comes to him for guidance, Mahesh clarifies thus: "What do you do? You live here and you ask that? You do what we all do: you carry on" (105). Salim never develops any sense of belonging to a place where he lives. He remains obsessed with fate and immoral character.

For Salim the irony of freedom to move from place to place is his choice. "I could always move on" (32). Raymond avoids the truth of his situation of being a wanderer, "no were else to go" (230). Salim wishes that he would know more about Raymond. Looking Yvette more clearly – "her ambition, her bad judgment, her failure" (215), Salim sees that the lives of both Raymond and Yvette are almost ruined in exile. Chaotic condition of post-colonial Africa indicates what Salim waits for is his unfulfilled dream. President's whimsical policies hugely affected life to lose whatever he has achieved in life.

Salim tries to revolt against his fate but once again, his revolution turns tumid and sour. Unfortunately, as an immigrant exile, he was isolated and obliged to quite business, but still desperately expects something bright: "I was waiting for some illumination to come to me, to guide me to the good place and the 'life' I was still waiting for" (95). Salim generally tends to occupy the middle ground between pragmatism in life and soaring with his dreams.

The dream of Africa is to turn to civilized Africa, and this dream has aroused some hope in the residents. Salim is no exception to it.: "The president had wished to

show us a new Africa. And I saw Africa in a way I had never seen before, saw the defeats and humiliations which until then I had regarded as just a fact of life. I felt like that full of tenderness for the Bigman, for the ragged villagers walking around the domain, and the soldiers showing them the shabby sights" (101). But, the situation does not turn out as he expects. He cast a dark and perceptively ironic eye on a varied world.

Salim sounds as if he is a "realistic" character who has the ability to observe things objectively. "So from an early age I developed the habit of detaching myself from a familiar scene and trying to consider it from a distance" (15). He looks at the things and events remaining away from his personal emotions.

Salim's dynamic personality also stems from conflicts between needs and life goals. He moves to Zaire, the recently independent state ruled by the Bigman, and notices conflict between past and present. He introduces his pessimism from the very beginning; he also confesses that he is atheist to some extent: "My own pessimism, my insecurity, was a more terrestrial affair. I was without the religious sense of my family. The insecurity I felt was due to lack of my true religions" (16). Even after realizing that religion is something with a power to control human affairs, he is apathetic towards it.

Violence becomes common throughout the country, and no place is seen to be safe. The terrible situation is described by the narrator's slave Metty as:

They are going to kill everybody who can read and write, everybody who ever put on a jacket and tie, everybody who put on a Jacket. They are going to kill all the masters and all servants. When they're finished nobody will know there was a place like this here. They're going to kill and kill. They say it is the only way to go back to the beginning before it's too late. (275)

Humans are capable of self-destruction and disintegration when they choose to live authentically, irresponsibly, and pursue self-centered life goals. This violent situation drives so many residents from place to place in search of safety. Salim is also the representative character to undergo this fate.

Psychologically Africa becomes a great prison to Salim and shows deep anguish. Indian characters face existential crises. Indar, an Indian young boy living in Congo, leaves his home in search of promising prospects in the west. This Indian African boy returns to Congo being a failure as a man of two worlds.

After the independence of Africa, familiar places became unfamiliar and strange. Salim with other migrants living along the coast felt severe identity crisis:

We are distinct from the Arabs and other Muslim of the coast; in our customs and attitudes, we were closer to the Hindus of north western India, from which we had originally come. When we had come no one could tell me. We are not the kind of people we simply lived; we did what was expected of us, what we had seen the previous generation do. We never asked why; we never recorded we felt in our bones that we were very old peoples; but we seemed to have no means of gauging the passing of time. Neither my father, nor grandfather put dates to their stories. Not because they had forgotten or were confused; the past was simply the past. (11)

Salim expresses his feeling of loneliness while living in the community with the majority population from other ethnic groups. However, even in this unfavourable place, Salim and his forefathers have been living for years.

The historical tide of migration, colonization and racial discrimination have changed the life, but it was not impossible for them to deny history. For Salim, such inherited nationality has no value because the history of the Indian Ocean is written

by European.

When salim feels that no progress is possible in the coastal Africa and there is no future of his business due to fresh riots, he decides to leave the place and go to London for better options of making money. He expresses his desire: "I wrote to Nazruddin that I was coming to London for a visit, leaving him to interpret that simple message. What a decision, though! When no other choice was left to me, when family and community hardly existed, when duty hardly had meaning, and there were no safe houses" (228). To break out of narrow geography Salim wants to join the Nazruddin family in London. He is also in the expectation that life in London must be better.

Africans are straightforward, simple-minded people and they never assess themselves as there was nothing to lie. They were simply themselves and did what they could. But in their eyes, the Europeans are liars as they say one thing and do something different. They are hungry for resources, image and power: "The Europeans wanted gold and slaves, like everybody else; but at the same time they wanted statues put up to themselves as people who had done good things for slaves" (17). The Africans, though they really hated the Europeans, could not express their opposition to them. There was no other option except submission.

It made me feel like I was nowhere. It forced old anxieties on me and added new ones, about London, about this bigger world where I would have to make my way. Where would I start? When I turned the television on, it wasn't marvelous. It was to become aware of the great strangers outside, and to wonder how this man on screen had had themselves picked out from the crowd. And always in my mind then was the comfort of "going back," of taking another airplane, of perhaps not having, after all, to be here, (231). What he assures about London proved to be as thinking that one place

was one thing, and another place another thing.

Salim decides to leave for London when he sees no future for Africa under Bigman's rule: "I saw a disordered future for the country. No one was going to be secure here: no man of the country was to be envied" (118). The narcissistic and selfish Bigman divides Africa into bits and pieces. Bigman's rule was like of a local king. Nobody is allowed to surpass him though. He is constantly haunted with fear, so he uses all the political power. Due to nationalization concept, many Indian and Arab migrants lose their home in Africa.

When Salim comes back from London he knows his business has been ceased by the government. Metty informs Salim:

You do not know? Nobody told you in London? You do not read papers? You do not have anything. They take away your shop. They give it to native citizens of Africa. The president made a speech a fortnight back. He said he was radicalizing and taking away everything from everybody. [From] all foreigners ... you don't have anything; I do not have anything. (254)

Social and cultural forces contributing to war and violence in Africa create hopelessness and homelessness. For Salim, radicalization is the new big event for change.

One of the reasons Salim and other immigrants are fed up with the President is his one-sided imposition of different rules. Indar comments, "That was what he said. But I didn't have to tell you that what he was really talking about was his own virtue and good fortune. For himself the purity of caste, arranged marriage, the correct diet, the service of untouchables. For everybody else, pollution. Everybody else stepped in pollution and had to pay the price" (149).

Nostalgically, Salim notices Bigman's unfriendly rule. "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. And now I felt that the mystery and magic of the place had gone” (103). The aim of Bigman is to create a model Africa destroying traditional Africa. To maintain his power and political career he looks towards the west.

Salim had never discussed his future or the future of the coast with his family. The assumption seemed to be that things will continue but the condition has not been as they expect. He does not believe in fate, either. His intention is to do something good to carry on their tradition of business. Salim says:

I could no longer submit to fate. My wish was not to be good, in the way of our tradition, but to make good. But how? What did I have to offer? What talent, what skill apart from the African trading of skills of our family? This anxiety began to eat away at me. And that was why, when Nazruddin made his offer, of a shop and business in a far-off country that was still in Africa. (20)

But mere desire and intention cannot make a person successful; deeds and the favourable situation are even more important. We have to become what the world outside makes us. We have to live the world as it exists.

Having destroyed their town, they had wished to see it a living place again. They had brought so much suffering themselves:

The people of our region had been much abused, not only by Europeans and Arabs.... If the movement had been more reasoned, had been less a movement of simple rejection, the people of our region might have seen that the town at the bend in the river was theirs, the capital of any state they might set up. But they had hated the town for the intruders who had ruled in it and from it; and they had preferred to destroy the town rather than take it over. (67)

The activities of the Europeans had made the African people feel that the intruders are there not for ruling over the nation but for destroying it. Violence becomes a natural process for Africans that destroys everything. The madness calls the humanity of Africans into questions. Due to bloody war, they live in a state of confusion.

Salim's migration has made him an alien person even to his own family members. Feeling of isolation and detachment from family and friends, he feels, "I was mister because I was a foreigner, someone from the far-off coast, and an English speaker, I was mister in order to be distinguished from the other resident foreigners, who were monsieur" (6). All the optimism and expectation shattered and Salim suffers from the memory of his life on East coast. He was not happy there, either but life was better. Salim had expected better, that is the nature of stupidity and incompetence.

Salim's ideology was affected due to his agonized life. Because of war, he thinks that armies are only for destruction. He is against the idea of using technology, and views that Africans use modern technology to destroy themselves. It does not matter what others modern tools they use, they will do what their ancestors did, Salim had doubts about army. "The army had a real war to fight; and no one could say whether those men, given modern weapons again and orders to kill, would not fall into the ways of their slave hunting ancestors and break up into marauding bands, as they had done at independence, with the collapse of all authority" (68). The force intends to produce violence and destructions in town. Even small things can start new ways of destruction. Salim wants the old balanced system to be maintained. He shows sympathy to the people of own region.

Due to British colonization, Salim finds himself in a state of confusion. Psychological impact is another consequence of hostile country towards mobilization

for political change, creating a habit of looking and contemplating on own situation:

The British administration gave us beautiful stamps. These stamps depicted local scenes and local things; there was one called "Arab Dhow." It was as though, in those stamps, a foreigner had said, "This is what is most striking about this place." Without that stamp of the dhow I might have taken the dhow for granted. As it was, I learned to look at them. (15)

Europe as a touchstone by which the other nation should be tested, evaluated and valued. Salim is compelled to put his head under knee and apply the strategy of 'wait and see to exist'.

Throughout the novel, the writer uses a young boy narrator Salim to dehumanize the Africans and the impact of the British colonizer as a slow poison. Salim and Ferdinand are the victims of this moment and are almost lost due to the absence of the true spirit of nationalism. Salim is not a completely defeated man though the sadness can't be ignored in search for a better life. Ferdinand was not able to escape from plight but did not lose everything.

Mahesh and Shova, who seem to be more competent, continue to "carry on" as they can successfully use the skill of survival. These two and Indar represent the floating diasporic Indians. As a dictatorship; manipulation of natural resources, cultural heritage, and history of life of African's is in hand of the colonizer President. Whatever the situation comes, patience is the best policy to revive and struggle from ground level. In changing the world, Salim thinks about his future, moves from place to place and settles, but his aimless journey efforts are only his wishes.

In the final section of the novel Salim travels with other co-passengers in a steamer in search of peace and security. The surroundings are full of unknown pain and danger. "I had to make more, as fast as I could, and the little I had, I had to get out

of the country" (258). Now his destination is in darkness. Nobody knows, even he does not know where he is going to. Anyway it is his search for his identity.

The novel clearly presents the diaspora people like Salim struggling for identity. They work hard; make choices; go after their choices, knowing that they have to make their identity by themselves. They move according to their own accord. They also know that identity is not given but made entity. However, they cannot attain what they struggle for. They fail to work out the real meaning of life with individual identity. Finally, they suffer a type of agony. In this sense, they are following existential values with their failure to make their desired identity.

Chapter 3

Salim's Life into Meaninglessness

This thesis is aimed at analyzing V.S. Naipaul's *A Bend in the River* through the view point of existential crisis of the protagonist. The existential issue is connected with the imagination of the expatriate. The novel depicts the plight of the people, who happen to be in new place in search of their better identity. It also makes the readers aware that forth coming generations are bound to be affected by the sense of cultural loss and confusion of fractured identity. He expresses his voices through the narrator to define what the motherland means, and what the value of peace for existing life is. Salim, the protagonist in the novel, is unable to invent good times to change life into better conditions. He starts the journey with some aim, but the journey ends in aimlessness.

Salim is of Indian origin, migrating to Africa a few generations ago. He is not the pure native citizen of Africa. There are a lot of other such immigrants residing there. Salim is the representative character of those immigrants. These characters experience a type of torture from the natives of Africa as they are labeled as diaspora, and the natives' viewpoint to them is negative. Moreover, after the Europeans lift their colony in Africa, the natives start the movement of nationalism, which proves to be very dangerous to these immigrants. Salim is one of those to suffer this agony.

As a representative character, Salim's migrating nature and fluidity in his identity has been a major issue in the thesis. He is described to have been a resident of coastal Africa. Because of political movements, he shifted to the interior. Again when the colonizers lifted their colony, he migrated to the coastal area for business. The movement of nationalism caused disintegration to his family and he also migrated to London for a better life, but all in vain. He again came back to Africa in search of his

past life, but it had gone far away from him. He finally starts a journey into darkness.

The characters of the novel disperse to different countries in search of better life. They connect their native land and country of present settlement with the remembrances of their homeland and try to adjust in an imaginary place. Being connected with Indian and Arab roots, they hope to live in foreign land with dignity, but all their attempts result in fruitlessness.

The main research problem of this thesis is: why Salim migrates from place to place and what experience he gains in the process of displacement. The thesis concludes that Salim and other characters migrate from place to place for better existence but their struggles for better survival have suffered failures, making them regret their decisions and actions. These characters' moves for survival have been analyzed from existential perspectives. These characters become the examples of Sartre's view of existentialism, that is, no meaning of life.

Initially, Africa is compared with a garden but later it turns into desert like land due to the damage of the war. The characters have difficulty in adjusting themselves to new country and they further search for a safe world. In the novel, we find the immigrants' inability to completely follow their old culture and to get adjusted to the new one. Mixing of two cultures creates the third culture. Following third culture makes them feel their attachment towards both nations, thus confusing life style, leading to existential crisis.

One of the crises the character's face is the invasion of the Western culture upon the traditional society. Political revolution and war directly affect the immigrants' families and public, social life. Salim and his contemporaries experience different political upheavals in Africa, but they do not find these changes in their favor. On the contrary, the changes caused a certain type of anxiety and danger to

them.

In *A Bend in the River*, British rulers leave their political, propellant and cultural legacies in both the African countries and Trinidad. The novel clearly portrays Salim's aimless struggle. Ferdinand, Indar and other Indian families undergo the similar fate. As a result, feelings of alienation, homelessness, and hybridism take place in the characters' life. Alienation and exile have been shown as the dimension of colonial impact in the text. Loss of their own cultural values and forceful implementation of foreign culture through white dictatorship creates more insecurity in the lives of the immigrants. Uprooting and displacement of cultures result in creating diasporic insecurity.

The study has clearly pointed out the influences of political changes and colonization in life. So, Salim and friends migrate to search for a better place home but all the efforts seem to be in Diasporas. Salim acquires experience of pain and seeks life in imagination. Disorganized and disorderly society of the town at the bend in the river doesn't provide much chance of any fulfillment. Those who cannot construct a coherent self are in condition of existential suffering. Salim, Ferdinand, Raymond, Indar, Mahesh and Yvette are all outsiders floating and lost without definite identity.

Salim never identifies the living country. He seeks his fortune in an unnamed place at the town bend in the river, in Africa. His dream is changing as the following water flows in the river. There he becomes the owner of a shop in a colonial village which was left due to chaotic conditions ruled by a President. The newly emergent national identity in Africa is a threat to Salim and others. They express individual experience collectively.

As breakup with Yvette, Salim went to London; there he tried to make a new

life, marrying Kareisha. London he feels rootless and goes back to hometown. Salim was imprisoned due to illegal activities nevertheless he was saved from probable punishment of death by an officer named Ferdinand. Salim was allowed to leave the towns secretly in night; Salim continued his aimless journey through life, through history, and larger of larger spirals of exile and loss away from Africa. Salim identity crisis reflects the crisis of other immigrants living in Africa.

The study has clearly indicated that political upheavals push countries in conflict between western culture and eastern culture. The major concern is what exists and happens after colonial rule. This thesis is an attempt to study the novels through an existential approach. Moreover, this thesis opens the way to other researchers to make further study of this novel from the existential perspective. Not all the aspects of existentialism are studied in this thesis due to limitations. It can be studied from various points of view of existentialism like fluidity of identity, migration and living conditions of people, cultural hybridism in immigrants and more. These kinds of studies could be recommended for the studies. Those who cannot construct a coherent self are in a condition of existential suffering.

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