

Evolution of Feminine Space in V. S. Naipaul's Selected Novels

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Abstract: Feminism through the lens of spatial theory provides a new perspective and insight into various aspects of feminine space. Spatial theory highlights an awareness of status of women at many levels. Spaces are encoded differently for men and women. Literature creates a narrative space to produce new interpretation of women.

In the history of any literature of the world feminine space has witnessed a change to greater degree. The evolution of feminine space in the narrative of literary text is paradoxical. In spite of being a peripheral figure, women form the integral part of male's world. In V. S. Naipaul's novels women are the directional force of the narrative. It is the women who push the men into action and their forceful spatial background gives direction to male characters in their quest for destiny. This study attempts to analyse, how the feminine space in the novels of Naipaul evolved from his initial phase of writing to the latest. A distinct change that corresponds with the progression of time is noticeable.

Key words: *Feminine space, private, social space, Naipaul, evolution.*

In V.S. Naipaul's narrative space men were always the central characters but women characters have their own space through whose assistance men discharge their purposeful roles. Women characters have their own private spaces. They even form a directional force behind men's spatial identities. Though women in Naipaul's narrative space do not have a central space, they do play an important role in most of his works. Literature helps to know the space of feminine characters which marks the private and social identity of characters. Naipaul's feminine space is evolved from postcolonial world to the current scenario of the world in relation to his early phase of writing to the latest novels.

In one of his early novels *A House for Mr Biswas* women characters not only try to create their own space in their private life but also as immigrants strive to establish themselves in the new spatial order of Trinidad. This place holds people from various countries who strive to accommodate themselves along with others. Hence, women need to establish both their personal and social space. This situation indeed motivated women characters first to create a strong hold to their personal space. The women characters here represent the post independent time and lifestyle. Mrs. Tulsi the head of the family in the Hanuman House occupy a rare dominant feminine space unlike other women of her time. The joint family headed by her represent the traditional Indian family set up.

In this novel, women hold dominant personal space where men have no interference. They were indispensable especially in the household. The characters like Tara, Biswas' aunt, Mrs. Tulsi, Biswas's mother in law, Shama his wife, Savi his daughter are powerful force behind the protagonist Biswas' life. The space these women characters occupy in Biswas life reveal how he is a man who promises lot but fails to deliver anything. He shuns from his responsibilities and expects from the women he is associated with. His role as a son, husband, son in law and father is fulfilled only with the help of the responsible role played by the women of his relationship.

In comparison, with the female characters, Biswas is more inferior in his capacity to perform his duties. His affluent aunt Tara nurtured him in all ways before his marriage, wife rescues him from all his misadventures, mother-in-law protects him after his every failure and finally his daughter takes over this family during his last days of his life. But all these female characters are limited and confined only to their personal space and do not extend outside of it.

Mrs. Tulsi and Tara are two very strong women, where Tara dominates the first phase of the novel while Mrs. Tulsi the later half. These two women occupy a prominent place in the development of the narrative space of the novel. The character of Shama always backs Biswas in all his attempts. In one of his failures Biswas said that "He wanted to comfort her. But he needed the comfort himself. in the end it was Shama who gave him comfort" (149). She is also much stronger than Biswas. Savi also becomes a redeemer of her family after Biswas falls sick and was no longer able to work at the end of the novel. "Savi got a job, at a bigger salary than Mr. Biswas could ever have got" (622). Biswas realized the importance of female strength through his daughter Savi. This brings out the Paradigm shift in the attitude of the male towards the female strength.

Presentation of Savi by Naipaul was as the saviour of the house. When the novel ends it is the strong female character of Savi that has saved him. Biswas welcomed her as if she was his son Anand combined. Naipaul here presents a transformed Biswas, who had earlier not even been aware of her growing up is now welcoming her as both son and his daughter. Biswas' role being replaced by Savi is a very important aspect of the novel from the feminist perspective. This noteworthy act of the Savi is acknowledged by her father proves the evolution of feminine space in the modern perspective.

In the later novel, *Half a Life* three women are brought to light in the life of central character Willie Chandran. He was born in India and nurtured by his mother moves to England and to Africa with his girlfriend Ana and finally to Germany to settle with his sister Sarojini. Willie's father marries a low cost women and regrets for his decision. She always falls short of his father's expectations. Willie Chandran too felt ashamed and "there came a little sympathy" (12). But the mother sacrifices her life for the betterment of her family. She loves her son though he is entirely different from her and considers his son the only hope of her. Willie only deserts her mother and associated her with everything ugly.

Willie's mother was given no voice she is presented only through Willie or his father. But at the same time Naipaul do allow some positive feminine space for Willie's mother. From the son's point of view she is shown how Willie as a young child felt for his mother and loved her. His view on his mother gets tainted by his perception of the world. The character delineation of Willie's mother by Naipaul clearly bring out the limitation of feminine space in the social life of human being no matter whatever the period may be. The view on women is tainted and even limited with the standards of feminine beauty, birth lineage and expected behaviour.

Willie's married life with Ana is different as he is financially dependent on her. With the help of Ana he could gain confidence to live an independent life in an alien society in England. Though belonging to a non-Indian community Ana accepts even Willie's deception. She faces all the insults to save her marital life and continue to live with him. Willie deserted Ana just because he was fed up living her life in Africa. But Ana is fully aware of the weakness of his character and never shows her anger. Her strength is dire in contrast with Willie's weakness.

Ana was the one who made Willie feel that he was a man for the first time in his life. Nowhere in his life, he felt this sense of peace with any relationship. Willie confess this to his sister later, "for the luck and liberation she had brought me, the undoing of fear the granting to me of full man hood." (145). She became the source for the stories of Willie's books. It increased his feeling for her when he heard one of the story of her life in Africa. In spite of all the comfort enjoyed by Willie in the hand of Ana he rejects her. This revealed the non-acceptance of the feminine space fully by the male. He felt that he cannot live the life of her in her country. He rejects Ana and her country and wished to return to live his own life. Ana became the victim of sexual abuse not only by Willie but within her family. This proved the helplessness of the powerless under the powerful. This is the hierarchy in power where men are powerful and is at the lower level. The illusioned life of men like Willie has to end dramatically with Ana when he states, "I am forty-one. I am tired of living your life" (227). Both of them discovered that they were not living their own lives and finally Ana could only represent the half living of women in their social and personal space.

Another important female character is Willie's sister Sarojini. It was Sarojini who was responsible for next course of action from Africa to Germany. For Sarojini, his father plans for a marriage but unlike the usual development she goes away with a German, a photographer by profession. Unlike being the member of the suppressed feminine space she chooses to make her own choice escaping the patriarchal domination. She is very straight forward in making her observation. She does not wait for the ways of freedom to be given by the male. She does not succumb to others orders. Though her father arranged for her marriage she vanished abruptly foregoing the protectiveness of her family. She does not allow the patriarchy domination in her private space and either the suppressive codes of patriarchy in her social space. But she faces a setback in spite of all these progressive traits of freedom. Her husband deserts her. Willie seeks support from his sister after leaving Asia.

Naipaul in this novel, spare the major narrative force with the female characters. The feminist space forms the background for the central character Willie and for the development of the plot. Willie had always been protected and guided by female characters especially Ana and Sarojini from two different communities. Both differ from each other, Sarojini of Indian background follow her maternal uncle's radical genes and furious in nature. Ana is different in her thinking due to her racial and social difference. Ana is important for Willie as he depended on her in the beginning of his years and Sarojini was depended by him for his survival in his later life.

The major evolution of feminine space is evident in comparison with initial and later novels are the mention of sexual relationships. In *A House for Mr. Biswas* there is no explicit mention of it and is confined to the marital relationship. In the later novels, Naipaul while depicting African and European setting the presentation of sexual relationship forms a major component of the male-female relationship. They are not confined to the marital sphere. The central character here gets into number of extramarital affairs. This element of male-female relationship is absent in the part of the novel set in India. Willie's sexual encounters are shown to have occurred outside the Indian setting. The world has remained unchanged on the Indian subcontinent in the authors' mind.

Nowhere Naipaul's representation of female characters gained the importance of mutual bonding between male female relationships. Being a realist, the author shows the true state of women. Female characters are flat characters and lack development, but contribute to the development of the narrative. They do not develop in their status and their only means to survive is to adapt to the male oriented world and remain stereotypes forever with a very limited scope for individualistic feminine space. Though Naipaul's female characters have evolved from age old customs and codes of living to the present mode of living, their scope for an elusive feminine space remains a dream.

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