

**Decentering the West: Tracing the Postcolonial Bildungsroman in Naipaul's *A Bend in the River***

\* Nausheen Ishaque (Corresponding Author)

\*\* Muhammad Afzal Faheem

**Abstract**



*This paper deploys postcolonial bildungsroman as a theoretical tool to analyze Salim's maturity in Naipaul's A Bend in The River. In the theoretical tradition of postcolonial bildungsroman, the growth of the protagonist is not only anti-colonial, but is also leaned towards indigenouness in language, style, religio-cultural rootedness, and belonging. Salim's quest for self is a modern-day odyssey which is marked with his anti-colonial coming-of-age sensibility – a progression that makes its way through decentering the West. Salim challenges the merging of cultures -a colonial strategy- to signal his postcolonial coming into being. The assertion of the indigenous self directs Salim to give up on his Eurocentric worldview and wedge an identity of his own. With the belief that Master's tools will dismantle the Master's house, Salim achieves the validation of his 'native' self through exploiting Master's language. His journey to and education in England prove as catalysts in Salim's growth as a post(-) colonial subject and is, therefore, characterized by the structural othering of the West which pushes it from the center to the periphery.*

**Introduction**

V.S.Naipaul is an intellectual celebrity in the emerging post-post-colonial world. His works have won acclaim for faithfully depicting the sufferings of the colony and for inspiring resistance against the colonial machinery. The critical canon eulogizes his literary craftsmanship, but at the same time, charges him with ideologically aligning himself with the imperial master. His detractors pour scorn on him for blaming the colonized for their own colonization. V.S.Naipaul invites mixed response from the critical voices, but nobody casts aspersions on his authorial ingenuity, thoughtful turn of phrase and complex plot line. Jussawalla compares Naipaul to Kipling's Kim while establishing that "[i]t is interesting to see how much there is in common between Kim and Naipaul. Mr. Naipaul is just like the foundling child, Kim, caught between his Indian culture and his desire to be British" (Jussawalla 36). Naipaul never had a liking for his hybrid existence; in fact, he was always in search of his own identity and had denounced "hybridity in much the same way as Kipling does in Kim as the monstrous hybridism of East and West" (Jussawalla 37). The fact that Naipaul himself came in contact with different cultures, blended in with colonizer's values, but finally identified with his native culture, is a classic example of postcolonial bildungsroman.

The protagonist's vacillation between the native and the foreign culture, reconciling with two different selves and finally embracing the native culture is a process known as postcolonial bildungsroman. "He [Naipaul] has made his journey from the initial culture contact, the absorption into the colonizers' frame of mind, a move towards hybridity and a final coming to a recognition of himself as belonging to the culture that he started from. This is a typical 'postcolonial bildungsroman'" (Jussawalla 37). The chief character of *A Bend in the River*, Salim, acts as Naipaul's fictional alter ego. Salim is a universal outcast in *A Bend in the River* owing to his Arab descent. He faces rejection in Africa for being an Arab and faces marginalization in England for being an African. In the pre-awakening stage, he looks up to England as a dream place. Salim's worldview shatters when he encounters marginalization in England. It is a watershed in Salim's life, because the English reality is as stark as the African reality. The glorifying portrayal of England in the European books is totally different from the real England that treated Salim as a cultural other. So, this is the starting point of his anti-colonial growth. He systematically decenters West from the position of subjectivity by

\* University of Central Punjab, Lahore Email: [nausheenishaque@gmail.com](mailto:nausheenishaque@gmail.com)

\*\* The University of Lahore Email: [muhammad.afzal1@ell.uol.edu.pk](mailto:muhammad.afzal1@ell.uol.edu.pk)

employing Western theoretical and linguistic weapons. A cultural other's postcolonial coming into being is a major turning point in the theoretical paradigm of postcolonial bildungsroman.

The literary canon of postcolonial bildungsroman provides opportunities to the oppressed to retrieve their identity, reclaim their sovereignty and reconquer their space. The colonizer's attempt to dispossess the colonized of his identity and impair his vision falls through. "For Lorde, it is difficult to wield the linguistic, theoretical, and ideological tools of the master (the white, male, middle-class, heterosexual, Christian from the West) because they are explicitly designed to uphold the status quo" (Hoagland 7). The oppressed unlearns the ideological indoctrination carried out through the process of education and registers his anti-colonial struggle in the colonizer's language, that is, English. The tools of the master designed to overthrow the oppressed serve a self-defeating purpose for the West, as the colonized utilize the same tools to retrieve their identity. For Hoagland thus, "why can't the very tools which built the house be used to dismantle it" (Hoagland 7). The structural dismantling of the West, from the position of center, through the Western weapons, signals the success of resistance staged by the (ex)cultural other.

The protagonist comes out of the colonial stranglehold to discover his true identity. The epiphany of Salim about the hypocrisy of the Western world changes his worldview entirely about his entirety. "The child (adult) . . . turns away from westernization or modernization and turns towards an introspective knowledge of who he or she is within the parent culture. This is the basis postcolonial bildungsroman" (Jussawalla 31). Rejecting the Western values signals disengagement with the colonial structure. Salim starts the decolonization process to recover his voice. It shows "turning away from the colonizing culture towards authentic indigenesness" (37) to attain selfhood. The journey of self-awareness of Salim shows an anti-colonial growth. The chief emphasis is on self-understanding of Salim brought on as a result of encountering the Western culture. He undoes Eurocentrism to foster his indigenous self.

A series of events shape the anti-colonial self of Salim in *A Bend in the River*. He experiences marginalization from the natives of Africa, despite being an African himself. The hopes of attaining social acceptability in Africa are dashed to the ground, because Africans treat him as a non-native. Therefore, he tries to socially advance in the president's regime, though he remains an outcast for not being a part of the State Domain – a place designed to switch the loyalties of Africans towards the West. Salim envisions England as the center of excellence, since his outlook is shaped by European books. His English dream turns into a nightmare as soon as he has a firsthand experience ostracization in England. Therefore, Salim considers himself a perpetual outcast - one who does not belong to any culture.

#### **Postcolonial Bildungsroman as a Theoretical Tool**

Salim's journey to maturity, the stages of his character development, and his unlearning of colonial ways hold a key value in the literary tradition of postcolonial bildungsroman. "Contemporary postcolonial theory simply lays emphasis on the events of colonialism that the hero experiences rather than on his understanding and absorption of events of colonization and culture contact" (Jussawalla 29). Grappling with the colonial machinery, the protagonist's arc of vision is enlarged through successive colonial onslaughts. He carves a new self to dislocate the colonial structures that stifled his worldview. This is a characteristic feature of bildungsroman novels to lay emphasis on protagonist's self-understanding. "*Bildungsroman* as a highly self reflexive novel, one in which the problem of the *bildung*, of personal growth, is enacted in the narrator's discursive self-understanding" (Jussawalla 28). The chief character discovers the discriminatory ways adopted by the colonial setup to oppress him. Therefore, he consciously drifts away from the colonial ways and tilts towards nationhood. The journey of the protagonist towards selfhood, independence and nationhood signifies his anti-colonial growth.

Drifting away from the colonial ways and shifting towards the native culture is an assertion of selfhood from the chief character. The central character of *A Bend in the River*, Salim, denounces the colonizing culture, Europe, for robbing his vision of life. He turns against Europe for outwardly being a home to all cultures and treating him as a cultural other owing to his African background. His mistreatment shatters the illusions about the glamour of Europe and prompts him to reconsider his ideological leanings. The outcast Salim makes up his mind to bring Europe to the periphery from the center. It amounts to Europe's theoretical fall from grace and it will be achieved by employing the tools of the master.

Postcolonial bildungsroman as a genre poses a threat to the West's position of subjectivity, because it is designed to be subversive in nature. "They [postcolonial bildungsromane] represent "immediate interventions into the historical record" creating new kinds of knowledge, and disrupting the Western-biased nexus of power and knowledge" (Hoagland 6). Postcolonial bildungsroman is a "resistance narrative" (Hoagland 6) that seeks to overthrow the hegemony of West in the realm of knowledge. As resistance literature, postcolonial bildungsroman stresses on self-realization of the protagonist brought on as a result of living through discrimination. It underscores the series of stages a protagonist goes through to attain postcolonial coming into being. The growth of the central character is mostly anti-colonial, because he removes his Eurocentric spectacles that tainted his vision of life.

The protagonist's awakening, reconfiguration of ideological tilt and realization about his identity are key concerns in postcolonial bildungsroman. "The protagonist must experience some form of "identity flux," which may be connected to severed ties to the tribe or community, exclusion from the dominant culture" (Hoagland 10). The key character discovers his place of belonging and disassociates himself from the Western influences of knowledge. The shift towards selfhood, nationhood and decolonization are signs of betraying the European camp. "Thus in the epilogue I identify further articulations of the postcolonial *bildungsroman*, namely religion, diaspora, and nation, which can offer additional ways to understand how the *Bildungsroman* has been "postcolonialized" (Hoagland 13). It is a typical feature of postcolonial bildungsroman genre that the protagonist is a diasporic character, who tries to find his real place of belonging. He is subjected to racial insults, cultural bias and ethnic discrimination and it makes the protagonist a person of insight.

Postcolonial bildungsroman emphasizes on re-writing of history, reclaiming of lost identity and assertion of indigenous values. "The genre [postcolonial bildungsroman] is used to reclaim and assert lost histories and identities" (Hoagland iv). It empowers the ex-colonized colonized to employ colonial weapons to overthrow the colonial machinery. "Why can't the very tools which built the house be used to dismantle it" (Hoagland 7)? Colonial machinery can be silenced by employing the colonial weapons. It points to reversal of roles in the new postcolonial equation, where the colonized would subvert West's position of authority. It is a literary counterattack from the colonized, intended to rewrite their own history and assert their narratives.

### Literature Review

#### Decentering the West from the center of power

The Western desire of perpetuating colonialism in Africa falls through. In the article, "Naipaul's *A Bend in the River*: Time, History, And "Africa"", the doom of European civilization is predicted. "Europe . . . has lost control of history and is on its way to becoming subject to colonization and exploitation" (Vincent 348). The colonial machinery stamped its authority over the Africans, but they became victim to their own policies of colonization. In the wake of imperial domination, Africans regained controlled of their own territory. A native African took charge of the presidential throne. Naipaul expresses this grim reality that nations have to realize their strength to avoid becoming a victim of colonization. "The world is what it is; men who are nothing, who allow themselves to become nothing, have no place in it" (Naipaul 4). Vincent comes up with the most unique interpretation of these lines, he says "Are not these words the death knell of western civilization" (348)? In the light of this interpretation, Western conspiracy to control the African narrative gets foiled. Salim distances himself from Europe at the end of the novel and expresses his disgust for European educational institutions for robbing him of his vision.

The realization that the grandeur of Europe is a hoax changes the course of Salim's life. In the article: "Searching for a Centre: The Writing of V.S. Naipaul", Salim is described as a dynamic character, because he changes his intellectual orientation on realizing the duplicity of the colonial apparatus. "Salim's capacity to adapt and take a new direction, when his world falls apart at the end, does offer a more positive vision than *Guerrillas*" (Thieme 1364). Salim lives through racial marginalization which helps him in achieving intellectual maturity. He considers Europe as the center of his world; but the rude awakening sets him on a rebellious path with Europe. "The Europe the airplane brought me to was not the Europe I had known all my life" (Naipaul 139). The reality of Europe is so disturbing that Salim's exalted perception of Europe falls apart. As Salim's understanding matures, he learns that Europe stands for outward glory. The disenchantment with Europe expresses his anti-colonial growth.

### **Shedding the illusion of Eurocentrism and the Postcolonial Bildungsroman of Salim**

The critical canon accuses V.S. Naipaul of upholding Eurocentrism and painting a black future of Africans. In the article: "The Garden Trampled: Or, the Liquidation of African Culture in V.S. Naipaul's "A Bend in the River", Wise suggests that Africans should try to get rid of the slavish past, but their attempts at starting a new life in Africa are an illusion. "Naipaul's suggestion that Africans today must deliberately "trample" upon the gardens of their past - - it also belies Naipaul's utopian hope for the future redemption of African culture and history" (Wise 59). Wise assails Naipaul for giving a hopeless vision to Africans about their future in Africa. It would be misreading of *A Bend in the River*, because Africans drive the colonizers out of their land and Salim shifts his position on West following his moment of postcolonial awakening. He breaks free of all European influences "Europe no longer ruled" (Naipaul 139). It signals Salim's hatred for Europe that deceived him in multiple ways.

Naipaul's faithful portrayal of African plight is perceived as bleak pessimism. In the article: "Pessimism and Existentialism in V.S. Naipaul", Santiago believes that Naipaul depicts Africa as a country where chaos reigns supreme. "*A Bend in the River* and *In a Free State* are novels with a deep Conradian pathos that reflect worlds falling apart - - there is an extreme pessimism projected by Naipaul in both these texts" (Santiago-Roldan 162). Pessimism implies that the colonial rule will never come to an end and the native Africans will continue to be ruled by colonial powers time and again. In fact, Africans vociferously resisted the colonial onslaught to reclaim their own homeland. Salim's postcolonial bildungsroman can be equated with pessimism at this point in *A Bend in the River*. He lost his interest in Africa and England: "I played off London against Africa until both became unreal" (Naipaul 146). Salim's disillusionment with Africa and England is a result of being subjected to ethnic marginalization on successive occasions. So, he develops a passionate hatred for England and Africa on realizing that he is a misfit in all the cultures he tries to integrate into.

### **Decentering the West: Tracing the Postcolonial Bildungsroman in Naipaul's A Bend in the River**

The world view of the chief character, Salim, is shaped by European books. He is ideologically indoctrinated through the process of education; therefore, he betrays a pro-European slant in his outlook. The impact of this education is manifest on Salim as he looks down on African culture. Salim's naiveté is expressed by his inability to probe into the heart of matters. He believes in European accounts of history, without verifying the accuracy of those narratives. Salim makes a sweeping statement by considering Europeans as torchbearers of civilization and custodian of African values. His ideological alignment with the West is the result of educational influence. "All that I know of our history and the history of the Indian Ocean I have got from books written by Europeans" (Naipaul 9). European books help in destroying non-Western ways of thinking. "First Nation authors use the genre {postcolonial bildungsroman} to explore how colonialism impaired and destroyed indigenous identity and culture" (Hoagland iv). The imperial attempt to hijack Salim's vision of life through the process of education turns on West's head itself-- it speeds up his anti-colonial coming of age. The quest to discover his identity sets him on a confrontational course with the West, because he gives up on his Eurocentric vision.

The disempowered position of Africans puts Salim on the road to maturity. The exclusion of Africans from the center of power plays a central role in the artistic formation and reconfiguration of Salim. A painful reality dawned on him when he looked at the magnified image of the president and minimized photos of local Africans in the newspaper. "In pictures in the newspapers only visiting foreigners were given equal space with the President. With local people the President was always presented as a towering figure" (Naipaul 136). Salim realizes that the president is the real instrument of Western colonization who wants to bring Africans into complete submission. Therefore, president's smokescreen of order and African empowerment turns out to be charade. "In the postcolonial world, such a Bildung is almost impossible, since the heroes must seek their identities in milieus that have no stability and consistency" (Peiker 11). Salim keeps looking for an ordered life in disordered Africa.

Salim holds onto a misguided illusion that London could be a place of his dreams. A paradigm shift has taken place in the approach of Salim towards Africa. He appears to be disgruntled by the prevalence of racial violence in his hometown. This serves as a moment of truth in his life. A man of Salim's heritage is a universal outsider, who feels vulnerable in all parts of the world. "I was

waiting for some illumination to come to me, to guide me to the good place and the 'life' I was still waiting for" (Naipaul 59). Salim cherishes an illusion that London could be a land of opportunities. He will get over with the feeling of homelessness in London and locate his place in the world. "Postcoloniality in a work of literature . . . expresses a turn away from the colonizing culture towards authentic indigenosity" (Jussawalla 37). Salim wants an anchorage in his life, a place where he could belong to. The journey to London heightened his sense of homelessness as he gets rejected on the grounds of being an African.

Salim fears that a presentiment of doom looms large over Africa. He has a grim sense of foreboding that Africa would be the epicenter of chaos. "My own feelings were more complicated. I saw a disordered future for the country" (63). Everything in Africa seems to be regressive, people feel ill at ease in the new Africa. But Ferdinand's meteoric rise to prominence from obscurity is the result of abandoning African norms and aligning himself with the Western way of life. Salim's development of character is directly linked with his experiences of marginalization. "Bildungsroman is a highly self-reflexive novel, one in which the problem of the bildung, of personal growth, is enacted in the narrator's discursive self-understanding rather than in the events which the hero experiences" (Jussawalla 28). Salim's anti-colonial evolution stems from his harsh experiences of otherization in Africa and England.

The dichotomy between the artificial glamour of Africa and its inward hollowness awakens Salim to a new plane of artistic existence. He formulates a hopeless vision about Africa that was ruled by a colonizer disguised as an African loyalist. "He (Mahesh) had said, "It isn't that there's no right and wrong here. There's no right" (Naipaul 78). Salim's attitude towards life has hardened to a great extent, because Africa represents the antithesis of civilization under the garb of democratic norms. In a normal political equation, goodness and evilness exist side by side, but in pseudo-democratic Africa of the president, goodness is eliminated from the equation altogether. The trajectory of Salim's character development is not linear. He lives through a range of emotions: disillusionment, hopelessness, pessimism, directionlessness, homelessness and, finally, his postcolonial coming into being.

A sea change takes place in Salim's perception of Africa. He begins to look at everything associated with Africa as unremarkable. "I began to see the town as ordinary, for the first time . . . that feeling of stillness--it seemed without further human promise" (Naipaul 58). An undercurrent of desolation can be sensed in Salim's tone. "I became very dejected . . . I feel that everything one does is just going to waste" (Naipaul 79). Salim has a feeling that Africa is destined to destruction and all efforts to restore the stability of the place would be futile. He boils down the equation of life to the experience of pleasure and pain which downplays the importance of life considerably. "I had an illumination . . . Men lived to acquire experience; the quality of the experience was immaterial . . . to possess pain was as meaningless as to chase pleasure (Naipaul 135). Salim has grown so disheartened with Africa that he envisions the whole process of life as meaningless. The will to advance in the world or to look for grand happiness is a hoax to him. The illusion of happiness and sadness strikes an existential note; Salim takes a downward course in his life.

Africa is a battle zone between the White forces of the president and the African rebels. The African president wants to consolidate his hold on Africa; therefore, he asks European forces to curb the advances of native African rebels. The native rebels are bent on committing violence to destabilize the president; it all has negative implications for Africa. Africa remains the epicenter of crisis as the opposing camps step up efforts to implement their agendas on the land. "Before the arrival of the white men, I had considered myself neutral. I had wanted neither side to win, neither the army nor the rebels. As it turned out, both sides lost" (Naipaul 48). So, the war between president's White army and African rebels is waged at the cost of African territory. The West perpetuates imperialism in Africa through the president. Salim feels that both sides are at a disadvantage, because it is the African soil that will be plundered as a result of this crisis. It indicates that Salim's vision has enlarged. He can connect with the larger reality at this point.

Salim expresses his disenchantment with the West for dividing his loyalties. It serves as the moment of Postcolonial Bildungsroman as the chief character looks at the West as the center of evil. Salim attains intellectual maturity as a result of his painful experiences and launches a broadside at the British Empire for dividing his loyalties. He also considers Africans guilty for not being able to resist the imperial onslaught of the West and falling victim to her machinations. "I was filled with a

colonial rage. And this wasn't only a rage with London or England; it was also a rage with the people who had allowed themselves to be corralled into a foreign fantasy" (Naipaul 88-89). Salim's ideals of a superior England fall apart as a result of his revised understanding. He stands for resistance, liberation and anti-imperialism in his post-awakening phase.

The Liberation Army publishes a political document *The ANCESTORS* shriek to bring about the political awakening of Africans. The liberation army blames the imperialist forces, teachers and priests for letting Africa slide into anarchy. It is a seminal moment in the life of Salim because Africans have unchained themselves. They have discovered the true enemy of the land. The British Empire that launched cultural and intellectual onslaught to dispossess Africans is the enemy of the land. The current African president who works as the instrument of the British Empire is the enemy of Africa. The agents of imperialism include priests, teachers and soldiers who have not lived up to their national duty. These revolutionary slogans of the Liberation Army show the resolve of Africans to dethrone the president. Africans are misled by native traitors and foreign forces of imperialism. The real reason of Africa's overall decline is forgetting the African norms, the truthful laws of the ancestors. In order to battle with the agents of imperialism, Africans should uphold the stance of Liberation army. The title of the political document arouses feelings of patriotism in the masses; it is intended to jolt the Africans out of their comfort zone. But the president launches a counter revolutionary movement to crush all the dissenting voices. As a result, Africans fail to liberate themselves from the clutches of the British Empire.

The ANCESTORS shriek. Many false gods have come to this land, but none have been as false as the gods of today . . . By ENEMY we mean the powers of imperialism, the multi-nationals (128-129).

Yvette's disposal of European furniture comes as a big blow to the African president. The President glorifies European civilization in all respects, but Yvette registers her disapproval for European norms by throwing the European objects out as unwanted. It serves as a strong postcolonial metaphor in the novel. Yvette has exhibited rebellious tendencies by discarding a European object that the president wholeheartedly treasures. "Yvette said, referring to the furniture, "The President has an exaggerated idea of the needs of Europeans. I've dumped all that velvety stuff in one of the bedrooms"" (Naipaul 77). In the process of decolonization, Africans decide to discard imperial ideas and objects. The love affair between Salim and Yvette is a key symbol in *A Bend in the River* that shows the tempestuous relationship between Africa and Europe. Their relationship symbolizes an emotional roller coaster. Salim disengages himself from Yvette, which also shows withdrawal from European influence.

Salim's disenchantment with the West signals his postcolonial bildungsroman. He sees through the ruse of West to make him a slave to the Western doctrines. Following this intellectual awakening, the West is no longer the center of Salim's world. "The Europe the airplane brought me to was not the Europe I had known all my life. When I was a child Europe ruled my world" (Naipaul 139). The revised outlook of Salim shows that he has recovered his autonomy. He unlearns European educational influence that stifled his perception. In the post-awakening phase, Salim voices his anger at Europe for hijacking his vision. He breaks all the shackles of confinement and forcefully registers his contempt for the West. "Postcolonial literary works share certain characteristics, such as those of linguistic experimentation and assertion of an indigenous selfhood" (Jussawalla 30). Salim's retrieves his voice and castigates the West mercilessly for making him a slave to the Western doctrines. He is a dynamic character who transforms from a European admirer to European detractor in the course of the novel.

Salim vehemently exposes the hypocrisy of West's civilizing mission in Africa. He finds faults with Europe's way of conducting itself in Africa. "If it was Europe that gave us on the coast some idea of our history, it was Europe, I feel, that also introduced us to the lie" (Naipaul 11). The West had a double-faced policy for Africans. They launched a colonizing mission in Africa in the guise of a loyalist. The Africans could have resisted Western cultural domination, but the naiveté of Africans allowed the West to carry out their imperialistic designs in Africa. The West believes in the supremacy of their race, and consider it their moral duty to civilize other races. Salim decides to unsettle the colonizer with her own tools. "English has in fact been used in various ways, as a tool to effectively attack Britain as a colonial power" (Talib 107). The West can only be unsettled from within. This ideological onslaught from Salim on England in the colonizer's own language dislodges

the Western hegemony over narrative. "A rejection of Westernization and the colonizers' values as expressed in the growth of the hero or heroine's point of view" (Jussawalla 31) shows postcolonial bildungsroman of Salim. The West loses the much-cherished position of power over narrative, knowledge and territory.

The realization about England's flat reality brings about Salim's intellectual awakening. This is a defining moment in the life of Salim, because he indicates his passionate disgust for Europe for making him blind to the truth. Indar and Nazruddin also had very high opinion of British Empire, but their contact with actual reality turned them into critics of the Empire. The facade of Europe's flawlessness gets stripped, and all the characters begin to feel hatred for Europe. It reveals that Europe is not the dream world as it is presented in European books; ethnic marginalization, racial persecution and cultural insensitivity also take place in London. "London seems to be another Africa: here also there is an invasion of Arabs, and here also people are fleeing" (Chellappan 305). Salim does not consider London as the land of opportunity anymore. He understands that European books gave him fictional accounts about London's reality. The actual reality of London is not much different from the African reality. "But the Europe I had come to . . . It was something shrunken and mean and forbidding" (139). The series of unpleasant experiences in Africa and London bring about Salim's intellectual maturity. He turns against Europe and Africa for making him a victim of cultural intolerance and racism. "In some way or another, all the different strands of postcolonial studies confront the Western enlightenment project of modernity" (Peiker 5). Salim challenges the motives of Western civilizing mission, because it was designed to rob Africans of their own culture, identity and values.

Hollowness of life strikes a depressing note to Salim. His version of reality becomes bitter because he has seen the government officials flouting law all the time. Salim is put behind bars due to president's radicalization program. He might be killed in the African custody. It is through Raymond's intervention that Salim manages to escape death. Africa has virtually become a prison for the native Africans. "There was no law; this was only make-believe, play, a waste of men's time in the world" (Naipaul 161). Africans are vulnerable to abuse in their own home. The President has put Africans in captivity; the prisoners make a final effort to cheat death by means of a steamer. When the steamer is in the middle of river, a bloody battle takes place between prisoners and government officials. A large number of people get killed. The people on steamer have lost their sense of hope and sense of direction. "The searchlight lit up the barge passengers, who, behind bars and wire guards, as yet scarcely seemed to understand that they were adrift." Then all is dark and the novel ends. Such seems to be the human condition. One can sympathetically respond, "The Horror" (Farwell 2)! It suggests that the future of Africa hangs in the balance and an invader can never bring prosperity to Africa. This is a metaphorical way of deriding the West for its brutalities, atrocities and injustices that it perpetrated on the native Africans. It amounts to metaphorical othering of the West and the rise of the marginalized from the periphery to the center in the power structure.

### **Conclusion**

The structural and metaphorical decentering of the West through West's own tools show a reversal of roles in the postcolonial paradigm. The imperial idea that the colonized regress backwards to primitivism is challenged. In fact, Salim attains postcolonial bildungsroman as a result of a series of persecutions/epiphanies. Following the moment of awakening, Salim engages with the colonial apparatus in a resentful manner. The intellectual growth, broadening of the arc of vision, increase of awareness underscore Salim's dynamic character. He understands the colonial methods of oppression, turns the colonial deceptions on its head and carves out an independent identity for himself. He destabilizes the Western ways of thinking, fights back against enslavement and exposes the duplicity of colonial projects. It is a big leap forward in the process of decolonization. The West stands decentered and the (ex) cultural other attains the center stage in the postcolonial paradigm.

### **References**

- Chellappan, K. "Voice in Exile: 'Journey' in Raja Rao and V. S. Naipaul." *Reference Guide to English Literature* 2 (1991).
- Farwell, Harold. "A Bend in the River: Overview." *Reference Guide to English Literature* 2 (1991).
- Hoagland, Ericka A. *Postcolonizing the Bildungsroman: A Study of the Evolution of a Genre*. Diss. doctoral dissertation, Purdue University, 2006.
- Johnson, Erica L. "'Provincializing Europe': The Postcolonial Urban Uncanny in V. S. Naipaul's 'A Bend in the River'" *Journal of Narrative Theory* 40.2 (2010): 209-30. Web.

- Jussawalla, Feroza. "Kim, Huck and Naipaul: using the postcolonial bildungsroman to (re) define postcoloniality." *Links & Letters* (1997): 25-38.
- Naipaul, Vidiadhar Surajprasad. *A Bend in the River*. Pan Macmillan, 2002.
- Peiker, Piret. "Postcommunist Literatures: A Postcolonial Perspective." *Eurozine* <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2006-03-28-peiker-en.html> (accessed 07.12. 2016) (2006).
- Roldan-Santiago, Serafin. "Pessimism and existentialism in VS Naipaul." *Journal of Caribbean Literatures* 5.2 (2008): 153-167.
- Talib, Ismail S. *The Language of Postcolonial Literatures*. London: Routledge, 2002.
- Thieme, John. "Searching for a centre: The writing of VS Naipaul." *Third World Quarterly* 9.4 (1987): 1352-1365.
- Vincent, William. "NAIPAUL'S A BEND IN THE RIVER: TIME, HISTORY, AND 'AFRICA'" *Journal of South Asian Literature* 26.1/2 (1991): 337-49. Web.
- Wise, Christopher. "The Garden Trampled: Or, the Liquidation of African Culture in VS Naipaul's 'A Bend in the River'." *College Literature* 23.3 (1996): 58-72.