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English 3316

6 July 2010

The Casualties of Freedom: An Analysis of V.S. Naipaul's *One Out of Many*

Independence Day is marked as the day of celebration for the freedom our country, America, has fought so readily to earn. Yet, it is this freedom that has depleted funds, cost many valuable lives, and upset the world. Despite the many costs and casualties, freedom has been held as the ultimate victor in the eyes of Americans, but is it worth the battle to earn one's independence and become a part of a new found community where we come together as "many of one"? Naipaul attempts to questions this notion of liberty and freedom and suggests that many, like Santosh, fall among the casualties of freedom's impending doom.

V.S. Naipaul's short story, *One Out of Many*, reflects the world falling apart as Santosh, the narrator and main character, "deal[s] with alienation and fluctuating identities in the post-colonial world where tragic figures, marginalized and frustrated, grope for a sense of identity and meaning in life" (Roldan). Santosh's personal identity instantly depleted as he crossed the borders and entered into a new world where he was dissipated into the mainstream, lost and unable to find his true identity.

Santosh uniqueness vanished in America since his own culture and heritage made him an exile in a “perpetually adrift ‘free state’” (Morris 74). His loss of personal identity is due to the illusion that freedom permeates momentum and thus thrusts individuals into the “unavoidable seepage of despair that spreads...to reach a floodtide” (Morris 75).

When first introduced to Santosh, readers are drawn to his innocent content for life. We are instantly attracted to his self-effacing nature, yet, our attraction is soon turned to shame. V.S. Naipaul masters the difficult art that makes his readers “laugh and then feel shame at [their own] laughter” (Naipaul, V 373). The use of this skill creates an ironic comedy that depicts a tale of a relatively poor man who sleeps on the sidewalks of Bombay, has cordial friends, a regular job he appreciates, and a position in a basic social system. In many eyes, what he had does not amount to much, but for Santosh he was proud of his achievements, his ability to liberate himself from the “crippling destitution of his village” (Boxill). When confronted by his employers call to Washington D.C., Santosh immediately urges him to take him to the capital of the world, Washington D.C. He was not willing to go back to “the limitations of his village as the freedom of America beckons” (Boxill) him onward.

Santosh’s life in Bombay was settled. He had served willingly and had come to know hard times. Yet, he was unable to feel as if he could start over again. He began to feel hopeless in his impending doom of being left behind in Bombay that would result in the unfathomable of falling to unemployment or worse; being forced to return to his old ways of life that were so limiting. However, his naive interpretation of freedom and its limitations offered may have seem more comforting if it was compared to the newly formed concept of freedom he discovered in America. The extreme anxiety he previously held was only a flicker of pain in comparison to the engulfed disparity he was about to undergo.

Santosh was unaware of the casualties that freedom purveyed on the bearers of its existence. He unintentionally became a representative of the “self-exiled people who ha[d] become lost souls” (Naipaul, V 373). He had abandoned his own country and soon found himself in a strange place “without friends, with few loyalties, and with the feeling that [he] was trespassing” (Naipaul, V 373). He was trapped in a state of exile and could no longer return home. His existence had become “like that of souls in a classical underworld” (Naipaul, V 373).

Santosh was hardly on the plane that took him away from his satisfying life in Bombay into the thresholds of the catastrophic new world, when he began to realize that the freedom he had achieved in Bombay was now being threatened and was irrelevant to the new journey he was embarking upon. When he sat down on the plane he found no one like him but instead people who were dressed “as though they were going to a wedding” (Naipaul 2724). He instantly became the outsider and gathered the notice of people around him due to his domestic clothes that were “neither dirty nor clean” and his appearance that reflected “the colour of a corpse” (Naipaul 2725). Before his journey began, he was ready for it to end. The road ahead of him had already proven to be a long one.

Upon entering his new home he was cast as a foreigner, questioned for his American-deemed peculiar behavior, and “forever enclosed” (Naipaul 2726) by America’s limitations and surroundings. His previous freedom no longer existed since his new voyage for America’s freedom had made him a victim of tragedy.

Through the use of pathos, V.S. Naipaul immaculately portrayed the tragedy of freedom as a limitation that “deserves to be seen [more] as wider prisons in which the characters find themselves trapped” (Boxill). American’s freedom was like a prison in which escape was

impossible except by death. Yet, “actual prisons can prove more protective than freedom in a world which does not understand freedom” (Boxill), a world like the one Santosh has been introduced to. The isolation experienced by Santosh’s new freedom is no better than the freedom offered within a prison cell. Despite limitations and forced enclosure, Santosh is able to achieve his personal freedom, escape his employer’s ownership, and create his own presence in the new world. He “graduated from a cupboard to a real room, to a drab house” (Boxill) where he could no longer easily renounce his free state. Santosh was bound by his newly discovered identity and liberation. Freedom had made him a slave to its liberty.

Unfortunately, Santosh desired to regain his lost identity in an alien country. While undergoing culture shock, he had successfully “escaped the constraints of [his] own culture” (V(idiadhar) 319) only to discover that he did not belong anywhere. He was lost in an endless maze of discontent as his feelings and actions transpired in different directions. He was “a cook, bearer, pavement sleeper, ganja smoker, [who was] transplanted in his master’s diplomatic baggage to Washington” (Dhondy 2550). He was immediately caught off guard and became disoriented in thought and feeling as he meddled in the transition of American life.

At first overjoyed by receiving the empty pantry as a room rather than a small cupboard under the stairs in Bombay, Santosh soon realized that his original way of life was not the norm for America. He was shocked when he was chased from a café because he was barefoot, “Can you read? We don’t serve hippies or bare feet here” (Naipaul 2278). Furthermore, he was dismayed when he learned the value of two week’s pay, \$7.50, could only go as far as to the movies and back, bewildered that his smoke attracted *weirdos*, and disturbed that a troupe of hippies attempted to chant “Sanskrit words in praise of Lord Krishna” with an unusual accent and pronunciation.

One Out of Many represents a man who “after some trouble with the toilet in the plane lands in what he feels is a city overfull of *hubushis*. He adventures through a misunderstanding of a black girl’s affection for the smell of weed that haunts his body, through a guilty sexual encounter with the black sister who cleans his master’s flat, through a misvaluation of a group of Lord Krishna’s valets who freak out in the public square” (Dhundy 2550). Amongst the black riots and the burning city, Santosh acquired a position as a cook in an Indian restraint and finally found himself too alienated in a world of uncertainty and married to a *hubushi* woman in order to gain a passport and independence. However, through all his encounters and journey, he gained his freedom only by giving up his real freedom of self.

Naipaul suggests that in one way or another we are all foreign to our surroundings and fighting for our freedom. We are all lost to our culture, our heritage, and our identity. Santosh was utterly appalled and frightened that the *hubushis* were permitted to roam the streets so freely. Yet, he was shocked to see that “[h]appiness was on the faces of the *hubushi*. They were like people amazed they could do so much, that so much lay in their power” (Naipaul 2735).

Underneath the story of Santosh’s freedom lies the story of the fight for liberation by the *hubushi* through acts of violence. Their acts of retaliation against a nation or an oppressor were only temporary successes since they were short lived and futile. Plus, how can you battle the enemy, when the enemy lies within the man? This question was an underlying suggestion implied by V.S. Naipaul in *One Out of Many*.

Santosh proved that the enemy of freedom could be found inside our self and that one must die to their identity and become a casualty to freedom in order to gain their true independence and liberation. Santosh’s freedom “had left him to want to dissociate himself from

the brotherhood of man” just as the *hubushi* too were “guilty for stressing a racial rather than a human brotherhood” (Boxill). One must dissociate self from their entity and deny oneself completely in order to be content. However, in order to do this “you [must] accept slavery” and inadvertently “condemn oneself to prison” (Boxill).

The new world presented a new field of anxieties and fears to the individual who was marked as an outsider, yet confined to be inside the boundaries of a free state. To be “one out of many” in Bombay, is much different from being “one out of many” in America, where the phrase “no longer connotes individuality but consolidation, amalgamation, uniformity, mediocrity at best; and at worst- for a confused and frightened immigrant- displacement and anonymity” (Morris 76-7).

In Naipaul’s work, freedom is a fabrication and an illusion that causes individuals to act out and yearn for things only achievable by the dead. Santosh embraced the once unfathomable act of mingling with the *hubushi*, an act of will that asserted his freedom and independence. The effects of Santosh’s sexual escapade and the horrid oversize green suit, bought from his earnings from his weed, led him to discover that “he is now his own man and not a reflection of his employer’s ‘presence’” (Morris 79). It was an assertion of his freedom, but this freedom permitted his exile from the self and his surroundings.

Santosh attempted to break away from the shackles of freedom, yet he found himself amongst the casualties of a free state. He stood “looking into a mirror... [and] realize[d] that he c[ould] no longer return to the purity and innocence of his Bombay days” (Morris 79). It was then that he decided he had to escape. But, as previously stated, in order to escape the bondage of freedom it is necessary to become a casualty to the cause; only those of the tomb can achieve

total liberation. According to Naipaul “man should neither reject completely nor embrace the notion of freedom” (Boxill).

The post-colonial world is abhorred for “its lies, its mediocrity, cruelty, violence, and maudlin self-indulgence” (Said 113). In *One Out of Many*, Naipaul lashes out “over the spilt milk of colonialism” (Said 113) as Santosh watched the city burn and blacks run amuck. To his surprise, one of them scribbled “Soul Brother” on his house for protection from the fires and violence. He then mused, “Brother to what or to whom?” he had lost his sense of self and felt as if he no longer belonged to a group as he had in Bombay. He then stated:

I was once a part of the flow, never thinking of myself as a presence. Then I looked in the mirror and decided to be free. All that my freedom has brought me is the knowledge that I have a face and have a body, that I must feed this body and clothe this body for a certain number of years. Then it will be over (Naipaul 2745).

Naipaul had created a fictional story ingrained with truth. Underneath his ironic overtures, lied the notion that freedom is not freedom after all. To gain freedom is to gain the limitations of society- a responsibility for “the man in the mirror” and an entirely new dimension of tragedies. It is freedom that creates causalities.

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