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# Research Chronicler

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A detailed still-life composition featuring a quill pen as the central element. The quill is positioned diagonally, with its tip resting on a scroll of aged parchment. The scroll is secured with a red wax seal and a red ribbon. In the background, a lit candle in a brass holder casts a warm glow. In the foreground, a glass inkwell with a quill inside and a red wax seal are visible. The entire scene is set on a dark wooden surface.

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A Peer-Reviewed Refereed and Indexed International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

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**Political Context of V.S. Naipaul's Early Novels: Identity Crisis, Marginalization and Cultural Predicament in *The Mystic Masseur*, *The Suffrage of Elvira* and *The Mimic Men***

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**Abstract**

V.S. Naipaul's early fiction is dominated by his youthful perceptions and impulses to understand his personal life deeper and better in a capricious, chaotic world-order. His existential position has been well narrated by the narrators of the early fiction so powerfully that these novels grip the attention of the readers deeply. All the protagonists of his early fiction are existential human beings, who struggle hard to challenge all the odds of life which rather marginalize them in their efforts to establish their identity.

Naipaul is concerned with the condition of human world, their wretchedness, isolation and rootlessness. Since Naipaul declares himself that he does not belong to any country, society or religion or culture, he is a man of the world. With his impartiality, he perceives a clear vision of human situations that are rather disturbing. Moreover, as writer of fiction and travelogues he does not follow the traditional forms. He thinks that the existing forms are inadequate to represent the complexities of the contemporary human world. He is therefore iconoclastic in his approaches to both forms of fictions and travelogues. In his writings Naipaul as a sensitive writer, has tried to explore the predicament of all of us who are more or less exiles in our own surroundings. The novel has therefore been rejuvenating through new materials of the new world. The paper aims at bringing out the political context of V.S. Naipaul's early novels. We will focus on Naipaul's early novels, more specifically the three novels written till 1967. Trinidad life is pre-dominant in these early novels. Both *The Mystic Masseur* and *The Suffrage of Elvira* deal with the exposure of Trinidad world of immigrant Hindu community with focus on post-colonial Third-world politics. *The Mystic Masseur* narrates the situations of life of Trinidad at the time of first General Election in 1946 whereas *The Suffrage of Elvira* focuses on the second General Election in 1950. *The Mimic Men* (1967) deals with politics, and illustrates the predicament of a decolonized country of developing and Independent existence.

**Key Words:** Exile, diaspora, rootlessness, cultural identity, marginalization, existentialism, immigrant, decolonization, globalization, colonialism, postcolonialism

**I**

The paper aims at bringing out the political context of V.S. Naipaul's early novels. We have however not considered the shorter fictions of Naipaul namely *Miguel Street*, *A*

*Flag on the Island* and *In a Free State*, in this paper. That is because we treat them as short stories in a collection rather than full-fledged novels. We have therefore analyzed the early fictional texts, namely *The Mystic Masseur*, *The Suffrage of Elvira*, and *The*



*Mimic Men*. Naipaul's early fiction is dominated by his youthful perceptions and impulses to understand his personal life deeper and better in a capricious, chaotic world-order. His existential position has been well narrated by the narrators of the early fiction so powerfully that these novels grip the attention of the readers deeply. All the protagonists of his early fiction are existential human beings, who struggle hard to challenge all the odds of life which rather marginalize them in their efforts to establish their identity. *A House for Mr. Biswas* and *Mr. Stone and the Knights' Companion* have not been considered because of the apolitical context in which they are set.

These novels have been written during 1957-1967. We see that Naipaul is an engaging writer of fictional and non-fictional writings. As a writer he is concerned with the condition of human world, their wretchedness, isolation and rootlessness. Since Naipaul declares himself that he does not belong to any country, society or religion or culture, he is a man of the world. With his impartiality, he perceives a clear vision of human situations that are rather disturbing. Moreover, as writer of fiction and travelogues he does not follow the traditional forms. He thinks that the existing forms are inadequate to represent the complexities of the contemporary human world. He is therefore iconoclastic in his approaches to both forms of fictions and travelogues. Joshi rightly argues: "Naipaul has himself insisted that a novelist's function goes beyond documentary realism, that he must impose his vision on the world, not merely record what he sees. He describes the novel as 'a

form of social inquiry' and sees the writer as one who owes a responsibility by society. Although for a writer with such a positive prescription his is a singularly negative vision, Naipaul's work is of the utmost relevance in a world in which we are all in a sense exiles" (1994: xiii). In his writings Naipaul as a sensitive writer, has tried to explore the predicament of all of us who are more or less exiles in our own surroundings. Joshi furthers her argument quite convincingly when she writes: "His ruthless adherences to his own dark vision, his refusal to pretend to an optimism he cannot feel, give a compellingly persuasive power to his depressing fictional world" (1994 XIII – XIV). What is important for Naipaul is that he is not pretentious in his descriptions and analyses even though there is an element of brutality in it. He is not even optimistic for the sake of it. To him, what he sees is tried; he is not interested in being unnecessarily optimistic. That is why his character Salim utters in *A Bend in the River*: "The world is what it is: men who are nothing, who allow themselves to become nothing, have no place in it. (Bend: 1). Even his early novels underlie such a dark vision of the later works through their comic exuberance.

Naipaul writes in *The Return of Eva Peron* (1980): "The great societies that produced the great novels of the past have cracked. Writing has become more private and more privately glamorous. The novel as a form no longer carries conviction" (218). Such a view was also expressed in the 1960s when many believed that the novel was dead because the novels as traditional form lost its vigour and appeal to the people in the

New World. In a changing scenario of the postcolonial people, the new materials for the novel could not be incorporated in the old form. Even Naipaul in his own life experimented with new materials in his novels. Bradbury (1977), Steiner (1969), Massey (1990), Lodge (1971), Patrinder (1987) have argued how the traditional form of novel has lost its relevance to suit to the new materials of the post-colonial people. The notion of history plays a prominent role in our postcolonial world. The novelists of this contemporary time therefore emphasized the concept of history and reinterpreted it. They also deconstructed people's history to know the truthfulness of their culture, society, political and economic conditions. V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Gunter Grass, Albert Camus, Doris Lessing, Samuel Becket and many others adapted the form of novel according to their own needs in a fast changing global situation. Bhat (2000) therefore quite rightly puts forth her arguments in the context of the materials of this new form of novel:

A new way of looking at the novel with the abundant experimentation going on within it under the influence of post-modern theories, is its close association with history. The novel today, especially in the growing Third world countries is a reflection of the history in the making at every minute there. History in action and the concept of history are alive as subject and theme in recent fiction". (2000: 5)

During the 1980s and 1990s, history has a potential meaning for the novelists:

The novel receives and absorbs history, transforms it into a creative stream and pours itself out into a form

which may coincide with the previous novel forms or under the impact of the new experiments, emerge as a completely transformed unit. The novel exists today, as much truthfully as the sun blazes or the moon shines. (Bhat 2002: 5-6)

The novel has therefore been rejuvenating through new materials of the new world. The New Literatures in English that emerged in Australia, West Indies, India, Africa, New Zealand and many Third World diasporic writers regenerated this art form from its decay. Naipaul, a Third world diasporic writer, living in England contributed significantly to the new novel of today with his own experiments with Third-world countries and societies. First he made use of the West Indian life and societies as materials for his fiction. However, he used the British European structural models and his inherent Hindu perspectives also interacted. As a result "his novels became a blend of trinity, giving a new dimension to English fiction, widening and extending its frontiers" (Bhat 2000: 68). Naipaul experimented the contemporary problems of postcolonial societies. He has high concerns for the marginalized, who suffer by being dominated. That is why Bhat says: "In these experiments, he emerged as a true post-modernist, using the form of the novel for analyzing the postcolonial predicament, neo-colonialism and the global phenomenon of Diaspora" (Bhat 2000: 68).

In this paper we will focus on Naipaul's early novels, more specifically the three novels written till 1967. Trinidad life is predominant in these early novels. Both *The Mystic Masseur* and *The Suffrage of Elvira* deal with the exposure of Trinidad world of

immigrant Hindu community with focus on post-colonial Third-world politics. *The Mystic Masseur* narrates the situations of life of Trinidad at the time of first General Election in 1946 whereas *The Suffrage of Elvira* focuses on the second General Election in 1950. *The Mimic Men* (1967) deals with politics, and illustrates the predicament of a decolonized country of developing and Independent existence.

## II

### *The Mystic Masseur*

*The Mystic Masseur* sets before us a typical prototype character of the Caribbean world. The novel highlights the personality of Ganesh who yearns for power and prestige for which he finds “politics” as an easy means. He is quite vigilant to every situation around his milieu and whatever he finds suitable to his interest; he avails of the opportunity as he is well aware of the limited resources of his nation. Politics becomes a medium for personal gains and achievement rather than for any social or national cause. The themes running in the novel are displacement, dislocation, mimicry of democracy, chaos and corruption in the postcolonial Trinidad. The novel opens with the description of the struggle of the hero, Ganesh, as a masseur, which is obvious in the statement of the narrator: “But when I first met him, he was still a struggling masseur, at a time when masseurs were ten a penny in Trinidad” (*Mystic 1*). Though the profession of a masseur is not very much promising in Trinidad, Ganesh plunges into this field because the natives still prefer these unqualified doctors to the good, qualified doctors. The narrator says: “My

mother distrusted doctors and never took me to one. I am not blaming her for this because in those days people went by preference to the unqualified masseur or the quack dentist” (*Mystic 1*).

This illustrates the fact that this colony has been totally exploited and squeezed out of all its resources and left with nothing but ignorance, illiteracy and superstition. And the natives are also not sensitive to their situations, but they are involved in playing on the innocence and weakness of other native fellows. As we find that Ganesh has a number of books with him in his shelves but he has nothing to do with these books. He does not study them but he keeps them for public admiration and befools the illiterate native easily. He likes only the numbers of books:

Four hundred Everyman, two hundred Penguin- six hundred. Six hundred, and one hundred Reader’s Library, make seven – hundred. I think with all the other books, it have about fifteen hundred good books here. (*Mystic 5*)

Though Ganesh aspires to be a writer and a reader, he is not very much proficient in this quality. He just follows this habit as a fashion which is the result of his European education. He does not have the knack of being a good writer/ reader at all. Simultaneously he has an adherence to the Hindu culture and religion. His adherence is only to exploit the religious sentiments of innocent Trinidadians. In fact he is caught up in the ‘Porous Border’ between East and West for his identity.

I tried to forget Ganesh thumping my leg about and concentrated on the walls. They were covered with

religious quotations, in Hindi and English, and with Hindu religious pictures. My gaze settled on a beautiful four-armed god standing in an open lotus. (*Mystic 6*)

The second chapter takes us to the days of Ganesh's boyhood. At the age of 15 Ganesh was sent to Queens Royal College. His father feels proud of sending his son to an English school. Before going to the college, he moves about the district with Ganesh and shows off the people that his son was going to attend an English school. The people were also fascinated to Ganesh's going to Royal College. It shows their colonial mentality because Trinidadians have not yet developed their own identity and they still find their existence in following the West:

Mr. Ramsumair made a lot of noise about sending his son to the 'town college', and the week before the term began he took Ganesh all over the district, showing him off to friends and acquaintances. He had Ganesh dressed in a khaki suit and a khaki toupee and many people said the boy looked like a little sahib. (*Mystic 9*)

But in fact he was looking ridiculous in his dress:

When they got to St Joseph, Ganesh began to feel shy. Their dress and manner were no longer drawing looks of respect. People were smiling, and when they got off at the railway terminus in Port of Spain, a woman laughed. (*Mystic 10*)

Harvin Sachdeva rightly comments:

Queen Royal College in Port of Spain is a mere secondary school that imparts a Victorian educational system ill-suited to the need of an emergent

nation and that succeeds only in fostering in the students, a need to mimic the English. (MFS Vol.30, No.3, 1984: 472 – 73)

In addition to this, his father gets humiliated in the English principal's office due to his cultural difference: "Then there was the scene in the principal's office: his father gesticulating with his white cap and umbrella; the English principal patient, then firm and finally exasperated; the old man enraged, muttering, 'Gaddaha! Gaddaha!'" (*Mystic 10*). Though Ganesh was sent to school to be like an Englishman but 'he could never stop being a country boy'. He just proved to be a mimic man of the English. In the process he also changed his name but all in vain. His indigenous culture and beliefs were in his instinct though he tried his best to shed off but he couldn't:

"Ganesh never lost his awkwardness. He was so ashamed of his Indian name that for a while he spread a story that he was really called Gareth. This did him little good. He continued to dress badly. He didn't play games, and his accent remained too clearly that of the Indian from the country. He never stopped being a country boy... He went to sleep with the hens and woke before the cocks. (*Mystic 11*)

Ganesh goes back home to become a complete Brahmin following one of the rituals and when he returns from home he is again insulted by the principal: "Ramsumair, you are creating a disturbance on the school. Wear something on your head?" (*ibid 11*). It is important to note that the religious and cultural differences create a very deplorable plight for the marginalized groups through



humiliations and insults inflicted on them by the dominant colonizers.

Though Ganesh was not able to adjust himself in the Christian school, the modern city life and education had a great influence on him. His rejection of the marriage proposal of his father's choice was the result of his modernity. He went to the extent of accepting himself as an orphan: "Ganesh wrote back that he had no intention of getting married, and when his father replied that if Ganesh didn't want to get married he must consider himself an orphan, Ganesh decided to consider himself an orphan" (Mystic 12-13).

For survival Ganesh takes up the job of a teacher but only to be again insulted due to his cultural differences: "This teaching is an art, but it have all sort of people who thinks they could come up from the cane field and start teaching in Port of Spain"(ibid 16). Chandra B. Joshi rightly comments:

In Ganesh's instinct to hide behind the name Gareth, the author is sympathetically aware of the pains of adjustment to an unfamiliar environment. This is an important theme in Naipaul's work, a way in which he has explored the challenges to the preservation of identity in an alien environment. That many Indians felt the compulsion to take on Anglicized names does suggest that they found it difficult to preserve their cultural identity in the Creole world. However, even when they surrendered their names in a move to identify with their environment they met with a measure of contempt and hostility. (1994: 115- 116)

With the death of his father when he had to return to Fourways he feels quite relieved:

"For it was indeed a singular conspiracy of events that pulled me away from the emptiness of urban life back into the stimulating peace and quiet of the country".

Ganesh was happy to get away from Port of Spain. He had spent five years there but he had never become used to it or felt part of it. It was too big, too noisy, too alien." (Mystic 21)

Though he is back to the place where he is known and honored, he is still in the grip of the influence of the Western education and city life which creates a sense of alienation in him: "He knows the Fourways people, and they know him and liked him but now he sometimes felt cut off from them" (ibid 22). Charda B. Joshi comments on the existential condition of Ganesh:

Ganesh's sense of displacement and his groping towards a solution are presented with full understanding of his predicament, caught as he is between an Indian past and Creole present. To see Ganesh merely as a character in a farce does not quite do justice to the author's treatment. (1994:116 -117)

Ram Logan, though an illiterate fellow, has a Western set of mind. His longing for Ganesh as his son-in-law is due to Ganesh's Christian education. Ganesh, for him, is a modern man in European sense. His flattering to Ganesh is just to placate him for his daughter's engagement with him:

"Look Ram Logan marrying off his second and best daughter to a boy with a college education, and this is all the man giving." Is that what eating me up, sahib? I know that for you, educated and reading books night and

day, it wouldn't mean much, but for me, sahib, what about my character and sensa values?"(Mystic 40)

But to Ram Logan's amazement Ganesh plays greater trick on him. Ganesh grabs a lot of dowry from his father-in-law. "In the end Ganesh got from Ram Logan: a cow and a heifer, fifteen hundred dollars in cash, and a house in Fuente Grove. Ram Logan also cancelled the bill for the food he had sent to Ganesh's house" (ibid 45). In fact everyone is opportunist here. All human relations seem to be for vested interest only. In a decolonized continent, it unfolds colonial trait. Ganesh's ill-treatment to his wife, Leela, further emphasizes the subordinate condition of fair-sex in the society. It seems that Ganesh's ill-treatment to his wife is the result of his sense of insecurity. He perhaps feels insecure due to his wife's modernity and education, as the Great Belcher told Ganesh: "these modern girls is hell self", she said. "And from what I see and hear this Leela is a modern girl. Anyway, you got to make the best of what is yours" (ibid 46)

For writing books also, Ganesh is encouraged by the great Belcher Ganesh doesn't have the instinctive quality of writing or massaging. He has the only motive that behind every profession the intention is to accumulate money. After robbing off Ram Logan, Ganesh moves to rob the entire Trinidadians and thus ceases to be a mimic of Colonial masters who have exploited the country for years. Trinidadians are crazy after anything which makes them important in European sense. All the admirers, friends and acquaintances of Ganesh wish him to be a great writer like a European. Behary who has anglicized his

name as Behary encourages Ganesh. He says: "The Americans is nice people. You must write this book for them": (ibid 64). The use of colonial language and style may have some other implications as well. Manjit Inder Singh makes a remarkable point in this context:

The notable point is the realization of the necessity to exploit language to enter a class which will ensure recognition and importance. However, Ganesh doesn't exemplify a subversive strategy or design to undermine the power of the colonizer. On the other hand the acquisition of literary through the colonizer's language becomes a technique to conquer the empty spots, the vacuum in the colony that only waits to be filled by the intelligent mimic like the hero of *The Mystic Masseur*. (1998: 102)

In Trinidad, a newly independent country, a few people have access to education and Ganesh who has got a little Christian education is, for the uneducated natives, equal to the Governor. His apparent habit (actually showing off) of reading brought an unexpected reputation to him. It brought a good support to him when his profession as a masseur had disappointed him:

But Ganesh's reputation, lowered by his incompetence as a masseur, rose in the village; and presently peasants, crumpling their grimy felt hats in their hands, came to ask him to write letters for them to the Governor, or to read letters which the Government curiously had sent them". (Mystic 69)

Soomintra, the other daughter of Ram Logan, was oscillating between the two cultures, on the one hand the modern

European style and on the other hand her fascination for India:

She had a son whom she had called Jawaharlal, after the Indian leader; and her daughter was called Sarojini, after the Indian poetess.

‘The third one, the one coming, if he is a boy, I go call him Motilal: if she is a girl I go call she Kamala.

Admiration for the Nehru family couldn’t go much farther.” (ibid 74)

Her hypocrisy reveals in her showing off her wealth and concealing the poor educational background of her husband to show herself as a modern woman. She is the representative of the Trinidadians who cheat their culture and social milieu in following the Western way of life:

Soomintra jangled her gold bracelets and at the same time coughed, howled, but didn’t spit- another mannerism of wealth, Leela recognized. ‘Jawaharlal father start reading the other day too. He always say that if he had the time he would do some writing, but with all the coming and going in the shop he ain’t really have the time, poor man. I don’t suppose Ganesh so busy, eh?’ (ibid 75)

Behary, another character, has fascination for Western modernity, even more than Ganesh. Their appreciation for Basdeo’s printing machine reveals their indifference to anything Trinidadian:

You think they have that – sort of type in Trinidad. All they have here is one sort of mash- up type, ugly as hell. ‘But this boy, this man I was telling you about, Basdeo, he have a new printing machine. It like a big typewriter: ..... ‘It does just show you how backward

this Trinidad is. When you look at those American magazines; you don’t wish people in Trinidad could print like that?’ (77- 78)

When the little book of Ganesh, *101 Questions on Hinduism*, was published, it brought a lot of reputation and love to him from his wife and relatives but the book did not have a great sale in the country, and Ganesh blamed the incapability of Trinidadians for the inability to appreciate a quality work. Harveen Sachdeva comments here rightly:

Occasionally the narrator shows Ganesh to damn himself. When he becomes an author, Ganesh, who had brought books for their size, complains that people ‘want a book that looks big. Once it looks big they think it good’. In exposing the public’s illiteracy, he unwillingly reveals his own hypocrisy and pretentiousness of his status as scholar.” (MFS 1984: 475)

Ganesh seems to hang between two cultures- Indian and Western. But in fact Indian culture is a kind of mask for him to cover his failures. When he fails as a writer, at the suggestion of the Great Belcher, he again plunges in mystic business of a masseur. To have the real looking of mystic masseur he wears dhoti-kurta but it doesn’t have any religious implication because he doesn’t like Indian dress. Behary comments on his dress: “Nobody would believe now that you did go to the Christian college in Port of Spain. Man, you look like a pukka Brahmin” (Mystic 13).

The Negro family, his clients comes on the appointed time. The following passage reveals how Ganesh cheats innocent people:

Shortly after twelve the boy, his mother and father arrived, in the same taxi as before. Ganesh, dressed once more in his Hindu garments welcomed them in Hindi and Leela interpreted as arranged. They took off their shoes in the verandah and Ganesh led them all to the darkened bedroom, aromatic with camphor and incense, and lit only by the candle below the picture of Lakshmi on her lotus. Other pictures were barely visible in the semi-darkness: a stabbed and bleeding heart, a putative likeness of Christ, two or three crosses, and other designs of dubious significance (ibid 122)

By curing the boy successfully, he becomes the most successful masseur in Trinidad superseding all other masseurs. With the prosperity of his business Leela like Soomintra, starts displaying her wealth. Even the change also comes in the behavior of Ganesh. Such changed behavior brought a distance between him and Behary's family. Behary's wife says: "Suraj Poopa, you ain't listening to me. Every Sunday morning bright and early you jump out of your bed and running over to kiss the man foot as though he is some Lord Lallo (ibid 131). Ram Logan, the father-in-law of Ganesh, who had grudge against Ganesh, now starts taking the advantage of the reputation of Ganesh. He hires taxis on high rates for the patients, though later he is checked by Ganesh. Ganesh also gets a temple built for himself by an Indian architect from British Guiana but it does not have any religious or cultural implications, in fact, it is meant to enhance his mystic profession and reputation. This indicates the opportunistic attitude of Trinidadians. After getting riches and prosperity, Leela behaves like colonial

masters: she starts imitating Western manners and style. She tells Suraj Momma: "This house I are building, I doesn't want it to come like erther Indian house. I want it to have good furnitures and I wants everything to remain prutty prutty. I are thinking about getting a refrigerator and a few other things like that" (143). The following passage reveals the two aspects of Ganesh's character:

He didn't forget the smaller things. From an Indian dealer in San Fernando he bought two sepia reproductions of Indian drawings. One represented an amorous scene: in the other God had come down to earth to talk to a sage. Leela didn't like the first drawing. "It are not going to hang in my drawing-room".

'You have a bad mind, girl'. Under the amorous drawing he wrote, will you come to me like this? And under the other, or like this? (ibid 145)

Bruce King's remarks, here, are quite pertinent:

But there are the resulting incongruities as an unsuccessful Hindu masseur becomes, through the study of modern psychology, a rich successful medicine man for the black Trinidadian and then a leading national politician who is eventually knighted by the British. (1993: 29)

Ganesh cheats the innocent and uneducated natives very easily. The numbers of books are his weapons to play with the emotion of the people. Though his preaching is spiritual, it is also self-contradictory. He himself is ambitious; but he instructs people to shun the desires:



He spoke about the good life, about happiness and how to get it. He borrowed from Buddhism and other religions and didn't hesitate to say so .... He spoke in Hindi but the books he showed in this way were in English, and people were awed by this display of learning. His main point was that desire was source of misery and therefore desire ought to be suppressed... At other times he said that happiness was only possible if you cleared your mind of desire... (ibid 149-150)

In Trinidad, politics is a vehicle for the natives to become part of a larger national society. But it is not used in proper way. It becomes the means of personal gain, advancement. The main purpose as social justice, ethnic dignity and independence are kept aside. Democracy becomes a plaything in the hands of a few selfish leaders like Ganesh and Narayan. Bruce King's argument is appropriate here:

British political culture is seen as absurd in Trinidad when at the time, 1946, there was no strong sense of nationhood and a common past, little education, little political discussion, no political ideals or politics. Ganesh is an Indian version of Man-man, the unemployed, apparently untalented, marginal man who finds a career and employment first in religion and then as a leader of the people. [1993:30]

Ganesh's clash with Narayan for getting thirty thousand rupees granted by Indian government was not for any religious cause. He had his self-motive behind that to grab the fund granted for the spread of Hindu religion in Trinidad. Bruce King further remarks in this context:

.....religion, ethnic organizations and politics offer for personal advancement. This is a marooned, impoverished, disorganized, neglected colonial society which has been given a gift of elections. (1993: 30)

However the conflict between the two proves to be destructive for Hinduism in Trinidad. The Hindu is divided into political parties - Hindu Association led by Narayan and Hindu League led by Ganesh. Though Ganesh wins, their conflict results in some indifference towards Hinduism by the others who had earlier strong faith in Hinduism:

The bearded Negro stood up and made a long speech. He said that he had been attracted to Hinduism because he liked Indians; but the corruption he had seen that day was entirely repugnant to him. It had, as a matter of fact, decided him to join the Muslims, and the Hindus had better look out when he was a Muslim. (Mystic 183)

The unending ambitions of Ganesh seem to have the motto of enjoying the privilege of colonial masters. In this context Manjit Inder Singh's comments are appropriate:

The political fraud and metropolitan mimicry is a simpler theme, compared with the life and times of the master-trickster Ganesh Ramsumair in *The Mystic Masseur*. Yet, Naipaul traces another facet of the destitution and derivativeness of Trinidad society to survive, for Ganesh, the successful mystic turned politician is an illustration of the scandalous ways to ascend the ladder in the colonized outpost. (1998: 98)

A week before the polling of M.L.C. Ganesh organized a recitation of *Bhagwat*, a seven-day prayer meeting. Leela's comment, here,

is noteworthy regarding the nature of natives towards religion:

Leela didn't approve. 'Is easy for you, just sitting down and reciting prayers and thing to the people. But they don't come to *Bhagwat* just for prayers; I can tell you they come for the free food. (Mystic 191)

It exposes the fact that people here do not have a deep sense of involvement and sincerity in religious affairs. On the last day of *Bhagwat* while introducing Indar Singh to the audience, Ganesh highlights his European education and praises his English though for the last seven days he had been organizing a prayer meeting related to his own culture:

I got to talk English to introduce this man to you, because I don't think he could talk any Hindi. But I think all of all you go agree with me that he does talk English like a pukka Englishman. That is because he have a foreign education and he only just come back to try and help out the poor Trinidad people. Ladies and gentlemen-- Mr. Indar Sing, Bachelor of Arts of Oxford University London, England.' [ibid 192]

Both Leela and Ganesh are living a very unreal life. Their aspirations and ambitions have put them in a situation of uncertainty and instability. They hang between two cultures. On the one hand they want to be modern in European sense, and on the other hand they also wish to retain their own cultural identity. When the members of the new Legislative Council and their wives were invited to dinner of Government House, Leela did not go though she had

always an inclination towards European manners:

Leela was shy but she made out that she couldn't bear the thought of eating off other people's plates. 'It are like going to a restaurant. You don't know what the food are and you don't know who cook it.' (ibid 194)

Though Ganesh attends the dinner party, his awkwardness shows the cultural confusion: The meal was torture to Ganesh. He felt alien and uncomfortable. He grew sulkier and sulkier and refused all the courses. He felt as if he were a boy again, going to the Queen's Royal College for the first time. (ibid 197)

The humiliation at Governor's dinner forces him to leave rural Fuente Grove for urban, Port of Spain. Chandra B. Joshi comments:

The move from Fuentes Grove to Port of Spain is a wrench too and Ganesh cries out: "I wish the whole thing did never happen".... It is not only leaving Fuente Grove that is distressing Ganesh. He knows that he is leaving behind something of his past for ever. (1994: 118)

Though he becomes an M.L.C., but very soon he becomes a puppet in the hands of the government led by whites. Second time, even after losing the election he is made M.B.E. because of his loyalties to the ruling government. He is sent to England when the narrator meets him. The narrator is amazed at the new look of Ganesh:

Pundit Ganesh!' I cried, running towards him, 'Pundit Ganesh Ramsumair!'

'G. Ramsay Muir,' he said coldly. (Mystic- 208)

The word “coldly” suggests a sense of loss in Ganesh as Chandra B. Joshi rightly argues:

In that “coldly” is conveyed all the loss involved in that transformation. Through all the stages of his career Ganesh had never really lost the reader’s sympathy – because he was shown as retaining always a certain warm humanity. Now, with that one word “coldly” that sympathy seems to be withdrawn. [1994:119]

However it would be appropriate to sum up the character of Ganesh in the words of Bruce King:

The life of Pt. Ganesh in *The Mystic Masseur* can be seen as a humorous success story during a time of social & political change, but it also illustrates a rapid deterioration of Hindu culture which, historically, parallels the movements towards self-Govt. in the colony. If Pt. Ganesh is a colorful figure he is without culture or moral standards. He unashamedly surrounds himself with symbols from many religions when he seeks business as a faith healer, he appeals to Hindu Nationalism, however, to win an election. After a period as a radical fire-brand he becomes a supporter of the colonial government and receives a knighthood. (1980: 102- 103)

### ***The Suffrage of Elvira***

*The Suffrage of Elvira* is a continuation of *The Mystic Masseur*. Like *The Mystic Masseur*, it also explores the theme of election in Trinidad. It deals with the second general election in the village of Elvira which is remote and unconnected to the outside world. It explores the possibility of democracy, political awakening among the

natives, gain and loss due to democracy in a world which is multiracial, multireligious, and multiethnic. Like all other third world nations, the political forms and social institutions of Trinidad “were imitated rather than created, borrowed rather than relevant, reflecting the forms existing in the particular metropolitan country from which they were derived” (Williams 1970: 501). The very beginning of the novel, in the prologue, anticipates the mimicry of the democracy in a newly decolonized nation. Harbans who is contesting for M.L. C. has to bargain for votes of the people. Such a step is rather very undemocratic to bring a fair democracy in the country:

He (Harbans) had done all his bargaining for the election; the political correspondents said he has as good as was already. This afternoon he was going to offer himself formally to Baksh and Chittaranjan, the powers of Elvira. The bargain had only to be formally sealed. (Suffrage 11)

The very word ‘power’ used before the names of Baksh and Chittaranjan presents the neocolonial situation in a newly independent country. In such a situation Harbans had to grab and purchase votes from different communities. Since Baksh and Chittaranjan were the leaders of Muslim and Hindu communities respectively, Harbans was having some secret deals with them. When Harbans met Baksh, he was puzzled to understand as to how a man like Baksh could be the leader of Muslims:

It was a puzzle: how Baksh came to be the Muslim leader. He wasn’t a good Muslim. He didn’t know all the injunctions of the Prophet and those he did know he broke. For instance he

was a great drinker; ... He had none of the dignity of the leader. He was a big talker; in Elvira they called him 'the mouther'. (Suffrage 12)

According to Harbans another Muslim, Haq, should have been the leader of Muslims but he could not become because he was poor. As Harbans puts it: "... Though the position should have gone in all fairness to Haq..... Haq was orthodox, or so he led people to believe, but Haq was poor" (ibid 12-13). Baksh was a man who was mentally colonized and lacked the spirit of nationalism as his statement makes it clear:

'Only', he used to say, 'they just ain't have the sort of materials I want for my house. This Trinidad backward to hell, you hear'. He kept the designs of California-style houses from American magazines to show the sort of house he wanted." (ibid 13)

Baksh was the representative of Muslim vote bank and he might support anyone either Harbans or preacher depending on the money he gets. As the elections were coming near, Baksh was well aware of his position and importance. When Harbans came to him, he did not pay any attention to him nor did he give him any weight: "Foam kept on tacking. Baksh made more marks on his cloth. Two months, one month ago they would have jumped up as soon as they saw him (Harbans) coming (ibid 15) .At last the bargain was settled. Foam would campaign for Harbans for seventy- five dollars a month:

Baksh said, "I promise you the boy going to work night and day for you. And the Muslim leader kissed his crossed index fingers. 'Seventy dollars a month.'

'All right, boss.'

Foam said, 'Eh, I could talk for myself, you hear. Seventy-five.'(ibid 20)

Baksh has not only aspiration for a house like California style but his whole family has a liking for Western modernity. Mrs. Baksh doesn't wear her Muslim dress but Western knee length skirt: "Harbans thought there was a little of her husband's recklessness about her as well. Perhaps this was because of her modern skirt, the hem of which fell only just below the knee" (ibid 20). Even Baksh has chosen alternative creation and Muslim names for their children:

Baksh boys: Eqbal, Herbert. Rafiq and Charles. (It was a concession the Bakshes made to their environment: they chose alternate Christian and Muslim names for their children.) (ibid 21)

After the negotiation with Baksh, Harbans moves to Chittaranjan, with Foam to bargain for Hindu votes. The bargain with Chittranjan was settled on the condition that Harbans would marry his son with Chittranajan's daughter Nelly:

'Daughter?' Harbans asked. As though he didn't know about Nalini, little Nelly; as though all Elvira didn't know that Chittaranjan wanted Nelly married to Harbans's son, that this was the bargain to be settled that afternoon. (ibid 30)

In most of the Trinidadian novels of Naipaul, the protagonists do not plunge into politics intentionally. It is just by dint of money, intellect and opportunity that they try their hand in politics. The same is with Harbans. He is not at all aware of Elvira, the people, and the locality:



‘Foam,’ Harbans said, ‘is a good thing I have a campaign manager like you. I only know about Elvira roads. I ain’t know about the people.’ (ibid 28)

But as his political journey proceeds further, he realizes that society is more hostile to him rather than supporting. Foam is well aware of the political reality and his awareness also exposes that the upcoming generation is in the process of getting maturity in politics. Foam summarizes very well the political situation of Trinidad:

‘You shy, Mr. Harbans,’ Foam said. ‘I know how it is. But you going to get use to this waving. Ten to one, before this election over, we going to see you waving and shouting to everybody, even to people who ain’t going to vote for you.’

Harbans shook his head sadly.

Foam settled into the angle of the seat and the door. ‘Way I see it is this. In Trinidad this democracy is a brand new thing. We is still creeping. We is a creeping nation.’ He dropped his voice solemnly: ‘I respect people like you, you know, Mr. Harbans, doing this thing for the first time’. (ibid 25- 26)

It is worth mentioning Kamra’s comments in this context:

The younger generation is as entrapped as their elders but they are aware of it and wish to get away from it. As individuals they might escape their physical and economic deprivation. But the lack of educational opportunities or the mimic nature of those available has entrapped them in repetitive patterns of behavior though the elections have brought the promises of a wider world.(69- 70)

Though the novel is about political awakening and rise of democracy, the excitement and enthusiasm of the people of the country are not for democracy but for imitation of Western systems. The fascination for Western superficialities is seen in the use of instruments during the campaign. Since the people are mostly orthodox and superstitious, the use of Western instrument turns out to be a mere Western mimicry. And this mimicry proves to be a mockery of Democracy as Mr. Baksh puts it:

“I been telling him, Teach, a hundred times if I tell him one time, that this election begin sweet sweet for everybody, but the same sweetness going to turn sour in the end.’ (Suffrage125)

This is also anticipated by other characters. Teacher Francis thinks: “This new constitution is a trick, Miss Chittaranjan. Just another British trick to demoralize the people... ‘No point in voting. People in Elvira don’t know the value of their vote’... Elvira was a good friendly place before this universal suffrage nonsense’ (ibid 89-90). Dhaniram says, ‘This democracy is a damn funny thing’. Even Harbans accepts “This democracy is a strange thing. It does make the great poor and the poor great”. (Ibid 137).

At last the novel concludes with the definition of the democracy only as a loss:

“So, Harbans won the election and the insurance company lost a Jaguar. Chittaranjan lost a son- in- law and Dhaniram lost a daughter- in- law. Elvira lost Lorkhoor and Lorkhoor won a reputation. Elvira lost Mr.

Cuffy. And Preacher lost his deposit.”  
(P220)

However, the aping of West is not only in political arena but also in social life, it is widespread. In this context Harveen Sachdeva Mann observes rightly:

Nalini Chittaranjan becomes ‘Nelly’ and Surajpat Harbans becomes ‘pat’ Harbans. The Indian won allegiance not to one but to three countries—Trinidad, England and India - as do those immigrants from Africa Portugal, Spain, and China, their names emphasizing ethnic confusion yet the same time indicating assimilation into a national identity. The Baksh children have alternate Muslim & Christian names - Iqbal and Herbert, Rafiq and Charles, Zilla and Carol—as ‘a concession... to their environment’. [MFS 1984: 480]

There are persons who are living a hybrid cultural life. Although Dhaniram was a Hindu pundit, he was proud of his Christian education:

Pundit Dhaniram had been educated at one of the Presbyterian schools of the Canadian Mission where he had been taught hymns and other Christian things. He cherished the training. ‘It make me see both sides, ‘he used to say; and even now, although he was a Hindu priest, he often found himself humming hymns like ‘Jesus loves me, yes I know’. He slapped his thigh and exclaimed, ‘Armageddon!’ (Suffrage 50)

The activities (like social welfare), which should be the core of democracy after its establishment, are used in Elvira only as tools for securing votes. As Pundit Dhaniram says:

It go take some money. But not much. Here in Elvira the campaign committee must be a sort of social welfare committee. Supposing one of those Negroes fall sick. *We* go to them. *We* go take them to doctor in *we* taxi. *We* go pay for their medicine. (ibid .53)

They go to the extent of wishing Negroes to be dead so that they may contribute in their burial ceremony and win their sympathy and votes.

The novel presents people who are selfish, without following any definite ideals. They are rather playing with democracy for self interest. Baksh says to Harbans that if he does not purchase a van and loudspeaker, he may not get the Muslim votes: “you ain’t got no Muslim vote” (ibid 17). Harichand says: “...if you want my vote, you want my printery” (ibid 77). A large population of Elvira does not know how to make an “X” on their ballot papers as they are uneducated and ignorant. Superstition prevails not only among simple ignorant villagers but it also affects people like Harbans who are well educated:

He was nearly seized with another fit of pessimism.... Then he thought of the sign he had had; the white women and the stalled engine, the black bitch and stalled engine. He had seen what the first meant. The women had stalled him in Cordoba.

But the dog. What about the dog? Where was that going to stall him? (55)

Though the population of Elvira is divided in the name of religion during electioneering for bargaining of votes, the people of different cultures and races live a culturally mix- up life in Elvira:

Things were crazily mixed up in Elvira. Everybody, Hindus, Muslims and Christians, owned Bible; the Hindus and Muslims looking on it, if anything, with greater awe. Hindus and Muslims celebrated Christmas and Easter. The Spaniards and some of the Negroes celebrated the Hindu festival of lights..... Everybody celebrated the Muslim festival of Hosein. In fact, when Elvira was done with religious festivals, there were few straight days left.” (ibid 69)

Like other Trinidadian novels, *The Suffrage of Elvira* also reinforces the lack of moral codes in the society. “The only character who has a complete ethical system, who lives by traditional values, is Chittaranjan, and he is one of the few losers connected with the election” [King 1993: 34]. Although Nelly is already engaged, she still spends nights with Foam:

Nelly Chittaranjan hadn't been thinking when she agreed to meet Foam that evening and take the dog.... She didn't believe the dog existed at all. But the thought of meeting a boy at night in a lonely lane had kept her excited all afternoon. She had never walked out with any boy: it was wrong; now that she was practically engaged, it was more than wrong.”(ibid 88)

Lorkhoor didn't care for women and disapproved the marriage institution but in the nights he visited a woman in his van: “He said he didn't care for women that marriage was unnatural, and here he was driving out Elvira at night with a woman who wasn't anxious to be seen” (ibid 91). Ultimately we find that the daughter-in-law of pundit Dhaniram runs away with

Lorkhoor, taking away all clothes and jewelry, “The *doolahin* gone, Goldsmith. She run away with Lorkhoor’ (ibid 187).

But the elopement of *doolahin* (The daughter-in-law of Dhaniram) may be seen as a step of liberating herself from the ruthless patriarchal domain of pundit Dhaniram. In fact she symbolizes the marginalized condition of women in the society. Her husband is living away from her in England, and here in Elvira, she is just like a servant of Dhaniram; she doesn't have any identity of her own. Elvira is a place which is full of differences of religion, race or culture but in some context we find cohesiveness among its inhabitants. As Shashi Kamra puts it rightly:

Elvira, like Miguel Street, has a public personality. Its striking feature is the cohesiveness of its inhabitants in spite of the conflict of race, religion and personal interests. They live very much in the present propelled by immediate needs. They can put aside their differences to unite in the demand for cases of whiskey for the whole community or for a religious thanksgiving ceremony for the victory of Harbans: they can recognize justice when they see it and can speak as one voice in their claim for fair play. (1993 65)

There are three kinds of representatives, representing Elvira. The first categories of people like Lorkhoor Doolahin, Teacher Francis and Nelly have the feeling of alienation and deprivation by staying in Elvira. They wish to go away from Elvira. Secondly people like Harbans and Chittaranjan, who are entrapped in Elvira, can't get away from there even if they wish.

For example, Harbans has spent so much money to win the election that he can't leave it though he wishes to get away.

When Harbans had left Elvira and was in Country Caroni, he stopped the lorry and shook his fist at the dark countryside behind him.

'Elvira!' he shouted. 'You is a bitch! A bitch! A bitch'. (Suffrage 154)

Although Chittaranjan knows that there is less chance of his daughter to get married to Harban's son, yet he tries. And he is not much worried at the loss of his money because his failure in a way is one of the tools to establish democracy in Elvira. There are third types of characters who are instrumental for the success of democracy in Elvira. Nelly, Chittaranjan, Foam and Doolahin may be mentioned in this context. In fact these are the characters that mark the hope of democracy in Elvira. Chittaranjan is fully democratized during electioneering on behalf of Harbans. Nelly is granted the permission to go to England for her further studies. The long-standing enmity between Chittaranjan and Ram Logan diminishes with mutual understanding. Though Harbans is hopeless in the election, we find in Foam, an upcoming leader of Elvira. Bhat's comments are remarkable in this context:

The novel is superb in its exposition of the mechanism of the functioning of the democratic process and its initial filtering down to the common people. The machinery of election is educative and brings out not only the dormant differences but also a temporarily forged unity created by a common involvement in the election. (2000:71-72)

The coming of democracy has also unveiled so many realities and the inhabitants are

disillusioned. When Harbans is asked about the next election he says, "Next election? This is the fust and last election I fighting in Elvira" (Suffrage 177). When Harbans returns Elvira first time (and perhaps last time after winning the election, the people of Elvira are hurt to find an entirely new Harbans:

He wasn't the candidate they knew. Gone was the informality of dress, the loose trousers... Harbans didn't wave. He looked preoccupied, kept his eyes on the ground....

The people of Elvira were hurt. He didn't look at anybody, didn't look at anybody. He made his way silently through the silent crowd...

They didn't like it at all. (Suffrage 207-208)

Chittaranjan's expectations are totally shattered when he goes to see Harbans in Port of Spain:

And Chittaranjan. But he had lost. He sent many messages to Harbans but got no reply. At last he went to see Harbans in Port of Spain; but Harbans kept him waiting so long in the veranda and greeted him so coldly, he couldn't bring himself to ask about the marriage... Harbans said... But we can't let our children marry people who do run about late at night with Muslim boys.' Chittaranjan accepted the justice of the argument. And that was that. (ibid 219)

The failure of a political career of the protagonist and unsuccessful democracy in the novels of Naipaul emphasize the fact that colonial institutions could not be utilized by the newly decolonized countries. This fact has been very well elaborated by Shashi Kamra:



The protagonists of these novels realize the self only through political failure. Such failure for island politicians becomes not only the 'point of return' but is also a dead end. The trap manufactured out of the colonial condition is strengthened by the colonizer's inability to perceive its structure as it inheres in his personality and environment.....

The political despair of the protagonist as experienced absurdity provides the narrator with an entry into the very particular Trinidadian sensibility. Through it alone can he hope to make the reader aware of the essential simplicity and literalness of a colonized mind without a concrete past or a promising future, product of a system which recognizes only its market value living out an isolated fantasy of fulfillment which rivals the amorphous subjective trapped existence of Beckett's protagonists—unable to live or die. (55-56)

(All references to *Suffrage* from *The Night-Watchman's Occurrence Book* [2002] published by Picador.)

### *The Mimic Men*

The novel, *The Mimic Men* in the first person narrative, reveals the condition of the hero, Ralph Singh, shipwrecked first on his native island, and then in England. The image of shipwreck has a deep symbolic meaning which pervades through the novel, referring to the sense of abandonment and dereliction. This sense of abandonment comes into focus as a sharp contrast with ambition to achieve success and identity. Naipaul once again reinforces the theme of psychic damage to the colonial subjects.

Naipaul examines the social, historical and political reality of the third world countries and reveals how "emptiness and hollowness of colonial set-up compel people to pose as the Mimic Men. These men live in the memory of the past or in the fantasies of the future, and cultivate an ambivalent personality" (Veena Singh in Ray 2005:156). In *The Mimic men*, Naipaul reveals the static conditions of a newly decolonized country where there is no hope for change because of the deep impact of the colonial master on its inhabitants' psyche. In this context, Manjeet Inder Singh comments quiet aptly:

... it is important to remember that Ralph Ranjit Kripal Singh, the exiled ex-politician hero of *The Mimic Men* is an 'insider', one who has practiced the most dubious forms of colonial mimicry as a politician and dandy, as husband and businessman and sees through the charade of politics, the deep humiliation and self-contempt that results from defeat and failure. Ralph Singh is the example of a thoroughly, psychologically colonized man, one who knows both the hurts and the excitements of the short-lived euphoria of inconsequential 'empires of our times.' (V. S. Naipaul 1998b: 105)

The protagonist of the novel, a Caribbean Indian (Hindu) politician, is living an exiled life in London because of racial discrimination on his island. We find the protagonist writing his memoirs of island and London in a hotel in London. He examines the concept of decolonization, independence, success, recognition, self-identity and how these are cherished by the society without an awareness of history. He observes the causes of the instability of

newly free colonies and his own past and identity. In the process he realizes that writing the book itself becomes his identity and success. He presents himself as a completely psychologically wounded person who faces only failures in love, intimacy, marriage or long-lasting relationships. It was his passion for order and coherence that he looks into the history in order to find a meaning and order in his life. He says:

I know that return to my island and to my political life is impossible. The pace of colonial events is quick, the turnover of leaders rapid. I have already been forgotten: and I know that the people who supplanted me are themselves about to be supplanted. My career of the colonial politician is short, and ends brutally. We lack order. Above all, we lack power and we don't understand that we lack power. (MM 6)

Ralph Singh is able to dismantle the old order but he does not get success in creating the new order. Throughout his life he tries to find order and fight against corruption. But in the process, his "self" gets lost. Singh therefore rightly comments in this context:

In an individual the mimicry is caused by loss of sense of belonging, and in the society it is caused by loss of culture. Naipaul like other commonwealth writers considers this cultural loss a threat to identity. The constantly shifting character of life is the cause of rootlessness. There are no place associations; as a result the individual becomes impotent rendering all values meaningless. Naipaul depicts the metaphysical alienation of man which is a significant aspect of the modern sensibility in literature. (Ray 157)

In fact *The Mimic Men* presents the hurdles which the colonized face in getting independence in the real sense. Isabella is a small colony which lacks the economic resources, skills and knowledge, and that is why it is under other's domination. The inhabitants here belong to different cultures, traditions, and races and therefore the country lacks the unity which is the foremost requirement of a nation. Bruce King is right when he comments:

Because the nationalist movement has been driven by racial hurt, nation and race have become confused, and those who do not share in the dominant vision are treated as enemies. While the whites move to safety elsewhere the Asians, especially the Indians, are left as victims of the new black rulers. (1993: 67)

Such background of racial fear reflects the period in Trinidad when just after the independence there was the rule of Eric Williams and the bloody racial conflict in Guyana. On the one hand Singh mentions the violence done to Indians. Singh is also accused of racial exclusiveness in developing Cripple Ville because he does not feel comfortable around blacks. Even his mother does not give consent to his marriage with an English woman.

The colonial rule had influenced the inhabitants so much that even after decolonization; they are still in the grip of psychological and mental slavery. They have lost the sense of their independent ethos. They are unable to cope with the new system and order and therefore they have lost the sense of direction in the processes of achieving cultural, political and social identities. This influence forces them to fall

in the grip of mimicry. And ultimately they are found culturally displaced as John Theime observes:

Escape has become a way of life and displacement a perennial condition. For the dispossessed colonial, political independence solves no problem. A kind of cycle determinism makes it possible for them to find home. Neither colony nor mother country provides matrix. Dependence and displacement are his ultimate. [*Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 13 Aug, 1975:11]

The memoirs of RRK Singh includes a wide range of themes as he is not writing continuously but he recalls and contemplates his past and, then he writes. The themes which he covers up are the influence of colonial educational system, slavery of the past, loneliness, and racial discrimination, disillusionment of the world of fantasies, homelessness, power and politics. We do not find any ordered sequence in different episodes of his life. The only fact which holds them together is that he examines each episode in the context of his present situation.

*The Mimic Men* reflects the first four novels of Naipaul but it is different in the sense that the first four novels are set in Trinidad while *The Mimic Men* is set in an imaginary island, namely Isabella. In fact he presents this novel as a representative of all the other colonies of the world. As Kripal Singh says: "It has happened in twenty places, twenty countries, islands, colonies, territories ... I can not see our predicament as unique" (MM 209). In the four preceding novels set in Caribbean land, the chief characters escape to England as they find their land

incomplete and unreal, and not providing any opportunity. *The Mimic Men* depicts their conditions after escape. In this context Joshi rightly comments:

Kripalsingh comes from his Caribbean island to England with the usual expectations of the people from his region. Refusing to consider the island of his birth as his home, looking on himself as marooned on this island, soon to be rescued he comes to England seeking fulfillment, completion, a sense of belonging to a well-established order. He finds only a greater isolation, a more acute sense of being adrift, of being shipwrecked. Sexual promiscuity, role playing – these are his ways of fighting the overwhelming sense of loss, the shock of disillusionment. On the verge of a breakdown he marries a London girl in a desperate bid for reassurance. She seems to him strong and secure, full of certainties. (1994: 166-167)

Another concern of *The Mimic Men* is the influence of colonization and slavery on third- world politics and how it affects the individuals psychologically. Though they are unchained from this slavery and receive freedom and democracy, they are devoid of any social, political, economic and cultural past of their own. In such a situation they look towards their colonial masters as their model and thus they are unable to release themselves from mental slavery. Peter Nazareth's view is worth quoting here:

Slavery did the greatest damage in them by destroying their value and setting before them the ideals of their civilization. Unfortunately this white civilization is not really the civilization as it is in Europe, it is a form of behaviors represented by the third rate

people who have had a chance to become rich in the West Indies in a way they wouldn't be in England .....Such a society has no inner values. It merely copies its way of life from the Western Consumer society. [Nazareth in Hammer: 146]

Singh belongs to a poor family in Isabella. His father is a school teacher but his mother is from a well prosperous rich family. His mother's family owned the Bella Bella Bottling Works and this business made them rich and prosperous but not by so fair means. They practiced white master's trickery of 'exploit and plunder'. When Singh read 'The Missionary Martyr of Isabella', he came to know how his father came to this slave Caribbean Island:

When I read this book I used to get the feeling that my father was a man who had been cut off from his real country, which in my imagination was as glorious as the Isabella described in the diary of the missionary's lady: nowhere else would people see magic in a white turban, hibiscus hedge, a bicycle and the Sunday- morning sun. I used to get the feeling that my father had in some storybook way been shipwrecked on the island and that over the years the hope of rescue had altogether faded. (MM 94)

He feels a kind of inferiority complex due to his Indianness and shows inclination towards Western modernity. Such a condition throws him into a clash of the inherited culture and modern culture or inner world and outer world. To achieve success, he goes to the extent of changing his name from Ranjit Kripal Singh to Ralph Singh. His step however irritates his father who is a staunch Hindu:

He was not pleased at having to sign an affidavit that the son he had sent out into the world as Ranjit Kripal Singh had been transformed into Ralph Singh. He saw it as an affront, a further example of the corrupting influence of Cecil and my mother's family. (MM 101)

His fascination towards Western world is intensified by the description given to him by the English expatriate teacher at school. The description of England given to Ralph Singh reinforces his restlessness in Isabella. He feels a kind of distance from his own land. He feels alienated and a sense of loss in Isabella because it is an obscure, colonial and barbarous transplantation. Whenever he thinks of the preservation of his identity and culture, he feels insecure and his fear heightens. He himself says:

I have read that it was a saying of an ancient Greek that the first requisite for happiness was to be born in a famous city... To be born on an island like Isabella, an obscure New World transplantation, second- hand and barbarous, was to be born to disorder. From an early age, almost from my first lesson at school about the weight of the King's crown, I had sensed this. (MM 127)

But at the same time he becomes nostalgic when he thinks of escaping from Isabella: "Even as I was formulating my resolve to escape, there began those series of events which, while sharpening my desire to get away, yet rooted me more firmly to the locality where accident had placed me( MM 127).

One important aspect of the novel which, according to Molly Mahood, many critics



don't observe is that how Naipaul focuses on the consequences which affect the colonized nations. And these effects have been caused by the capitalist production of the imperial centre. Molly argues that most of the critics do not observe distinctive wrongness of Caribbean colonialism in its different phases that has been portrayed in *The Mimic Men*:

.....the primal wrongness of Caribbean colonialism in all its phases- the creation of a slave society and economy, the prolongation through indentured labor of a form of serfdom long after black slavery ended, and the relegation of the islands for many decades to the status of slums of empire, a relegation culminating in an ill-prepared "granting of independence". This was the violation the novel never lets us forget, as it traces out the pattern of rejection, impairment, alienation, in individual lives as well as in the groups that compose this heterogeneous society (1977: 161)

MM reveals that the colonial subjects feel alienated and exiled because of their separation from their original home, their past and culture and which are not possible to be recompensated in this situation. Mixing up of cultures, hybridity can not substitute their alienation. As Ralph observes:

The restlessness, the deep disorder, which the great explorations, the overthrow in three continents of established, social organizations, the unnatural bringing together of peoples who could achieve fulfillment only within the security of their own societies and the landscapes hymned by their ancestors.... The empires of

our times were short-lived, but they have altered the world forever; their passing away is their least significant feature. (MM .32)

Isabella is a new democratic world and the dilemma of this new political society is exposed in the mimicry of its inhabitants. The Mimicry authenticates the West and makes them real while the Caribbean world becomes the symbol of mimicry, absence and unreality. The following passage from the text reveals this fact. This passage also signifies that the island is not a "unified and unitary identity" but "a fragment, a part of some greater whole from which it is in exile and to which it must be related in an act of (never completed) completion that is always also, as it were, an exile, a loss of the particular" ( Bongie 1998). In this context, let us consider the passage from the novel:

There, in Liege in traffic jam, on the snow slopes of the Laurentians, was the true, pure world. We, here, on our islands, handling books printed in this world and using its goods, had been abandoned and forgotten. We pretended to be real, to be learning, to be preparing ourselves for life, we mimic men of the New World, one unknown corner of it, with all its reminders of the corruption that came so quickly to the new. (MM 157)

Though Ralph is a colonial man who reflects the dominant power there is something of the subversive ambivalence of mimicry in *The Mimic Men*. According to Bhabha: "colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same but not quite*. This is to say that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around ambivalence;

in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference.” (1994: 96). Ralph and his wife belong to a group on the island, Isabella, which represents the colonial state of Indian men and their expatriate wives. The consequence of the colonization is that they mimic the memories, stories, myths, lives and landscapes that don't belong to them. This distance and separation from their own culture, home, life and self is the result of the colonial past and this situation leads them into a state of fragmentation. Ralph belongs to the generation, which sees the Caribbean world from the English point of view and recreates “home” through English mythologies. Ralph also changes his name Ranjit Kripal Singh to the anglicized Ralph Singh. But colonialism turns out to be a rupture, an absence, a displacement for this generation because they don't have their own authentic experiences and identities.

Though Ralph's generation finds recourse to English mythology, his mother's generation on the other hand looks back to the Indian culture and landscape as shelter. But the performance of the following ritual of Indian culture by his mother's generation also serves to be a kind of mimicry. When Ralph and his wife return, his mother performs a specific Hindu religious rite for them. Such a ritual is rather a form of mimicry. Though Ralph knows the incongruity of the rituals, he realizes that the maintenance of such rituals is an attempt to acquire a sense of continuity and wholeness: “My mother's sanctions were a pretence, no doubt; but they were also an act of piety towards the past towards ancient unknown wanderings in another continent. It was a piety I shared”

(MM. 59).As Ralph belongs to the third generation expatriate, he desires an ordered/ systematic society and it is his irresistible urge for a well-regulated society that he leaves for England. Ralph is so much concerned with his personal dilemma that he does not realize this fact that being ‘Lost’ is “the universal condition of man in the twentieth century” (Brude 1975:45).He goes to England in search of order but his dilemma intensifies when he experiences a crisis of identity. He is rather disillusioned and awed. When he attends the Christening Party of Lieni's baby in the church, he feels suffocated because there is a big gap between his imagination and the reality which he faces:

The priest hallowed the baby with his saliva, his thumb and his fingers. With his nose he made the sign of the cross over the baby. I believe - my memories of the ceremony are now a little vague - that at a certain stage he put a pinch of salt into the baby's mouth. John Cedric made a sour face and worked his tongue. (M.M 12)

Ralph's marriage to Sandra also seems to be a means to secure his ‘identity’ and ‘certainty’ in life which he had in Isabella but even in this he is unsuccessful. And here he realizes the futility of coming to an alien milieu: “It was my hope to give partial expression to the restlessness which this great upheaval has brought about.” (MM 32).When Sandra leaves him for England, he plunges into politics but here also he gets humiliation when he goes to England regarding bauxite contract; the minister refuses to talk about colonial problems. When he goes to another minister he also treats him in the same way. Such

disillusionment by these representatives of power and democracy touches the soul of Ralph. Critics like Landeng White feel that Ralph finds a release from his frustration in his writing: "For Kripal Singh's discovery of himself as a writer marks his personal salvation. In act of writing, he finds at last that order and coherence which has eluded him in every other activity" (White). Ultimately he is able to free himself from his dilemma. Though he does not get success in creating an ordered and systematic world, he at least recreates himself as an independent man. Singh himself expresses: "Yet I feel that in this time I have cleared the decks, as it were, and prepared myself for fresh action. It will be the action of a free man." (MM 274).

Naipaul has often been accused of in the context of *The Mimic Men*, presenting a pessimistic hero. But this seems to be a prejudiced claim as Naipaul presents the reality quite authentically. Veena Singh's comment is convincing on this point: "Naipaul like the modern writers of the age mirrors the tortured and twisted psyche of man, and also his ambiguous and irrational self. Like Ellison's *The Invisible Man*, *The Mimic Men* is not about politics or about a particular race or society but about the dissociation of sensibility about the displacement, isolation and identity crisis" (Ray 2005: 165)

### III

In *Mystic Masseur*, Ganesh, an English educated man, becomes ambitious and exploits the situations to materialize his dreams. The protagonist of the novel is a man who has a narrow vision about life because he has strived for his personal aggrandizement

rather than for any national or social cause. He has been very much selfish, and therefore has amassed money through cheating. Even then Naipaul has subjected him to many trials and tribulations as a teacher, a masseur, and a politician finally. His life has not been smooth sailing all along despite the fact that he has been narrow, selfish and hypocritical. He is a protagonist of his early novels in which the hero has been put to test, to various pressures of life to face them boldly to overcome them. Man as an individual is always existential in these novels. The challenges that he faces under the various circumstances try to crush him down. However, Naipaul as an author makes them move on with their objectives of life to counterattack these circumstances through their thoughts as well as actions to overcome them. They do not become completely successful as also is the case in the real world. Even with negative attitude to life, these heroes try to achieve human excellence. But then, everything is not under their control. So also is the case with Ganesh. Though apparently he seems to be successful within the limited resources of his own country where there are radical, social and political changes, he is also a character who fails in the human level. That is because he, as a masseur, has cheated the marginalized, poor people. He has even betrayed the Hindus because after winning the elections with the votes of people by appealing to their sentiments through "Hindu Nationalism", he however changes the sides and supports the colonial administrators for his personal gains. In the process, the colonial Government awards him a Knighthood. Naipaul, the author, has been critical of the attitude of Ganesh, and therefore in totality Ganesh has been portrayed as a

hollow man, a cheat, a puppet to the Governments to serve the cause of his own self, rather than championing the cause of the poor people, and the displaced diaspora who had high hopes on him. But then despite his negative qualities he still stands boldly as an individual who faces the opposing forces of life, the circumstances that challenge him quite significantly. Through his individuality he has been able to transform these challenges into his own advantages. In this regard he is an existential protagonist that Naipaul has created in his novels.

*The Suffrage of Elvira* focuses on the political awareness of the people of Elvira during the second general election in Trinidad in 1950. It explores the possibility of democratic awareness of the multicultural, multiracial and multi-religious communities in the postcolonial Trinidad. Naipaul has been also quite critical in his approach to the rise of democracy in Trinidad, and how it has affected the “Centre-margin equation” by way of influencing the attitudes, social mannerism and political consciousness. We have seen that Naipaul has presented the first general elections of 1946 in *The Mystic Masseur* quite vividly, satirizing the manners and attitudes of people. In this novel, he has also satirized the “mimicry of democracy” in the newly decolonized nation of Trinidad. In a democracy, political consciousness and exercise of choice in casting vote in the election are crucial for its functioning. It is quite ironical that Harbans bargains for votes, which action is rather a mockery to democratic norms. Harbans’s negotiation with Baksh, the Muslim leader and his secret of agreement with the Hindu leader Chittarajan are quite unethical, and also against the

principles of democracy. Naipaul however portrays this “incident of bargain” in the proper perspective of “politics” in a newly postcolonial country like Trinidad. In such postcolonial countries, despite the independence of the country, people are rather living in the political, economic and social disorders. The situation is thus based on political corruption, moral bankruptcy and lack of proper intellectuality. Naipaul therefore suggests that along with political freedom, the necessity of making people aware of intellectual side of democracy is more important. Moreover, people like Harbans manipulate such deficiencies to their own advantage to rise in power in the society and amass money quite unscrupulously being completely blind to the people’s miseries and disadvantages. However Naipaul also emphasizes the existential condition of such heroes. They manipulate the conditions of society to change their fortunes, to become leaders and rich. Despite such deficiencies of the initial democracy in Trinidad, Naipaul has shown how elections have brought new possibilities and promises, and also have inculcated the spirit of ignition in the younger generation to change their fortunes socially and politically. But as we have already discussed, they have no proper systems of education to facilitate their movements to intellectual vigour to change the society in its proper perspective. Naipaul has always been critical in portraying these postcolonial societies. Though democracy is very important to these societies, what is more important for them is the opportunity of education to have a serious understanding of things in right perspective. The mimicry of the “Englishness” in manner and attitude is to be



shunned. The apparently good things of the British are to be interpreted properly. Mature understanding is highly essential for moving these postcolonial societies in the path of progress, harmony and socio-economic stability. In a democracy, there are failures and successes. Sometimes, the successes in a person transform him into a different kind of man who aspires for his own gains as in the case of Harbans who after victory does not bother for people's needs and miseries. On the other hand, failures as in the case of Chittarajan have yielded a different kind of gain because democracy has enlightened him. His daughter has been sent to England for studies to achieve something higher in life, to have intellectual awareness in its proper spirit. These gains are no mean things for developing the country in its right direction.

The next novel, *The Mimic Men*, also explores human predicament in the efforts of the existential hero, Ralph Singh in his struggle to reverse his antagonistic circumstances. The core theme of the novel is related to the political situation of the imaginary island of Isabela, the native land of Ralph Singh, the protagonist. The most important thing with which Naipaul is concerned here is the assault of colonialism on the psyche of the people in a recently decolonized nation like Isabela. The continuance of colonial mimicry has turned these people into "mimic men" who do not have such intellectual strength and vigour to overcome it. As the country is rotten by racialism, Ralph Singh becomes an exile in London where he writes a book wherein he examines the various ideas such as decolonization and the consequences on the social, political and economic situations of

his country. Writing itself becomes the definition of his identity, his exploration about his nation and his "self". Ralph Singh's exploration of his "self" makes him realize that he has been a "lost" man losing his identity and the society has been mimic by losing its indigenous culture. This is a significant negative impact of colonialism on a society despite its recent freedom from the colonial rule. It can be justifiably argued that in MM "postcolonial stability is unstable and unreal because Isabela (Modeled on Trinidad) is an artificially created society, designed for colonial profit, in which very different peoples have been forced to live together" (Nandan in Panwar 2007: 130). Naipaul thus suggests that such a society can not be empowered till it has settled itself with power relations. His strong conviction is that such a society, even if decolonized now, has remained a powerless society because the colonial power has damaged it psychologically, culturally and economically to a large measure. That is why Naipaul with so much anguish sums up how this society is a crippled society: "The bigger truth came: that in a society like ours, fragmented, inorganic, no link between man and the landscape, a society not held together by common interests, there was no true internal source of power" (MM : 206). It is important to locate the wrongdoing of the colonial power to the Caribbean society in a planned manner. First of all the colonial power created a slave society and economy, and then they perpetuated this spirit for a long time through indentured labour after the end of black slavery. The colonial mischief does not end here. They further handicapped the Caribbean colony into

different “slums” without well-designed improvement, and when they freed the country, it was not properly equipped with the vision of a modern state to move forward. This is the most important aspect on which Naipaul focuses in the novel *The Mimic Men*. That is why Molly Mahood makes a quite convincing argument in this context: “This was the violation the novel never lets us forge, as it traces out the pattern of rejection, impairment, alienation in individual lives as well as in the groups that compose this heterogeneous society”

(1977: 161). The individuals are therefore continuously displaced as their roots are destabilized because they are to live in interfering cultures because of their multi-cultural and multi-racial aspects of the society. Ralph understands that these empires have spoiled the colonies permanently even though they disappear after their tenure of Empire: “The empires of our time were short-lived, but they have altered the world forever; their passing away is their least significant feature” (MM 32)

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### Abbreviations

Mystic	-	<i>Mystic Masseur</i>
MFS	-	<i>Modern Fiction Studies</i>
Suffrage	-	<i>The Suffrage of Elvira</i>
MM	-	<i>The Mimic Man</i>



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