

## PANORAMIC VIEW OF CHARACTERS IN NAIPAUL'S MIGUEL STREET

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### Abstract

Present paper is an effort to analyze major characters of V.S. Naipaul's *Miguel Street*. The characters, under scrutiny in this paper, are Bogart, Popo, W. George, Elias, Man-man, Eddoes, B. Wordsworth and Hat. These are the major characters in this novel. These are almost those characters who do nothing special in their lives. They just kill their time and form their own different world. Bogart and Popo's similar lives and their relationships with their wives also have been discussed. The characters, their frivolous activities, their fighting, laziness, insights and their mutual-relationships have been explored in this paper.

**Keywords:** Colonial-discourse, Diaspora, Cultural-clash, Culture-immigration, Miguel Street.

Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul, known as V.S. Naipaul, was born in 1932 in the town of Chaguanas in Trinidad in an orthodox Hindu family. He has won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2001 and many other literary honours in his prolific career. Family conflict and relationships remain central in some of his works. *Miguel Street* is a perfect example of it. Dooley rightly contends, "Violence between men and women is a feature of everyday life in *Miguel Street*, but even in the warped morality of the men of the street, it is acceptable only in moderation". (Dooley, 16) *Miguel Street* is the first written semi-autobiographical novel by Nobel Laureate V. S. Naipaul though it was published in 1959 after his two novels. *The Mystic Masseur* (1958) and *The Suffrage of Elvira* (1958). It is a novel, a semi-autobiography, a series of sketches and a gallery of apocalyptic characters. These stories are the stories of the slums of Trinidad beginning in the 1930's. The stories follow the daily lives of joys, sorrows and loss of these characters through beginning of World War II, though the war itself barely seems to affect their lives. The novel is set in the World War II in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago. The book is the portrait of the time, the culture and the society of that time in this poor neighborhood. *Miguel Street* is far more than a slum spread in the Port of Spain, Trinidad; it is a universe of its own where marriage, love, quarrels, hate, pride and relations are lived every day.

Naipaul's *Miguel Street* has divergent characters like Bogart, Popo, W. George, Elias, Man-man, Eddoes, Wordsworth, Nathaniel, Toni, Mrs. Hereira, Uncle Bhaku, Bolo, Edward and Hat etc. live with their strange habits in the Port of Spain, the capital of Trinidad and Tobago, where Naipaul spent his childhood. It brings forth and highlight how different characters in the novel *Miguel Street* live in street; they sometimes quarrel with one another and sometime they sit and drink together and form a different world of their own, known as Miguel Street. These characters are not from business class, they just spend their time in the trivial activities and in minor projects of their lives. Despite hailing from heterogeneous backgrounds, they live together. The novel is set in a street named Miguel Street in Western Port of Spain. The novel (sometimes considered as a short-story collection) has been studied by a keenly observant precocious and amiable school boy, Vidiadhar Naipaul who lives as a boy in a multi-cultural Indo-Trinidadian environment and depicts the myriad lives of quirky inhabitants of Trinidad. Different stories have been studied particularly focusing on the main character of that story. The novel comprises seventeen different chapters each narrating a different story pertaining to different character. The novel appears to be dominated the male characters and women characters remain eclipsed in the narrative. However, the women characters have been described as strong characters, sometimes working partners or sometimes reduced to be the victim of their husbands beatings. B. Wordsworth reminds about the great poet William Wordsworth, belonging to British Romantic Era and the girl, B. Wordsworth loves, can find parallel to William Wordsworth's relation with Annette Vallon.

The first story is about a trivial character named Bogart that reminds one of Humphrey Bogart, the great actor. At the beginning of the story Bogart seems to be not a social person as he does not want to talk to anybody except Popo. He lives in Miguel Street on rent. He is a tailor by profession but surprisingly enough, he does not do any work of stitching the clothes. He merely pretends to be a tailor by displaying a board. One day when Hats calls him as usual he gives no replies. The news is sprung that Bogart has gone somewhere. He comes as a transformed man and has also acquired an American accent. He drinks a lot and, is captured by the police on the charge of felony.

Popo is the character of the second story. He resembles with Bogart to some extent. He is a carpenter and like Bogart, remains idle in his workshop but keep himself busy with his tools. If someone asks him, he replies, "I making the thing without a name" (Naipaul 9). Popo has a strange habit. He does not drink but still he takes a glass of rum every morning. He does not drink it just dips his middle finger in the rum and licks it whenever he sees that someone is coming in the street. He prefers not to work as he thinks that men are not made to work; these are women who should work for men. Popo says that women "are made for work nor men, women and them like work, men not make for work" (10). Popo's wife works for him. She does cooking in a house to make her livelihood. Popo has no child that is why Hats thinks that he is impotent and he calls him an effeminate, "Popo is a man-woman. Not a proper man" (10). He has to pay a high price for this habit when his wife elopes with a gardener. He becomes very sad without her and its evident from the way he respond in a sad manner when narrator boy asks him.

One day like Bogart he too leaves Miguel Street and when he returns, undergoes a transformation and starts working non-stop in his workshop. His business blossoms and there is always a line of vehicles in front of his workshop to load and unload articles. A noticeable change is seen in his activities. He gets irritated when somebody tries to talk to him. Hat thinks, "Woman send that man mad, you hear" (11). He paints his house and the roof. He goes and returns with his same wife and starts living his ordinary life. His wife resumes her work. But he

is sent to jail on the charge of stealing the things and sells them after remodeling. He comes as a reformed man from the jail and starts working in his workshop honestly.

Elias is the cleanest boy in the street. He takes a bath twice a day and brushes his teeth twice a day. He cleans his house every morning before going to school. He is different from his father. His father was of short stature, obese and dirty while he is tall, skinny and clean. He neither drinks like his father nor uses any filthy language to anybody. He is serious about his studies that why narrator boy's mother tells him to be studious like Elias. The narrator boy's mother says to him 'Why you don't take after Elias? I really don't know what sort of son God give me, you hear?' (29) Hat says about him that Elias has "nice ways too"(29). He aspires to be a doctor. Elias is a boy of fourteen at that time but he talks like a mature person and he also believes in God. George calls the author horse-faced. When author complains this to Elias, he says, "Boy, my father is a funny man. But you must forgive him. What he say don't matter. He old. He have life hard. He not educated like we here"(17) Due to his genial nature, Hat praises him in these words, "The boy Elias have too much good mind"(16). He fails three times in sanitary inspector's exam and went at other two places British Guana and Barbados at Hat's advice but failed all times. Ultimately he becomes cart-driver.

George is more frightening figure even than Big Foot. He always keeps cursing himself and muttering something. He was almost cut off from outside world, "George was never really in touch with what was going on around him all the time"(15) People call him mad. The look of George' house also makes him think so: "It was a broken-down wooden building, painted pink on the outside, and the galvanized -iron roof was brown from rust.[...]There was a dirty bad in one corner and in another there was a table and a stool. That was all. No curtains, no pictures on the wall"(15).The narrator boy is surprised he had never had a family also, "I found it hard to believe that George had a wife and a son and a daughter"(15). George's wife is always busy in cow pen. Unlike Hat and others, George never tried to mix up with the Miguel street gang. He beats his wife and his son, Elias and daughter, Dolly. When his son got young, he starts beating his daughter and his wife more than ever. His wife grows thinner by his blows but his daughter gets fatter. His son grows sterner but he never says a word to his father. When Elias' mother dies, the Miguel street has the saddest, shabbiest and the loneliest funeral .One thing to notice is that the people don't sympathies at the death of with wife" Not one of the men said a word for George.", "No one rather they doubt he had killed his wife" Edward says,"The woman dead from blows. I telling you."(17) But after his wife's death, he wails badly and behaves in a peculiar way George remains very sad for the first few days after the funeral. He drinks a lot of rum and goes about crying in the streets, beating his chest and asking everybody to forgive him, and to take pity on him. (18) When George dies Hat and other boys collect money together and arrange his burial at Lapeyrouse Cemenry. Elias also comes for the funeral.

George is the protagonist of the third story who has grey moustache and a big belly. He is always silent like his donkey. He has one wife and two children. People are afraid of him though he was not as strong and big as Big Foot. He is an eccentric and half-mad person who keeps talking to himself. He has a pink house that was so dirty and not properly maintained by him. George was as idle as Popo whose wife worked in the home, yard and the cow-pen. George does nothing but sitting on the front concrete step outside the open door of his house. He never participates in the activities of the gang of the Miguel Street. He beats his wife and two children.

George's son, Elias is fourteen years old. His father, George beats him with blows, but Elias complains against his father. Eddoes is a cart-driver. He belongs to a low Hindu caste. His

father was also a very skilled driver and Eddoes tells the stories of his father's skillfulness of cart-driving.

Man-man is another character of Miguel Street. He is not bad-looking and has medium stature. People consider him mad. He stands in very election and himself sticks posters on walls. He just writes the word 'Vote' and below it is his picture. He himself votes for himself and even after it he gets three votes. Man-man loved his dog and his dog also loved him so much. He announces himself as a Messiah. He tells people that he is going to be crucified one of these days. People tie him to the cross in Blue Basin and he says himself to hit him with stone: "Stone, stone, STONE me, Brethren! I forgive you". When he is hurt, he himself cries, "Cut this stupidity out. Cut it out, I tell you. I finish with this arseness, you hear."(40)

B. Wordsworth is a poet who goes around in the street selling his poetry. He wanted to sell his poetry but nobody was ready to buy it. "He was a small man and he was tidily dressed. He wore a hat, a white shirt and black trousers."(40) He speaks less and accurate as if he is being charged for his words. B. Wordsworth's full name is Black Wordsworth and he is brother of White Wordsworth. He is a small man who is dressed awkwardly. He calls himself a poet, "the greatest in the world". He wears a hat, a white shirt and black trousers. He comes to watch the bee of the narrator boy.

The author describes the Hat who has enjoyed the life, "I never knew a man who enjoyed life as much as Hat did"(160). Though he never does something particular in his life, but whatever he does he enjoys the moments, "He did nothing new of spectacular-in fact, he did practically the same things every day-but he always enjoyed what he did. And every now and then he managed to give a very fantastic twist to some very ordinary stories."(160) Hat is a lecherous man who loves talking about women and making a mystery of smallest things. He says that both his nephews, Boyee and Errol, were his illegitimate sons and sometimes himself is not certain about his statement. Both the boys come to live with Hat when their parents die, "Their mother, who lived up in the bush near Sangre Grande, died after her husband died and the boys came to live with Hat"(157). They do not like much Hat and never mind whatever the story their uncle tells about their birth. He and Edward even enjoy together with the same woman. Hat teaches many new things about cricket to the author boy. He has a passion for impossible bets and he loses too lot of money while betting at the races. He is fond of pet macaws, parrots and dogs. "Sometimes Hats house became a dangerous place with all these birds around."(160). "One of the thing I noticed in Miguel Street was the way dogs resembled their owners. George has a surely, mean mongrel. Toni's dog was a terrible savage..Hat's dog was the only Alsatian I knew with a sense of humour."(160)

In an interview when Naipaul was asked, "Do you ever wonder what would have become of you if you had stayed in Trinidad"? He himself replies that "I would have killed myself. A friend of mine did—out of stress, I think. He was a boy of mixed race. A lovely boy, and very bright. It was a great waste". (Interview) Naipaul has not much interest in Trinidad that's why he leaves it. Cudjoe says that Naipaul left Trinidad "Because the society was 'unimportant, uncreative' and 'cynical', one could not practise one's craft. (Cudjoe, 35) Homi K. Bhabha in his work *Location of Culture* says, "Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable 'Other', as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite." (Bhabha, 122)

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