



Portrayal of Post-Independence Conditions of African Countries in Naipaul's 'A Bend in the River'

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Abstract:

Europe no longer ruled Africa. But it still fed them in a hundred ways like its language, culture, education, wonderful goods and many more. Despite the formal independence of African countries from colonizers, these countries have not become independent in true sense. Their dependence continues and they rely on the colonizers for many things still. They hate everything associated with colonizers and they try to destroy the things of colonizers. But they don't have any thing concrete to fall back on in the name of their own culture, administration, or a society etc. Colonizer's everything like language, culture, religion have altered and made hybrid. Despite the wish neither they can go back to their bush culture nor they can follow colonizer's culture completely. They are stranded in-between Consequently, the country has descended into chaos. Violence erupts everywhere. Same condition prevails which was prevalent during colonization. Few elite people like Big man try to restore the lost culture of Africa but in doing so he follows European ways. His very methods of doing so are reminders of European's. True motif of him is to gain power and take benefit of the situation for the personal Agenda and not to improve the condition of African's.

Key words: Colonizer, colonized, & in-between culture of Africa.

Colonisers ruled the African countries for decades and departed. During colonization the impact made by colonisers is very long-lasting. All aspects of life of colonised people are changed from their original ways. All post-colonial societies are still influenced and impacted by many ways from colonisers domination even after their independence. European feed these countries in many ways. Independence has not restored their freedom & previous way of life. Neither it has solved their persisting problems. On the

contrary, it has created many complex problems like cultural conflict, religious conflict, economic loss, imitation, hybridity, mimicry, identity, alienation and rootlessness. This conflict has never been the seamless and homogeneous. That's why this conflict between coloniser and colonised is not limited to one aspect but it is all pervasive, and continuous process. This conflict is of broader and deeper level than what meets the eye.

Colonisers exploited colonised people on every possible front and left country in chaos. Challenge of taking newly independent country forward couldn't be shouldered by these people. So it descended into chaos and confusion. During colonization colonisers had destroyed everything of colonised and had left them good for nothing. During colonization Europeans have suppressed the culture of African people and moreover encouraged their own culture. It was also imbibed that African culture is inferior and European culture is superior. This made deep impact on a section of the society. Consequently, a section of African society adores the culture of colonisers and they look down upon their own people who don't follow the culture of colonisers. So, two sections of African societies have emerged: one is pro to the legacies left by colonisers and another opposes it and prefers their original bush culture. As a result of it, the country has descended into the utter chaos. Conflict between Liberation army and Army of Big Man is the fight about same. Big man wants the country to be ruled in the ways of Europe.; whereas the Liberation army wants to go back to previous bush culture of Africa.

This is the predicament of any country from where colonizers have departed recently. The roots of colonialism run so deep in the soil of colonized country. Postcolonial country must grapple with its issue of governing and restructuring the country. In a country like Africa in a precolonial political and societal administration was strictly confined to a close-knit tribal territory, this sudden abandonment to a vast territory expanded nationhood, ushered in by the colonizer, forebode abject fear like that of a malin an exposed pray. Franz Fannon prophetically writes.

It so happens that the unpreparedness of the educated classes, the lack of practical links between them and the mass of the people, their laziness and let it be said, their cowardice at the decisive moment of the struggle will give rise to tragic mishap (Fannon, 78)

A Bend.... Is the perfect example of double-edged predicament of the colonized psyche of the people? The Big man forcibly brings in the Agenda of colonial cleansing and removal of people in his opposition. But the method of doing so is only too reminiscent of the colonizers and their ways. This chapter

attempts to highlight this ambivalence and conflict where the apparent symbolic destruction of colonialism seems actually to continue the strategies of colonial oppression.

They will be enslaved but by African Ruler: Salim, the narrator of the novel, is basically an outsider hailing from India. His forefathers have been living on the east coast of Africa for hundreds of years. He didn't have any connections with his land, culture and religion of his forefathers. He is an expatriate Indian Muslim with no family, no flag, no fetish. In short, he has no identity. His attempt has always been to survive only in the volatile temperament. He sarcastically comments and in a very detached manner takes part in everything happening in the town situated on a bend in the river. As Salim journey's towards from his east coast destination of the Africa to the center of the continent (Bend in the river), he remembered only the march of the slaves in the similar manner, sure seal of the colonialism. Salim felt it is a historically reverse journey.

I couldn't help thinking that was how it was in old days slaves were transported. They had made the similar journey but of course on foot and in the opposite direction." (Naipaul, 4)

Salim could feel that this coming back to the center of the town is reverse form of the slavery. African's will be enslaved once again and the only difference this time will be, they will be ruled by an African ruler not the Europeans. There is hatred towards European culture by Liberation Army. They destroy everything left behind by colonizers. This destruction can be seen to Salim. While journeying from east coast to the Bend in the river, Salim observes that the town has visible marks of the primitive destruction. Everything associated with colonizers was destroyed. As Salim drives to his destination he couldn't help feeling "This is madness, I am going in the wrong direction. There can't be new life at the end of this." (Ibid) Everywhere unmistakable traces of destruction are found.

The steamer monument had been knocked down with all the other colonial statures and monuments. Pedestals had been defaced, protective railings flattened, floodlights smashed and left to rust. Ruins had been left as ruins no attempts had been made to tidy up. The names of all streets had been changed. No one used the new names because no one really cared them. The wish only had been to get rid of the old, to wipe out the memory of the intruder. It was unnerving the depth of thar African Rage, the wish to destroy regardless of the consequences." (Naipaul, 26). These people destroy without bothering about the consequences.

The newly independent country is ruled by the Big man. He is the follower of European ways of ruling. Though his ways, according to him, are African ways but they are not in reality. Whatever he does for

the people of Africa, it is done to keep his authority and power intact. In doing so, he reverses the symbol of colonial civilization to lay claim to the country as his own. The big man has totally changed the white man's religion by destroying everything associated with white people and attempted to return to the old African religion. It is his endeavor to get close to the African People. But what he is doing is not the authenticating spiritual experience of the African ancestors but it is an elaborate device to defy him by displaying his enlarged photographs in a native costume and with a walking stick as a fetish.

His attempts have been to reverse the religious symbols of the post-colonial civilization. By doing so, he claims that these practices are his own countries and his own people's. But it is not true. Whatever is done is an imitation from colonizers. But people have totally eradicated the white man's religion by destroying pedestals and returning to the old African religion of bush. Big Man doesn't have authenticating spiritual experience of the African ancestors but a skillful plan to portray himself through the installation of his enlarge photographs dressed in an African Manner and with a walking stick as a fetish.

Another example of imitating the Europeans is the photographs of the Big man. The photograph of the president was very large. They were about three feet high. The official portraits of the president in African Garb were getting bigger and bigger, larger and larger. The quality of the print was getting finer and finer. These photographs were said to be made in Europe. They were said to be done in Europe.

The white man's idols have now been replaced by the photographs of the president, the big man. This method of invasion in the minds of the people has been subtle and at the same time very forceful. The Person like Salim who is always nonchalant comments-

“Understanding the intent behind each new official photograph each new statue of the African Madonna with child, I could no longer consider statues and photographs as background. New statues were still added to from time to time to this public walk. The most recent at the end of the main avenue was a bulky sculpture in stone unfinished of a mother and a child. “(Naipaul, 273)

Big man is not attempting anything new. Merely the old flavor of European religion is replaced by an African One. The sculpture of his mother as African Madonna has become a cult in post-independence Africa. “Shrines had been set up – and were continuously being set up – in various parts of Africa. These were connected with the president's mother and pilgrimages to these places had been decided for certain days in a year. (Naipaul, 94) The president's expensive and European made photographs with his fetish proclaim the metaphorical representation of the new African religion.

The deification (elevation) is further sealed by the presidents' walking stick which is considered as fetish-a symbol of power. The walking stick has a symbol of serpent on it. The serpent is apparently a fetish or symbol of power reminding of precolonial bush culture of Africa. But it could also be thought, in the post-colonial context, that the political equivalent of the scepter, a European symbol of kingship. The president, in a very skillful manner, exploits the precolonial all ritual symbolism for consolidating and strengthening his political power post-colonial Africa. This is beyond the knowledge and comprehension of the average white, a symbol of the colonial power. This can be realized in the remark of Yvette to Salim.

"He had put his stick on the ground. I didn't know that had a meaning. I didn't know I had to shut up, that in the old days of chiefs; to talk when the stick was down was something you could be beaten to death. I was close to him and said something banal about the skill of the dancers. He just curled his lips in anger and looked away, lifting his head up All Africans were horrified at what I had done (Naipaul, 187).

The incident brought doom to the political friendship of Raymond and The Big Man. The incident brought lot of negative impact on the life of Yvette also. Thus, the fetish, the symbol of political power in precolonial African bush-Cultural Practice is converted into the postcolonial power echelons.

The president interprets and adopts the religion of Africa in his own manner leading to the politically benefitting. It is not the original religion of African people but it is influenced by colonizers religion. That's why it is not liberating like pure religion as it should be. All the things done by Big Man aren't pure but they are mostly influenced by colonizers. Consequently, the true political administrative system of African tribe is wiped away and in a very subtle manner replaced by the colonial hegemony. This is nothing but the continuation of the colonial practices. Like colonizers during colonization, this feeling is given to the people of Africa by Big Man that he does everything for the people and their welfare. But on the contrary neither he does it for the people nor it is done in the African ways. All the ways and manners of colonizers to rule the Africa are used by Big man but in a subtle and disguised manner. It is very clear by now that practices of colonizers still persist and it is the root cause of conflict and rage in African society.

(White architecture is viewed as connected with white ruler) Similarly, construction, architecture and all other things of white people are viewed as association (connected without break) with the white ruler and their culture. Africans looked at it with hate and anger. These constructions were the reminder of the repressive colonial past for the people of Africa. This danger, in the form of construction, was looming large everywhere around them. African people couldn't tolerate it. Salim, while entering the town, realized that the

town was almost destroyed. The American suburban area was burnt down and bush and other small trees had grown all over the ruins. Salim shudders at the terrifying anger of the African's. He is shocked by seeing the wish of Africans to destroy, regardless of the consequences.

Remnants of hotels and night clubs, after destroying, can barely be recognized since it was reduced to the debris. Everything was destroyed by Africans. The Africans had gone back to the bush by abandoning the town. All the developments made by white during their rule were wiped out. The steamer monument, useful development, had been destroyed. After the colonizers have left the town, life is returning to normalcy. Fr. Huismans is the last reminder of the colonialism who considers himself lucky one to witness the change is killed, He is also not spared. He is killed in an African Primitive way. The rage of the people of Africa towards colonizers can be understood.

After the second rebellion, peace fell over and rebuilding started telephone, grew new domain) Second rebellion of liberation Army at the bend was crushed down by the president's white mercenaries in a brutal and primitive manner. Soon after this a strange peace over powered the town and the rebuilding of the town started. New things were brought to the place like telephone which was hardly needed or was the requirement of the time. Out of the ruins of town the new domains came into the being, the president's miracle of modern Africa. It was attempt of the president to modernize Africa. "Domain were startling concrete louvers pierced through concrete blocks of great size , tinted glass. The smaller buildings- houses and bungalows were none like what we were used to. Even they were on the large side and with air conditioner sticking out in many places like building blocks that had slipped and looked extravagant." (Naipaul, 100) Domain modeled on European style lured youths to become part of the establishment. Colonial architecture by European's is now merely replaced by the imperial architecture of the president. The entire domain, miracle project of president, is modelled on the style of Europe. This domain doesn't wipe out the anti- colonial sentiments of the people but it attracts them to be part of the newly established domain. Ferdinand, the son of the Zabath was too proud to join the domain. Every student dreamt of following the prototype of the president. In this context, Homi K. Bhaba writes:

It is the problem of how in signifying the present something comes to be repeated, relocated, translated in the name of tradition in the guise of pastness that is not necessarily a faithful sign of historical memory but a strategy of representing authority in terms of the artifice of the archaic. (Bhabha, 394)

The president manipulates the people though domain doesn't remind anything about history of Africa. The domain is not reminder of anything historic about people of Africa. It has nothing to do with the culture of Africa. But it is manipulation by the president as a miracle of new Africa. He is misleading the African's by telling them domain as a part of their culture. He is projecting himself as chief person behind this project and absolute ruler. He leaves no stone unturned to claim his rule over the place.

Speeches delivered by the president are an attempt to have full control over country. He derives the motivation from European's to rule the people by fooling them. He may go to any extent to achieve this. His linguistic jingoism, one of the ways, held his absolute control of the country. By delivering impactful speeches he would change the opinion of the people.

At one time the president's speeches were in French. The African language the president has chosen for his speech was mixed and simple language and simplified it further, making it the language of drinking booth and the street brawl, converting himself, while he spoke, this man who kept everybody dangling and imitated the etiquette of royalty and graces of de Gaulle, into the lowest of the low. (Naipaul, 205)

The youths who became victim of the policy of the Big man were men of no culture. Ferdinand's condition was the condition of the youths of the Africa. He was lured by the development of Big Man's project. Domain was constructed and polytechnic was started on the domain. By putting in lot of efforts, Ferdinand had studied in it. After completing the education, he developed himself into a confused person rather than a confident man. He was neither a man of Africa nor Europe. His life was scattered across various cultures. He was with his father in his childhood. After the death of the father, mother brought him up and later he was brought to Salim. Ferdinand was admitted in polytechnic run on the principles of Europe. He was forced to learn the curriculum designed by European scholars in polytechnic. His upbringing involved many new environments, many new people of different religion and background. They influenced him in a variety of proportion. He didn't have one role model in his life to follow. Sometimes he followed his bush culture, sometimes manners of Salim and sometimes the things taught to him in polytechnic. As a result of it, He had become a confused individual. This is the condition of youths of Africa. All the youths who got education became directionless. They remained neither youths of Africa nor the European. It is the strategy of the Big man to manipulate the youths and maintain his absolute authority. Whatever was being done in the name of development was based on the colonizer's strategy. Colonizers have left the country but

their impact is made at deeper level. A section of people still think that colonizers culture was superior and have continued to follow their legacy. Big man has similar plans for the African people. So, this conflict between colonizer and colonized is way broader than other limited conflicts. Some or the other way, the legacy of colonizers was followed and maintained without any break. Though they left the country but remained present through their ideology among African's.

African was spellbound, youth group banished, radicalization of business. The skillful exploitation of the native language held every African hooked. It was deliberate attempt of the Big Man to use native language in his speech. Every speech was also like a new performance for himself and the people. Army group, representative of the traditional Africa was banished because it was his wish to do so. It was conflict between two factions of the society. One is continuing the legacy of the colonizers and other hates it. Then he takes one drastic step to win the hearts of the African's. Suddenly, he brought in the move called 'radicalization'. With its arrival all the businesses of non-African people were handed over to the Africans. It was staggering. It ensured total control of the power and administration. He even ensured through this move that there is no opposition from the people.

Oblivious ill intent of the president can't remain unnoticed. Statue destroyed, Ferdinand's despair, at the end of the novel, the colonial hegemonic intent of the president resurfaces and becomes obvious. It couldn't remain unnoticed from people. People realized the ill intent of the president behind his hypocrisy. Africa would not be safe haven for me, Saleem thought. Because of destabilization, Violence and uncertainty Salim is forced to flee to London. But London was not a safe haven either. One night the statue of African Madonna and child in the domain was knocked off its pedestal and smashed, as the colonial statues had once been smashed and the monument outside the dock gates". (Naipaul, 210)

Ferdinand, the model of African youth once puffed up with knowledge of being chosen one, now sits defeated and he voices out his despair to the Salim. "we are all going to hell and every man knows in his bones. We are being killed. Nothing has any meaning. I felt I had been used. I felt I had given myself an education for nothing. I felt I had been fooled. Everything that was given to me to destroy me. I began to think I wanted to be a child again, to forget books and everything connected with books. The bush runs itself. But there is no place to go to. (Naipaul, 272)

The incapability of the African civilization to go back to the pure bush culture and everlasting colonial influence has settled in the consciousness of the leaders of the nation. It has spelt doom and despair.

It has nurtured the spirit of helplessness in the minds of its people. Despite every step towards Africanization of people, very clearly traces inability of a colonial country to achieve an autonomous indigenous rule. But even that indigenous rule reeks with the traces of hidden colonial imperatives in the social, cultural and religious sector.

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