

**The Notion of Hybridity in V.S. Naipaul's
Novels:
A Reading of *The Mystic Masseur*, *A House for
Mr. Biswas* & *The Mimic Men***

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract -----	1
Introduction-----	2
Chapter 1 -----	9
Chapter 2-----	17
Chapter 3-----	30
Conclusion-----	41
Bibliography-----	45

Abstract

V.S. Naipaul's writings encompass themes that deal with little things in narrow and small settings and perspectives to issues which are much more significant and hold greater gravity. His best works and portrayals depict Trinidadian society. Novels which are set in Trinidad are often self-reflexive for Naipaul and profoundly insightful. Being known as the mouthpiece of ex-colonized people, he magnificently writes about the present problems of post-colonial societies. Themes such as rootlessness, hybridity, mimicry and cultural dislocation are prevalent in his works. This thesis work intends to explore Naipaul's use of these notions in three of his novels: *The Mystic Masseur* (1957), *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961) and *The Mimic Men* (1967).

Introduction

This thesis aims at discussing the concepts of hybridity and ambivalence in three of V.S. Naipaul's novels, *The Mystic Masseur* (1957), *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961) and *The Mimic Men* (1967). The main task of this thesis will be to check out the various aspects of the notion of hybridity as theorized by post-colonial writers such as Homi K. Bhabha and Naipaul's novels will be examined to show how his characters uphold the concept of hybridity and ambivalence posited by Bhabha.

When Christopher Columbus first stepped onto the islands of the Central American coast, he thought he had found the "spice islands" in the East. This is how the West Indies was named; with a big mistake, which still remains. The West Indian islands have never been a part of Central America, or even of South or North America. They have always been considered as a place separate from all the main lands and as a place that reminded everyone about the colonial endeavors. The inhabitants of these islands are mostly from Africa and India, whose ancestors had been brought here as indentured labourers, their descendants are still displaced on those islands colonial systems still prevail in their world.

Trinidad, one of the countries in the West Indies, was named after the holy Trinity, where many displaced East Indians live. Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul, popularly known as V.S. Naipaul was born in the West Indian island of Trinidad to a family descended from U.P. in Eastern India. He is regarded as a mouthpiece of displacement and rootlessness by literary critics and scholars. Naipaul confirms the idea himself in an interview: "When I speak of being an exile or a refugee, I am not just using a metaphor, I am speaking literally" (Evans, 1972: 62). He has never settled in one place.

This is one of the essential characteristics of a postcolonial writer. The question to be asked here is who can be considered a postcolonial writer. John McLeod in his *Beginning Postcolonialism* says postcolonial writing or criticism involves-

reading texts produced by writers from countries with a history of colonialism(...), reading texts produced by those that have migrated from countries with a history of colonialism, or those descended from migrant families, which deal in the main with diaspora experience and its many consequences (McLeod, 2007: 33).

Naipaul has all the characteristics that McLeod talks about. He lived in Trinidad which is a former British colony, he migrated from Trinidad to England for his education and to start and continue his career as a writer and his parents migrated from India to Trinidad during the period of British rule in India.

Bill Ashcroft and his co-authors in *The Empire Writes Back* say that-

the idea of 'post-colonial literary theory' emerges from the inability of European theory to deal adequately with the complexities and varied cultural provenance of post-colonial writing. (Ashcroft et al, 1989: 11).

Naipaul applies this theory in his novels. Ashcroft et al also say about postcolonial literature that-

What each of these literatures has in common beyond their special and distinctive regional characteristics is that they emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonisation and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre. It is this which makes them distinctively post-colonial (ibid, p. 2).

Ideas like ‘experience of colonization’, ‘imperial power’ and ‘imperial centre’ are of vital importance to this study. They again provide another crucial argument for this research work:

It can be argued that the study of English and the growth of Empire proceeded from a single ideological climate and that the development of the one is intrinsically bound up with the other, both at the level of simple utility (as propaganda for instance) and at the unconscious level, where it leads to the naturalizing of constructed values (e.g. civilization, humanity, etc.) which, conversely, established ‘savagery’, ‘native’, ‘primitive’, as their antitheses and as the object of a reforming zeal (ibid, p. 3).

The argument made here is highly significant for this study because it says that values such as ‘civilization’ and ‘humanity’ are ‘constructed values’ that are used as propaganda to justify the colonisation of a country in order to ‘reform’ the ‘savage,’ ‘native’ and ‘primitive’ inhabitants of that country.

Another notion stated by Ashcroft et al, which will be discussed in this study, is the concept of ‘place and displacement.’ According to them, “A major feature of post-colonial literatures is the concern with place and displacement.” (Ashcroft et al, 1989, p. 8) Ashcroft et al go on saying,

A valid and active sense of self may have been eroded by dislocation, resulting from migration, the experience of enslavement, transportation, or ‘voluntary’ removal for indentured labour. Or it may have been destroyed by cultural denigration, the conscious and unconscious oppression of the indigenous personality and culture by a supposedly superior racial or cultural model. The dialectic of place and displacement is always a feature of postcolonial societies whether these have been created by a process of settlement, intervention, or a mixture of the two. Beyond their historical and cultural differences, place, displacement, and a pervasive concern with the myths of identity and authenticity are a feature common to all post-colonial literatures in English (ibid, p. 9).

The notion of 'place and displacement' is a major concern in all of the novels that are going to be analyzed in this study; therefore, such terms as 'displacement', 'dislocation', and 'cultural denigration' will be used in this work.

Postcolonial discourse studies concepts like cultural stereotype, ambivalence, mimicry and hybridity with great importance. These concepts were first coined and discussed by Edward Said and Homi K. Bhabha. Edward Said introduced the term 'stereotype' to show how western colonizers justified their actions. In order to clarify his argument Said cites two leading persons, Balfour¹ and Cromer². Their ideas of the Orient are expressed in the lines like the following: "The Oriental is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, 'different'; thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, 'normal' (Said, 1978: 40). The use of these 'stereotypes' rationalizes and justifies the idea that 'these backward' Orientals cannot govern themselves, so they 'have' to be ruled by the 'rational' and 'mature' Europeans.

Homi K. Bhabha also adopted the term stereotype and enlarged its meaning and applications.

Bhabha says-

... It is recognisably true that the chain of stereotypical signification is curiously mixed and split, polymorphous and perverse, an articulation of multiple beliefs. The black is both savage (cannibal) and yet the most obedient and dignified of servants (the bearer of food); he is the embodiment of rampant sexuality and yet innocent as a child; he is mystical, primitive, simple-minded and yet the most worldly and accomplished liar, manipulator of social forces (Bhabha, 1994: 82).

¹ Sir Andrew Balfour, (21 March 1873 – 30 January 1931) was a Scottish Medical Officer who specialised in tropical medicine. He was the director of the Wellcome Tropical Research Laboratory in Khartoum in Sudan in 1902.

² Evelyn Baring, 1st Earl of Cromer, (26 February 1841 – 29 January 1917), was a British statesman, diplomat and colonial administrator. He was British controller-general in Egypt during 1879, part of the international Control which oversaw Egyptian finances.

This depiction of duality by Bhabha will be of great help to understand Naipaul's characters. But, before that it is necessary to understand Bhabha's concepts clearly.

Two of Bhabha's interrelated terms are mimicry and ambivalence. This paper sets its ground on these sorts of conceptions; therefore they carry a lot of importance here. Many of Naipaul's works take them constructing the storyline. About mimicry Bhabha says-“The effect of mimicry on the authority of colonial discourse is profound and disturbing.” (Bhabha, 1994: 86) He explains colonial mimicry as “the desire for a reformed, recognisable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite.” (ibid, 86) Just as the ‘colonial stereotype’ had been ‘ambivalent’, so is ‘mimicry’. He goes on saying:

... the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference. The authority of that mode of colonial discourse that I have called mimicry is therefore stricken by an indeterminacy: mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal (ibid, 86).

Just like Edward W. Said, Bhabha gives two examples of how the colonizers would rule:

The first example Bhabha writes about is of Charles Grant ³ who wrote in 1792 that he had a dream of reforming the native Indians' manner in such a way so that they can appear to the colonizers with ‘a sense of identity as we know it.’ What is paradoxical with this approach is he wanted to make a ‘colonial subjectivity’ with some essence of Christianity and a bit of morality, but the thing here was he was caught up between his desire for religious reform and the fear that the Indians might

³ Charles Grant (16 April 1746 – 31 October 1823), was a British politician influential in Indian and domestic affairs who, motivated by his evangelical Christianity, championed the causes of social reform and Christian mission, particularly in India. He served as Chairman of the British East India Company, and as a member of parliament (MP).

become ‘turbulent for liberty’. Grant thought, with the partial reform they will have such a production which will imitate English manners, which will help them to stay under their ‘protection’. Bhabha argues that by doing this, Grant mocked his moral project and along with that, he broke a central missionary rule, because no heathen faith was allowed for them to tolerate.

Bhabha cites a second example of colonial mimicry which he calls “the absurd extravagance of Macaulay’s ‘Minute’ (1835)”. (ibid, 87). Macaulay⁴ wanted to start a project that will produce “a class of interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern – a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect.” (Macaulay, 1995: 430) Bhabha argues that the result is a “mimic man”, raised through the English school, “whose line of descent can be traced through the works of Kipling, Forster, Orwell, Naipaul (...)” This person is “the effect of a flawed colonial mimesis, in which to be Anglicized is emphatically not to be English”. (Bhabha, 87).

Along with mimicry and ambivalence, Bhabha introduced another term that carries prior significance that is hybridity. In Bhabha’s words:

Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal (that is, the production of discriminatory identities that secure the ‘pure’ and original identity of authority). Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects. It displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination. It unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but reimplicates its identifications in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power. For the

⁴ Thomas Babington Macaulay, (25 October 1800 – 28 December 1859) was a British historian and Whig politician. Macaulay held political office as the Secretary at War between 1839 and 1841 and the Paymaster-General between 1846 and 1848. He played a major role in introducing English and western concepts to education in India. He supported the replacement of Persian by English as the official language, the use of English as the medium of instruction in all schools, and the training of English-speaking Indians as teachers.

colonial hybrid is the articulation of the ambivalent space where the rite of power is enacted on the site of desire, making its objects at once disciplinary and disseminatory – or, in my mixed metaphor, a negative transparency. (Bhabha, 159-160).

In Naipaul's novels, the characters show these aspects, and display the traits of being in hybridity. Hybridity is a concept given by Homi K Bhabha, who says that hybridity is the synthesis of two conflicted cultural identities that results in the formation of a third, transcendent identity.

Distortion and hybridity are interrelated; one stage is symptomatic of another. The members of a distorted society fail to connect themselves with the cultural heritages that their ancestors once had because they have been dislocated from their roots, and also, they cannot develop the sense of belonging to the culture of their colonial masters, as a result, what they adopt is hybridity. The reason for that is cultural and psychological rootlessness are inextricable. The inhabitants of the West Indies face this problem.

These concepts given and illustrated by Said and Bhabha can be found in many of Naipaul's novels. It is possible to find the effect of colonial mimicry and hybridized characters in his novels and this paper intends to illustrate this through some of those characters.

Naipaul's characters have different characteristics and features in different books, but along with the differences, they also have some similarities. At present, capitalist economy and communication technology are transforming this whole world into a huge commercial village; older customs and beliefs are in the state of random change, in the name of development and progress. Naipaul presents this picture through portraying people living in a confused state of mind, yearning

to have an identity to hold onto, no matter in what corner of this world they are living in the ebb and flow of agency, identity formation and disillusionment with oppressive systems, both on the individual and national level, which exist within Naipaul's novels.

This thesis paper will work on three of Naipaul's novels, *The Mystic Masseur* (1957), *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961) and *The Mimic Men* (1967) and will try to find the applications of theories which are posited by Said and Bhabha in the storylines of the novels.

Chapter 1

V.S. Naipaul started his career as a presenter in a radio program named “Caribbean Voices” in London in 1954. He wrote his first book *Miguel Street* in 1955 in a BBC freelancer’s room at the Langham Hotel which he wrote within only six weeks. However, Naipaul never took writing as a simple task. In his essay “Prologue to an Autobiography” from *Finding the Center*, Naipaul has written:

Half a writer’s work . . . is the discovery of his subject. And a problem for me was that my life had been varied, full of upheavals and moves: from grandmother’s Hindu house in the country, still close to the rituals and social ways of village India; to Port of Spain, the negro, and G.I. life of its streets, the other, ordered life of my colonial English school, which is called Queen’s Royal College, and then Oxford, London and the freelancers’ room at the BBC. Trying to make a beginning as a writer, I didn’t know where to focus. (V.S. Naipaul, *The Art of Fiction* No. 154; Interviewed by Jonathan Rosen, Tarun Tejpal).

He had a lot to write about, but his thoughts were scattered for a while. After two failed attempts, his thoughts finally turned into words.

The *Mystic Masseur* (1957) was Naipaul’s second novel which received the John Llewellyn Rhys Memorial Prize. It describes Trinidadian society in a sarcastic manner. Most of his early books are written with a comic tone depicting both urban and rural Trinidad in the thirties, forties and early fifties. *The Mystic Masseur* is a light, funny and farcical novel; it is also true that, this

novel partly shows Naipaul's early reaction to what he had experienced in his chaotic and fragmented background. In an interview in 1958, he says-

The social comedies I write can be fully appreciated only by someone who knows the region I write about. Without that knowledge it is easy for my books to be dismissed as farces and my characters as eccentrics. (V.S. Naipaul, *The Overcrowded Barracoon and other articles*; p. 11)

Covered with a thin veil of humour and irony, *The Mystic Masseur* portrays Trinidadian society with all its disorder and superstitions. Among other things, shameless mimicry is its most prominent characteristic, while greed and charlatanism also invade the scenario. Features such as Hinduism, Creole life, politics, profit-making are mingled with genuine aspirations and in some cases, elements of hope.

The protagonist of the novel is Ganesh Ramsumair, the 'picaroon hero'⁵; whose mock biography is told by a rather naïve narrator, and in his introduction, he says-

The wider world has not learnt of Ganesh's early struggles, and Trinidad resents this. I myself believe that the history of Ganesh is, in a way, the history of our times. (Naipaul, 1964, p.14)

The novel tells the story of how a 'picaroon' hero's astonishing success and the place where advancement of this sort is possible.

⁵ A picaroon hero is a dishonest, playfully mischievous person, Pertaining to a form of prose fiction, originally developed in Spain, in which the adventures of an engagingly roguish hero are described in a series of usually humorous or satiric episodes that often depict, in realistic detail, the everyday life of the common people. Picaroon Heroes are also known as Picaresque Hero or Rogues.

Ganesh grows up in a typical colonial society. In that society, the way to overcome all incompetence is quackery. As a student, Ganesh was never really serious, and his performance as a teacher is simply a parody of a teacher's duties. It is not Ganesh alone, but also the headmaster of the school who is an object of satire, in a conversation with Ganesh, he asks-

What is the purpose of the school? he asked suddenly. "Form-" Ganesh began. "Not-" the headmaster encouraged. "Inform." "You quick, Mr. Ramsumair. You is a man after my own heart. You and me going to get on good good. (ibid, 20).

Seemingly, Ganesh did not take his writing task seriously either. His writing is nothing but a charade; one can easily find it out seeing at the extract below from Ganesh's first book *101*

Questions and Answers on Hindu Religion:

Question Number Forty-Six. Who is the greatest modern Hindu?...Question Number Forty- Seven. Who is the second greatest modern Hindu?...Question Number-Forty Eight. Who is the third greatest modern Hindu? (ibid, 96)

Ganesh becomes popular after the publication of this book. One of the major reasons for this is that the other local books are of similar quality; as the institutions regarding religion, labour and politics are mostly corrupt. For example, "The second General Meeting of the Hindu Association," or the leaders becoming wealthier from bribe and using public fund for personal profit show the condition of Trinidad, but the part of colonial heritage remains. In *The Middle Passage*, the author says:

Again and again one comes back to the main, degrading fact of the colonial society; It never required efficiency, it never required quality, and these things, because unrequired, became undesirable. (ibid, 62)

It is easily understandable that, those who are unfamiliar with excellence will never try to achieve it, rather will become blind to their limitations.

Hinduism is satirized in this book because of its outdated customs and rituals, which can be understood through some descriptions as Ganesh goes to Benares to study or the system of the ritual while Ganesh's father dies. Hinduism is also represented here with materialistic interests.

Ganesh, seemingly, is embarrassed by his Indian heritage. As a student, Ganesh feels ashamed in modern Trinidad. Modern Trinidad considers someone up to date only when he is close to English culture.

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. (ibid, 16)

As a matter of fact, he succeeded to Anglicize his name at the end of the novel. What he becomes at the end is "G Ramsay Muir", which has little connection to his previous identity. The name "Pundit Ganesh Ramsumair" indicates a Hindu person, and it can be said that for Ganesh Hinduism was a tool to serve his purpose. The way he used to dress was only to flaunt that he is a 'mystic'. Later on he joins the 'Hindu Association' so that he could stand in the election against Narayan, one of his rivals. As soon as he goes to the parliament, he changes his dress code, he then "stopped wearing dhoti and turban altogether." (ibid, 206)

How Ganesh looks at Hinduism, is described in his autobiography; and that description is analysed by a critic as “a sort of spiritual thriller, handled with a technique which would not have disgraced the creator of Sherlock Holmes.” (ibid, 114). For Ganesh, Hinduism was a thrilling experience. Therefore, he tries to get the most out of it. When he was young, he could understand the meaning of being a descendant of an indentured labourer, and felt ashamed of his cultural background. That is the reason why he never felt the spirit of true mysticism, he only used its gestures as long as it was required, and after entering the parliament, he let that go without a second thought.

What lies at the heart of this novel is Ganesh’s failure to hold onto his identity. It is only to be expected that any person, living in a society which is still suffering from its colonial effects, may become very confused regarding his or her identity. In order to be free from such confusion, the colonial person tries to hide his confusion under the cover of an appearance which imitates his former colonial master. This problem is a widespread phenomenon in such societies as everyone living in that society, only strives for material success; money, education and power. Any abstract quality such as benevolence, imagination or art is considered to be just a waste of time. That is why people never try to understand their values and remain as imitators and therefore inferior beings. They remain in their inferior state because they never try to demonstrate their culture to the outer world; they only try to claim a higher position within their small acquaintances through mimicking the colonial masters.

Ganesh's school friend, Inder Singh gets a scholarship and goes to England to study. The author says, "To Ganesh, Inder Singh had achieved a greatness beyond ambition." (ibid, 18) A couple of years later, Ganesh sitting in a cinema, starts to think while watching the film that:

All these people with their name in big print on the screen have their bread butter, you hear. Even those in little little print. They not like me. (ibid, 22)

What can be seen here is that maybe Ganesh had a desire to become famous. Presumably, that is one of the reasons why Ganesh starts to write. Here he creates a new identity as Ganesh the writer; it is also found in a conversation between Ganesh and Leela, his wife-

Leela spoke to Ganesh. She asked him a question! "You could write too, sahib?" It took him off his guard. To cover up his surprise he began rearranging the booklets on the table. "Yes," he said. "I could write." And then, stupidly, almost without knowing what he was saying, "And one day I go write books like these. Just like these." Ramlogan's mouth fell open. You only joking, sahib." Ganesh slapped his hand down on the booklets, and himself saying, "Yes, just like these. Just like these." (ibid, 40)

It is true that Ganesh told them that he will start writing without thinking about it previously, but he steps to this plan. Possibly it started as an aspiration, but later on it turned into inspiration. He had found his ambition all of a sudden, and started to put into action. This quality, apparently, separates him from other Trinidadians. He started to make tentative inquires at a printing press, where a boy asks him "You ever hear of Trinidad people writing books?" (ibid, 44) Ganesh answered him saying "I writing a book" (ibid, 44) with courage.

Ganesh's first creation was rather funny. His *101 Questions and Answers on the Hindu Religion* is not a good read at all, and the other books he produces later were "spiritual thrillers", but it has to be admitted that he had a good intention.

It has to be stated that Ganesh was never simply a successful trickster; he was someone who used to help people:

But more than his powers, learning or tolerance, people liked his charity. He had no fixed fee and accepted whatever was given to him. When someone complained that he was poor and at the same time persecuted by an evil spirit, Ganesh took care of the spirit and waived the fee. People began to say, "He not like the others. They only hot after your money. But Ganesh, he is a good man." (ibid, 134)

Undoubtedly, he was a popular man. Ramlogan, his father-in-law, as well as Leela, his wife, used this popularity of his to gain personal profit which Ganesh disliked. He even gets into a fight with Ramlogan regarding this issue once, when Ramlogan starts a monopoly taxi service to Fuente Grove. It was a monopoly business because Ramlogan had threatened the other taxi drivers with a picture of the goddess Lakshmi saying that the 'holy pundit masseur Ganesh' will curse them. Ganesh becomes very angry at this. He goes to Ramlogan at once and says "Ramlogan, ain't you does ever get a little tired of being smart all the time, even in your old age?" (ibid, p-150) And tells him that he will buy the taxies. Ramlogan says "But you too greedy. You want to rob the people yourself."(ibid, p-150) But Ganesh steps out of the argument and tries to make him understand rationally saying "Is a favour I want to do you, Ramlogan. I giving you money for the taxis. If I buy my own, you think you could find people to drive your taxis from Princes Town and San Fernando to Fuente Grove? Tell me." (ibid, p-150)Nevertheless, later, Ganesh too fell a victim to the profit making business.

Ganesh's political career also followed this characteristic, at first he was an honest politician, he was the "terror in the Legislative Council"-

There was no doubt that Ganesh was the most popular man in Trinidad. He never went to a cocktail party at Government House. He never went to dinner there. He was always ready to present a petition to the Governor. He exposed scandal after scandal. And he was always ready to do a favour for any member of the public, rich or poor. (ibid, 208)

But Ganesh's honesty could not last long. Ganesh did not have a clear idea about his surroundings and because of that, when it was his turn to deal with the sugar estate workers, he failed to do it and had to run away, "He talked instead as though they were the easy going crowd in Woodford Square and he the fighting M.L.C. and nothing more." (ibid, 211)The workers became furious and the whole thing turned into a chaos. After that Ganesh underwent a drastic change, "Ganesh never walked out again. He went to cocktail parties at Government House and drank lemonade. He wore a dinner-jacket to official dinners." (ibid, 213)

Ultimately, Ganesh turned into a mimic-man, changing his name and becoming "G.R Muir, Esq. M.B.E." signifying that his previous life has now been omitted and he will simply live by the codes that was given by the former colonial masters. Ganesh's being is completely destroyed and he will go on playing the role of a simple follower of the codes that are set by the westerners for the rest of his life. But it is not really possible to omit someone's past completely. And that brings us to the next chapter, where Mohun Biswas, of *A House for Mr. Biswas* notes "The past

was never a counterfeit.” The concepts of hybridity and alienation are further examined in *A House for Mr. Biswas* to find out fresh dimensions in these concepts.

Chapter 2

V.S. Naipaul's early works such as *Miguel Street* (1955), *The Mystic Masseur* (1957) and *The Suffrage of Elvira* (1958) were comic novels dealing with light topics which mainly concentrate on social disorder and superstitious deeds of the characters. After the success of these books, in 1961, Naipaul wrote his masterpiece, *A House for Mr. Biswas*. This novel is different in a number of ways; it deals with a serious topic with a solid story line. It seems like a departure from his light social comedies to a more grim and serious tone. Naipaul says, "Those three books were an apprenticeship, if you like, then I was ready to write Mr. Biswas." (V.S. Naipaul, *Speaking of Writing*, *London Times*, 2 January, 1964). But Naipaul also asserts that he kept the frothy comedy in *A House for Biswas* too:

Actually the tone is not grim. The book is full of comedy. Perhaps the comedy is less verbal, less farcical but it is in everything, I assure you. I can read a page of my writing from any book, however dark you might think it is, and you will laugh. The jokes have become deeper; the comedy has become more profound. Without the humorous view, you couldn't go on. You can't give a dark, tragic view all the time—it must be supported by this underlying comedy. (V.S. Naipaul, *The Art of Fiction*, no. 154, *Paris Review*)

A House for Mr. Biswas is a fully rounded novel and the characters are more grounded. It tells the story of a man's lifelong battle, with its ups and downs and his effort to rise above a superstitious, conservative Hindu world, and the Creole society marked by poverty and chaos. Naipaul fictionalized his own history and regenerated his Caribbean society in a truly remarkable manner. Naipaul says:

At first I looked for this release in humour, but as the horizon of writing expanded I sought to reconstruct my disintegrated society, to impose order on the world, to seek patterns, to tell myself - this is what happens when people are weak. I had to find that degree of intellectual comfort, or would have gone mad.

(V.S. Naipaul, A Transition Interview by Adrian Rowe-Evans,”

<http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/2934130?>)

As Kenneth Ramchand notes, *A House for Mr. Biswas* “is the West Indian novel of rootlessness par excellence” (<http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/40653186>), Naipaul’s excellence is displayed when this theme of his can be applied to a number of subjects and at different levels simultaneously. In this novel, the “house” is undoubtedly the most powerful symbol as it represents the need for a physical and spiritual shelter. The need is common to both the Hindu and the Creole and especially to Mr. Biswas himself. Through an accident, that took place in history, all characters find themselves “unnecessary and unaccommodated” (Naipaul, 2003, p. 13-14), and this novel shows their painful attempts to come out of that state, which most of the times go in vain.

The Hanuman House is described as a place where people live, but instead of comfort, it reminds us more of a military barracks than a sweet home. “Hanuman House stood like an alien white fortress...bulky, impregnable and blank...the sidewalls were windowless.” (Naipaul, 2003, p. 81) This house is not only alien but also deceptive. To show one reason for that, the example of the wall can be drawn here; the “bulky, impregnable” walls are not made of concrete at all, but hollow clay blocks. What this symbolizes is that the Tulsis are vainly attempting to keep intact a culture which has become coreless because of going through transplantations and colonialism and which is now reduced to hollow rituals. While the “fortress” can give some protection to its

older members who are incapable of dealing with the “new world” around them, it imprisons the new ones in an older world they are not accustomed with. The windowless walls of Hanuman House are “as difficult for the outsider to penetrate as for one of its members to escape. It protected and imprisoned, a static world, awaiting decay.” (Naipaul, *The Middle Passage*, 2001, p. 87) Naipaul’s describes a statue of the Hindu god ‘Hanuman’ after whom the Tulsis had named their house; the statue is “whitewashed”, and from ground it looks “slightly sinister”. This “whitewashed”, distorted god of the Tulsis indicates the truth that their religion has been “reduced to rites without philosophy” (Naipaul, *The Middle Passage*, 2001, p. 88)

The Hanuman House is short lived and is continuously under the dual force of tradition and modernity. And it does fall apart before Mr. Biswas turns forty. The attempt to regroup at “Shorthills” is a final but futile effort to hold back a greater chaos and a more permanent dislocation, predictably, “Shorthills” also collapses, then everyone becomes aware of a new and frightening disorder:

The widows were now almost frantic to have their children educated. There was no longer a Hanuman House to protect them; everyone had to fight for himself in a new world, the world Owad and Shekhar had entered, where education was the only protection. (ibid, 437)

They are all suddenly exposed and vulnerable. They had to come out of the familiar rural surroundings and come face to face with the Creole Trinidadian world, They must now be trained to survive, and even to succeed in this alien “new world”.

The elder son of Mrs. Tulsi, Shekhar, marries into a very rich family because he is known to be “well educated”. But the family that he marries into is not Hindu. Dorothy and her family

are Presbyterians. So, Shekher had given up his brahminical beliefs of keeping the purity of the high caste by marrying into another Brahmin family. The marriage takes place in a registry office and after that, contrary to the Hindu customs, Shekhar goes to Dorothy's house. The author writes-

Contrary to Hindu custom and the tradition of his family, he did not bring his bride home, but left Hanuman House for good, no longer talking of suicide, to look after the Lorries, cinema, land and falling station of his wife's family. (ibid, 230)

He wanted to have material gaining by marrying Dorothy, but at Dorothy's house, Shekhar finds himself in an inferior place same as Biswas or the other poor husbands of the daughters of the Tulsi house. And he burst into tears when he learned that Owad is going "abroad to study, to become a doctor." (ibid, 349) It is not like that Shekhar did not gain anything materially, but he has lost a lot psychologically and culturally. That is what made Shekhar cry. But to talk about Owad, "studies abroad" could not really provide him the qualities that Shekhar lacks.

Owad comes back to Trinidad after becoming a doctor. This has made him a different person. His change reminds us of Ganesh, of *The Mystic Masseur*, even though he does not change his name. his appearance is changed completely, he starts to look down on the other members of his society, even at his family members. He criticizes Anand for his 'conceited selfishness and egocentricity', but his own actions reflect the same characteristics.

He had become a member of the elite class, "released" from both of the Indian and Creole sections of Trinidad. The new society proudly announced themselves to be different from the native people and tried to copy the lifestyle of the westerners, which they have become

acquainted recently. Owad married Dorothy's cousin, "the Presbyterian violinist", and left Port-of-Spain, which clearly indicates that he cuts off all the relations that he had in his former life. As a matter of fact, Owad is successful in his new world. Yet the "readers and learners", Owad and Shekhar, and even Anand are caught in a dilemma, on the one hand they simply hold on to their traditions, in which case they will stagnate and decay; or they will try to be successful in their new lives, in a more western way where they will have to become hybrid beings and lose the very basis of their personalities.

But for Mr. Biswas, there is one other problem along with this dilemma he has to fight for his honor even within his own society. With the death of his father, Mr. Biswas and his family were confronted with the brutality of this world and as a result, the family was torn apart. Mohun's two older brothers were sent to a distant relative "in the heart of the sugar estates; they were already broken into estate work and were too old to learn anything else." (Page 38) His sister goes to their aunt Tara, where she is treated as a maid, but hopefully she will be provided with some dowry when she gets married. Mohun Biswas, as the youngest son, stays with his mother at Pagots "on Tara's bounty...and some of Tara's husband's dependent relations." (ibid, 40)

Mr. Biswas's fate took him to many different places, but he remained dependent on others for most of his life:

For the next thirty five years he was to be a wanderer with no place he would call his own, with no family except that which he was to attempt to create out of the engulfing world of the Tulsis. (ibid, 40)

For this reason, Mr. Biswas wanted to own a house. Primarily, the reason was to have a shelter, and secondly, and more importantly, to create an identity, to have a purpose. Seemingly he was

an optimistic man. He had some romanticism in him from his early ages, he had read Hall Caine, Marie Corelli and Samuel Smiles and somewhere in his subconscious mind, he assumes the part of the young, struggling hero who will finally succeed:

He no longer simply lived. He had begun to wait, not only for love, but for the world to yield its sweetness and romance. He deferred all his pleasure in life until that day (ibid, 80)

This could be a reason why he “falls in love with” Shama Tulsi. After that he marries Shama in Mrs. Tulsi’s terms and falls a victim to the Hanuman House. There, he becomes one of those “Tulsi husbands” who-

Under Seth’s supervision, worked in the Tulsi Land, looked after the Tulsi animals, and served in the store. In return they were given food, shelter and a little money; their children were looked after; and they were treated with respect by people outside because they were connected with the Tulsi family. Their names were forgotten; they became Tulsis (ibid, 97)

But Mr. Biswas could not tolerate that, and most likely, he was the first person who began to rebel. All he could do was to make up names for them for some of the members of the household and exhibit his “flour sack” shorts in defiance of taunts from the Tulsi children. But he soon realizes that all these are pointless gestures which would not take him anywhere:

All his joy at that had turned into disgust at his condition. The campaign against the Tulsis, which he had been conducting with such pleasure, now seemed pointless and degrading. Suppose, Mr. Biswas thought in the long room, suppose that in one word I could just disappear from this room, what would remain to speak of me? A few clothes, a few books. The shouts and trumps in the hall would continue; the puja would be done; in the morning the Tulsi store would open its doors.

He had lived in many houses. And how easy it was to think of those houses without him (ibid, 131)

At this point he confronted his greatest fear, the void of nonentity. By knowing the negative connotations of a house, Mr. Biswas comes to know the positive sides of a house. He could understand that a house of his own was his utmost desire.

Mr. Biswas had many limitations to overcome in the path of his true independence. His limitations became clearer when he could enjoy a little bit of freedom as seen in the chapter “The Chase”. This place gives Mr. Biswas some “establishment”, but it is smelly and bug infested. The place reflects the psychological state of Mr. Biswas. In The Chase, Mr. Biswas comes face to face with all his responsibilities. He was frightened to face them all, “How lonely the shop was! And how frightening!” He could finally have some independence from the Tulsis, but the experience was far different from his expectations. For six years he lived at The Chase, became father of six, but with a little gaining. His days were dull and boring; “years so squashed by their own boredom and futility that at the end they could be comprehended in one glance.” On the other hand, the Hanuman House was “a world, more real than The Chase, and less exposed”. What used to be “prison” became a “sanctuary”. Mr. Biswas craves for his independence from Tulsidom, but is least successful in fulfilling all the necessities of his family and of himself. At a time like this, in order to escape the reality, he starts reading philosophy which is mainly based on stoicism, religion as well as “innumerable” novels. He attempts to write short stories and painting-

He painted cool, ordered forest scenes, with gracefully curving grass, cultivated trees ringed with friendly serpents, and floors bright with perfect flowers; not the rotting, mosquito-infested jungle he could find within an hour’s walk. (ibid, 183)

Mr. Biswas makes a futile effort to escape from the disordered world around him with the help of art and philosophy. But “the rotting, mosquito-infested jungle” comes before him as an overwhelming image, and he finds that no philosophy or art can alter the reality that he is living in.

Mr. Biswas took some lessons from *The Chase*, and after six years he agrees to be a “driver” on the Tulsi estate at Green Vale. At the Green Vale he made a clear vision about a house of his own, and that vision started to motivate his life from then:

He had thought deeply about this house, and knew exactly what he wanted. He wanted, in the first place, a real house, made with real materials. He didn't want mud for walls, earth for floor, three branches for rafters and grass for roof. He wanted wooden walls, all tongue-and-groove. He wanted a galvanized iron roof and a wooden ceiling. He would walk up concrete steps into a small verandah; through doors with coloured panes into a small drawingroom; from there to a small bedroom, then another small bedroom, then back into a small verandah. The house would stand on tall concrete pillars so that he would get two floors instead of one, and the way would be left upon for future development (ibid, 210)

The house that Biswas craves for is not a simple house, it has a symbolic meaning. Mr. Biswas wants to create an identity of his own where he will be the master. His failings do not stop him from trying, rather makes him aspire to have his own house, ‘his own portion of earth’. For him the house is so important that it not only is a material possession, it is the only way to escape the emptiness of his heart, where he can really become someone important and significant. Only a house of his own can give him the dignity that he has been searching for throughout his life. The biggest heroic quality Naipaul gives him is his self-respect, and to establish that in his society, a house of his own, where he could accommodate his whole family, was the best option available.

Mr. Biswas clearly dreams of a house that is fully ordered which he consciously lacks in his real life. To make his dream come true, he makes a house at Green Vale, but it is far from what he had in his vision. He could complete only one room ever and that house was never fully inhabitable. Much to his fears he sees “asphalt snakes hanging from the roof” which are certainly not the friendly ones that he painted but black, ominous creatures that oppress his dreams. Naipaul relates the condition of the house with the psychological state of Mr. Biswas. Mr. Biswas starts to think about himself as the-

boy leaning against an earth house that had no reason for being there, under the dark falling sky, a boy who didn't know where the road ...went. (ibid, 190)

The fragmented past of Mr. Biswas and his dislocated and disordered mind confuses him in such a way that everything around him, living or non living starts to frighten him, he sees a future full of emptiness. He has a complete nervous breakdown when his ever incomplete house is destroyed by a storm right before his eyes.

It was the second time that he failed to rise above his circumstances, Mr. Biswas ended up like a winged ant demolished by the storm, “its wings collapsed and now a burden in its wormlike body” (ibid, 288). In this situation, he again surrendered himself to the Hanumans. He was happy to think that at least his children will not suffer:

His children would never starve; they would always be sheltered and clothed. It didn't matter if he were at Green Vale or Arwacas, if he were alive or dead. (ibid, 304)

He was hoping that he could rely on the Hanumans for sometime, to have some rest from what he had been going through, but soon he realized, once again that he has to face the hostile world alone, which literarily frees him to start afresh: “He was going out into the world, to test it for its power to frighten. The past was counterfeit, a series of cheating accidents. Real life, and its

especial sweetness, awaited; he was still beginning.” (ibid, 305) The greatest power Mr. Biswas had, perhaps, was his optimism. With the help of this optimism, he stands on his feet again and goes to Port-of-Spain, to try his luck.

He becomes a reporter in Port-of-Spain and turns into a prosperous man. He earns money and fame, and most importantly, some respect from the Tulsis for the first time. They offer him to run their house in Port-of-Spain except for the rooms occupied by Owad and Mrs. Tulsi. At first he was really happy about the house, and thought of this as “the climax of his current good fortune”. For four years, he enjoys the solid, spacious and modern shelter provided by his in-laws and was happy with his job. But the truth came to him once again with its power to frighten with the departure of Mr. Brunett, his patron at the Sentinel, the place where he works as a reporter. He became a vulnerable person in his office and also understood that the house where he lives does not belong to him. It is just a place where he is staying temporarily. They reminded him that “The past could not be ignored; it was never counterfeit; he carried it with himself” (ibid 316) He knew from the past that his relation with the Tulsis was hostile, and the hostility came back when he rejoined the Tulsis after the “Shorthills Adventure”. Mr. Biswas builds a house here again which represents the whole “Shorthills Adventure”: “The house was not painted. It stood red-raw in its unregulated green setting, not seeming to invite habitation so much as decay.” (ibid, 424) Just like the other two houses, with which he attempted to claim his independence, that was also destroyed by fire. From Shorthills, Biswas and his family go to live with the Tulsis in Port-of-Spain.

The emptiness and the overwhelming void that he had inside him come back to him during his stay in Port-of-Spain with the Tulsis. He wants to take refuge in his work from the “childish

multitude” that remains in the house. But, what he finds is an equally crowded society that the Creole world created as he was forced by his assignment to the “Deserving Destitute Fund”:

The Sentinel could not have chosen a better way of terrifying Mr. Biswas...Day after day he visited the mutilated, the defeated, the futile and the insane living in conditions not far removed from his own: in suffocating rotten wooden kennels, in sheds of box-board, canvas and tin, in dark and sweating concrete caverns...horror increased by the litters of children, most of them illegitimate, with navels projecting inches out of their bellies, as though they had been delivered with haste and disgust. (ibid, 441)

The disordered society described here is indeed very frightening, and Mr. Biswas seeks to escape from this scary setting. To have his refuge, he buys the house with innumerable flaws. However, there was another reason behind it. He had to leave his portion of the house as Owad was back from abroad after completing his studies, at least he wanted to leave with dignity:

“You curse the day,” Mrs. Tulsi said. “Coming to us with no more clothes than you could hang on a nail.” This wounded Mr. Biswas. He could not reply at once. “I am giving you notice,” he repeated at last. “I am giving YOU notice,” Mrs. Tulsi said.

“I gave it to you first.” (ibid, 557)

Mr. Biswas was in desperate need of a house and almost sunk into debt to buy an overflawed one; “The staircase was dangerous; the upper floor sagged; there was no backdoor; most of the windows didn’t close; one door could not open.” (ibid, 12) The house was flawed undoubtedly, but more than just the condition of the house, some other things were important. First of all, he managed to accommodate his family members in a real house, and secondly, by owning this house, Mr. Biswas could rise above the overcrowded, hostile Tulsi house and also the “defeated, futile” Creole world. The house here works as the symbol of Mr. Biswas’s

personality, which has a number of shortcomings, but it is also valuable in everyone's life; especially someone who is living in a society where all the civic facilities are limited and poverty stricken.

After owning that house, Mr. Biswas became a satisfied person. He was finally with his family and "the gathering of a lifetime"- furniture and household materials that took his entire life to collect, were there under a single roof that he can claim as his own. The house was of monumental importance to him:

How terrible it would have been, at this time, to be without it: to have died among the Tulsis, amid the squalor of that large, disintegrating and indifferent family; to have left Shama and the children among them, in one room; worse, to have lived without even attempting to lay claim to one's portion of the earth; to have lived and died as one had been born, unnecessary and unaccommodated. (ibid, 13-14)

There can be no denial of the fact that Mr. Biswas had achieved a triumph, a house of his own was as big as a cathedral in a society that is characterized by backwardness and stagnation. A house can provide some physical, mental and spiritual rest and guidance to a confused mind, which gained all its knowledge from a fragmented Creole society; a society where everyone is made despaired by rootlessness and fragmentation. At the age of forty six, he finally puts an end to all his battles. By then he could be considered a winner, he had won what was possible within his limited talent, and had to hand over his gains to his children, and wait for them to have a successful life; "There was nothing Mr. Biswas could do but wait. Wait for Anand. Wait for Savi. Wait for the five years to come to an end. Wait. Wait." Biswas waited his entire life to own a house with eagerness, and then, he waited for his children to have achievements with happiness. He had a peaceful death, thinking about the mystery of life in a joyful mind, "The

shade was flowering again; wasn't it strange that a tree which grew so quickly could produce flowers with such a sweet scent?" (ibid, 589)

However, it was not joyful for his son, Anand, who was really close to his father. Anand had inherited the psychological blankness that his father suffered from for so many years. He grew up as a person who is rather gloomy and moody. By giving this ending, Naipaul maintains the argument that, despite Mr. Biswas's achievement, the future generation falls a victim to the same disordered society and its distorted psyches. The heavy burden put by the fragmented society on them is so powerful, that accommodation or education which their ancestors lacked, cannot ease them. They grow up lacking a culture of their own, a history to refer to. Naipaul knows it better than anyone else, and he portrays it with real mastery.

That portrayal can be found in *The Mimic Men*, where the protagonist continuously fails to connect himself with any physical landscape. In a sense, Ralph Singh, the central character of *The Mimic Men*, is the alter ego of Savi, Mr. Biswas's son. The third chapter, therefore, looks at *The Mimic Men* to explore Singh's sense of alienation and inbetweenness.

Chapter 3

We, here on our island, 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. (Naipaul, 1967, p. 146)

Naipaul's most insightful novel about cultural displacement is *The Mimic Men* (1967). In this novel Naipaul portrays the life of a colonized man and his thoughts and experiences. The protagonist of the novel is Ralph Singh who, to some extent, has a life that is a lot better than that of Ganesh or Mr. Biswas. But what is similar about all of them is that they suffer from an identity crisis. Ralph Singh, despite all his education and wealthy family background, fails to experience the feeling of togetherness anywhere in the world. He roams about with his sense of inbetweenness in Europe, or in Isabella, his birthplace. Being unable to feel at home, Singh starts to live within the space of his imagination.

Ralph Singh has gained all the materialist advancement and he never had to suffer like Mr. Biswas or Ganesh because of poverty, ignorance, a lack of natural talent or the superstitions of a typical Hindu family. He has a wonderful academic background, he has achieved popularity which Ganesh wanted so badly and the independence which was the most desirable thing for Mr. Biswas. In addition to all that, he could join the sophisticated society in London and is one of the most prominent persons in his native island. Despite these achievements, he suffers from psychological fragmentation and rootlessness. Thus, he becomes more or less similar to Ganesh or Mohun Biswas.

The settings of *The Mimic Men* are London and the island of Isabella, an imaginary island in the Caribbean. Kripal Singh, the narrator and the protagonist of this novel writes down his reactions to the three cultures, Indian, Creole and English, which are narrated in a confusing manner. He keeps on commenting on power, politics, social and racial interactions, sex, education, displacement, isolation and identity as they are experienced by him as an ex-colonial. Each of these topics reveals a different side of his personality. Singh is constantly haunted by the feeling of alienation and dislocation. Naipaul sketches a displaced New World inhabitant who could never be in a place where he had a sense of belonging, as a result he finally drops away from active life.

The novel is written in a diary writing style, with a first person narrative. The narrative structure of the novel is somewhat disjointed which reflects the psychological condition of the narrator, who looks forward to writing a book with perfect order, which he lacks in real life, “in that dream of writing I was attracted less by the act and the labour than by the calm and the order which the act would have implied.” (ibid, 32) In the active years he remains in between having a life and the mere performance of leading a life-

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. (ibid, 146)

This confusion of being someone or simply performing to be someone is not a phenomenon that is applicable only to Singh, but to many others who are suffering from the same syndrome. The education system for the elite put the students in a position where they are cut off from their surrounding and in some cases, from their real life. The school, for example, has ‘a private hemisphere’ for them and nothing else really matters, “we denied the landscape and the people we could see out of open doors and windows, we who took apples to the teacher and wrote

essays about visits to temperate farms.” (ibid, 95) Through this process, their English education encouraged them to be alienated which later on was so deeply rooted inside them that they could never escape it in the future. Many of them become afraid to face reality, to express what they really are; one such incident occurs when Hok, one of the students of the Isabella Imperial School, is ashamed to greet his Negro mother, as she passes by. When his teacher tells him to do so, he breaks down and starts crying-

It wasn't only that the mother was black and of the people, though that was a point; it was that he had been expelled from that private hemisphere of fantasy where lay his true life. The last book he had been reading was *The Heroes*. What a difference between the mother of Perseus and that mother! (ibid, 97)

What becomes clear here is their confusion lies between the line of ‘the gold of the imagination’ and ‘the lead of reality’. Singh could find his similarity with Hok in this situation:

Hok had dreams like mine, was probably also marked, and lived in imagination far from us, far from the island which he, like my father, like myself, had been shipwrecked. (ibid, 97)

Some other names can be cited in this regard: Hok is in ancient China, Eden is Lord Jim, Browne is in Africa, Deschampsneufs paints on the Laurentian slopes and Singh thinks of him as a leader of Aryan Warriors in central Asia. So, each of the boys live in a dream world and does not want to wake from that dream, they all want to remain in their different psychological world which isolates them even further.

The students of ‘Isabella Imperial’ never really learnt to think of the land as their own. They rather regretted having been from there. To them, it is only a narrow, barren world with

nothing authentic or worth-while; the island's very existence was shameful to them. For example, when Singh visited Browne, he found that "it was more than an interior I had entered. I felt I had had a glimpse of the prison of the spirit in which Brown lived, to which he awakened everyday." (ibid, 150) It is from a similar 'prison' that Singh wants to run away:

to abandon the shipwrecked island and all on it, and to seek my chieftainship in that real world... I was consciously holding myself back for the reality which lay elsewhere (ibid, 118)

In England or France or some other place like that, "in Liege in a traffic jam, on the snow slopes of the Laurentians, was the true, pure world." (ibid, 146) So, this is what happens to the students of "Isabella Imperial", they grow up thinking that the aim of receiving education here is to win a scholarship, not to stay in Isabella and enter the 'real world', "this meant studies abroad, a profession, independence, the past wiped out." (ibid, 148) What is a little surprising here is that Singh seems to be aware of this fact, "How could anyone, wishing only to abolish himself, go beyond a statement of distress?" (ibid, 151) but he acts no differently than Eden or Browne. The people of Isabella think that Isabella's business and political life come from schools such as this, the students start considering them superior to them in their own land. Singh's dislike of the land becomes clear when he says "To be born on an island like Isabella, an obscure New World transplantation, second hand and barbarous, was to be born to disorder" (ibid, 118). Another thing in Singh was his East Indianness. All the time he refers to himself as the 'picturesque Asiatic'. Nothing was up to the scale for him in Isabella. That is why he goes to London, where to him, everything is genuine and real.

However, within a short period of time, Singh learns that London, his 'fantasy city', has an even 'greater disorder'. In the city of London, Singh stays at Mr. Shylock's boarding house and comes to meet a number of immigrants who are also staying there. After meeting them, he knows that

all these people are as lonely as Singh in their hearts living in “a conglomeration of private cells” (ibid, 18). One of them, is the Maltese housekeeper, Lieni. Lieni is a single mother who lives there with her child, is able to play the part of the ‘smart London girl’ perfectly, hiding her pain, which is common among immigrants. Staying in that boarding house Singh develops the idea that, “we become what we see of ourselves in the eyes of others.” (ibid, 20) As Lieni takes Singh as ‘the dandy, the extravagant colonial’, he starts playing that role happily.

The search for order and “the flowering, the extension of myself” does not stop in Isabella, his birthplace. Singh goes on searching for order in different places, “From room to room I moved, from district to district.” (ibid, 30) The sheer feeling of homelessness and alienation does not ever let him feel any satisfaction anywhere. This feeling of utter rootlessness is something which he cannot control; rather, it seems that he is being controlled by it. As a result, he is always restless and dissatisfied. He finds no solace in changing landscapes. Singh did realize the futility of his search for order-

The crash was coming, but I could see this only when the crash had been abandoned for something more immediate and more reassuring. And the need for reassurance was constant. (ibid, 28)

Reassurance is in the centre of Singh’s search, what he desperately seeks is never found and his search ends in utter despair. Singh suffers from psychological rootlessness which he cannot overcome simply by changing the physical landscapes. It is the Prufrockian problem that derives from loneliness and insecurity. At a time like that, Sandra, who could bring some relaxation from his crippled psychological state, came to his life, “To me, drifting about the big city that had reduced me to futility, she was all that was positive.” (ibid, 45) Singh describes his reasons to stay with Sandra as-

I had such confidence in her rapaciousness, such confidence in her as someone who could come to no harm- a superstitious reliance on her, which was part of the strength I drew from her...it seemed to me that to attach myself to her was so acquire that protection that she offered. (ibid, 47)

But the protection offered by Sandra was never really enough for him. Sandra could not be the one who could give the psychological support as she herself was alienated - "She had no community, no group, and had rejected her family." (ibid, 44) Two persons, who were insecure themselves, could not support one another for long. This becomes clear to Singh and Sandra only after they return to Isabella.

While Singh was considering Sandra as the embodiment of his 'luck', he returned to Isabella and he brought Sandra along with him. Singh described his return to Isabella as, "the period between my withdrawal from it, that period in parenthesis, when I was most active." (ibid, 32) And he was active indeed. He becomes a successful businessman and after that the 'dandy' socialist politician. But deep inside, Singh knew that he was only playing a role. He has been attached to this role playing since his childhood - "many were willing to take me for what I said I was...it was like a revelation of wholeness." (ibid, 113) But later on he could understand that "wholeness" he talks about here is only a deception of the actual "wholeness". Despite knowing this truth, he develops an acquaintance who is also pretentious and only playing roles, "The men were professionals, young, mainly Indians, with a couple of local whites and coloured; they had all studied abroad and married abroad." (ibid, 55) The idea of 'being abroad' casts a magic spell on the people of the West Indies. The untraveled natives think of them as persons with richness and mystery, they worship the returnees' status and the returnees enjoy being so. But they do not deceive themselves, because within their own community, they present themselves in their original form, "The talk is a bit too loud, too hearty, too aggressive or too defensive; these people

are acting, overdoing domesticity and small details, over-stressing the fullness of their own lives.” (ibid, 63) It is something very common in the colonial middle-class society. They carry on mimicking what they have seen in the western societies where they have been, only to fit their characters they are playing. They have given their lifestyle such a shape where they got trapped in the space in between and can hardly find an escape.

It was more or less inevitable that Singh and Sandra would become bored with this group of people with colonized minds. Although they both were flattered by all the attention and respect that were given to them, especially after the huge success of “Crippleville”, they soon lost interest in the group, and, to some extent, their role playing too. And for Singh, there was something else too, he learnt to realize Sandra’s insecurity -“She told me she had awakened in the night with a feeling of fear, a simple fear of place, of the absent world.” (ibid, 69) In the island of Isabella, Sandra is a dislocated person, so she started to feel Singh’s void in that place. When she admitted that to Singh, he understood that Sandra is unable to give him any solace from the fear of void that he has been trying to escape from his entire life. After this their separation became just a matter of time. Singh loses interest in everything, even in the house they were living in. Their “Roman House” had become insignificant to both of them, “We had both lost interest in it, but we both kept this secret from the others.” (ibid, 73) And after that, Singh breaks all relations with his group and Sandra. To have some relief, he goes to visit an old slave plantation, away from his gaudy mansion the Roman House. This visit of his carries some other significance. His visit to the ruins from the mansion represents his past and his present. The author shows here that Singh’s pompous lifestyle in Isabella works simply as a cover of his origins which he is unwilling or unable to acknowledge.

After his separation from Sandra and his rejection by the circle of returnees, he was a little lost. At that time, his childhood friend, Browne suggested to him that he should join politics. A politician could easily use his reputation as a businessman and profit from politics. Singh accepts this suggestion and in no time and became a nationalist politician in Isabella.

But, just like the other efforts, Singh soon finds that Isabellan politics is not for him; he could never be “committed to a series of interiors I never wanted to enter.” (ibid, 188-189) Along with that, he understands that he could never be connected to Isabellan soil or anything else:

A man I suppose, fights only he hopes, when he has a vision of order, when he feels strongly there is some connection between the earth on which he walks and himself. But there was my vision of a disorder which it was beyond any one man to put it right. There was my sense of wrongness, beginning with the stillness of that morning of return when I looked out on the slave island and tried to pretend it was mine. There was my deep sense of intrusion which deepened as I felt my power to be more a matter of words. So defiantly, in my mind I asserted my character as an intruder, the picturesque Asiatic born for other landscapes. (ibid, 207)

In many of Naipaul's East Indian characters in the West Indies, this quality is common. This East Indianness helps Ganesh to act like a mystic masseur, for Mr. Biswas it is the greatest threat to his individuality, and in the case of Kripal Singh, it provides him with the fantasies that make him a foreigner in his own country.

Singh was brought up with this sense of alienation and remained an alienated person all his life in his country as well as in the other places he goes to. When he was young, he decided not to become a part “of those thousands who, from their fields, could look forward to nothing but servitude and days in the sun.” (ibid, 144-145) In his adulthood, when he becomes a politician in Isabella, when he had to represent those people “from their field” his standpoint does not change. Therefore, he never develops any interest in the common people's plight. Instead, he simply goes on with the “sense of drama” while, he plays his role as a politician.

Singh is not the only one who has been playing this role in Isabellan politics. Browne, the Chief Minister is no different from him, he also has this “ambivalent attitude towards the subject he most exploited; the distressed of his race.” (ibid, 185) Singh asserts, “on the public platform...we each become our character.” (ibid, 196) The truth about Isabellan politics is that the political leaders can actually do little for the people. They were dependent on foreign capital, goods and values, “no power was real which did not come from the outside.” The leaders were mere puppets in the hands of foreign powers. However, they do talk about nationalism and nationalization, but they all know that they are playing roles, believing in their parts and taking them very seriously, overestimating the power of their roles.

But Singh had lost all faith in this role playing. After four years, he admitted that to himself, “For four years drama had supported me; now, abruptly drama failed.” (ibid, 221) His support stops, both nationally and internationally. His career as a politician ends before he goes to London with a mission on behalf of his government. So, he returns from London empty handed.

After his second return to Isabella, numbness takes over both his body and spirit. Everything became meaningless to him, even his name, “I soon ceased to react to the sight of my name; it was no longer I could attach t myself.” (ibid, 239) Isabella became a restless place, a bloody racial conflict was taking place right in front of eyes but he could not feel attachment to that. He became a completely broken man.

From his childhood, Singh had dreamt of moving away from his land to the farthest corner of the flat world along with his Asian ancestors. In his adulthood, he wanders about in search of order and meaning in different countries, different landscapes, where he plays different and versatile roles. But it is all in vain and everything ends for him in the same way. He yearns to

get some support from people and professions but fails to involve himself with either. As a matter of fact, he fails to connect to anything or anyone. His deep and sheer sense of alienation, which he grew up with, never lets him experience any togetherness regardless of place or time. Gradually, he makes a total rejection of all activity and effort.

Therefore, few changes can take place in Singh's psychological world. Becoming an adult, he could finally articulate the insecurity that he has been suffering his entire life, "each person looks down into himself and finds only weakness, sees the boy or child he was and has never ceased to be." (ibid, 200) Here, it becomes clear that the insecurity had always remained with him as it was making him a victim of lack of identifiable foundation. In search of a foundation and to escape from disorder, he travelled to London, his "ideal landscape", which was also a "fairy-land" for him. But, after returning from London with the disillusion, he faced "the final emptiness". He states his final condition as-

I have lived through attachment and freed myself from one cycle of events. It gives me joy to find that in no doing I have also fulfilled the fourfold division of life prescribed by our Aryan ancestors. I have been student, householder and man of affairs, recluse. (ibid, 250-251)

After all these, he makes his attempts to write a book, where he tells the story of his life and gives at least a little expression to all his pains-

To give expression to 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, it was my hope to give partial expression to the restlessness which this great upheaval has brought about...but this work will now be written by me; I am too much a victim of that restlessness which was to have been my subject. (ibid, 32)

Singh could put his pains and feelings into words successfully expressed "the restlessness and deep disorder" to everyone that he has inherited from history. His account is more vivid and it

could truly represent in what way the physical and cultural dislocation of a people can lead to cultural, psychological and actual rootlessness. Here, he could present himself with all the acuteness he needed.

Being homeless and alienated all his life, Singh ends up in a “sanitarium” –

We are people who for one reason or another have withdrawn, from our respective countries, from city where we find ourselves, from our families...it comforts me to think that in this city alone there must be hundreds and thousands like ourselves. (ibid, 247)

At the end of the novel, Naipaul hints that the feeling of ‘rootlessness’ is increasing. This phenomenon is not something which is applicable only to the people of the West Indies, but to all the people who experiencing isolation in different places. Singh could become one of the representatives of those who are exiled people and no longer belong to any one culture.

Conclusion

In an interview with Ronald Bryden, V.S. Naipaul says that, “All my work is really one. I am really writing one big book. I come to the conclusion that, considering the nature of the society I came from, considering the nature of the world I have stepped into and the world I have to look at I could not be a professional novelist in the old sense...”.

Interview by Ronald Bryden, (*The Listener*, Vol. 89, March 22, 1973, pp. 367-70.)

In the diasporic literature, the theme of rootlessness and alienation is predominant and Naipaul's writings on this theme are most prominent among the English-writing Caribbean writers. His works developed in the course of time with dealing with narrow perspectives in small, backward rural societies to modern cities like London, but his theme remained unchanged. The two novels that have been discussed in the first two chapters of this paper are set in rural Trinidad and the third one takes place in the city of London.

Naipaul portrays Ganesh, the hero of his first novel as an opportunist, who wants to become rich and successful in his life in one way or another. He uses fraud for financial gain by becoming a masseur from being a school teacher and finally a mystic. His book which he wrote as a mystic, was rather ridiculous, still it gave him some fame. Finally, for material gains, Ganesh becomes a politician and with a twist in his political career, he joins his former colonial masters away from his mother land. What is significant in this novel is that, it sheds light on the fact that in a post colonial society, where people are still living between the present system and the former values, a bias for the colonizers' society still remains. Naipaul shows that, it is important to become successful in Trinidad, does not matter by what means, because people will not bother at all.

Mohun Biswas, the hero of the second novel, on the other hand, is presented in a way that he becomes an existential hero. He learns at every stage of his life that man lives alone in society and has to fight and suffer to gain a rightful and just place in his own land. Along with that, Naipaul also gives his hero another quality, that is of tenacity. Mr. Biswas goes on struggling for his dignity against a background without standards or order. He achieves his biggest success, and perhaps the only one, in the late days of his life when he owns a house, with numerous flaws. The house provides him not only with shelter, but also identity and the power to claim self respect. He remained unhoused in his active days and therefore a 'nobody' for most of his life. With owning a house, his lifelong quest for an identity came to an end.

Ranjit Kripal Singh or Ralph Ranjit Kripal Singh as he prefers to be known, is a little different from the other two heroes. Naipaul creates him as a representative of modern man with the Prufrockian symptom, that is alienation. There is no real commitment or even affection for life and society in Ralph Singh. He is only pretending, but deep inside he looks for order. Singh seeks order in his life and desperately wants to escape from his confusing past. He continuously fails to feel any togetherness with his surroundings, no matter what place or time he is in.

He feels that, in Isabella, his birthplace, he is 'shipwrecked' and must escape to find the real world. He remained within a limited circle in his youth, which was detached from the others around and each member of that circle did not consider Isabella as a real land. The reason behind this was that the society of Isabella was a "mimic" one. For one's intellectual development, a mimicking society cannot be an ideal place. The city of London was his dreamland, the name of the city asserted all the charms of magic for him in his youth, but after confronting his disillusionment, he finally understands that the sense of alienation that he is suffering from lies within himself.

Therefore, there can be no denial of the fact that, Naipaul's writings cover different settings and characters, but a single strain always can be found that is based on rootlessness and alienation. He has dealt with the problems of an ex-colonized society in his writings more than any other writer in the English language. He has depicted societies that are beset with the problems of neo-colonialism and portrayed the people living in them with frightening insight. This is the very quality that makes him one of the most significant and prominent post colonial writers of the present era.

But that is not all. Naipaul's importance is not only in post colonial studies, but he has now become equally important in the modern studies since he sketches characters that are victims of Profrokan symptom. In his fifty year career with almost thirty books published, Naipaul makes the reader see the world through the telescope of truth only. He shows the world with its ruthless face, where everyone has to fight for a position, "The world is what it is; men who are nothing, who allow themselves to become nothing have no place in it" (*A Bend in the River*, P-143)

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