

On the Way of Hybridity: Naipaul's "One out of many"

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Abstract

The following study aims to supply Homi Bhabha's approach to the situation of the protagonist in V. S. Naipaul's "One out of Many" in the light of such concepts as 'enunciation', 'mimicry', 'ambivalence', 'in-between's', 'third space', and 'hybridity'. The study draws the conclusion that the character who fluctuates between his native culture and the colonising one occupies the third place as a once-colonised immigrant and is on the way of hybridity after a series of conflicts and struggles.

Keywords: Homi Bhabha, V. S. Naipaul, One out of many, hybridity.

1. Introduction

The Trinidad-born British writer, V. S. Naipaul (1932-)'s "One out of Many" is one of the short stories in his collection entitled as *Ina Free State* (1971). The story revolves around a lower class-Indian cook called 'Santosh', who migrates from Bombay to Washington, DC with his employer. Santosh's diasporic situation results from economic bases, the hope of making a better life in Washington with the help of his employer. Thus, he makes his own decision to go there. With first person narrative voice, the writer presents the struggles of the central character in adjusting to a new culture and country as a once-colonised immigrant. The story displays how an Indian immigrant from a low caste suffers from his choice of migration to America.

The character starts the story by saying "Many people, both here [Washington] and India, will feel that I have done well. But" (1984, 21). Ending with "but" indicates that he has had some hard conditions until he became an American citizen (1984, 21) and possibly still has some difficulties there. Santosh represents colonised immigrants that are on the way of becoming hybrid in multicultural countries. The story sheds light on the immigrant occupying the third place in Homi K. Bhabha's terms. Thus, the study aims at analysing the situation of the narrator/protagonist in the story by means of Homi K. Bhabha's concepts like 'enunciation', 'mimicry', 'ambivalence', 'in-between's', 'third space', and 'hybridity'.

Although the protagonist says to have been "happy", "respected" and had "many friends" in Bombay, his spending time and sleeping "on the pavement" signals his coming from lower-caste and, in fact, not so much respected position (1984,21). Also, he owes his respect and security to "the importance of his employer" (1984, 22). Thus, he seems to be dependent on his employer and defines his position thanks to him, thus, it is clear that he is a poor and obedient employer leaving his children and wife in his small village to work in Bombay (1984,54). He thinks that the Tailor's bearer is jealous of him when he says: 'Will the Americans smoke with you? Will they sit and talk with you in the evenings? Will they hold you by the hand and walk with you beside the ocean?' (1984, 23). Therefore, it is obvious that he regards himself lucky to be able to go to Washington of which he dreams well.

Santosh seems to be used to living as "a city man" (1984, 22) in Bombay; however, in spite of his employer's warning him many times that "Washington is not Bombay" (1984, 22 & 29), he realizes that it is not easy to become a city man in Washington. The first shake in his self-respect and security occurs in his flight to America.

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Feeling the passengers' gazes upon himself because of his clothes frightens him arriving in America and encountering worse. He observes the passengers around himself and says: "Worse, they were all dressed as though they were going to a wedding and, brother, I soon saw it wasn't they who were conspicuous. I was in my ordinary Bombay clothes, the loose long tailed shirt, the wide-waisted pants held up with a piece of string. Perfectly respectable domestic's wear, neither dirty nor clean, and in Bombay no one would have looked" (1984, 24).

Santosh's self-established identity begins to undergo devastation. He loses control of himself and wishes the plane would crash (1984, 25). When he looks at his face in the mirror at the toilet of the plane, he says: "In the fluorescent light it was the colour of a corpse. My eyes were strained; the sharp air hurt my nose and seemed to get into my brain" (1984, 25). He realizes that he has left his self-respect and security behind in Bombay to which he feels belonged in spite of his lower class in the society. Despite his poor conditions in Bombay, he describes it vividly with bright colours: "Then the city and the ocean gleamed like gold. Alas for those morning walks, that sudden ocean dazzles the moist salt breeze on my face, the flap of my shirt, that first cup of hot sweet tea from a stall..." (1984,22).

Conversely, Washington welcomes him with cold colours of "[t]he blue metal door," "[p]lain concrete corridors," and "[b]lank walls," "[t]he noise of machinery" (1984, 27). Away from neutrality, he is now in the center of industrialism, and everything is strange to him. The strangeness around himself makes him alienated, and he feels just like "a prisoner" (1984, 27) in this new country. All these feelings and expressions are called as "enunciation" by Homi K. Bhabha. Enunciation is defined as the act of utterance or expression of a culture that takes place in the third space. According to Bhabha, the third space acts as an ambiguous area that develops when two or more individuals or cultures interact (1994, 54). It "challenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by the original past, kept alive in the national tradition of the People" (Bhabha, 1994, 54). Santosh seems to be in a new environment where everything is strange to him and his own culture. The dilemma he falls in draws him to imprisonment.

To Bhabha, since culture is never pre-given, it must be uttered. It is through enunciation that cultural difference is discovered and recognized (1994, 33). Bhabha presents cultural difference as an alternative to cultural diversity. To him, in cultural diversity, a culture is an "object of empirical knowledge" (1994, 33) and pre-exists the knower, whereas cultural difference takes culture as the point at which two or more cultures meet and it is also where most problems occur especially for the one who encounters. This is a "process of enunciation of culture as 'knowledgeable'" (Bhabha, 1994: 34). Thus, Santos enunciates himself by underlining the cultural differences. Firstly, he questions: "Why must they [American people] wear out shoes and fine clothes for no purpose?" (1984, 29), because even shoes or clothes become different signs with which Santosh is unfamiliar. Thus, his enunciation reveals that culture has "no fixity and even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized, and read anew" (Bhabha, 1994, 37). Wearing out shoes inside or putting on smart clothes except on extraordinary occasions seems meaningless to him. Not being allowed to enter a bar with bare feet makes him surprised (1984,29). Oppressed by the weight of the dominated culture, Santosh becomes alienated with feeling of inferiority. He says to his employer whom he calls 'Sahib' meaning 'master': "...they can just look at me and see I am dirt" (1984,28). Then, he utters: "I understood I was a prisoner. I accepted this and adjusted. I learned to live within the apartment, and I was even calm" (1984,31). The reason is that he undergoes ambivalence, which can be evaluated as thinking of culture as consisting of opposing perceptions and dimensions.

According to Bhabha, "the colonial presence remains ambivalent, split between colonial signifier's appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference" (1994, 153). This reveals two dimensions of colonial discourse, the first one is characterized by invention and mastery, and the second one is the one of displacement and fantasy. For instance, spending time at his cupboard watching American channels on TV, penniless Santosh discerns that the ones he sees on TV are different from the real Americans and their lives he observes (1984,33). This increases his ambivalence between two dimensions; two different perception of the American culture as the real one and the one represented on the media. Bhabhanotes "cultural statements and systems are constructed in this contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation" (1994, 37). For instance, when he notices a group of dancers including bearded and bare-footed men and girls wearing traditional clothes and dancing a little bit "like Red Indians" in a cowboy movie, he becomes happy and wants to become friends with them. However, then he considers about the reason of their observable outsidersness and says: "...a disturbing thought came to me.

It might have been because of the half-case appearance of the dancers; it might have been their bad accent... I thought that these people were now strangers, but that perhaps once upon a time they had been like me... they had become a lost people... had forgotten who they were" (1984,30). It is so obvious that he associates them with himself as he thinks he has much in common with them. He feels himself lost and confused about his identity, just like the ones in the group. He also looks a stranger from outside. He confesses that he does not feel like being in that group as he does not want to see the "Other" from outside: "... I felt for the dancers the sort of distaste we feel when we are faced with something that should be kin but turns out not to be, turns out to be degraded, like a deformed man, or like a leper, who from a distance looks a whole" (1984, 30).

Then, Santosh begins to imitate the local people to reconstruct his damaged self-respect. However, this imitation remains on the surface, because he changes in appearance. Also, it is dramatic irony that the reader discerns it is a superficial change, but Santosh himself does not realize it at the beginning. When he begins to wear "a green suit" and "pants with some sort of zippered jacket", he thinks they make him feel better. In fact, the only change is about the other people's gazes that stop. He draws less attention now with his European-style clothes than when he has worn his shabby Indian clothes. In Bhabha's terms, he becomes a mimic-man.

Bhabha includes the quotation of Lacan in his essay "Of Mimicry and Man": "[t]he effect of mimicry is camouflage... It is not a question of harmonizing with the background, but against a mottled background, of becoming mottled-exactly like the technique of camouflage practiced in human warfare" (qtd. in Bhabha, 1994, 121). Defining mimicry as colonised man's imitating colonisers, for example, by taking on their behaviours and dressings, Bhabha does analysis of mimicry in his essay by basing his opinion on the Lacanian vision of mimicry as camouflage resulting in colonial ambivalence. Bhabha considers the coloniser as a snake in the grass who, "speaks in a tongue that is forked", and produces a mimetic representation that "... emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial which centres around *civilising mission* based on the notion of 'human and not wholly human'" (qtd. in Bhabha, 1994, 124). That is, excluding the people of different ethnicities as the "Other", coloniser makes colonial immigrant believe in his superiority, thus, coloniser appears modern and right whatever he does. Excluded from the bar because of being bare-footed, Santosh is taught to wear shoes and fine clothes just like themselves so that he can be allowed to the public places. He feels obliged to adapt to the culture to avoid disturbing eyes and gestures around him. On the other hand, the similarity of Santosh to the American people remains limited, as he is still a black man and it is enough for him to be degraded among white "superior" men.

According to Homi K. Bhabha, "colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable 'Other', as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha, 1994, 122). Thus, Santosh becomes almost the same as the Americans in his new clothes; however, not quite. He cannot get rid of being "Other" and cannot internalise new cultural values exactly. It is mimicry that enables to him to live in the Self/Subject/White's country, however he preserves his difference to a certain level that causes ambivalence. Therefore, just like many other mimic men, Santosh also faces the trauma of the colonial ambivalence resulting from 'mimicry', because "[t]he 'Self' versus 'Other' dichotomy results into perpetual uncertainty, fluidity and permanent disillusionment among the colonials (Kumar, 2011, 120). In other words, that the binarism between self and other, coloniser and colonised, subject and object is blurred creates ambivalence in mimic man. Santosh's feelings and thoughts become so much shaky and ambivalent that he swings back and forth like a pendulum. Kumar argues: "The problematic of mimicry lies in the fact that it 'repeats rather than re-presents' which further leads the mimic man to realize his nothingness and insignificance in Naipaulian terms" (2011, 120). That is, his double vision of colonised/subject/self makes him confused. He cannot decide to which part of the binary opposition he belongs. This is the reason why Santosh claims:

I felt a hole in my stomach. I couldn't think. I was glad I had to go down almost immediately to the kitchen, glad to be busy until midnight. But then I had to go up my room again, and I was alone. I hadn't escaped; I had never been free. I had been abandoned. I was like nothing; I had made myself nothing. And I couldn't turn back. (1984, 53).

Thus, it is clear that he suffers from in-between's; in other words, that he belongs neither to the new culture nor to his native one any more gives him pain. He does not even have anything to hold so as not to be drowned in the swamp he has fallen. A woman of another origin is called by Santosh as "*hubshi*" which is written in italics throughout the story and refers to African blacks in derogatory Indian term.

Indeed, hubshi represents his fear of Indo-American hybrid identity. He says: "I saw her as Kali, goddess of death, destruction, coal-black, with a red tongue and White eyeballs and many powerful arms" (1984,38). His approaching her is just like his becoming closer to death. After having a sexual intercourse with her, he claims: "I wanted to be forgiven, I wanted her to go. Nothing frightened me more than the way she had ceased to be a visitor in the apartment and behaved as though she possessed it" (1984,38). He feels he has contaminated his identity, so he cleans himself well and pours the tears of regret (1984,38). His fear is again reflected with his feeling cold: "It was cool in the apartment; the air-conditioning always hummed; but I could see that it was hot outside, like one of our own summer days in the hills" (1984,39). The multiculturalism and hybridity are sensed as contaminating elements, which endanger the purity of natives. Therefore, he avoids miscegenation that is, mixing of racial groups through marriage and cohabitation. To prove his concepts of hybridity, multiculturalism and notion of origins, Bhabha refers to Freud who says concerning hybrid people: "Their mixed and split origin is what decides their fate. We may compare them with individuals of mixed race who taken all around resemble white men but who betray their coloured descent by some striking feature or other and on that account are excluded from society and enjoy none of the privileges" (1994,127). Accordingly, Santosh does not enjoy making love with the hubshi woman, contrarily, he feels guilty. This becomes the first step of his falling from innocence.

Then, as a next step, he leaves his employer to whom he has seemed loyal at the very beginning and begins to work for Priya, who is another Indian he meets and feels closer to in comparison to his employer. Perhaps, this is the first time he takes a step independent of nobody. He thinks "ceasing to [him] self of [his] employer's presence" (1984,37) is necessary for him. He gets away emotionally, as well by "beginning at the same time see him as an outsider might see him" (1984, 37). Thus, he seems on the way of individuality. His preferring Priya to his employer results from the fact that Priya has gone through many phases of being an immigrant for many years in America and has become a hybrid. He says he has founded the way of living in America: "If you can't beat them, join them. I joined them" (1984, 42). Unlike Priya, Santosh's employer has much progress to make. He is so half-baked that he keeps warning Santosh not to do anything to bother Americans or not to spend much money. He is as new as Santosh in America, and the only difference is that he is the employer of Santosh, that is all.

Another limitation anticipates Santosh leaving his employer, likewise limitations surrounding him when he leaves Bombay for Washington. He is unaware of the fact that he has become an illicit immigrant worker without a green card, thus, can be arrested any time. Desperate times call for desperate measurements: despite his avoidance, he feels obliged to get married to the hubshi woman to become an American citizen, because he no longer wants to return to Bombay. He says: "I couldn't easily become part of someone else's presence again. Those evening chats on the pavement, those morning walks: happy times, but they were like the happy times of childhood: I didn't want them to return" (1984, 41). It is obvious that on one hand, he does not feel belonged to Bombay any more. On the other hand, by marrying the hubshi, he gets married to death and destruction he has tried to avoid of. His freedom on physical plane in Washington corresponds to his spiritual death. He feels as if he lives in "the dark house" (1984, 57). He claims: "Its [the house's] smells are strange, and everything in it is strange. But my strength in this house is that I am a stranger" (1984, 57). His depressive mode results from his fear, as he is now with his wife's totally different culture, which is strange to him. Furthermore, by marrying an African woman, Indian Santosh takes a further step in hybridity. Their children in future will also be hybrid because of having both Indian and African roots, and they will most probably be grown up in the culture which their parents reconstruct by mingling their own ones.

In addition, about the script "*Soul Brother*" (1984,57) on his house's wall scrawled by someone, most probably, a hippie, he states: "I understand the words; but I feel, brother to what or to whom? I was once part of the flow, never thinking of myself as a presence. Then I looked in the mirror and decided to be free" (1984, 57). This expression signals the possibility of a new hybrid identity with which he will not copy the Americans as a mimic man, nor will he forget his native culture completely; conversely, by mingling them, he will have a hybrid identity. Bhabha claims: "...hybridity to me is the 'third space' which enables other positions to emerge...the process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation" (1994,58). Considering Santosh's situation in this context, it can be claimed that he seems to be on the way of becoming hybrid by combining his native culture and the American one in a new form and thus, creating a new space for himself to live in.

In Bhabha's words, hybridity is the result of an identification process interpreted as a "recombination of elements that are rooted in different traditions and that are creatively combined in the interstitial space between cultures" (1994, 38).

To conclude, in "One out of Many", Naipaul gives voice to a once-colonised Indian Santosh who tells about his experiences and feelings when he migrates to the coloniser country, America. The story reveals his in-between's, ambivalence, and enunciation. In his struggle to balance between his native culture and the American culture, he makes progress in establishing a new identity for himself. Since he feels himself belonged exactly neither to Bombay nor to Washington at the same time, he seems to be giving birth to a new hybrid identity occupying the third space, thus, becoming one out of many hybrid people in the multicultural American society.

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