

Research Paper—English



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## IMMIGRANT'S VOICE IN 'MR.STONE AND THE KNIGHTS COMPANION' A CRITIQUE



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Never ceased to be a highly controversial writer since the late 1950s V.S.Naipaul has been called 'the world's writer'. Renowned for his novels like 'The Mystic Masseur', 'The Suffrage of Elvira', 'A House for Mr.Biswas', 'The Mimic Men, Guerrillas and above all 'Mr.Stone and the Knights Companion', he is a keen observer of civilizations, cultures and histories across the world who can be compared to his great precursor Joseph Conrad-also a novelist of exile and a rootless man. Really called as Conrad's heir, Naipaul seeks in 'himself the annalist of the destinies of the empires in the moral sense: what they do to human being'<sup>1</sup>. His authority as a narrator is grounded in his memory of what others have forgotten, the history of the vanquished. Here, an attempt has been made to envisage Naipaul's dominant theme of rootlessness or displacement before the Non-native learners in the Post-Colonial context.

The present paper aims at analyzing Naipaul's attitude towards life to the Non-native learners especially one that is mentioned in the novel, 'Mr.Stone and the Knights Companion' (1963). Set in London, the novel has thematic similarity with the earlier Trinidadian novels in its treatment of the struggle of a weak protagonist to overcome his sense of displacement. In terms of the crisis of cultural identity, Mr.Stone, a sixty two year old bachelor librarian of a large firm in London, is as much an expatriate in his native English environment as any of the colonial protagonist we see in his earlier fiction. He is an almost conservative suburban little man who cannot stand his neighbour's cat that often violets his garden and describe his gruesome

vision of-

".....*dipping the cat's paws in oil, of swinging the Creature by its tail and flinging it down to the pavement Below, of scalding it in boiling water.*"<sup>1</sup>

Thus, the novel deals with his quest for renewal in the midst of decay and signs of imminent extinction. Environment is the key feature of the novel for it reflects the hollowness and gloom of Mr. Stone's life. The story, the story, though opens in winter, depicts his cold, dark, empty house. Unlike Naipaul's early novels, this novel lacks in a prologue and an apologue. We are deafened to the narrator's voice. Here, the learners should be heeded upon the novelist's new device of upholding the character of Mr.Stone. The two prominent symbols that pervasive in the novel are 'the tree' and 'the cat'. The cat symbolises free and posits an intelligent contrast to Mr. Stone who is often in pursuit of the cat that violates his privacy and routine life. It is noteworthy that the novel begins and ends with the cat.

At the outset, the protagonist seems to be entrapping the cat that disturbs his privacy; however, his approach to the cat is encountered in a different manner. In addition to the cat's event, the novelist imparts much significance to 'the tree' in the schoolyard. In the beginning, it appears to be an emblem of loneliness, but later it becomes an index of the passing of time. The prospect of spring in the tree and the corresponding change in flowers has some equilibrium with the spring of Mr.Stone's married life. For, he married an elderly lady, Margaret Springer, and along with it, the tree

at the back of the house sprouted. Naipaul's comment in this respect is very apt:

*"In the second week of March Mr.Stone and Mrs.Springer were married, when on the tree in the school ground the buds had swollen and in sunshine were like points of white."*<sup>2</sup>

The sign of the tree here indicates an expected change in the protagonist's attitude to life. Nevertheless, we learn later that his marriage has proved to be totally futile and desolate. The learners will definitely note that his wife's hinted as Mrs. Springer and not Mrs. Stone. Her surname gives us hint of her behaviour along with her traits, vitality and vulgarity as well. After his marriage, Mr. Stone is dramatized to another passive role with Margaret in the house. The novelist in frenzy makes comic exaggeration of this saying:

*"Twice a day [thrice on Sunday] he faced her across the dining table; and these moments, which in no consideration of marriage he had envisaged, were moments of the greatest strain."*<sup>3</sup>

Thus, Mr.Stone finds himself in some loss and gain due to marriage. The loss is that he remains in long cherished privacy even after his marriage and the gain is that he compensates this loss in his old age by searching a good companion in her. Nevertheless, his joy and pride appear to be short-lived because of nefarious role of Mr. Whymper, the PRO of Excal, who turns it into a business scheme. Around Mr.Stone are constant reminders of bareness, decay and imminent death. Miss Millington, slow, too old for work and too helpless to retire, anticipates his later sense of 'the darkness that was to come'. He continues to be in association with her and gives thought even to her reaction as an old housekeeper. Naipaul's views as regards the

change in her condition are of paramount significance:

*"Change also came to Miss Millington. whereas before she was an old servant whose inefficiency and physical failings were getting more and more troublesome, now she became precious, she added lustre to establishment."*<sup>4</sup>

Thus, the growing frustration of Mr.Stone is expressed through the image of the tree and the solitary mind at his own residence. In a nutshell, the paper unfolds Naipaulian vision that man needs the help of community for his survival. It also finds out how Mr.Stone takes consolation in surviving himself in his own community and experiences calmness of mind though at the end. About his situation, while struggling with hazards of isolation, Karl Miller points out:

*"Mr.Stone's only charm is to possess a certain indefinitely embarrassed decency, and, ironically enough, it is this decency which enables him at last, for he is more or less pensionable, to shine in the huge firm where he works."*<sup>5</sup>

Thus, the novel deals with an old man's quest for renewal in the midst of decay and signs of imminent extinction. It merely is not the novel of despair, but that of struggle of the faceless man to achieve recognition in the hostile surroundings. By introducing to Mr.Stone and his own problems of assessments, Naipaul has laid bare another kind of displacement. To conclude, Ladeg White aptly remarks about the situations of the man behind the pen and one that is being penned:

*".....a rootlessness which matches his own is equally What Naipaul has discovered in Mr.Stone."*<sup>6</sup>

## REFERENCE

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