



《大河灣》文本分析：以文化遺產保存為場域

范秀娟

南榮科技大學 觀光系

摘要

本論文將以文本分析之方法，討論《大河灣》之文化資產保存主題。印度裔英國作家奈波爾於 2001 年獲得諾貝爾文學獎，1979 年所出版的旅行小說《大河灣》被列為二十世紀百大英美小說。有關《大河灣》的論述，大多集中於殖民主義、帝國主義或後殖民主義的觀點。奈波爾是位嚴肅的旅者，《大河灣》是一本寓意深遠的小說。這本有關非洲的旅遊文學小說中，奈波爾讓讀者看到一個位於非洲東海岸被遺棄的殖民城鎮，透過他的真實觀察，小說同時具有地方色彩以及舉世皆然的普同性，傳遞出人類共同關心的現象和主題。本論文將以文本分析為主，輔以文化論述的觀點，剖析小說中的文化遺產保存主題。

關鍵詞：奈波爾、《大河灣》、文化遺產保存、文本分析

A Content Analysis on *A Bend in the River*: The Theme of Cultural Heritage Preservation

Hsiu-Chuan Fan

Department of Tourism, Nan Jeon University of Science and Technology

Abstract

This paper is purposed to illustrate the theme of cultural heritage preservation in V. S. Naipaul's *A Bend in the River* by the method of content analysis. V. S. Naipaul won the Nobel Prize in literature in 2001. His travel novel, *A Bend in the River*, published in 1979, is ranked one of the top 100 English novels. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization started to advocate the protection of cultural diversity in 1972. As the novel is semi-autobiographical, Naipaul recorded his experiences of touring post-colonial Africa. In this paper, the travel novel will be discussed in the respective of cultural heritage preservation, with special reference to Naipaul's characterization and portrayals of the African monuments, African masks and the chief's stick in the travel novel. In conclusion, Naipaul asserts the importance of cultural heritage preservation in his novel and awakens the Africans to cherish their past to obtain the sense of identity and belonging.

Keywords: V. S. Naipaul; *A Bend in the River*; cultural heritage preservation; content analysis



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Hsiu-Chuan Fan

Department of Tourism, Nan Jeon University of Science and Technology

1. Introduction

This paper aims to apply the method of content or textual analysis or content analysis to interpret Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul's *A Bend in the River* in the perspective of cultural heritage preservation. Naipaul is the 2001 Nobel Prize Winner in literature and his travel novel, *A Bend in the River*, was published in 1979. In 1998, the Modern Library ranked the novel on its list of the 100 best English-language novels of the 20th century.¹

With the advent of the world heritage movement in 1972, members of the United Nations and the European Union began to make efforts to preserve their cultural heritage. First of all, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) advocates the protection of cultural diversity in different dimensions, such as the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972), the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003), and the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005). The three legal instruments contribute to sensitize the authorities, the private sector and the civil society on the value of cultural heritage.²

Furthermore, according to *Cultural Heritage Preservation Act*, pronounced in

¹ Patrick French. *The World Is What It Is: The Authorized Biography of V. S. Naipaul*. (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2008) Hereinafter cited as Patrick French.

² Chih-Hung Lin Roland. *World Heritage and Historic Sites in the Perspective of Culture Diversity*. (Taipei: The Commercial Press, Ltd., 2012. p.4 Hereinafter cited as *World Heritage*).





2011 in Taiwan, cultural heritage stands for the assets having historical, cultural, artistic or scientific value. In Taiwan, cultural heritage is classified into seven groups: the first, monuments, historical buildings and settlements; secondly, historical sites; thirdly, cultural landscapes; the fourth, traditional art; the fifth, folk customs and related cultural artifacts; the sixth, antiquities; and the last, natural landscapes.³ As it is stated in Article 21 of *Cultural Heritage Preservation Act*, monuments shall be preserved “in their original appearance and construction method.” Article 60 also mentions that the competent authority shall draft plans for preservation of traditional arts and folk customs and to record in detail, teach or take appropriate preservation measures for those traditional arts and folk customs that are at the verge of extinction.⁴ Moreover, cultural diversity is also promoted by Montreal Declaration of 2007 by the European Union.

V. S. Naipaul asserts the importance of cultural heritage preservation in his travel novel, *A Bend in the River*. The novel is semi-autobiographical; the story is closely related to Naipaul’s life experience. Naipaul’s tormented personal life is portrayed in Patrick French’s authorized biography of Naipaul in 2008. It was at a time of de-colonialization and at that time many people over the world had to reassess their identity as well as the meaning of culture and history.⁵

Naipaul was born on the seventeenth of August in 1932, in Chaguanas, Trinidad, to a correspondent for the *Trinidad Guardian*. The family moved to the capital, Port of Spain, when he was six. He studied at Queen’s Royal College and he won a scholarship to Oxford in 1950. After graduation, he moved to London and worked as a broadcaster for the BBC’s Caribbean Voices. During this period Naipaul felt himself rootless and examined his own Trinidadian background.⁶

In 1961, he received a grant and began to travel in India, South-America,

³ Cultural Heritage Preservation Act., pronounced in Taiwan on 9 Nov., 2011 Chapter 1

⁴ Ministry of Culture, Taiwan. *Cultural Heritage Preservation Act*. 9 Nov., 2011 Article 60

⁵ Patrick French. p. 80.

⁶ Patrick French. P. 81



Arica, Iran, Pakistan, Malaysia and the U.S.A. After the long and wide period of travels in the 1960s and early 1970s, he wrote *A Bend in the River* in 1979.

Therefore, *A Bend in the River* is referred as travel literature, in which Naipaul recorded his experiences of touring Africa.

The novel is divided into four parts, including “The Second Rebellion,” “The New Doman,” “The Big Man,” and “Battle.” It is set in an unnamed African country after independence and the story is told by the narrator Salim, an Indian Muslim trader, who has spent his childhood and youth in the East Coast of Africa. To make a fortune, Salim moves inland and runs a shop at the bend of the river in a colonial village. Through his eyes, the reader learns about the corruption of the rootless people and the transformation of Africa from a colonial land into a chaotic continent ruled by the Big Man, a jingoistic president.⁷

Naipaul tries to awaken the Africans’ awareness of cultural heritage in this travel novel. His portrayal of characters, like Salim, Indar, Father Huismans, Raymond, and the Big Man, and his description of monuments, the chief’s stick and so forth serve his purpose. To illustrate Naipaul’s concern on cultural heritage preservation, a textual analysis approach will be used to interpret the theme.

2. Literature Review

A Bend in the River is often regarded as a pessimistic novel about Africa, proclaiming the corruptibility of mankind. It gains much attention from postcolonial theorists. Most literary critics, like Paul Theroux, Rushdie, and Derek Walcott, tend to analyze *A Bend in the River* with reference to colonialism, capitalism, and post-colonialism. As one of the most significant critics, Edward Said, in *Orientalism*, has commented that Naipaul “allowed himself quite consciously to be turned into a witness for the Western prosecution”⁸

⁷ V. S. Naipaul. *A Bend in the River*. (London: Penguin Books, 1991) Hereinafter cited as *A Bend in the River*

⁸ Edward W. Said. *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*. (London: Penguin, 1978)





V. S. Naipaul is generally considered the leading novelist of the English-speaking Caribbean. As a Caribbean author, Naipaul takes on many techniques to explore the status as colony, as margin to the center of the dominant imperial power of North America and Europe. Some critics focus on the autobiographical aspect of the novel, and refer to Naipaul's own experience as an Indian in the West Indies, a West Indian in England, and a nomadic intellectual in a postcolonial world.

Furthermore, Naipaul has constantly refused to avoid unwelcome topics and has arisen much controversy because of his politically views. *A Bend in the River* is often criticized as negative and even accused by some Muslim readers of narrow and selective vision of Islam. Naipaul endures harsh criticism for the allegedly unsympathetic portrayal of the Third World since his writings compel the reader to see the presence of suppressed histories.

Besides, Naipaul has been compared to Joseph Conrad because of similar pessimistic portrayal of human nature and the themes of exile and alienation. In the novel, Naipaul paints portraits of the outcast roaming through civilizations of the world. His world view and personal experience contribute to the novel. Although his parents descended from Hindu immigrants from North India, Naipaul's inability to form spiritual connection with his heritage, be it Trinidadian, Indian, or British, dominates his thought as it appears in the novel. An intrinsic study and a close analysis is necessary to illustrate Naipaul's points of view and the dominant themes, such as the loss of self-identity, the importance of history and its subjectivity. This paper will focus on the importance of history by pointing out the close relationship between history and self-identity.

V. S. Naipaul is controversial in some aspects regarding his negative and pessimistic attitude towards Africans and Muslims. Postcolonial theorist Edward Said in his *Culture and Imperialism*, criticizes Naipaul's views about the Third World.⁹ Said declares that Naipaul allows himself consciously to be a witness for the Western prosecution. Besides,

⁹ Edward W. Said. *Culture and Imperialism*. (Taipei: New Century Publishing Co., Ltd., 2010) Hereinafter cited as Said.



Paul Theroux and Derek Walcott declare that Naipaul is melancholic and his works are full of darkness and depression. S. Rushdie claims that there is no passion and love in Naipaul's novels.

In *Orientalism*, Edward Said has commented that V. S. Naipaul “allowed himself quite consciously to be turned into a witness for the Western prosecution.”¹⁰ Derek Walcott, the West Indian poet who won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1992, notes that Naipaul is praised for his frankness.

The Committee of Nobel Prize, the Swedish Academy, praise his work for having “united perceptive narrative and incorruptible scrutiny in works that compel us to see the presence of suppressed histories.” The Committee also noted Naipaul's affinity with Joseph Conrad and commented that Naipaul is Conrad's heir. “Naipaul is Conrad's heir as the annalist of the destinies of empires in the moral sense: what they do to human beings.”¹¹ His authority as a narrator is grounded in the memory of what others have forgotten, the history of the vanquished.

In “V. S. Naipaul's *A Bend in the River: A Study on History and Self-identity*,” the close relationship between history and self-identity is focused, with special reference to Naipaul's characterization of the rootless Africans. On the other hand, in “The Colonial Trauma in the Travel Writer V. S. Naipaul's *A Bend in the River*,” illustrates the colonial trauma by observing the process of the acculturation of the characters in the novel. In this paper, a new perspective will be observed by analyzing the novel by the view of culture heritage preservation.

3. Method

In this paper, the content approach is used to illustrate the theme of cultural heritage preservation. In 1931, Alfred Lindesmith developed content analysis technique. It gained popularity in the 1960s. The assumption is that words and phrases mentioned most often are those reflecting important concerns in every communication. According to the *Dictionary of*

¹⁰ Said. P. 30

¹¹ The Committee of Nobel Prize, the Swedish Academy 2001





the English Language, a content analysis is “a systematic analysis of the content rather than the structure of a communication, such as a written work, speech, or film, including the study of thematic and symbolic elements to determine the objective or meaning of the communication.”¹²

Mike Pfarrer defines content analysis as a research technique used to make valid inferences by interpreting textual material.¹³ According to Kimberly Neuendorf’s *The Content Analysis Guidebook*, textual analysis or content analysis is a “methodology in the social sciences for studying the content of communication.”¹⁴ As Earl Babbie defines, it is “the study of recorded human communications, such books, websites, paintings and laws”¹⁵ This approach is considered a method by which texts are studied as to authorship, authenticity, or meaning.¹⁶

Besides, Harold Lasswell formulated the core questions of textual analysis: “Who says what, to whom, why, to what extent and with what effect?”¹⁷ Holsti asserts three basic parts of content or textual analysis: First, to make inferences about the antecedents of a communication; then, to describe and make inferences about characteristics of a communication and finally, to make inferences about the effects of a communication.¹⁸ As defined by Kimberly Neuendorf, content analysis “enables the researcher to include large amounts of textual information and systematically identify its properties, such as the frequencies of most used keywords by locating the more important structures of its communication content.” Such amounts of textual information must be

¹² *The American Heritage: Dictionary of the English Language*, Fourth Edition copyright 2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company. Updated in 2009. Published by Houghton Mifflin Company.

¹³ Mike Pfarrer, professor at the Department of Management at the Terry College of Business, University of Georgia, has published award-winning research using content analysis techniques.

¹⁴ Kimberly A. Neuendorf. *The Content Analysis Guidebook*. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2002). p. 10.

¹⁵ Babbie, Earl R. *The Practice of Social Research* (12th ed. (Wadsworth: Cengage Learning, 2012) p. 530.

¹⁶ Muhammad Farooq Joubish; Muhammad Ashraf Khurram. "Outlook on Some Concepts in the Curriculum of Social Studies". *World Applied Sciences Journal* 12 (2011) (9): 1374–1377.

¹⁷ Harold Dwight Lasswell. *Power and Personality*. (New York: NY, 1948)

¹⁸ Ole R. Holsti . *Content Analysis for the Social Sciences and Humanities Reading*, (MA: Addison-Wesley, 1969)



categorized to provide “a meaningful reading of content under scrutiny.”¹⁹

Moreover, according to Dr. Klaus Krippendorff, textual analysis is useful for researchers working in cultural studies, media studies, in mass communication, literary criticism, and perhaps even in sociology and philosophy.²⁰ “When we perform textual analysis on a text, we make an educated guess at some of the most likely interpretations that might be made of that text.”²¹ We interpret texts in order to obtain what the author tries to say. In other words, a textual analysis paper is an examination of a text or essay and the manner in which it conveys its author's ideas to the readers. That is, a textual analysis is the analysis of how an author presents an argument. “It looks at whether the author has effectively passed his point across by looking at techniques used.”²²

In the following, a textual analysis is used to analyze the theme of cultural heritage preservation in *A Bend in the River*. Naipaul's description of both tangible and intangible African culture heritage will be discussed, with special references to his characterization of Salim, Indar, Father Huismans, and so on. To achieve the intended purpose, Naipaul has presented the argument effectively by the symbols of the African Madonna, African masks and the chief's stick. As a result, the most likely interpretation that may be made of the text is Naipaul's awareness of the importance of cultural heritage preservation.

4. Discussion

(1) Culture, Cultural Diversity and Cultural Heritage Preservation

The English cultural anthropologist, Sir Edward Tylor in his *Primitive Culture* defines culture as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.”²³ Besides, according to *The World Heritage*, culture involves cultural criteria and emerges as a central concept encompassing the range of human

¹⁹ Kimberly A. Neuendorf. *The Content Analysis Guidebook*. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2002). p. 10.

²⁰ Klaus Krippendorff. *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology* 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2004). p. 413. Hereinafter cited as Krippendorff.

²¹ http://www.cs.columbia.edu/~sbenus/Teaching/APTD/McKee_Ch1.pdf

²² Krippendorff, p. 413

²³ Edward Tylor. *Primitive Culture*. Volume 1 (New York: J.P. Putman's Sons, 1920) p.1





phenomena that cannot be attributed to genetic inheritance. Kluckhohn asserts that culture is a system of explicit and implicit designs for living.²⁴

The term “culture” has two meanings. First, it stands for the evolved human capacity to classify and represent experiences with symbols, and to act imaginatively and creatively. On the other hand, it means the distinct ways of living, experiences, and creative acts. Culture is a set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society of a social group; cultural diversity is the quality of diverse or different cultures.

Since cultural diversity is regarded as a fact and it takes places in our everyday reality, culture in different communities deserves equal respect and dignity.²⁵ The General Conference of UNESCO asserts in Article 1 of the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity that “cultural diversity is as necessary for mankind as biodiversity is for nature.”²⁶ This article is adopted by UNESCO to recognize cultural diversity as “common heritage of humanity” and consider its safeguarding to be “a concrete and ethical imperative inseparable from respect for human dignity.”²⁷

In *Introduction to World Heritage*, the English scholars, Barry Culling Worth and Vincent Nadin define “heritage,” as an “icon” which is a complex word, stressing on the value of time and the process of passing on cultures. “World Heritage” is classified into “Natural Heritage,” “Cultural Heritage,” and “Complex Heritage.”

Cultural heritage is “the legacy of physical artifacts and intangible attributes of a group or society that are inherited from past generations, maintained

²⁴ Qi-Wei Liu. *Notes on Cultural Anthropology*. (Taipei: Artists Publications, 1991) p. 196

²⁵ Hui-Cheng Wang. *The World Heritage*. (Taipei: Culture Taiwan Consortium, 2003) p. 52 Hereinafter cited as Hui-Cheng Wang..

²⁶ UNESCO (2002). “*UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity*,” Article 1. Hereinafter cited as UNESCO

²⁷ UNESCO, Article 1



in the present and bestowed for the benefit of future generations.”²⁸ Cultural heritage includes tangible, intangible and natural heritage. Tangible heritage includes monuments, buildings, books, works of art and artifacts while intangible heritage stands for folklore, tradition, language, knowledge and so forth. Natural heritage includes significant landscapes.²⁹ As stated in the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, ratified on June 20, 2007, the intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is “constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history”, and gives them “a sense for identity and continuity”, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity.³⁰

Francesco Bandarin, Former director of the World Heritage Centre and Assistant Director-General for Culture UNESCO, in *World Heritage and Historic Cities in the Perspective of Culture diversity*, has mentioned the importance of ensuring the conservation, protection and promotion of the world’s culture heritage. He declares that “cultural heritage is a source of eternal values in the memory and history of mankind.”³¹ That is, the goal of cultural heritage preservation is to strike “a fair balance between the constraints imposed by conservation of historic urban centers and the legitimate requirements of modernization, without compromising their identity.”³² The deliberate act of keeping cultural heritage from the present for the future is known as preservation or conservation. The cultural heritage of a people is “the memory of its living culture and the result of many influences which make the richness of its diversity.”³³

To Naipaul, to preserve cultural heritage is extremely essential because

²⁸ Hui-Cheng Wang, p. 6

²⁹ Hui-Cheng Wang, p. 22

³⁰ UNESCO (2007). “*Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage*”

³¹ *World Heritage*, p. 3

³² *World Heritage*, p. 3

³³ *World Heritage*, p. 7





cultural heritage conserves the legacy of generations and the culture of a people. The descendants can understand and carry on the cultures of their ancestors by preserving the cultural heritage. Keeping cultural heritage becomes an urgent and universal issue.

(2) The Destroyed Tangible Cultural Heritage: the Monuments

In the novel, the destroyed monuments are served as symbols for the Africans' indifference to their cultural heritage and history as well. As depicted in *A Bend in the River*, when Salim arrived at the town at the bend in the river in the heart of Africa, the place was almost ruined. He was told that the steamer monument "had been put up a few years before, almost at the end of the colonial time, to mark the years of the steamer service from the capital."³⁴ "The steamer monument had been knocked down, with all the other colonial statues and monuments."³⁵ As informed by Metty, the white people had been driven out from their town, and the monuments are destroyed.³⁶ The preservation of cultural heritage appears to a big problem for the Africans. Lots of historical sites and other tangible cultural heritage are destroyed because of war. The monuments built during the period of colonialism were torn into ruins.

After the country declared its independence, the President, the Big Man, built the State Domain, and Africans became modern men. The Big man was creating modern Africa. The cult of the African Madonna with child and shrines are set in various places connected with the President's mother. "The statue of the European explorer who had charted the river and used the first steamer had been replaced by a gigantic statue of an African tribesman with spear and shield, done in the modern African style." Beside this statue was a smaller one of an African Madonna with a bowed, veiled head. Nearby were the graves of the earliest Europeans.... Out of

³⁴ *A Bend in the River*, p. 32

³⁵ *A Bend in the River*, p. 32

³⁶ *A Bend in the River*, p. 59.



which our own town had been seeded.”³⁷ Yet, it’s satirical that the Madonna statues in the Domain had been smashed during the insurrection.

Michael Petzet, President of International Council on Monument and Sites, Germany, declares that historic towns and villages remain “man-made cultural achievements of unequalled sustainability.”³⁸ Dealing with historic towns and villages turns them into places of social, ecological and technical innovation. Those sites remind the nations of their own cultural history, and at the same time, remind people to act responsibly towards the diversity of the cultural heritage of all nations. Furthermore, they enable us to take into account men’s search for historic orientation, identity and security.

As Salim says that all they know of their history and history of the Indian Ocean he has got from books written by Europeans. At that time, the Africans seemed to be indifferent to their own history. They knew their history from European books. “Without Europeans, all [their] past would have been washed away, like the scuff-marks of fisherman on the beach outside [their] town.”³⁹ As Salim declares, Arabs and Indian Africans were both “small groups living under a European flag.”⁴⁰ To trample on their memory of colonialism, the Africans destroy colonial statues and monuments. They do whatever they can to get rid of the memory of the European intruders, regardless all the consequence.

(3) The African Intangible Cultural Heritage: African arts and crafts

A Bend in the River contributes to sensitize the reader and the public on the value of cultural heritage by the implementing the character of Father Huismans, principal of a lycée.

Africa has a rich tradition of arts and crafts. Yet, in post-colonial Africa, African arts and crafts were neglected by most Africans. To illustrate a parody on the

³⁷ *A Bend in the River*, p. 339

³⁸ *World Heritage*, p. 10

³⁹ *A Bend in the River*, p. 18

⁴⁰ *A Bend in the River*, p. 21





Africans' indifference to African arts and crafts, Naipaul mentions Father Huismans's collection of African masks and wood carvings on purpose.

It is essential to note the symbolic meaning of Father Huismans' collection of masks and wood carving. Huismans goes into the bush to visit some villages and bring back masks and some old wood carving. To him, the masks and wood carving are imaginative and full of meaning. He tells Salim that "every carving, every mask served a specific purpose and could only be made once."⁴¹ "Copies were copies; there was no magical feeling or power in them."⁴² Father Huismans knows much about African religion and goes to trouble to collect his pieces. He looks in masks and carvings for a religious quality. To him, Africa is a wonderful place, full of new things. Father Huismans gains the reputation of being a lover of Africa. He does not simply see himself in a place in the bush, but he sees himself as part of an immense flow of history.

Father Huismans is characterized as "a true lover of Africa" and "the last, lucky witness" of African primitive culture. Father Huismans sees himself as "part of an immense flow of history,"⁴³ and he thinks that "colonial relics were as precious as the things of Africa." "True Africa he saw as dying or about to die. That was why it was so necessary, while that Africa still lived, to understand and collect and preserve its thing."⁴⁴ Though most African reject the colonial past in post-colonial Africa, Father Huismans sees beyond "the bitter past." He collects pieces of old steamers and bits of disused machinery from the late 1890s, like relics of an early civilization.⁴⁵ Father Huismans finds "human richness" where the rest of us saw bush or had stopped seeing anything at all.

In other word, the masks and carvings could have been any age, a hundred

⁴¹ *A Bend in the River*, p. 67

⁴² *A Bend in the River*, p. 67

⁴³ *A Bend in the River*, p. 68

⁴⁴ *A Bend in the River*, p. 70

⁴⁵ *A Bend in the River*, p. 69



years old, or even a thousand years old. Father Huismans dates them and he sees himself at the end of it all, the last, lucky witness to sensitize the public on the value of primitive art, the African cultural heritage. That is why it is so necessary for him to understand, collect and preserve African things while Africa still lives.

It is strange that a Christian priest should have had such regard for African beliefs to which most Africans paid no attention. It's also sarcastic that Father Huismans, a white man, cares about the preservation of African masks than any Africans.

However, Ferdinand, a native, does not approve of Father Huisman's idea. Ferdinand comments that "it is a thing of Europeans, a museum." "Here it is going against the god of Africans. We have masks in our houses and we know what they are there for. We don't have to go to Huismans's museum."⁴⁶

Ironically, Father Huismans is murdered in his outing to collect African masks. Salim feels that Father Huismans's attitudes, his relish for Africa, his feeling for the beliefs of the forest was buried with him.⁴⁷ What Ferdinand says about Father Huismans's collection reflects most Africans' attitude toward Father Huismans after his death. While Father Huismans lived, collecting the things of Africa, he has been thought "a friend of Africa." But now that changed. It was felt that the collection was "an affront to African collection", and no one at the lycée took it over"⁴⁸ "The collection began to be pillaged."⁴⁹ The masks lost the religious power Father Huismans had taught Salim to see in them.⁵⁰

Maulana Karenga, an African-American professor of Africana Studies, states that in African art, the object was not as important as the soul force behind the creation of the object. He also states that all art must be revolutionary and in being revolutionary it must be collective, committing, and functional, this is echoed

⁴⁶ *A Bend in the River*, p. 87

⁴⁷ *A Bend in the River*, p. 87

⁴⁸ *A Bend in the River*, p. 88

⁴⁹ *A Bend in the River*, p. 89

⁵⁰ *A Bend in the River*, p. 89





by Shahadah who states "in Africa all art is socially functional."⁵¹ Masks are made with elaborate designs and are important part of African culture. Masks are used in various ceremonies depicting ancestors and spirits, mythological characters and deities.

According to *Dictionary of Cultural Anthropology*, masks are important symbols for the aboriginal people. To mention the function of African masks, in the early 20th Century, artists like Pablo Picasso and Andre Derain were inspired by the bold abstract designs that they discovered in African tribal masks.⁵² As a result, people now tend to admire the bold design and abstract patterns of African masks through European eyes. Nowadays, people appreciate African masks as exhibits on museum walls, without recognizing their original meaning. The masks in the museums are cut off their magical power. Yet, this is not how they were designed to be viewed.

In Africa, ritual and ceremonial masks are an essential feature of the traditional culture and art of the peoples of Africa. While the specific implications associated to ritual masks widely vary in different cultures, some traits are common to most African cultures. For example, masks usually have a spiritual and religious meaning. They are used in ritual dances and social and religious events. Moreover, a special status is attributed to the artists that create masks and to those that wear them in ceremonies. In most cases, mask-making is an art that is passed on from father to son, from generation to generation. The art of mask-making denotes the symbolic meanings conveyed by masks.

African masks should be seen as "part of a ceremonial costume." They are used in religious and social events to represent "the spirits of ancestors or to control the good and evil forces in the community."⁵³ To the primitive tribes in Africa,

⁵¹ Maulana Karenga, *Introduction to Black Studies*, 3rd edition, (New York: University of Sankore Press, 2002)

⁵² Kuo-Chiang Chen, *Dictionary of Cultural Anthropology*, (Taipei, En-kei Co. Ltd.,2006) p. 52.

Hereinafter cited as *Cultural Anthropology*.

⁵³ *Cultural Anthropology* p. 52 .



masks “come to life, possessed by their spirit in the performance of the dance, and are enhanced by both the music and atmosphere of the occasion.”⁵⁴ “Some combine human and animal features to unite man with his natural environment.” This “bond with nature” is of great importance to the African and through the ages masks have always been used to express this relationship.⁵⁵

Near the end of the story, a young American, probably a discoverer or an anthropologist, “who appears among Africans, puts on African clothes, and dances African dances,” leaves Africa suddenly. The young American often speaks of starting a gallery or a museum. Those collections of African masks, “the richest products of the forest,” are shipped to America to be “the nucleus of the gallery of primitive art.”⁵⁶ As Salim states, the spirits of the river and forest, all the spirits seem to have left the place. The spirits appear to have left his masks after the death of Father Huismans.⁵⁷ The masks lying flat on the shelves in the American gallery symbolize the fate of African cultural heritage.⁵⁸

(4) African Customs

There are some important customs for the tribes in Africa. They are parts of intangible cultural heritage. As it is mentioned in the novel, going down on one knee is a traditional reverence for the natives. “It was what children of the bush did to show their respect for an older person....It was a custom that had spread from the forest kingdoms to the east.”⁵⁹ However, young Africans do not cherish their own tradition. Ferdinand does not complete the traditional reverence, going down on one knee to show respect. Besides, Shoba and Mahesh had cut themselves off the tribal tradition. “Once they were supported by their idea of

⁵⁴ *Cultural Anthropology* p. 52 .

⁵⁵ *Cultural Anthropology* p. 52.

⁵⁶ *A Bend in the River*, p. 89

⁵⁷ *A Bend in the River*, p. 87

⁵⁸ Hsiu-Chuan Fan. “The Colonial Trauma in the Travel Writer V. S. Naipaul’s *A Bend in the River*” *Journal of Nan Jeon*. Vol. 16. (Tainan: Nan Jeon University of Science and Technology, 2013) pp. A1-10.

⁵⁹ *A Bend in the River*, p. 43





their high traditions; now they were empty in Africa, and unprotected, with nothing to fall back on.”⁶⁰

Furthermore, the Big Man’s stick or scepter also has symbolic meaning. According to Encyclopedia Britannica , a scepter is a “symbolic ornamental wand” held in the hand by a ruling monarch as “an item of royal or imperial insignia.”⁶¹ The Big Man wants to give dignity to those dances that Hollywood and the West had maligned. During the welcoming animations, tribal dancing, the Big Man put his stick on the ground. Raymond, being the Big Man’s white man, did not know that had a meaning. Raymond did not know that he had to shut up when the chief’s stick was down. In the old days, he could be beaten to death for this mistake.⁶² The Big Man’s stick or scepter is a cane of authority. The chief’s stick and the symbolism of what was carved on the stick are very important to the African tribes.

As Salim mentions, the official portraits of the President in African garb with his chief’s stick were getting bigger and bigger. Instead of protecting his people, the President became a tyrant and was killing people. Zabeth, the native magician or sorceress, looks at the big photograph which shows “the President holding up his chief’s stick, carved with various emblems.” “In the distended belly of the Squat human figure half-way down the stick the special fetish was thought to be lodged.”⁶³ Zabeth says that’s nothing and there isn’t a fetish in his stick. What Zabeth mentions is related to the animism and witchcraft in the primitive culture.⁶⁴

(5) The Lack of Writing Tradition

The Caribbean possesses almost no indigenous tradition in writing. The American Indians who existed before Columbus’s discovery left very few carvings

⁶⁰ *A Bend in the River*, p. 235

⁶¹ Chisholm, Hugh, ed. "sceptre." *Encyclopedia Britannica* 11th ed. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1911)

⁶² *A Bend in the River*, p. 195

⁶³ *A Bend in the River*, p. 232

⁶⁴ Qi-Wei Liu. *Notes on Cultural Anthropology*. (Taipei: Artists Publications, 1991) p. 216



and their oral tradition seems to fade. The true natives of the islands were wiped by the colonization of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and their oral culture did not make for easy preservation. The civilization that was to replace the Indians is made up of different West Africans brought to the West Indies as slaves. Though they pass on an oral culture, they did not possess a written tradition. The institution of slavery even cut some people off from their personal ancestry.⁶⁵

The lack of writing tradition is asserted in the conversation between Salim and Indar. The past is simply the past; Salim and Indar do not care about their past. As Salim confesses, “all that [he knows] of [his] history and the history of Indian Ocean [he has] got from books written by Europeans.” “It was Europe that gave [them] the descriptive postage stamps that gave [them] [their] ideas of what was picturesque about [themselves.] It also gave [them] a new language.”⁶⁶ “Without Europeans, [he feels], all [their] past would have been washed away.” “People lived as they had always done; there was no break between past and present. All that had happened in the past was washed away; there was always only the present.” For the Arabs, their power had been broken by Europe. Their towns and orchards disappeared, swallowed in bush. They ceased to be driven on by their idea of their position in the world. “Their energy was lost; they forgot who they were and where they had come from.”⁶⁷

History provides people with the sense of belonging. Once people reject the past, they lose their roots; they don't know who they are and where they belong. After Salim has stripped himself of all rules, he feels the loss of self-identity. He says that “[he] had also discovered that [he] had stripped [himself] of the support the rules gave [to] think of it like that was to feel [himself] floating and lost.”⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Hsiu-Chuan Fan (2012) “V. S. Naipaul’s *A Bend in the River*: A Study on History and Self-identity” 2012 *Proceedings of International Seminars on Exotic Cultural Exchange*. pp.202 ~209. (Tainan: Nan Jeon University of Science and Technology, 2012) p.206

⁶⁶ *A Bend in the River*, p. 237

⁶⁷ *A Bend in the River*, pp. 18~20

⁶⁸ *A Bend in the River*, p. 198





What he means by “support” is the sense of belonging, while the “rules” refer to the life of his family and community. The loss of history makes Salim feel like a rootless plant floating without purpose. Indar also experiences the loss of self-identity. In India House, a London building which pretended to be of India, Indar “had lost an important part of [his] idea of who [he was]” and felt “[he] has been granted the most cruel knowledge of where [he] stood on the world.”⁶⁹

When Indar reminds Salim of the fact that they have to ‘trample on the past,’ he mentions that the past doesn’t exist in real life but only in the mind and heart.⁷⁰ Indar’s statement is not quite true in some way. It is true that the present events constitute the past and that time does not stop but it goes on in a chronological order while people can recall the past at any time. The past, even though it can be lost and altered, remains deeply in one’s mind. That is, memory, past events of course, lives presently in our mind, so one can’t get rid of his past completely. No matter how hard Indar and Salim tries to get rid of the past, the past is still inside them. But when they reject the past, the repressed past does not offer them the sense of belonging and support.

In the novel, Indar and Salim try very hard to escape from their past by trampling on the past while, Raymond, the Big Man’s white man, is the only character in the novel that cares about the history of Africa. However, it’s sarcastic that Raymond is thinking of writing a book about Africa by collecting articles from newspapers. As Edward Burnett Tylor, the founder of culture anthropology, defines, culture is a “complex whole” which includes knowledge, belief, law, custom and so forth. Naipaul tries to illustrate the importance of keeping the tradition in the written form by contrasting the characters such as Indar, Salim and Raymond’s attitude towards the cultural heritage in Africa. The lack of written tradition implies the characters’ lack of the concept of cultural heritage

⁶⁹ *A Bend in the River*, p. 152

⁷⁰ *A Bend in the River*, p. 120



preservation.

5. Conclusion

In this novel, Naipaul stresses on the theme of cultural heritage preservation. As Naipaul describes in the novel, in the post-colonial Africa, most Africans were indifferent to cultural heritage preservation. Naipaul illustrates the importance of cultural heritage preservation by the use of symbols, such as Huisman's collection of African masks and carvings, the African Madonna, and the Big Man's stick. He emphasizes on the richness of African cultural heritage and draws the reader's attention to African people's failure in preserving their own cultural heritage after independence. To promote the importance of cultural heritage preservation is the main issue in the novel.

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