THE MULTI-LAYERED VISION OF V.S.NAIPAUL

By

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DECLARATION

I, Sarala Joyce Christopher, Lecturer, Selection Grade, Department of English, St. Joseph’s College, Irinjalakuda, hereby declare that this thesis has not been previously published by me for the award of a degree, diploma, title or recognition.

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CONTENTS

Chapter **Pages**

I INTRODUCTION.. 1-39

II MERGING OF THE PAST AND PRESENT................ 40-83

III NAIPAUL'S CHARACTERS...................................... 84-170

IV NAIPAUL'S VISION AND STYLE.............................. 171-200

V CONCLUSION.. 201-215

BIBLIOGRAPHY.. 216-223

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Sir Vidiadhar Suraj Prasad Naipaul is the wordsmith, the critics love to hate. His name spells endless accolades along with even greater number of bitter critical attacks, directed against his treatment of fictional and non-fictional materials, ranging from the Caribbean to India. He has to his credit more than twenty-five critically acclaimed books – a mix of novels, some humorous, some painfully melancholic and many dealing with his pet themes of displacement and migration. His travel books, strongholds of his creativity, have been ever provocative and frequently open to racism and prejudice. Naipaul, till date, has been no stranger to controversy which he has actively and eagerly courted.

The very fact that he is the recipient of the much-coveted Nobel Prize in 2001 makes Naipaul a force to reckon with in the contemporary literary scenario. Any study about him gains importance in the present context.

Today, V. S. Naipaul stands as a master of the novel, a creative craftsman of such surpassing talent that V. S. Pritchett, Britain's leading critic calls him "the greatest living writer in the English language" (Kamra 9). One finds a chiselled bluntness and honesty about him. For him, the world is an unpleasant expanse that deserves no mercy in observation and no piety in judgment. And this world or ra his world which is of a million mutations, is very elegantly and precisely ured in an oeuvre of fourteen novels and twelve non-fiction works. The experience has apparently made him wiser, though lonelier.

Naipaul's first and foremost position in the world of literature is that of a novelist. He commenced his career by contributing to fiction and still continues to do it. Abundantly creative, he has a new publication practically every year, winning numerous awards in the process. Naipaul, unlike other contemporary novelists, had to create a tradition for his fiction and the emergence of this tradition is in itself a contribution. The inherent and latent Hindu perspectives within him are intertwined with his western life and therefore his novels become a blend of a trinity--- giving a new direction to fiction writing, opening up a new dimension to English fiction and widening and extending its frontiers. His translation of the world he has inherited and the world he has lost is in itself a text with no parallel in English fiction.

For the English reading public spread all over the world, Naipaul today, is a Caribbean writer coming from the family of Hindu immigrants settled in Trinidad, who later shifted to England, which became a second home to him. A Brahmin - cum - English man in Trinidad, a European in India, and an Indian in London --- it surely is an attractive despair for Naipaul, the romantic recluse, with the whole world at his disposal. He is a universal seer, uncorrupted by nationalism, bearing the full weight of a lonely quest for truth.

Naipaul's progress as a writer exhibits the various phases of the regional artist's evolution into a writer of universal humanity. The ex-Prime Minster of India, A. B. Vajpayee pronounces, "Naipaul's literary sensitivity, transcending all barriers has blossomed into an all-compassing concern for humanity. His incisive treatment of contemporary realities has never been bereft of humane perspectives" (*Hindustan Times* 11 Oct. 2001).

Naipaul is a multi-layered international writer and the question of his identity crops up because of his immigrant background and the displacement it caused. This 'unhousedness' could be seen as a problem that had haunted him all his life but it is also his strength, providing him with a detached and ruthless precision that marks his vision as well as his prose.

In a journey that began more than seventy years ago in Chaguanas, from where at eighteen he left for Oxford, Naipaul has never stopped recapturing his past, though there is no sign of homesickness or yearning for return. There is no happy homecoming for Naipaul. And no sentimental ancestral ties either. Though he has made use of the West Indian life as content for his fiction, for structural purposes, his models are British and European. The childhood and youth spent in Trinidad, the bond between father and son and the Hindu background – these are the three strands of his personal life that conspicuously shape Naipaul's sensibility. His multiple heritage and the peculiar displacement which left him connected to three societies, though belonging to none, have not only been the impelling force behind his writings but also its very subject.

Naipaul dreamt of India as his original home but has been disillusioned after his visits there and therefore remains an alien. His attitude towards India can be understood better if it is remembered that three sociological influences work on him and create peculiar psychological conditions. Having lived in Trinidad as an immigrant with a strange, nostalgic Hindu foundation, he shifted to England as an expatriate and when he visited India, he found that his expatriate sensibility was twice removed from the country of his origin. Hence when he came to India he came as an ‘outsider’, an individual influenced by western culture.

Naipaul has travelled all over the world and has finally settled down as an expatriate writer in England, exploring the issues and problems arising out of the diasporic situation akin to his own. His multiple heritage places him in a position that makes it possible for him to render a detached account of his subjective experiences. Travel has broadened his perspective and has made it possible for him to view his personal emptiness and homelessness against the wider context of a larger world.

Naipaul’s protagonists also go away from their native culture and their growing up depends on their going away. They may be different persons but one finds a thread of continuity in their separate lives and status. Willie Chandran in *Half a Life* may be in many ways different from Mohan Biswas in *House for Mr. Biswas.* Similarly, Ganesh Ramsumair in *Mystic Masseur* and Ralph Singh in *Mimic Men* may be like chalk and cheese. But, essentially, they are all one as they present different aspects of the same cultural mind-set. Naipaul once remarked in an interview to Ronald Bryden:

> All my work is really one. I’m 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 would not be a professional novelist in the old

> sense [. . .]. (*Listener* 22 Mar. 1973)

Naipaul has come to realise that the creative novels of the early phase of his career, fulfilled only part of the writer’s commitment – his commitment to art and left the larger commitment to his society unfulfilled. Such novels make sense only within the framework of an ordered society where “after a disturbance there is calm, and all crises fall back into that great underlying calm” (Evans 48). His unshakeable belief is that writers addressing the restless and riotous societies have a greater purpose to serve than the mere fulfilment of an aesthetic function. Not only that, for people living in a “disordered and fast changing world”, novels of purely imaginative nature, far removed from social reality, could hold no meaning. In his *Overcrowded Barracoon* Naipaul expresses his conviction that people living in a disordered and fast-changing world need help in “grasping it, understanding [and] controlling it” (11) and, according to him, this is the greater purpose a writer has to serve.

The major themes that emerge from a reading of Naipaul’s novels are related to the problems of the colonised people, their sense of alienation from the landscapes, their identity crisis, the paradox of freedom and the problem of neo-colonialism in the ex-colonies. And being an Indian by ancestry, Trinidadian by birth and English by intellectual training and residence, Naipaul could at once attune himself with their problems and write about them with enviable flair.

As a postcolonial novelist, Naipaul situates his novels in both colonial as well as ex-colonial societies and gives a perspective account of the complexities inherent in such societies. In the first four novels, he deals exclusively with the colonial society of Trinidad, the island of his nativity and is preoccupied with the themes of dispossession, homelessness, alienation, mimicry and the search for an authentic selfhood. The characters in these novels are continually in search of an identity and home. It can be discerned that much of Naipaul's early writing issues from his personal experience of being a displaced member of a minority race and religion in Trinidad.

In the later novels, however, he emerges as a novelist of post-imperial crisis. The characters in these novels are even more lost and insecure than those depicted in the early novels. His critically observant eye and his uncompromising commitment to truth lay bare hard facts about the ex-colonial societies. Naipaul makes it clear that political independence has not brought about any change and the imperialist states continue to retain their hold on the former colonies through newer, more camouflaged methods of neo-colonialism.

Generally considered the leading novelist of the English – speaking Caribbean, Naipaul's writing deals with the cultural confusion of the Third World and the problems of an outsider. Naipaul has always invoked much controversy because of his views on 'the half-made societies. He has refused to avoid unwelcome topics, characterising his role as a writer "to look and look again, to relook and rethink" (*New York Review of Books* 18 Feb. 1999). He does not concern himself with keeping anybody happy or being politically correct. "Writers are not pamphleteers twisting the truth, angling it. I would like to be judged as an imaginative writer, a shaper of experience" (*Hindustan Times* 15 Oct. 2001). And one has to agree that as an exile whose only kingdom is that of "intuition", and as a traveller swayed by the geography of national grief, Naipaul can afford to be alone and inaccurate.

The unique triumph of Naipaul is that, unlike some of his subjects, he is not trapped in ideals. Piqued by his own rootlessness, he looks at a number of countries, especially Third World nations with penetrating insight. Naturally, his insights have hurt many. When asked about this, his reply in an interview was: “When people are wicked, you tell them they are wicked. If people are cruel, you tell them they are cruel; if they have no aspiration and are lazy, you have to tell them that you have to do that – that’s part of it, part of writing”(*Times of India* 13 Oct. 2001).

For a writer, whose existence is part of the text of displacement, departures and arrivals, the world beyond is not a happy abstraction. In fact, it is a natural calling. Educated in England where he has been living for so many years, Naipaul does hardly write anything on the western affluence. His main concern is the dispossessed section of society, which makes him one of the world’s most sincere and progressive humanists, who refuses to bluff others as well as himself. According to Naipaul, “The only way we have of understanding another man’s condition is through ourselves, our experience and emotions” (*Enigma* 42). It is not very easy for a novelist who wants international fame to select the most marginal section of society as his subject.

To get started as a writer of consequence, Naipaul has had to go back to the beginning – forgetting oxford and London – to those early literary experiences, some of them not shared by anybody else. While for his early novels, *Mystic Masseur* (1957), *Miguel Street* (1960*)* and *House for Mr. Biswas* (1961), Naipaul uses the familiar milieu of Trinidad, the land of his early upbringing, he shifts the locale of his future writings to India, Africa and Latin America, both in fictional and non-fictional narratives.

Colonial set-up has had a great deal to do with his making as a novelist. Though he looked back to the great 19th century novelists and early 20th century writers of European fiction for inspiration, Naipaul quickly realised that the disorganised or less organised societies of the colonial composition such as his own native land, could hardly provide him with the world or the society, which the great novelists delineated. Naipaul says to Jussawallah, “It came to me that the great novelists wrote about highly organised societies. I had no such society. I couldn’t share the assumptions of the writers; I didn’t see my world reflected in them. My colonial world was more mixed and second-hand and more restricted” (14).

Naipaul’s multiple heritages, thus, pose a difficulty for him when he first ventured into his writing career because his material was not “sufficiently hallowed by a tradition” (*Barracoon* 27). He knew that his background of Trinidad was “fairly simple, barbarous and limited”(*Literature* 22 Mar. 1973). Life in the ‘‘barbaric’’ Trinidad has taught him the valuable lesson that though he could stake a claim on the English language, yet the English literary tradition with its alien mythology could never be his.

The conclusion Naipaul arrives at through his in-depth analysis of West Indian postcolonial societies is offered in his works as the ultimate truths about all postcolonial societies. Colonial policies being more or less the same in all the colonies, no matter who the colonizers are, the problems that have surfaced in the post independence era have much in common. The breakdown of economies and intellectual bankruptcy, neo-colonialism and fragmentation are major problems that all of them have to grapple with. As a postcolonial writer, Naipaul has been successful in conveying the effects of colonialism on the culture and psyche of the colonized. In his analysis:

> Fragmentation both at the macrocosmic level of the society and the microcosmic level of the individual, acts as the major deterrent to progress in the post-independence period. As a result of the first, the colonized develop a split personality and lose their sense of solidity. Having lost their sense of self, they resort to mimicry, in an attempt to experience a sense of wholeness and the model for mimicry is invariably a European one. Social fragmentation, the common fate of all postcolonial societies, precludes a sense of oneness which is the basic pre-requisite for the formation of a meaningful society. (Champa 112)

For Naipaul, the ambition to become a writer is in the first place, something that came to him from his father, who had followed the occupation of a journalist, which was unusual for a Trinidad Indian of his generation. His father's stories open up an exciting world to Naipaul, who goes to them as to the memorials of a heroic time he had missed. In a way the stories have compensated for his lack of tradition. In "Two Worlds", his Nobel Lecture on 7 Dec. 2001, Naipaul fondly remembers:

> If it were not for the short stories my father wrote, I would have known almost nothing about the general life of our Indian community. Those stories gave me more than knowledge – they gave me a kind of

> solidity. They gave me something to stand on in the world. I cannot imagine what my mental picture would have been without these stories.

Having found a model for his work, Naipaul sets about establishing his home identity by ordering his experiences through writing. This is best accomplished in his fourth novel, *House for Mr. Biswas*. The work shows forth the colonial shame and fantasy quite vividly and convincingly. In fact, all his fictional works are about how the powerless lie about themselves and to themselves, since it is their only resource. He writes eloquently about how the colonial men mimic the condition of manhood and how they have grown to distrust everything about themselves. Evaluating his work, *Mimic Men,* Naipaul remarked,

> It occurred to me that I had been writing about colonial schizophrenia. But I hadn't thought of it like that. I had never used abstract words to describe any writing purpose of mine. If I had, I would never have been able to do the book; the book was done intuitively and only out of close observation. ("Two Worlds" 7 Dec. 2001)

Naipaul, meanwhile, turns his attention to travel writing, which results in *Middle Passage*, his first travel book on West Indies. This book has not found a favourable response in the West Indies because of his scathing criticism of the West Indian life. But he justifies his open exposures as:

> I have always moved by intuition alone. I have no system, literary or political. I have no guiding political idea. I think that probably lies with my ancestry. My father, who wrote his stories in a very dark time, and

> for no reward, had no political idea. Perhaps it is because we have been far from authority for many centuries. It gives us a special point of view. I feel we are more inclined to see the humour and pity of things. ("Two Worlds" 7 Dec. 2001)

But while writing about them he chose to write without pity.

Middle Passage is followed by more travelogues based on Naipaul's travels to India, Africa, the Islamic world and South America. The non-fictional works are interspersed with novels which render a fictional account of his travels to other Caribbean Islands and Africa. In his later novels,*Mimic Men, Guerillas,* and *Bend in the River* as well as in his novellas contained in *Flag on the Island* and *In a Free State*, Naipaul's themes acquire a universality as he enters other states of minds and cultures to take note of the fact that fragmentation and alienation are the universal predicament of man in the present day world.

At a seminar in Bareilly, in Dec. 1999, Prof. Mohit K. Roy said that quest for identity or the literature of Diaspora was going to be a major recurring theme in literature the world over, for some years to come. The literature of Diaspora focusses on the dislocation of an individual or a race and their consequent alienation. Alienation leads to a sense of loss but, according to Naipaul, life consists not in losing but in the rediscovery of self. Hence, Naipaul, "the literary circumnavigator" (Thursday, October 11, 2001) as the Nobel citation describes him, leads his readers not to a sense of loss but to the rediscovery of self which is his recurrent theme.

For Naipaul, at every stage of his literary career, writing had been an activity that has led to self-discovery. He has himself said, “Most imaginative writers discover themselves and their world, through their work” (*Return* 211). Naipaul’s quest for his own identity has been brilliantly summed up in his words, “I didn’t know who I was” (*Sunday Times* 10 Sept. 1968). It is writing that imposed an order on his experience and lent it coherence. Through an imaginative recreation of the past, he has been able to reconcile himself to his present. Just as the house imposes a sense of order on the lives of the Biswases, the process of recording his ancestry helps Naipaul to find himself.

It has been said about Naipaul’s early novels that in writing them he has been writing off his debts to his origins, before severing his umbilical cord with them. Rather than a writing off, Naipaul’s early novels are the outcome of his attempts to discover his identity and understand his own place in the world. It is Naipaul’s “complex fate” that despite his multiple heritage, he is yet to find his spiritual home and his writing emanates from his desire to come to terms with his own displacement and homelessness.

In a later interview, however, he has denied that his identity has been any problem. He argues:

> Why do you keep asking, ‘Who I am?’. I never ask that question. I always knew who I was. My research was for knowledge. My writing has been my discoveries. I have no problem about my identity. None at all. My work is not exploration of the self. No, it is the exploration of the world. (*Times of India* 11 July 1994)

Naipaul seems to harbour resentment over being labelled as a West Indian, a Caribbean or a Third World writer, voiced as it is in some of his statements. He believes that such descriptions have a nationalistic or racial or ethnic connotation that smacks of a political bias and as such are meaningless. He asserts, “I have been breaking away from that tag all my life. [. . .] It’s all the things I reject. It’s not me” (*Times of India* 21 June 1994). He wishes to focus only on his professional status as a full-time writer, having for his ideology only humanism.

Half a Life, the Nobel winner, is the story of a race in search of a mooring. Through the story of William Somerset Chandran, Naipaul presents the ironical existence of the Naipauls of the world---homeless and rootless. He champions the issue of dislocation and the consequent loss of identity which incidentally is the recurring theme in all his fictional works. Ganesh Ramasumair’s (*Mystic Masseur*) search for roots takes him to various stages of transformation and finally he discovers himself as G. Ramsay Muir. Mohan Biswas’s (*House for Mr. Biswas*) search for a house is a metaphor for his search of his own identity just as Willie Chandran’s in *Half a life.*

Naipaul is often quoted as lamenting, “There is a feeling of desolation at having nothing that one could honestly call one’s own – neither country, nor culture, nor tradition” (Singh 22). He had visited Trinidad for a short while but returned soon to England because, for him, Trinidad still remained “a dark dot on the map of the world” (*Area* 27). England also offers him no solace or anchorage. Although his first wife Patricia Anne Hale, had been English, Naipaul still thinks that he is an ‘outsider’ in England. Apprehensive of developing sterility as a writer and dreading a probable crisis in creativity, Naipaul often appears to be forever in search of a new direction.

Travels to Trinidad, India and Africa are, thus, for Naipaul, an optimistic solution to the problem. So he travels to the West Indies for freshness,though he goes not so much as a native but as a product of Queen's Royal College and Oxford University. The outcome of this travel is his travel book, *Middle Passage*. Later he travels to India but finds himself a westernised misfit there. He returns to India again in 1975, and once again in the 1980's which enables him to write the famous trinity of Indian travels, *Area of Darkness, India: A wounded Civilization* and *India: A Million Multinies Now.*

He had dreamt of settling down in India but was totally disillusioned with the reality he experienced in his pet country and returns to England, a shattered person in 1970, to settle down there. For the next decade, England becomes his home from where he travels to distant lands frequently.

The emotional aridity of his fiction reflects the actuality of the lives of the homeless, the lost and the lonely, like himself. His ruthless adherence to his own dark vision, along with his refusal to be a pretentious optimist gives a compelling persuasive power to his depressing fictional world. He has no comforting message-- only the bleak knowledge that in today's rapidly changing world, the yearning for permanence can never be more than an unfulfilled ache—"everyone is far from home" (Singh 2). His views are not the result of self – righteousness, camouflaged in civilizational elitism. It is the vision of a traveller who is constantly swayed by the idea of rootlessness:

> The colonial world was a pretty awful world. People have now forgotten about it but I still carry it with me a little bit. I grew up at the fag end of Imperialism. It was very unpleasant. [. . .] I haven't written about personal psychosis at all. I've written about real things. (*India Today Plus* 18 Feb. 1997)

It has been said that Naipaul has always occupied the 'No man's land'. The above statement is more or less true about him because Naipaul is not an Indian, an English or a Caribbean. Infact, he is a genius who knows no nationality. Naipaul claims that, for him, a physical distance from the subject would be more fruitful for an objective presentation of his material. Just as his first four novels have been written in London, in order to write about England, he feels the need to refresh himself by travel. Travel indeed proves to be an important stimulus for the further development of his art. For it not only helps Naipaul to overcome his uncertainties but also enables him to find his vision. This is clearly evident from what Naipaul says in his Forward to *Finding the Centre:*

> To travel was glamorous. But travel also made unsuspected demands onme as a man and a writer and perhapsfor that reason it soon became a necessary stimulus for me. It broadened my world view; it showed me a changing world and took me out of my own colonial shell; it became a substitute for mature social experience -- the deepening knowledge of a society -- which my background and the nature of my life denied me. [. . .] I recognized my own instinct as traveller, and was content to be myself, to be what I had always been,

> a looker. And I learned to look my own way. (11)

The significance of Naipaul’s novels is that they are not only novels of the contemporary times, but also for all time. He experiments with several new techniques, especially the blending of genres in a post – modern style. To quote Bhat, the critic, “In his exposition on the role played by history, his awareness of pluralism and crumbling of barriers of the world; in voicing a note of existential nihilism and the nature of absurd in life, Naipaul fully voices the present-day scenario”(100).

A keen observer of humanity, like Charles Dickens and Jane Austen, Naipaul catches the postcolonial Third World countries vividly with the lens of his sensitive camera and nurtures a vision of it passing from the stage of colonial feudalism to capitalism. Borrowing Bhat’s words again, “He is truly a 20th century novelist capturing the epochal phenomenon of a colonial, pastoral, agricultural world becoming decolonised and the travails of a post-colonial third-world” (101). Strictly speaking, his novels are the saga of a postcolonial coming to terms with reality.

The incompetence and mendacity of the colonial rulers have imposed western practices on the colonised, without ensuring first that responsible educational policies have prepared these people to accept the cultural adjustments that democracy calls for. When a writer like Naipaul, who is perfectly justified in writing frankly and bluntly, about the things he knows best, he is made to seem patronizing and worse. One cannot find fault with Naipaul for envisioning the post-imperial world as falling apart. Even though at the end of *Mimic Men*, it is still possible for the narrator to“clear the decks” and make a fresh beginning, in *Guerrillas* and *Bend In The River*, Naipaul appears to be at the nadir of his hopes. His apocalyptic vision makes it explicit that“ no one will make a fresh start or do anything new ” (*Guerrillas* 149).

The Hindu immigrant background of Naipaul and his upbringing in Trinidad, which were claustrophobic for the growth of the writer in him, and his ‘flight’ or ‘escape’ to England for pastures new, is the story of many Third World writers, living as immigrants in London. This imperial metropolitan centre becomes the ‘home’ of Naipaul’s creative activity and literary business, though for stimulation he is forced to go back either to Trinidad or his original home India or resort to travel for opening out new areas. In spite of all the formidable challenges, it is in England that Naipaul finally blossomed in to a renowned writer. Raghubir Singh in a profile of Naipaul writes:

> Not only the western view but also the Indian view is incorrect about Naipaul. He is not the sad rootless man Indians make him out to be. The truth is that Naipaul’s roots are dug deep into the terra firma of English literature. That is his universe. That is his country. He walks like a king along the Avon in Wiltshire. He is treated with great respect and deference by the English. [. . .]He has a deep commitment to India; and to truth. He is the Gangetic plain’s Conradian gift to the World. (Singh 78)

It may be Naipaul’s attitude of superiority to mediocrity that has earned him the reputation of a supercilious, sulky person who has alienated even his closest friends. His gratuitous comments on certain countries and ethnic and social groups have not helped in improving his public image. However, he tends to be forever sympathetic with oppressed individuals in hostile environments and in his extensive writing, one finds appreciative portraits of the man in the streets, the small entrepreneur or the farmer. Above all, Naipaul is always ready to condemn the neglect or abuse of human rights. Naipaul is especially relevant when dealing with topics such as exile, mimicry and universalism.

Naipaul has received most of the major literary prizes in the English language. He is also knighted. His readership has expanded greatly and he is now accepted in academic circles as a master of English prose. Naipaul's more than twenty-nine works of fiction and non –fiction have won him virtually every conceivable literary award including the Nobel Prize. His journey from the son of an obscure Trinidadian journalist to a scholarship holder at Oxford and to unparalleled literary fame is a virtual pilgrimage of postcolonial success. While his works of fiction tend to earn him unequivocal admiration, the same cannot be said about his non –fiction. His bitter dispatches on the Third world, have earned him the dubious title of"the white man's brown mouthpiece" (Rao 245).

Naipaul's life-long engagement with literature has been a struggle with his own obsession, which he could not acknowledge explicitly, but which leaves its indelible trace in his texts. It is his obsession with the memory of some lost, far away 'imaginary homeland' ---- an India perhaps or even a different Trinidad___ with which he could quarrel, which he could accuse, but could never leave behind. It is his memory of the history of a forgotten people, the marginal men -- vanquished and displaced – that imparts the distinctive flavour to his writings. His galaxy of characters from Ganesh to Willie Chandran are mostly people born of Indian heritage and raised in the British Caribbean islands, who spend a life-time struggling against the torment of cultural displacement and identity crisis.

‘A dot on the map of the world’ says Naipaul of the small Caribbean island, Trinidad, off the coast of Venezuela, to which his great grandparents had gone as indentured labourers somewhere in 1880. This recurring phrase ‘ a dot on the map of the world’ reflects the insignificance of a cultural and political backwater like Trinidad that pervades all his writings about the land of his birth. The same is also reflected in the oppressed feelings of his characters who feel that they are living ‘on the rim of the world’ while real life is going on elsewhere.

The dark history of slavery in the island has bred only self-contempt in the non-white population. In 1979, Naipaul said, “Trinidad was incomplete in every way. Every thing was imported. Every book, every machine, every idea came from abroad. I felt I had lost very far away” (*Times* 13 May 1979). This is the society Naipaul grows up in and the society he rejects in unequivocal terms. It is in every way a borrowed culture – a society of mimic men. This desolate feeling __ of having inherited nothing that he can decently call his own__ permeates his work from the very beginning.

The years of childhood and the early youth that Naipaul spent in Trinidad, result in his antagonism and culminate in an undefined rejection of what he sees around him. For him, the Trinidadians are the peripheral people who cannot even have the humble dignity of the poor, but are reduced to comic figures. Writing to his mother from Oxford on May 3, 1954, he had said, “I don’t see myself fitting into the Trinidad way of life. I think I shall die if I have to spend the rest of my life in Trinidad. The place is too small, the values are all wrong and the people are petty[. . .]" (*Between Father and Son* 277).

But it is also the place he knows best, the society to which he keeps going back in his fiction. It is looking back to Trinidad of his childhood from the distance of London that produced his first four books. In *Middle Passage*, he wrote, "I knew Trinidad to be unimportant, uncreative, cynical [. . .]. It was a place of the stories of failure [. . .]. I never wanted to stay in Trinidad" (43-44). His unsentimental rejection of this "unimportant, uncreative" island stands in sharp contrast to the other intellectuals from the erstwhile Third World countries who took the first opportunity to migrate to the lands of milk and honey, but once there, never ceased to be nostalgic about the 'lost country'.

Gordon Rohlehr, the young West Indian critic remarks:

> Naipaul is a Trinidadian East Indian who has not come to terms with the Negro –Creole world in Trinidad or with the East Indian world in Trinidad, or with the greyness of English life in London, or with life in India itself, where he went in search of roots. (189)

Naipaul has always experienced his own strange dilemma over home. Andrew Gurr remarks that London where he headed to make a writer of himself turned out to be a clearing in the jungle, Trinidad a camp and "for Naipaul neither offered a home" (69). He had once looked upon England as "some purely literary region, where untrammelled by the accidents of history or background, I could make a romantic career for myself as a writer"

(*Jussawallah* 1997: 14). But life in England has convinced him that he has been misguided. “I am not in touch any longer,[. . .] relationships have all withered away, just withered away” (Gussow 18), is how Naipaul perceives his own displacement and homelessness.

It may appear that psychologically, India has always been an unseverable connection for him, which may largely account for his alienation from the Trinidad version of India. This explains his strange reaction to the Nobel Prize. On receiving the news of the Nobel award, Naipaul reacts with an adequate and unNaipaul-like response of genuine happiness and expresses his hearty thanks which include England and India, but surprisingly there is no mention of Trinidad.

The question remains whether such epithets as ‘surprising’ or ‘unexpected’ or ‘unusual’ could at all be applied to Naipaul who has all along remained unpredictable, paradoxical and enigmatic and apparently enjoyed being so. The brief statement he made from his home in Wiltshire was: “I am utterly delighted. This is an unexpected accolade. This is great tribute to England, my home, and to India, home of my ancestors and to the dedication of my agent, Gillon Aitken” (*Telegraph* 25 Oct. 2001). The statement wherein even the agent has been carefully included, Trinidad has been kept out with equal care.

On being asked why he had left out the Caribbean from his tribute, Naipaul dismisses the query with a deceptive casualness:

> It would have encumbered the dedication. If I had said ‘last but not

> the least [. . .]’ The truth is that for the last forty years, I have been attached to India. I am much more intellectually there than I am at Trinidad. It has been a long time since I went to Trinidad, nearly fifteen years. (*Telegraph* 25 Oct. 2001)

Naipaul’s grievance against the people of Trinidad is that as the colonial people on the margins of empires, Trinidadians lived in ignorance of their own history and nurtured a fantasy of the world beyond the island: “We could never be convinced of the value of reading the history of (Trinidad) which was, as everyone said, only a dot on the map of the world. Our interest was all in the world outside. [. . .]Our past was buried and no one cared to dig it up” (*Passage* 43).

The idea of Trinidad as a barbaric, backward place certainly had a strong impact on Naipaul. He has often directed barbs at his homeland, provoking much of his unpopularity among the postcolonialists: “If you’re from Trinidad”, he told Eastley in 1987, “You want to get away. You can’t write if you’re from bush” (*JCT* 1999 *Summer*: 37-38).

He cannot reconcile himself to the fact that his country does not have a past. England, where he lives, has a rich past; India has a glorious past, even though it remains ‘an area of darkness for him. ’ Compared to these countries, Trinidad is a non-entity. The original inhabitants of the island, the Caribs and the Amerindians have become extinct during the successive conquest of the island by England, Spain and France. This discovery leads him to further humiliation.

Philip Langran, another critic of Naipaul, does not condemn him for leaving the country because his literary works take the themes from that country. The country has never gone out of his mind. Langran writes:

> However, later works confirm that, in terms of subject matter, Naipaul would by no means escape the island. These include a fictionalised account of Trinidadian politics, (*The Mimic Men*, 1967), a history of the island (*The Loss Of Eldorado*, 1969), autobiographical writing (*Finding the Centre*, 1984) and recent fiction that revisits his place of birth (*The Enigma of Arrival*, 1987), and (*A way in the World*, 1994). Furthermore, Naipaul's distinctive voicing of personal involvement and detached observation characterises his work as a whole; the tension between the isolated individual and the potentially engulfing, imperfect community is a recurring theme. (*LC* 35:1-2, 2000: 48-49)

Nevertheless, Naipaul is not an irresponsible ironist as some critics think. On the contrary, it is his commitment to truth as well as his belief in the novel as a form of social inquiry that makes him reveal the shortcomings of his society as well as other colonial societies. He may seem cruel and unsympathetic but it is only because he is annoyed by the West Indians' appropriation of Western cultural norms, which clearly cannot be theirs.

"India is an ancestral fascination you cannot get away from", Naipaul told in an interview to *India Today*. "His first full-fledged India books -- *An Area of Darkness* (1964), *India: A Wounded Civilization* (1977), *India: A Million Mutinies Now* (1990) -- are homage as well as protest, memory as well as denial, disillusion as well as dirge" (Parker 61).

His explicit intention as stated in his books is to discover his roots and identity from which he has been alienated culturally, emotionally and also by birth. From his childhood, he has romanticised India and on his visit, seeks to realise the romanticised images of the land of his forefathers. He writes with a touch of feeling:

> And India had in a special way been the background of my childhood. It was the country from which my grandfather came, a country never physically described and therefore never real, a country out in the void, beyond the dot of Trinidad, and from it our journey had been final. (*Area* 27)

Naipaul belongs to the new version of Indians, an anglicised model of the immigrant Hindus in the West Indies. He, however, remains an 'outsider' in England also, because he cannot relate to the society culturally and socially. Nor does he belong to India because he is a 'New World' Hindu. He is alienated from India because of his stay in Trinidad thousands of miles away in the New World in a more international environment.

Naipaul comes to India and finds the Trinidadian squalor and corruption magnified in this great nation. The effect on him is profoundly disturbing. His revulsion at so many aspects of Indian life, his almost Swiftian horror of dirt, his fierce rejection of the Indian sense of non-reality, his suspicion -- all these things find ample space in his India books. He is rejecting not only India but trying to bleach out part of his own nature. His books are a kind of metaphysical diary, an effort to shine a western novelist's torch into an interior area of darkness.

Despite Indian media's unseemly scramble to appropriate Naipaul as an Indian after the Nobel, his actual links with the subcontinent are tenuous indeed. Naipaul himself had no personal connections with India until he was thirty. His family's past is part of a 'historical darkness' to him. When he does inquire further into that darkness, on his first visit, the attempt becomes a disaster because what he finds is not what he came looking for. At the end of his new book, *India: A Million Mutinies Now*, Naipaul records his encounter with another young West Indian tourist. Both seem to agree "the Indians in the West Indies are much more advanced in several matters than those in the homeland of theirs" (515).

So, India remains a difficult country for him: "India is for me a difficult country. It isn't my home and cannot be my home; and yet I cannot reject it or be indifferent to it" (*Civilization* 8). His visits to India convinced him that his long cherished dream of a home in his ancestral land had been a folly. In his forward to *India: A Wounded Civilization,* Naipaul records the disappointment thus: "In India I know I am a stranger; but increasingly I understand that my Indian memories of that India which lived on my childhood in Trinidad, are like trapdoors into a bottomless past" (10).

In his post-Nobel euphoria, Naipaul has declared that the changed Indian attitude towards him is the result of his success in educating the Indian people:

> The trouble with people like me writing about societies where there is no intellectual life is that if you write about it, people are angry. If they read the book, which in most cases they don't, they want approval. Now India has improved. The books have been accepted.

> Forty years ago India was living in rituals. This is one of the things I have helped India with. (*Frontline* 27 Nov. 2001) .

Naipaul's insights are not to be trifled with, for despite his stern vision, they are rooted in empathy and understanding. His works on India should remain a valuable record of the land and his concern, the concern of a well-wisher for the India in transition. The strength of Naipaul is the poignancy of Naipaul – the poignancy of a wanderer who tries to go home but is not taken in.

Defending his earlier stance of hostility in an interview with Dilip Padgaonkar for *The Times of India*, Naipaul says:

> I do not have the tenderness more secure people can have towards bush people. [. . .] I feel threatened by them. My attitude and the attitude of the people like me is quite different from the people who live outside the bush or who just go camping in the bush on weekends. (*Times of India 12* Nov. 2000)

The statement proves beyond doubt that Naipaul's denouncement, criticism and attack of his homelands are, in truth, the result of genuine involvement and the desire to help.

From the beginning, he has carried a longing for India within his heart, perhaps an imaginary India which is supposed to be different to the island life around him. When actual experience clashes with illusion, he becomes bitter and the bitterness drips into his perception of many 'wounds', 'mutinies' and 'areas of darkness' in the present-day India. But still he cannot get away from it.

The rationalism of the West Indies has taught Naipaul to find fault only with the malfunctioning of the society and government in India, in his travelogues. He is not so much bitter against the Indians living on the margin of life. He is more concerned about why their lot has not improved despite more than two and a half decades of independence.

From the very beginning, literary aspirations in Naipaul have been quite conspicuous and that's why, he has availed himself of the earliest opportunity to leave for England. Naipaul's fate is similar to that of the other expatriate European writers like Hemmingway, Pound, and Conrad, all of whom had left their provincial town and settled in some metropolis of their choice. Naipaul, too, has had his fair share of initial disappointment with England.

Life in London to which he had looked forward, turns out to be 'sterile' and 'mean'. Landscapes of the mind -- whether ancestral "areas of darkness" or literary or intellectual "dream Utopias" -- usually shock and disenchant when confronted in stark reality. Describing his disenchantment with England, R. Parthasarathy makes a coincidental remark: "A part of me finally died in England. Should I have had the journey at all? It had broken my life in two" (*Times Literary Supplement* 2 Sept. 1994).

Life in London, cuts away the past completely from Naipaul too. Like many others before and after him, it breaks his life into two. Like the water hyacinths cut off from their moorings, he seemed to be adrift in his new surroundings. But the same suffocating surroundings take him to the zenith of his career because it is in London that his dreams of becoming a writer materialise into reality. So he makes Ralph Singh say; "So the present residence in London, which I suppose can be called exile, has turned out to be the most fruitful”(*Men 248*). It is in England that he discovers himself and reviews and reconstructs the meaning of life through his writing.

The yearning for a personal space has always remained at the heart of Naipaul’s fiction. Writing becomes his identity and rescues him from sterility. As Sudha Rai says, “The writing of his story becomes the very means to endure the terror, shipwreck, abandonment and loneliness of his situation” (126).

Ian Hamilton in his interview with Naipaul asks him how he feels about popular response to his writings. Naipaul’s reply runs thus:

> I’m touched by it. Without London, without the generosity of the people in London, of critics and editors, one would have been trying to write in a wilderness, without any sort of tradition behind oneself. It would have been an impotent occupation. So that has mattered to me. (*TLS* 987-89)

Naipaul’s confession in these lines authenticates the statement that despite his being an outsider in London and suffering from rootlessness, he has struck roots on a literary and cultural level. London is his literary and commercial home. He has finally created new roots for himself.

The greatest hurdle for Naipaul has been the lack of rapport with the channel of mass communication in which the Americans consider him British and the British regard him as a foreigner. An added limitation is that he is a colonial; he could not write like an English or a French writer. Naipaul acknowledges, “because as a colonial, I was to be spared knowledge; it was to live in an intellectually restricted world, it was to accept those restrictions. So step-by-step, through seeking each time only to write another book, I eased myself into knowledge (*Barracoon* 27).

In Naipaul’s career as a writer, the central issue has been to find a centre for his literary pursuits and for his creative activity in general. The quest finally crystallised into his creative stabilising and his arrival on the English literary scene seems to have resolved the central enigma of his life. And he has succeeded in creating a tradition in 20th century literature.

The displaced colonials of his early novels cherish England as the land of opportunities and escape to England meant an escape from all miseries. But in *Mimic Men,* London is exposed for what it is-- a mirage, a mere illusion--because for its hero, the ‘promised land’ turns out to be equally fraudulent. With all the experiences and affairs in this city, Ralph Singh seems to be completely disillusioned regarding the sustaining powers of London, “the great city, the centre of the world, in which fleeing disorder, I had hoped to find the beginning of order” (*Men* 18). One understands at once that it is Naipaul speaking through his character. The idea of constriction is expressed almost exactly by Singh when he says: “My life has never been more physically limited than it has been during the last three years”(*Men* 251).

While it is quite true that Naipaul has an admiration for the positive features of the Western culture, he is at the same time very clear- sighted and emphatic about his own distance from it. In his interview with Ian Hamilton he says:

> London is my metropolitan centre; it is my commercial centre; and yet I know that it is a kind of limbo and that I am a refugee in the sense that I am always peripheral. One’s concerns are not the concerns of the local people. (*Jussawallah* 41)

He does arrive in England with an ‘enigma’ yet carves out a niche for his own creativity and moulds it to a shape successfully. The process has been so successful that today, not only has he become acceptable but is also laden with numerous prizes for literature from England. He has acquired an international status and has become a part of the fast growing ‘internationalism’ in life and literature though Naipaul has categorically stated that he remains an outsider in England in spite of his prolonged stay.

Naipaul has lived in England for almost fifty years, and still seems to experience the social and cultural vacuum of an exile, in spite of acquiring citizenship in the alien country. His prolonged stay and his marriage with an English lady, have given him only an expatriate feeling till date and the feeling of rootlessness still persists within him. In several of his books, he has expressed this sentiment.

Describing his stay in England, he observes: “I do not sign petitions. I do not cease to feel that this lack of interest is all wrong” (*Barracoon* 16). He admits that he lives there with a ‘Budhist detachment’ unable to utilize his immediate environment for creative purposes.

London remains his base, the land of his physical stay but it is his journey to various countries and to Trinidad and Tobago, the land of his birth, which give him stuff for creative work. The journeys may be physical or imaginative. A writer like him has a dual existence, living as he does simultaneously in two worlds – the one to which he cannot and does not wish to return and the other, the land of his actual stay, which he cannot or dare not leave. The hold of the country of his stay exerts a strong pull and glues him to it and the lure of his home remains a distant dream.

Naipaul travels to England from Trinidad hoping never to look back, yet distant lands continue to enchant him for various reasons. If he had resorted to flight from the creatively sterile Trinidad, he is once again compelled to undertake 'flights' from his alienness in London for creative freshness. The outcome of those reverse flights from the metropolitan centre of London to the Third World countries is the corpus of his Travel- Writing.

Naipaul is now an established writer of repute and has twenty- seven books to his credit, which cover a vast range – autobiography, fiction, travelogue, short story, journalism, criticism and that peculiar blend of all, a kaleidoscope of disparate streams, truly post-modern. Today, as a veteran writer of seventy- five, with half a century dedicated to literature, Naipaul has reached that stage when the focus shifts from the story to the story-teller.

The purpose of this study lies on the problems of the former colonized people both during colonization and formal decolonisation as portrayed in Naipaul's novels. Hence an attempt is made to approach his novels primarily from the point of view of the themes. Since this research deals with the presentation of the postcolonial situation in Naipaul's novels and his multi-layered vision, it has been limited to cover only those novels that demonstrate an immediate and obvious concern with the former colonized societies. Although Naipaul's output of non-fiction is prolific and closely interlinked to his fiction, yet his non-fictional works have not been taken up for discussion in a direct manner. However, materials are taken from them, wherever considered relevant, for the purpose of discussion.

While dealing with the works of a versatile genius like Naipaul, it becomes difficult to restrict oneself to the novels alone. Therefore, keeping in mind their thematic significance, works like *Flag on the Island*, *In A Free State*, *Enigma of Arrival*, and *Way in the world* have been given a cursory look-up as they are either a blend of different genres or are mainly autobiographical in nature and do not portray colonized societies directly. *Magic Seeds*, Naipaul's latest novel has not been taken up for discussion as it was published after the layout of this research was discussed and planned.

CHAPTER II

MERGING OF THE PAST AND PRESENT

Naipaul's work combines the accuracy of empirical fact and the objectivity of psychological insight. They furnish a coherent view of the human predicament in all its paradoxes and contradictions. His creations are the testament of the desperate faith of a man without ancestors and traditions, who is seeking to arrive at a point of rest in his own mind through the power of art. As Alistair Niven writes, "Naipaul's disassociation from Trinidad and the corresponding incapacity to find a spiritual home elsewhere has been the basis for almost all his writing" (22).

In *Middle Passage*, Naipaul remarks that, "Colonialism makes for a many-sided ambiguity in terms of human conduct and behaviour, and the secret of the fictional art lies in bringing to bear upon these ambiguities, an attitude of creative detachment beyond the accidents of geography, history and ethnicity" (61).

There is perhaps no other modern author whose own biographical presence looms larger in his or her texts than Naipaul. His readers find that the authorial presence occupies the centre stage in all his writings. It is always his own life that he puts on display in his writings. It is a broken ethos that he, as a philosopher of culture, displays and defends in them.

As the son of Indian immigrants to Trinidad and a member of the highest caste, a Brahmin, Naipaul, the writer, is the narrator or reporter who does not perceive a displeasing situation as merely a sensation. His empathy concerning the people he encounters on his travels and whose lives and cultures he describes is invariably broken and as a result, his reactions are not always palatable. He has also chosen not to shy away from voicing certain debatable opinions on culture rather vehemently and often inconsiderately.

By any canon, Naipaul has been a victim of peculiar circumstances. Being born and nurtured in an alien culture, it is no wonder that he grows up despising his immediate surroundings. His personal life testifies that his forefathers had never tried to strike roots in the foreign soil of Trinidad and had remained outsiders there, more by choice than by chance because they could never ‘let go’ ofIndia, the land of their origin, from where they emigrated.

Naipaul was born in an Indian Hindu Brahmin family in Trinidad. When he left India, his grandfather tenaciously carried with him to Trinidad, the Indian cultural ethos in which he has been brought up and matured. A first generation Indian immigrant in Trinidad, the man has always meticulously ensured the observance of Hindu rituals in the family with utmost piety and devotion.

As a young boy in Trinidad, Naipaul used to find the profoundly Brahmin modes of life in his home disheartening and embarrassing. The early initiation into the highly pious and ritualistic way of a typical Brahmin life has left its mark on this third generation Indian expatriate making him intolerant and impatient. It leads him to say rather helplessly about the culture and life in

Trinidad: “It still horrifies me that people should put out food for animals on plates they themselves use, as it horrified me at school to see boys sharing plates, local iced lollies, as it horrified me to see women sipping from ladles with which they stir their pots” (*Area* 47).

Being an Indian uprooted from the land of his ancestors, Naipaul naturally has a complex personality. The only means to fathom Naipaul’s approach to life and culture is to take into account his triple identity as a Trinidadian, Indian and a Westerner, along with his expatriate sensibility.

In the West Indies, there appears to be conspicuous gaps between the two sub-cultures of African and Indian due to the differences in origin and background. As a result there arises tensions and conflicts between the two communities. In *Middle Passage*, Naipaul has recorded it as, “When people speak of the race problem in Trinidad, they do not mean the Negro- White problem They mean the Negro-Indian rivalry” (87).

The situation of Indian immigrants in Trinidad has been that of one living a double exile. Uprooted from their ancestral country, the Indians have been imposed on an island that already had substantive population of African immigrants living there for centuries. Being sandwiched between the white rulers and the Black ruled, the coloured Indians have been subjected to untold miseries and hardships on several counts. The conglomeration of different cultural, ethnic and religious groups has created confusion and the younger generation grows up with the belief that relief is possible only through death or flight.

For the younger generations who are not directly exposed to their mother-culture, the loss of roots results in de-ritualisation and eventually in the loss of its cultural content. Consequently, the Hindu society in Trinidad and elsewhere in the West Indies is reduced to caricature and loses its significance completely and irrevocably.

Since his boyhood days, Naipaul has found himself unable to conform to the orthodox religious atmosphere of the family. He regards himself as an agnostic and an unbeliever. The failure to accept the inherited identity creates in him an urge to explore its alternative even when he had been a small boy. Surprisingly, he is still engaged in finding the centre he has longed for since the very beginning of his literary career.

To Naipaul, the urge to emigrate is the logical culmination of the inability to take root and form part of the distinctive culture in the West Indies, which according to him is:

> An ugly world, a jungle, where the picaroon hero starved unless he stole [. . .] where the weak were humiliated; where the powerful never appeared and were beyond reach; where noone was allowed any dignity and everyone had to impose himself; an uncreative society, where war was the only profession. (*Passage* 73)

The Hindu past, which he has inherited in his blood, weighs very heavy on his consciousness and in one form or the other, it keeps him battered and pre-occupied all his life. His situation is identical to those of his protagonists who too confront the problem of acceptability in a culturally, ethnically and religiously new milieu. One may believe that he forces his heroes to go through similar self-doubt and confusion, perhaps, as a means to purge himself off the disillusionment which has been his lot.

As the prodigy of a multiple heritage, Naipaul assesses Indian life and culture with the Hindu norms of *karma*, *dharma* and *moksha,* though the yardstick he uses for his assessment happens to be the western norms of individuality and freedom. As a result, his research and evaluation are that of an unbeliever Hindu totally ignorant of Hinduism. His views and attitudes are smeared with Western scepticism and he finds himself unable to grasp the real essence of Indian religiosity and as such some of his comments on Indian culture and on the Indians living in Trinidad are harmful and wrong. Yet his feeling is not contempt but pain at the plight and predicament of the East Indians in Trinidad.

The loss of self in dysfunctional culture is the characteristic trait of personality for most of Naipaul's Indian characters. Ganesh, Biswas, Ralph Singh, Salim and Willie Chandran are examples of individuals who reveal a tendency to neutralize their inherited traits and acquire the characteristics of their immediate mixed culture. But the reader finds that their efforts go waste most of the times.

For Naipaul, his own attempts at the neutralization of inherited traits and the acquisition of his immediate culture prove to have met with failure too because all his life he has remained a Brahmin in the West Indies, a West Indian in London and a cosmopolitan prodigal in India. This restlessness, which he has not been able to shake off, may be traced partly to his inheritance and partly to his acquired Western attitudes of mind and temperament. Hence, as a historical recorder of the cultural scene, whether in India or in the West Indies or in England, his comments may appear to be biased and incorrect at times.

At the same time, he seems deeply impressed by certain Hindu institutions like the four *ashramas.* It is evidenced by its artistic appropriation in his *Mimic Men*. Ralph Singh meticulously goes through the different stages in life towards his final transformation into a recluse, which is equivalent to *Sanyas* in the Hindu philosophy. Numerous references to diverse scriptural and philosophical ideas also lie randomly scattered in his writings. It should be said in all fairness to Naipaul that despite his overt prejudice against India, he has never distorted the Indian philosophical or religious content, which again may be due to the influence of his staunch Hindu background.

One cannot but catch the depth of his Hindu self in Naipaul's writings. He has himself admitted that his Hindu upbringing has left in him a vague sense of caste and a horror of the unclean, which he has not been able to discard. The intact continuation of the Hindu base in childhood and youth among the Indians in the diversified culture of Trinidad annoys Naipaul at times. The deep-rooted Hinduism and the pervasive sense of the old Hindu traditions in him is brought into the open when he exclaims that he is outraged to hear that in Bombay people use candles and electric bulbs for the Diwali festivals and not the rustic clay lamps which his family still used in Trinidad.

Yet to be one with India and merge with her millions still remains an impossibility for Naipaul, though it has been a constant ache in him. He carries his wounded soul with him wherever he goes, only to rediscover the agony of his own solitude in the Third World. In his Foreword to *India: A Wounded Civilization,* he refers to the beauty of sacrifice, a significant feature of Indian spirituality. At the same time he laments about its progressive erosion into a culinary ritual. He remembers how “the once meaningful rituals have now become empty forms, the flickering memories of a vanished world” (10). It is this world and these memories that he has been chasing after in his fictional and non-fictional works.

Throughout Naipaul’s work there is an emphasis on the importance of history both private and public. The identity crisis that his characters face is due to the obliteration of their past and those who eventually overcome the crisis are the ones who have recovered their past or somehow managed to impose an order on their histories and moved on in life.

In an interview given to *New Indian Express* in 2006, Naipaul declares: “People in the cities are turning their backs to Indian civilization. They want green cards. They want to migrate. They want to go to England. They want to go to the US” (*New Indian Express* 9 Nov. 2006).

Naipaul’s attitude to culture has always been progressive. It is the Third-World’s blind mimicry of the West that he cannot stomach. He lashes out at the shortcomings of Third-World societies, which have their roots in their traditional cultures, but are unmindful of them in their blind following of the West. Naipaul has always regretted the lack of a native tradition in Trinidad quite frequently in his writings. He records this agony in the words: “The English language was mine, the tradition was not” (Naipaul 24).

A close study of Naipaul's major creative works shows that with long years of generation gap, the homesickness or the urge to strike roots has gradually diminished in him. This fact is borne out by the comparative attitudes of Biswas, and Anand in *House for Mr. Biswas*. While the older generation, like Mr. Biswas, is content to settle down in the place and assert its identity by building a house, the younger generation of which Anand comprises, is on the lookout for the earliest opportunity to leave the place and explore alternatives.

This urge to emigrate can be seen as part of the urge of the West Indian to discover an identity, a place and a purpose in their hitherto meaningless existence. One may find that, by leaving their islands, the protagonists of Naipaul allow themselves to become part of a modern world in which identity and values are subjected to a continual, battering strain.

In his early novels that form the Trinidad tetralogy – *Mystic Masseur*, *Suffrage of Elvira*, *Miguel Street* and *House for Mr. Biswas*, Naipaul deals predominantly with the East Indian experience in the West Indies. He presents a poignant picture of the East Indians' struggle to preserve their identity in an alien environment. But one finds that the characters ultimately succumb to the influence of the dominating culture except perhaps for Mr. Biswas, who fights a lonely battle against the odds. The compromises that these Indians have to make in order to come to terms with the alien environment and forge an identity for themselves in the multi-cultural society form a long and painful process, and is touchingly retold by Naipaul in his works.

Denouncing Multi-culturalism as a bad, destructive idea, he says, "Multi-culturalism is a very much left-wing idea that gained currency about twenty years ago. It’s very destructive for the people it is supposed to defend” (New *Indian Express* 9 Nov.2006). He cites the example of Britain where, he says, there is a large immigrant population. Many of them bend the laws to be able to stay in England. “They wish to do that, but at the same time they don’t wish to enter the culture. I think it is parasitic and awful” (*New Indian Express* 9 Nov. 2006).

His experiences and knowledge of the Third World societies, which have come out of the bondage of the Colonizers, make Naipaul even more disappointed and cynical about their future. He declares that freedom has not helped them towards progress; freedom has taken them back to barbarism and a life of mimicry, devoid of values and morals.

Prison is an important presence in some of Naipaul’s works. One finds that the characters in Naipaul’s *Miguel Street* live in the shadow of an actual prison. Naipaul’s idea is to suggest that the street and Trinidad, the land itself, are both so limiting that they deserve to be seen as wider prisons in which characters find themselves trapped. In spite of its universal resonance, especially in the author’s ability to create characters that are alive and breathing, *Miguel Street* rightly implies that Trinidad is like a prison because of its remoteness and its past of colonialism and slavery.

The characters in *Miguel Street*, many of whom are remarkably creative, are frustrated because they live in a community which lack standards and does not value creativity. The book implies Naipaul’s theory that freedom can be achieved only by escaping to a country that has not been stunted by colonialism because its boy-narrator also accomplishes such an escape in the end.

No actual prison appears in *In A Free State*. Such a place is quite unnecessary in its world, because Naipaul attempts to suggest that for the Third World societies, the whole world and indeed freedom itself function as the perfect prison from which escape is not possible, except perhaps in death.

In A Free State does not solicit sympathy for a select few. Naipaul uses the work to prove that he concerns himself with all mankind, even the insane and the perverted. Just like in his other novels, *Free State* does not try to pinpoint the oppressor of mankind. The author rather suggests that the enemy is not simply slavery or colonialism. It is life itself and more specifically, mankind itself. It is as if with age Naipaul’s cynicism and contempt for the colonies have minimized considerably.

A third generation Indian in Trinidad, Naipaul, like his protagonists, has never been at ease with his identity as a Trinidadian. In *Middle Passage*, he observes that a society like Trinidad invariably forces its inhabitants to conform to the mediocrity of the place. Such an indifferent society neither recognizes talent nor nourishes it to flourish. Placed in such a situation, the talented and the gifted ones among the colonized have no other option. They are faced with the dilemma of either escaping from the society or fighting against the social order.

The Trinidad Indians define themselves in relation to an absent centre, India, the homeland they have been forced to leave. They regard the new land only as a point of transit, a temporary sojourn, at the end of which they would return to their places of origin -- a tragic dream which eludes them all their lives as is enunciated by Naipaul’s numerous characters.

In Middle Passage, Naipaul emerges as a bitter critic of the Trinidadian society that had produced him. While living in Trinidad, he had known only the overwhelming conviction that he must get away. According to him, the examination and analysis of his reaction to Trinidad began only during the writing of *Passage*: “I had never examined this fear of Trinidad. I had never wished to. In my novels I had only expressed this fear; and it is only now, at the moment of writing, that I am able to attempt to examine it (43).

It becomes evident then that during the years of childhood and early youth that he spent in Trinidad, his antagonism has been built up as an undefined rejection of the society he saw around him. The rational grounds for the rejection formulates only after he reaches the safe haven of England, when distance gives him the perspective and the calm to assess his own feelings. The impetus behind the first four books is in fact precisely this desire to understand the society that he has rejected. It is only later that he realizes that this is the society to which he is related by ties. A close observer of Naipaul detects that, no matter how vehemently he repudiates it, he has never succeeded in totally severing these ties in spite of the passage of time.

It would be wrong to find fault with Naipaul for his rejection of his birthplace. His unequivocal negation has something to do with the nature of the Trinidadian society itself. It is an immigrant society consisting of various races, religion and cliques. In his own words, it is an “unimportant, uncreative

[and] cynical society" (*Passage* 43). The society, a fragmented one, comprises heterogeneous people, whose presence in the island, according to Naipaul, appears to be purely an accident of history.

Commenting on the artificial nature of the society, Naipaul observes: "The West Indian colonial situation is unique because the West Indians in all their racial and social complexity are so completely a creation of the Empire that the withdrawal of the empire is almost without meaning" (*Passage* 152-53).

Naipaul is fairly irked at the West Indians because, instead of going back to their own innate culture, the people continued to mimic the colonizers even after their exit. At the same time he is also aware that the West Indians lacked a traditional culture, like the one the East Indians enjoyed. But he is strongly convinced that only a distinct past and history can produce progress and culture. In the absence of a common West-Indian identity, nationalism is impossible. This lack of a rich past and history, according to Naipaul, is the incurable malaise of his native land.

A reading of the colonial history of the West Indies points to the near decimation of the aboriginal inhabitants and also the enslaving of the Negroes at the hands of the colonizers. The Negroes brought to the West Indies as slaves are perhaps the worst affected victims of colonialism. Naipaul is of the opinion that the greatest damage done to the Negro by slavery is that it taught him "self-contempt" (*Passage* 71). The West Indian Negroes of African origin have not chosen to retain their traditional culture. Instead, they allowed the imposition of the colonizing culture and readily acquired the language, religion and even the attitudes of the Europeans. In Naipaul's opinion, they even share the European's contempt for the Africans.

In *Middle Passage*, Naipaul describes Trinidad as "unimportant, uncreative, cynical", a country in which "power was recognized but dignity was allowed to none" (43). It is not only Trinidad, his birthplace, which he detests. It is the region as a whole, the whole of the West Indies that Naipaul feels compelled to criticize harshly.

The East Indians differ from the Negroes in their colonial experience because they arrived on the West Indian scene much later. They land on the island armed with the background of a well-established civilization. Most of them happen to have migrated from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh and so share a common language and tradition. They are thus able to maintain a distinct identity. But for the generation born in exile, life in the foreign soil proves almost fatal, as they have not been blessed with the insularity of their forefathers, who went there from India. For the new generation, India loses the sense of reality that it had conveyed to their ancestors.

The feeling of rootlessness and the lack of a strong cultural and spiritual background take its toll on the later generations. The impact of urbanization gradually exposes them to the influence of the dominant Creole culture in Trinidad, thus breaking the hitherto impermeable insularity of the Indians. Thereafter follows the painful process of acculturation. Nevertheless, unlike the Negroes, who completely forgot Africa, the East Indians, "never lost pride in their origins" (*Passage* 88). As Naipaul points out in *Finding the Centre*, the life of the clan gave the East Indians, "a caste certainty, a high sense of the self"

(49).

One may observe that with the passing of years, the degradation of their culture together with the severe restrictions imposed on their life pattern in the colonies, begin to reduce the East Indians to virtual non-entities. In works like *Miguel Street* and *House for Mr. Biswas*, Naipaul deals sensitively with the East Indian's struggle to find a foothold in the New World. Deeply involved in the colonized people's quest for identity and order, Naipaul makes these aspects central to his novels.

In addition to the observance of traditional customs and rituals, Naipaul's works show that the East Indians in Trinidad, have also retained their belief in preordination. Naipaul, endowed with Western views and attitude to faith and religion, could never digest such superstitious beliefs. In *House for Mr. Biswas*, Bipti, Biswas's mother, tells her father about her unhappy marriage with Raghu. But the father consoles her by saying: "Fate; there is nothing we can do about it"(15). It is also evident in the narrator himself who makes the following observation about Bipti's father: "Fate had brought him from India to the sugar estate, aged him quickly and left him to die in a crumbling mud hut in the swamp lands" (15). This kind of a blind faith in one's destiny renders the East Indians incapable of reacting against injustices or in trying to better their impoverished lives.

The Hindu theory of *Karma* expounds faith. It preaches faith in religious rituals and principles. There is no room in the philosophy for individual freedom or reason. Faith and devotion are basic virtues and remain unquestionable. The Hindus have been trained for generations to accept religious matters without doubt or challenge and much to his chagrin, Naipaul has experienced the consequence of such a blind acceptance of fate or *Karma* among his clan in his native land.

In his analysis of India in *India: A Wounded Civilization*, Naipaul points out that the Indian concept of *Karma* is debilitating because it endorses a religious response to worldly problems. It only encourages passivity and leaves no scope for social enquiry. In Naipaul's view, the Indian view of perceiving is negative, because Indians "do not directly explore the world; rather they are defined by it" (103). Naipaul holds this defect of vision to be ultimately responsible for Indians' intellectual second-ratedness especially in Trinidad.

At the same time Naipaul has been able to discern a gradual change shaking the solid insularity of the Indians in Trinidad. The intrusion of the alien environment is already making itself felt. In his novels one reads about occasions when the Trinidad Hindus are forced to change their traditional customs like cremating their dead. In *House for Mr. Biswas*, Raghu, Biswas's father, is buried, though Biswas's own cremation, "one of the few permitted by the Health Department" (590), is conducted on the banks of a muddy stream.

Naipaul could foretell the changes that gradually creep into the solid foundations of the Hindu religious beliefs among the East Indians settled in Trinidad. It becomes evident in the inter-caste marriages that take place in the Tulsi family in *House for Mr. Biswas*. When a suitable girl could not be found for Sekhar, her son, Mrs. Tulsi readily agrees to settle for Dorothy, from a "laxly Presbyterian family, with one filling station, two lorries, a Cinema and some land" (230).

The change in the priorities cannot be missed. Caste, till then the prime consideration, has now been replaced by pecuniary factors. Sekhar's marriage takes place not in any temple, but in a registry office after which, instead of bringing the wife home, it is Sekhar who leaves Hanuman House for his wife's family and not the bride joining the family of her husband as is followed in the Indian culture and tradition.

In the early sections of *House*, the Hindu social order predominates. Yet, a close reading reveals that the process of disintegration has already begun to set in due to forces operating both from within and outside the East Indian society. Naipaul convincingly establishes this out. He points his finger at the slow and unwelcome intrusion of other faiths like Christianity into the hitherto unalloyed fortress of Hinduism among the Indians in Trinidad.

In the character of Lal, a low-caste Hindu converted to Presbyterianism, he makes an oblique reference to the threat posed by such conversions to other religions. Though Naipaul, the modern thinker, supports such changes in religious attitudes, still the Brahmin in him is unhappy at such intrusions that end in the inevitable loss of inherent faith and culture.

Naipaul's awareness of the changes that creep into the East Indian society of Trinidad is most evident in *House for Mr. Biswas*. In the novel, one is exposed to the rigidity of the Hindu social order being threatened from within by inter-caste marriages like the one between Biswas' sister Dehuti and Ramchand, a low-caste Hindu. At the time, such marriages were strongly disapproved of, and the couple, being ostracized by the society, had to shift to Port of Spain. Later, however, such marriages become socially sanctioned as is evident in the arranged marriage between Tulsi's son Sekhar and Dorothy. The disintegration is also visible in the casual inter-racial liaisons like the one between Bhandat and a Chinese woman. Though these are peripheral cases, yet, they signify the beginning of the process of disintegration of the rigid norms which have governed the East Indian society till then.

Perhaps at this stage of his career, Naipaul has not been able to come out of the rigid Brahmin frame of mind. But the later novels abound in inter-caste alliances and affairs like the ones between Ralph and Sandra in *Mimic Men*, Willie Chandran and Ana in *Half a Life*, the affair between Jimmy Ahmed and Jane in *Guerrillas*, Sarojini and her German husband in *Half A Life* and so on…Yet one discovers that he does not elaborate on his protagonists' sexual exploits and one fails to find anything verging on vulgarity in his novels. He, most of the times, shies away from presenting intimacy between man and woman, another trait of his orthodox upbringing.

As far as Naipaul is concerned, he has never found it easy to disregard the values he has been nurtured in, in both his personal life and his writing career. Though a British citizen, he has not shaken off completely the taboos associated with sex and marriage, a trait typically Indian in character. The following extract corroborates this observation: "I can't write sex [. . .]. I would be embarrassed even at the moment of writing. My friends would laugh. My mother would be shocked and with reason" (*Times Literary Supplement* 2 Sept. 1994).

It is at the same time surprising that Naipaul shows no respect or regard for institutions like the extended traditional family, prevalent in the Indian milieu. He seems to suggest quite vehemently that they are equally responsible for perpetuating dependence and passivity by suppressing individuality and are major deterrents to the development of personality.

In *House*, Naipaul describes a joint family similar to the one in which he grew up. It is significant to note that Biswas's development into an individual in his own right is directly proportional to the process of disintegration of the Hindu social order and the extended family culture of the Tulsis. As the inherited order passes away, the self evolves into a new entity that is more viable to the new environment. Biswas has to be shorn off his cultural identity and completely depersonalized before he could evolve into a new entity. It is this new and independent Biswas who succeeds in constructing his own house finally.

Naipaul is forcing Biswas into the "zero state of his cultural identity" (231), when in spite of being a Brahmin by caste he is sent to the Sudra world of The Chase to work as a labourer. The cultural void he experiences there leads to his nervous breakdown. However, this shearing of the cultural identity has been necessary to prepare Biswas to face the changing environment, where it is no longer possible to remain tethered to traditional caste roles.

It is the same condition of experience that Naipaul forces all his heroes to go through in order to establish an order in their lives. It is the same experience that he himself goes through when he cuts himself off from the oppressive and debilitating atmosphere of Trinidad into the freer and more urbane life of England and finds success in his career.

A study of Naipaul's characters having cross-cultural prejudices demonstrates that they lack the warmth of human relationship and are always suspicious and apprehensive. Naipaul blames it on the postcolonial mimic society which denies its men the necessary self-confidence and also faith in others. One can see how Ganesh in *Mystic Masseur* and Ralph Singh in*Mimic Men* fail to confide even to their family. Ralph even waits desperately for his English wife's departure once he realizes that Sandra cannot give the stability he has been looking for when he entered into a relationship with her. He laments:

> I had nowhere to go; I wished to experience no new landscapes; I had cut myself off from that avidity which I still attributed to her. It was not for me to decide to leave; that decision was hers alone [. . .]. But I was waiting for her to leave. (76-77)

The concept of family life in the Indian sense of the term seems to be an impossibility in the rather stifling atmosphere of the joint family. In *Mimic Men,* Ralph and Sandra find it equally difficult to stay with their sophisticated European friends in Isabella, after they leave Ralph's mother's home as she does not accept his marriage to the foreigner. This want of roots and want of trust in oneself and in others is the bane inherited by many of Naipaul's characters.

The agony of unacceptability and helplessness probably dry up human emotions. Consequently, Naipaul's protagonists behave indifferently even in situations which demand their love and affection. There is a poignant situation when Biswas turns his back on the cry for help of his wife:

> He was on a hill, above, brown- green hill. It was hot but the wind was cool and blew his hair. A woman was at the foot of the hill. She was crying and coming to him for help. He felt her pain but didn't want to be seen. And the woman-- Shama, Anand, Savi, his mother--kept coming up the hill. He heard her sobs and wanted to cry to her to go away.(*House* 272)

It must have been a very painful experience for Naipaul to disclaim completely the values which had been once very dear to the heart of his forefathers. But the bane of a society like the Trinidad colony is that it renders people inhuman and unsympathetic. One is able to deduce that all his characters, beginning with the rustics in *Miguel Street* upto the sophisticated lot of *Half a life* are all essentially good at heart and humane but their circumstances make them behave crudely and inhumanely.

Even at the creative level Naipaul exposes the impact of an expatriate sensibility. By belittling his Hindu side, he attempts to counter and neutralize his innate love for India because with the passage of time and also due to various other factors, he could not settle down in India and "rediscover my identity by losing myself in the million of India" (*Civilization* 253). The rather naïve comment exposes Naipaul's vain endeavour to measure Indian ethos against English and West Indian norms. No wonder then that his Indian trip was doomed to generate disenchantment, though with the passage of time, his vision of India has certainly undergone a tremendous shift in focus.

Naipaul articulates his dilemma rather poignantly in these lines, "India is for me a difficult country. It is not my home yet I cannot reject it or be indifferent to it; I cannot travel only for sight, I am at once too close and too far” (*Passage* 68).

It is, however, encouraging to note that with his maturity, Naipaul has outgrown his earlier apathy to Indian situation and his *India: A Million Mutinies Now* is milder in tone and compassionate in contention. It is apparently an expatriate’s attempt to locate his centre because “of all places, it is India that engages Naipaul, the country his family left behind, a hidden but capital source of customs and ideas, a place of pride and shame” (*Buchan* 34).

Naipaul raises controversies by his frank and candid observations. His special interest and concern with India lend a particular significance to his writings. Though a West Indian, he is acutely aware of his roots in India. In *Enigma of Arrival*, he appears to labour under the dilemma to call Trinidad, the adopted land, his home or to use that term for the forsaken land, India. Hence, “His full-fledged India books, *Area of Darkness*, *India*: *A Wounded Civilization* and *India: A Million Mutinies Now* are homage as well as protest, memory as well as denial, disillusion as well as dirge” (Iyer 87).

Naipaul makes no secret of the fact that life in London to which he has looked forward, has turned out to be sterile and mean, much to his disappointment. Living in London only intensifies his awareness of his distance from the English culture. So he sets out in search of the ‘lost’ land, once again, first in Trinidad and then in India. Unfortunately, his unexpected visit to Trinidad in search of an anchor has merely vindicated an early childhood vow to distance himself from the island.

There remains only India, the land of his Brahmin ancestors. His disappointment with India may be due to the fact that he took with him his own childhood memories of an old India, the Brahmin land of rituals and myths. This past holds an unshakeable emotional charge for Naipaul. From his childhood he has romanticized India and on his visit seeks to realize the romanticized image of the land of his forefathers.

Naipaul is shaken by the condition of squalor and the crude ways of a fundamentally crude society to which he returns again and again in a compulsive way. India's defecating masses, her filth, her pollution, her poverty and confusion shock his Brahmin sensibility. His attitude has something of a Brahmin's horror of the unclean.

The description of four men washing the steps of a seedy hotel in Bombay shows Naipaul's moral comment on Indian caste system:

> After they have passed, the steps are dirty as before. You cannot complain the hotel is dirty. No Indian will agree with you. Four sweepers are in daily attendance and it is enough in India that the sweeper attends. They are not required to clean. That is subsidiary part of their function which is to be sweepers, degraded beings, to go through the motion of degradation. (*Area* 79)

Caste in India is a medieval tyranny. Indians selfishly use religious sanctions to psychologically imprint and preserve the fundamental status quo of the lower castes. Caste system supports the Indians in abolishing the essential sense of self-esteem and personal dignity of the low-born. Naipaul, in spite of his Brahmin background refuses to understand or accept the religious callousness of the Indians. Perhaps it is the consequence of his markedly western background. But behind the personal account of anger and hatred, one can easily discern the moral concern and anguish that the concern for India brings to the fore. The anguish is partly due to the overwhelming cultural shock Naipaul received on his visit, despite his preparation through reading and visualizing about India.

In more recent statements, however, Naipaul has been disarmingly willing to acknowledge a positive view of India. Instead of an India that has nothing to recommend as its own, he has been now heard speaking appreciatively of things distinctly Indian, like the textile industry, spices and even Indian music.

In *India*: *A Million Mutinies Now*, Naipaul is able to observe the Indians gradually giving way to new ways of seeing and feeling. He tries to believe that these winds of change may open the Indians into broader visions of their community. Incidents like the South-Indian Brahmin marrying into a different community or Nizar from Kashmir venturing to aspire beyond the valley, thanks to his education and abilities as an accountant, are quoted by him as instances of India awakening to a new beginning.

Amir, the local Raja’s son, brings out explicitly Naipaul’s own views on religion, which have not changed since his Trinidad days. Amir’s father, a Raja, is both a politician and a religious person. The son with his western education develops religious doubts, but these doubts do not smother him because he says:

> I find solace in both ways of thinking—the historical way shows me that human destiny is above this—our sufferings, our little problems. This idea of human destiny shows me that we are really moving towards a better world, in spite of the trouble and conflagration. The religious way teaches me endurance and reconciliation with the divine plan of which this is a part, but with hope and belief in a better future. (381)

According to him “religion could be used to bring about a great change of consciousness -- about the place of men in it –- and also to bring men into action” (381). Naipaul’s own views on religion and caste are not any different. It is the religious fanaticism that he is against.

Naipaul has attempted to show through his various genres of work that most of the confusion and contradictions that he finds so irritating in Indian society are, in fact, the general characteristics of ex-colonial societies trying to find themselves. The West Indian mimicry and the Indian mimicry are the inevitable consequences of historical events. The Black Power movements in the West Indies, the spreading of Islamic fundamentalism and the anti-English agitations in India are all the fumbling attempts of the displaced and dispossessed peoples to find or recover their identity.

Naipaul’s *Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey*, is a general commentary on the societies of the Islamic countries he visited. The book is without doubt, the work of an older, mellowed Naipaul. Unlike earlier times, here Naipaul successfully forges many friendships and adorns the book with quite a gallery of individual portraits.

The chapter describing the meeting with the Indonesian poet Sitor Situmorang is most poignantly reminiscent of Naipaul's own fruitless search for a past. Sitor, like Naipaul himself, has lost touch with his tribal past. Naipaul had once said in an interview "I didn't know who I was" (White 24). Sitor's problem too has been one of self-definition. "He hadn't been able to define himself because he didn't know who he was" (*Believers* 295). Like Naipaul, sitor makes a journey back to his ancestral home. But having recovered the past, Sitor could no longer go back there; "He couldn't pretend to be what he had ceased to be" (296). Naipaul's search for his roots in Trinidad and India also has ended in the realization that there could be no going back.

In the book, the theme of loss is underscored through the presence of a large number of "lost" individuals whom Naipaul meets in the course of his travels. There is the Tamil driver of whom Naipaul writes:

> In postcolonial, Muslim Malaysia, he was squeezed out. He was as much a lost man as Shafi and the other village Malays. And perhaps he was more lost, not having a sense of community or the knowledge of a pure past, not having a faith to turn to, not being able to blame the world, not knowing whom to blame. (248-49)

For all these placeless people Naipaul shows compassion and concern, a shared pain that gives the book an ambience of gentle sorrow, regret and nostalgia. The older Naipaul has definitely acquired a more tolerant and sympathetic vision without losing the clarity and keenness of thought that distinguished his earlier works.

In *Beyond Belief*: *Islamic Excursions among the Converted Peoples*, Naipaul starts with the basic surmise that a Muslim who is not an Arab is a convert. He elaborates:

> A convert's world-view alters. [. . .] His idea of history alters. He rejects his own: he becomes, whether he likes it or not, a part of the Arab story. The convert has to turn away from everything that is his own. The disturbance for societies is immense, and even after a thousand years can remain unresolved; the turning away has to be done again and again. People develop fantasies about who and what they are; and in the Islam of converted countries there is an element of neurosis and nihilism. (1)

Naipaul's account of the Muslim countries like Indonesia, Iran, Pakistan and Malaysia, will drive one to the conclusion that the people of these countries are torn between two worlds—spiritual and geographical--- and that nowhere has history been so badly mangled into a cultural desert as it is in Pakistan, since its estrangement with India. The book reiterates Naipaul's theory that it is history and culture, unborrowed or forced that give strength and solidarity to a nation in progress.

In his *Bend in the River*, Naipaul focuses on Salim, an East Indian Muslim, whose family, though settled in Africa for generations, are still considered as outsiders. Salim, like Naipaul's Trinidad heroes, belongs to a community that is basically ahistorical. Whatever little Salim knows of his past is from books written by Europeans. He is sensible enough to realize that without the Europeans all their past "would have been washed away [. . .]" (17).

Salim has developed the habit of conscious self-assessment because of his western education and quite naturally is able to perceive that his community has fallen behind. Even Indar, his East Indian Hindu friend, arrives at the same insight. He tells Salim, “We are washed up here, you know. To be in Africa you have to be strong. We are not strong. We don’t even have a flag” (24).

In the novel, one reads that Europe has ruled Salim’s world since childhood. Like Naipaul, the London that he comes to is not the London of his fantasies. “It was something shrunken, mean and forbidding” (238). He comes to London for relief and rescue. But he remains confused and his identity remains divided. With Kareisha he acts out his man’s role and finds her affections wonderfully soothing but in the solitude of his hotel room, his old anxieties, added with new ones, haunt him. He describes his dilemma: “the decisions and the pleasures of the day and early evening were regularly cancelled out by me at night” (240).

Salim is reminiscent of Naipaul’s later protagonists like Ralph Singh, Jimmy Ahmed and Willie Chandran. They too meet with similar experiences, affairs and failures in London. As one goes through the life-history of Salim, one encounters this narrator- protagonist of *Bend in the River* to be without Ralph’s penetrating intelligence or Jimmy’s morbid sensibility or Willie’s sexual passion. He is more like his creator. According to Robert Boyers:

> For Salim is at once shrewd and innocent, capable and adrift. From time to time he says things that make us wince, so rapidly can he be influenced to shift his ground. What had seemed at one moment a

> settled conviction, is displaced rapidly by another, and for the smallest of reasons. Determined to look at a friend or antagonist in one way, he suddenly sees something that changes his mind altogether. (*American Scholar* Summer 1981)

One is reminded clearly of Naipaul, his creator, in Salim's shifting attitudes towards people and nations.

As he becomes older, Naipaul's sensibility also becomes mellower. The change in his approach and outlook and his becoming more compassionate have been revealed in his book *Half A life.*

In *Half a Life,* Naipaul introduces farcical elements and tells the story from a Brahmin's point of view. However, the revolutionary in him presents the character of Willie's father as a fraudulent follower of Gandhi with no genuine belief in abstinence and spirituality. Throughout the novel he remains nameless as Naipaul presents him as a trickster comedian. In everything the nameless individual "follows the Mahatma's call" (20) and consequently he marries a woman from the lower caste: "This was the girl I thought I should go and make a declaration to and in her company live out a life of sacrifice" (13). All his life he regards this decision as a magnanimous deed though he despises whole-heartedly the dark skinned woman he marries.

Citing the example of this neo-Gandhian, Naipaul describes with mocking ire, how Gandhi's work is destroyed by his Indian compatriots. Naipaul is annoyed at the fact that the Indians have made Gandhi a saint and have reinterpreted his teachings for their own convenient and domestic use. To reiterate this fact Naipaul introduces the incident in which Willie's father destroys the files at his office out of carelessness and declares his sloppiness to be a heroic moment of civil disobedience.

Willie's father never confronts Gandhi's quest as to how to live one's life, but is always pragmatically and coolly, on the look-out for what would be easy to give up. When legal problems arise out of his professional misconduct, he finds refuge in a temple and takes a vow of silence. Naipaul thus exposes the false pride and masked exploitation of Gandhi by his Indian followers.

In Naipaul's portrayal of the Africans, in *Half A Life* some critics detect a racist tendency. But Naipaul is equally critical of the English society, which he has looked up to. His dislike for the Africans has something to do with his personal experience in Trinidad. Ever since the arrival of the East-Indians on the Caribbean scene, an antagonism had existed between these two races.

Many critics consider Naipaul's early fiction superior to his later work but it is generally agreed upon that the social awareness displayed early in his career, has become prominent in his more recent works.

In his later works, one notices that all the important characters possess or achieve a greater degree of freedom than Naipaul has allowed any of his characters previously. Historical, environmental, economic and social stakes have pinned down his main characters from Ganesh to Mr.Stone, of the early novels. Now these considerations take second place to the bonds imposed by freedom.

According to Naipaul, freedom has caused more harm to these colonies than the foreign rulers. In the *New Indian Express* interview in 2006, he talks about the positive side of the British rule in India. He asserts, "At the end, the British rule in India was very good. They gave a lot back to India. All the institutions now work in India were given by the British. So, the British period was not that bad" (*New Indian Express* 9 Nov.2006).

One can notice the friction of the two sides of his nature, the Indian Brahmin and the English, which introduces not warmth but despair in his writing. This friction contributes intensively to Naipaul's works on India.

His insight into India is far above the judgment of an ordinary traveller. He has the privilege of Indian ancestry. Naipaul's problem is that while he has the sensibility of a Brahmin, he has not been able to acquire the supporting beliefs or complacence or callousness of the caste. His writings on India show that his Brahmin sensibility is overlaid with a Western vision, as a result of which ultimately he cannot find himself a home in India. Landeg White is right when he declares, "His assumptions are too much of the West" (7).

There are times when he expresses exuberantly his joy and exhilaration about India, which must necessarily come from his Brahmin self. At the same time his anger and negativity spring from his inherent Western self. His sympathy and compassion for Muslims are also because of his guilt at the contempt in which they are held by the Hindus and by their being classified as "unclean".

Naipaul's negative appraisal of life in the Third World has met with a lot of controversy especially in the case of novels such as *In A Free State,* *Guerrillas* and *Bend in the River*. Each of these works contains elements of sexual and political violence in an atmosphere of impending chaos, prompting reviewers to conclude that Naipaul finds Third World societies essentially hopeless.

While his rejection of Trinidad has not mellowed in any way, in 1965 he said, “I find the place frightening. I think this is a very sinister place” (*Walcott* 5). He acknowledges too that he owes a lot to Trinidad: “I have grown out of Trinidad and in a way I am grateful to Trinidad I knew as a boy for making me what I am”(*Walcott* 5). It was in India that he realized how conditioned he had been by the multi-racial society of Trinidad.

Naipaul’s father was his guru in more sense than one. Not only did he give his son the ambition to become a writer, but also provided him with the first model of stories that could be written about life in Trinidad. If an angry and anguished response to the half-made colonial society of Trinidad is one of the driving forces behind his work, his childhood years as a member of a large Hindu clan is the other. Both are aspects of his past that Naipaul was for long reluctant to face. He came to terms with them through his writing. In an interview with Nigel Bingham in 1972 he said: “For a long time I’ve been reluctant to face my childhood”(*Listener* 22 Mar.1972).

Naipaul strongly advocates Western individualism and scepticism because he believes that the first leads to active involvement and exploration of the world and the second lends the correct perspective to it. The past of the Third-World countries have been brutal but harping on the past can only cause pain. That is why he advocates, “the past has to be seen to be dead, or the past will kill” (*Civilization*174). Naipaul’s philosophy is encapsulated in Salim’s words in *Bend* , “ The world is what it is; men who are nothing, who allow themselves to be nothing, have no place in it” (*143*).

It is quite true that Naipaul has an admiration for the positive features of Western culture. He, at the same time, is very clear-sighted and emphatic about his own distance from it. In his interview with Ian Hamilton, he says, “London is my metropolitan centre; and yet I know that it is a kind of limbo and that I am a refugee in the sense that I am always peripheral. One’s concerns are not the concerns of local people” (897-98).

Naipaul’s disappointment with England becomes evident in the fact that England no longer features as the “promised land” of the colonized in the later novels but is exposed as a place which is fast falling into dereliction. In the later novels, all the sojourns in England end in disappointment. Even Mr. Stone, the English man, is presented by Naipaul as rootless and disillusioned in his own society. Naipaul suggests that when the world is in upheaval and exile a universal condition, the past can offer no consolation. That is why it is necessary to learn to trample on the past and live in the present.

It seems almost impossible to make a study of a writer’s work without taking an interest in the writer as a man. The names and personalities of great writers are as much a part of the literary heritage of a nation as their works. It is the writer who creates the world in which his characters live out their existence. It is often a world created out of conscious and unconscious memories of the writer, a world, which the writer himself has known in childhood, adolescence and youth. The environmental influences both natural and those of family and society that shape a man’s sensibility are often identifiable in the peculiar traits of a writer’s work.

In Naipaul’s case, what he says outright about other countries, their societies, about his own native island, and about the Indian community there and what he portrays through artistic representation are so similar that the inter-relation of life and literature is unavoidable. Naipaul has very pronounced views on the subjects he has chosen to write about and he has been quite outspoken in expressing them. There is a marked socio-political context to all his writing and his personal outlook and experience constitute the matrix of all his works.

Naipaul is the Brahmin Hindu born in Trinidad, the Indian in ancestry, the Trinidadian by nativity and the English by residence, intellectual training and inclination. He is the product of a distinctive combination of circumstances. He is someone who happens to find the squalor of Trinidad stifling, and the “darkness” of India alarming. London, out of necessity, thus becomes the centre of his world. But faced with a dislocation of an entirely different mode in the city of his dreams, he is forced to concede, “I came to London. It had become the center of my world. I had been misled [. . .]” (*Area* 42).

On being asked in an interview, if he felt like a European, his immediate rejoinder had been, “No, Not at all. One doesn’t have to be one thing or the other. One can be many things at the same time” (*New Indian Express* 9 Nov. 2006).

As an Indian in Trinidad he belongs to a distinctive minority and in

England too, as a Trinidadian, he retains a separate identity. In India when he blends unnoticed in the crowd, he finds it deflating. He perceives then that the sense of ‘difference’ has become a necessary stimulus to him. As he says to Mel Gussow, “One does get addicted to being different” (7). There may be some ground for Naipaul’s wondering whether his having started in Trinidad has not proved a handicap to him.

With the passing away of fruitful years, a wiser Naipaul has been able to realize his indebtedness to Trinidad though he still remains loathe to acknowledge it. There can be no doubt whatsoever that Naipaul would not have been what he is, had he started elsewhere. His sensibility and his achievements could not have resulted from any but the unique combination of circumstances, which has made him a homeless wanderer, a man without a country or a cause, a man whose voice has become the voice of exile.

Many fellow West Indians have acknowledged the truth of Naipaul’s strictures on his native country. They have felt that by putting his fingers on the malaise that afflicts the region as a whole he has done a service to it. They have given him credit for his objectivity and his passion for truth. Naipaul has always been fearless in recording his views honestly, no matter how unpalatable. One cannot but admire the courage that goes with such a stand as he takes.

That Naipaul’s outspokenness should arouse resentment in those who are at the receiving end is not surprising. He has been accused of neo-colonialism and looking down his austere Brahmin nose at the land of his birth. One may call him biased, but it cannot be denied that self-criticism and an awareness of one’s shortcomings are a much better way of tackling the problems facing these societies than indulging in the passing satisfaction of pointing an accusing finger at the former colonial powers.

Naipaul’s own cool reply to those who would accuse him of neo-colonialist leanings is, “A man must write to report his whole response to the world; not because it would be nice to do something for the prestige of his country” (*Evans* 78).

Though he disassociates himself from the outward semblances of Indian community life, something of it remains in him and examining himself now, Naipaul feels that there are certain things in him which can be traced to his Hindu background. “That sense of the difference of people, [. . .] a vaguer sense of caste and a horror of the unclean” (*Area* 32-33).

His Hinduism is an undeniable part of his background, a part of his multiple heritage and possibly the most important influence in the development of his sensibility. His fastidiousness about food, his regret at the decay of old customs and reverences are only some of the traits which can almost certainly be traced to what has been called his “Brahmin Sensibility”.

Beginning with his early stories and political arguments about Trinidad, Naipaul has continued his literary journey with his impressive books on India and other Asian countries, yet he remains a loner and a non-conformist thinker in all his following attempts at trying to understand his origin and history.

One has read about the sniggering in certain areas of the Press and also among the literati, the world over, that it is his anti-Islam stand that has finally brought Naipaul to the notice of the Swedish Academy and resulted in his award of the Nobel in 2001. But an avid reader of Naipaul knows that he has no personal politics and that he has not, till date, catered to any particular wing in politics. His detractors claim that it is his so-called harsh stance on Islam and the African nations in the recent years that has impressed the Nobel academy. But one must remember that Naipaul has never been intolerant of any religious faith or political ideal. It is the Muslim fundamentalism that has raised its head recently in the Third World that he has lashed out against in his travel books and later fiction. Naipaul has always been impatient with fanaticism of any kind. He has never retracted from expressing scathingly his stand against fanaticism and terrorism, be it Islam or Hindu.

In *Beyond Belief*, a major theme that recurs throughout the various sections is the emergence of Islam and its encounter with modern science and technology. He also delineates the destructive outcome of religious conversions of people in some of the Asian countries he visited. His opinion of Islam is a significant one and he believes that Islam can solve some modern questions especially of human relations because “Islam is not simply a matter of conscience or private belief” (1). That his stand against Islam has undergone a tremendous shift is evident in the fact that he has chosen to quote in the same work, an editorial from an Indonesian paper which says, “The development of religious ethics should be intensified in order to counter materialism” (80). The quotation testifies to Naipaul’s softened stance and a better understanding of Islam and his failure to wash himself clean of the Brahmin attitudes of intense religiosity, always at war with too much materialism.

That Naipaul has changed over the years and his bitterness and rootlessness have been replaced by a kind of universal humanism is evident in his response to the interviewer who dares to ask him if he could live in India. His reply, “If you would have asked me this question 50 years ago, I would have said, ‘out of the question’. It would have been impossible. So things are moving and changing, all the time” (*New Indian Express* 9 Nov. 2006), testifies to Naipaul’s progress towards achieving the position of being a universal seer with humanism as his doctrine.

CHAPTER III

NAIPAUL'S CHARACTERS

Human destiny looms large in Naipaul's works and is reflected largely in the primitive vitality of his art. Naipaul's characters represent a world not moved by love but dominated by greed, conflict and futility. As a satirical artist, he aims to provide a kind of hurtful laughter that may offer catharsis but not redemption. Naipaul observes, "My world is more confused than that of the other writers; I've had to fit in as part of the background" (*Drozdiak* 17).

It is easy to recognize that the miseries and sufferings faced by Naipaul's protagonists have natural conformity with the experiences of people all over the world, living in an alien land dominated by a colonized society. Their experience is different from the untold sufferings and thwarted desires imposed by a powerful Fate or Providence which one finds in Hardy's novels. Rather, Naipaul's works show the natural process of a man's life, which is the fusion of both happiness and sorrow, rough and sublime. Literary critic Manjit Inder Singh has drawn attention to the fact that,

> None of the [Novelist's] figures are allowed authenticity or a place in the landscape he inhabits. Indeed, Naipaul sees a necessarily fleeting and absurd wish in them to cross barriers erected by the limitations of colonized culture that [illegible] end can only lead to a falsity of purpose, supplemented or aggravated by a consciousness of unimportance. (236)

The main element of Naipaul’s work is the colonial society of the West Indies built on slavery and exploitation and the crudest of materialism with no political or cultural identity. This particular theme extends from G. Ramsumair at Fuent Grove to Mohun Biswas at Greenvale and is even transposed to South London where Mr. Stone holds up the image so that it stands for the common plight of the entire human state – loneliness and helplessness set against a sterile world.

Naipaul’s world is the world of the helpless nomadic migrants making an escape route from Africa or India to the West Indies, then to England and back again. One observes that even after three hundred long years, there is no society and no system of values in which these characters can take root. It is against such an indistinct and dissolving background that they try to seize upon something to give them permanence so as to arrest the flux in their lives. Mr. Biswas’s desire for a house, Ganesh Ramsumair’s uncompromising desire for success through the goals of education and religion, Ralph Singh’s writing of his memoir in order to put his life in order, Mr. Stone’s scheme for the aged, Willie Chandran’s shuttling from one country to another and his sexual exploits with various women, are nothing but the attempts to escape the inevitable.

So, the disappointment, frustration and disillusionment that become inevitable for Ganesh Ramsumair in *Mystic Masseur*, Mr. Mohun Biswas in *House for Mr. Biswas*, Mr.Stone in *Mr.Stone and the Knights Companion*, Ralph Singh in *Mimic Men* and Willie Somerset Chandran in *Half a Life* to name a striking few, are recorded by the author in a detached and analytical manner making him a powerful exponent of the Third World reality.

Writing about his world, Naipaul once remarked, “I begin with myself, this man, this time; I begin from all that and try to investigate it. I try to understand it. I try to arrive at some degree of self-knowledge and it is the kind of knowledge that cannot deny any aspect of the truth”(7). Autobiography, thus, provides the raw material for all of Naipaul’s novels.

At the same time, Naipaul also acts as a sensitive ironist. He distances reality from facts and character from action and presents his characters as individuals. Thus Ganesh, Biswas and Ralph Singh are not as much revealed through their actions but are projected through the action of an unveiling irony, which implies both detachment and sympathy. In Naipaul’s fiction, individuals are presented as prisoners of their own egoism. His protagonists are all intensely self-centered and self-enclosed individuals who resist the reciprocity of other human beings and are therefore inclined to be distrustful and even paranoid.

This chapter attempts to analyse the minds of a handful of Naipaul’s characters who bear a close resemblance to their creator. They also lay bare his anger and frustration against the Third World societies and simultaneously share his hopes and aspirations for the unfortunate people who live an uprooted, meaningless life in them. Only in Naipaul’s fiction, can one easily encounter people like Ganesh, Ralph Singh, and Willie Chandran who live discontented half-lives in their homelands and flee in search of newer pastures at the first opportunity. The background of his novels are the West Indian colonies, though in *Mr. Stone and the Knights Companion,* Naipaul shifts his locale to England and also exposes the myth about England being the land of milk and honey. Like the author, all his characters run away to the metropolitan centre, only to experience greater discontentment.

Naipaul focusses on the lives of particular individuals in *Miguel Street* which incidentally gives way to a broader focus on the East Indian Community, as a whole, in his first published novel *Mystic Masseur*. Distinguished by its alienation from the larger society, the community of *Mystic Masseur*, shows the socio-cultural openness to other cultural influences, which is typical of the African communities in the West Indies. The novel takes place entirely within an East Indian community in transition from feudalism to capitalism. The text examines Ganesh Ramsumair's progress to prominence from masseur to mystic and to the position of an MBE (Member of the British Empire), one of the highest honors a colonial subject could hope to achieve.

Mystic Masseur is a novel written primarily to illustrate a thesis with the characters chosen to support a comic but intellectual framework. It is an account of a typical aspirant to power and prestige, finally gravitating to politics as the supreme possibility. Naipaul emphasizes Ganesh's assertiveness of character and his alertness to opportunity, indicative of a greater sensitivity to his environment. Ganesh dominates easily in an environment that is mostly lethargic and easy-going. He is the prototype of Naipaul's instinctively successful men, who know when to move on.

Naipaul has no personal political commitment as a travelling writer but he has a first-hand experience of the nature of political twists and turns in the Third World countries. The knowledge offers him a unique opportunity to model the characters of this novel after such aspirations in politics. The book's charm also lies in its autobiographical elements in that its lead character Ganesh echoes Naipaul himself as a struggling writer dreaming of writing books.

M*ystic Masseur* is set in Port of Spain in the rural area of Trinidad where the Indians lived and worked. It is a comic study of life in Trinidad in the face of the postcolonial rise of politics that smacks of self-deception and centres on the meteoric rise and metamorphosis of Ganesh, the protagonist. Pundit Ganesh Ramsumair of Fuent Grove starts off as a teacher, tries to become a masseur in the family tradition and goes on to become a well-known psychic and faith-healer. The Hindu community in Trinidad considers him their leader and elects him to the Legislative Council. He is finally honoured with an MBE and travels to London as a colonial Statesman changing his name to G. Ramsay Muir.

The author takes delight in depicting the character of Ganesh and does it with gusto and vividness. The advent of the western institution of democracy with its noble humanism and liberalism also creates the required political hero, but in the context of the Trinidad world, what transfigures out of it is only an anti-hero. Underlying the surface comedy lies a deep sense of hurt which Naipaul and several thinkers like him may have felt, as they viewed the tragedy being enacted in their own home-lands.

At the Government Training College for teachers in Port of Spain, Ganesh " was taught many important subjects and from time to time he practised on little classes from schools nearby. He learned to write on a black board [. . .] " (23). Within a few words, Naipaul quietly ridicules three topics – the courses taken in the colleges of education, black board training and the improbability that practising on small select classes will groom teachers. A few pages later, he once again mocks the reality of local education through Ganesh's words: "If you leave the boys alone, they leave you alone" (25).

Naipaul's Ganesh is an opportunist, whose central motif in life is to bring success to himself by defrauding others, though not in any sinister way. His ultimate prosperity as a politician is humourously grounded in his early failures as a masseur and mystic. As a writer, his works instead of being informative or inspiring appear to be a clever means of exploiting a credulous populace.

The boy-narrator in the novel, is also the biographer of Ganesh and writes about him with timely comments and juxtaposition and humorous deflation. Naipaul uses him to reveal, very cleverly, the absurdity of a society that has pronounced Ganesh a hero. The narrator is an intelligent observer. If he frequently appears to be going along with the accepted views of Ganesh, it is not because he is taken in, but because he is delighted and intrigued by the fraudulent hero. As such, he explores the whole situation with his tongue-in-cheek manner and does not hesitate to convey the full flavour of his delight. It is the pose of Naipaul himself who invariably relishes the contradictions he is exposing.

Strangely enough, all the qualities of Ganesh, the hero, are not really virtuous or heroic but they are the most indispensable and strictly suitable for any individual to succeed in the Caribbean society during the transitional period between the disappearance of the older values and the appearance of a new cultural loyalty and standard. One is able to observe that there is obviously a physical and intellectual poverty in the midst of plenty.

At the same time Ganesh is not presented as a mere trickster hero, clever enough and unscrupulous enough to turn his back on all moral standards. He is shown as perfectly attuned to his times. He is a hero because the contradictions of his society are expressed and heightened in himself. He wins the readers' sympathy because he is not an outright fake and there are some genuine human qualities in him that deserve commendation. His generosity is evident in his treatment of Ramlogan, his father-in-law. In spite of the quarrels between them, Ganesh treats Ramlogan hospitably, which warms Leela's heart towards him:

> Leela had tears in her eyes. 'Man, is the second time in my life you make me feel proud of you'. She leaned on him.
>
> He didn't push her away.
>
> 'The first time was with the boy and the cloud.
>
> Now is with Pa'. (202 –3)

In his autobiography entitled *Years of Guilt*, Ganesh writes that his marriage to Leela was preordained, a work of fate which he knew but never questioned: "I had always, considered it as settled that I was going to marry his daughter. I never questioned it. It all seemed preordained" (*4*6).

However, the boy narrator's account of what actually happened shows that Ganesh accepts the proposal only after Ramlogan has revealed the exact worth of his property. Ganesh obviously achieves success by exercising his wit and intelligence. He thus tricks Ramlogan who deliberately tries to avoid giving a dowry and manages to extract a sizeable dowry from him.

A typical colonized Trinidad Indian, Ramlogan exhibits a tendency similar to the people who are victims of “Cultural Schizophrenia” (Goonatilake 130)--the tendency to legitimize their actions in either cultural frame to suit the demands of the situation. This is how Ramlogan attempts to avoid the traditional *Kedgeree-eating* ceremony during Ganesh’s marriage in order to escape from paying the dowry. He tells Ganesh:

> ‘Is the Shame, Sahib, that eating me up. You know how with these Hindu weddings everybody does know how much the boy get from the girl father…everybody go see what I give you, and they go say, “Look, Ramlogan 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?’. (51)

Ramlogan thus cunningly denounces the dowry system using modern education as a ploy. The same Ramlogan, a little earlier, had denounced education as an evil too: ‘‘Education, Sahib, is one hell of a thing. When you is a poor illiterate man like me, all sort of people does want to take advantage on you’’ (50). However, one knows that it is only one of his ploys to avoid paying dowry to Ganesh. He foolishly hopes that Ganesh being educated and modern in his views might forgo dowry and free him from paying the amount. But Ganesh dashes his hopes by turning the tables on him.

As Ganesh's fortune rises, he is forced to make compromises that lead him to stray from the path of virtue. Both circumstances as well as pressures from the people around him, whose fortunes are tied to his own, egg him on. Thus he is forced to commercialise his profession. He first opens a restaurant, then takes over the taxi business from Ramlogan. Beharry prospers as he makes a considerable profit through the sale of land when the land values rise in Fuent Grove due to Ganesh, the pundit's, popularity.

Up to this point, however, Ganesh has made no major compromise with his basic integrity. But his fall happens when he becomes the President of the Hindu Association by defeating Narayan, his opponent, in a carefully planned maneouvre.

From this point onwards Naipul's satire assumes such sharpness that by the end of the novel all sympathy towards Ganesh is more or less withdrawn though Naipaul allows his pet hero to win it back in the end.

After becoming the President of the Hindu Association, Ganesh contests the general elections of the island and fights, as the narrator ironically says, "the cleanest election campaign in Trinidad history" (199). Since Ganesh understands people of his land inside out, Inder Singh his opponent, even with the glamour of his Oxford degree, stands no chance against him.

As an M.L.C, Ganesh frequently stages walkouts and becomes the most popular man in Trinidad but has not yet come into the notice of the colonial office, which in its reports dismisses him as "an irresponsible agitator" (214). However, when Ganesh, unable to quell the strike in the sugar estates, pins the blame on the communists, his own party, and also declares his determination to fight against them, the colonial office begins to take notice of him. Its reports now describe Ganesh as “ an important political leader” (219). Soon, he is made the representative of the British colonial rule and this finally fetches him the title of M.B.E.

When success comes to Ganesh, he begins to see that advances can in fact be made and accomplished only with correctly thought-out and energetically executed plans. From this point onwards, his success grows and is manifested symbolically by the acquisition of western goods and products. His house expands, he moves into business ventures related to his success as a pundit and finally, the triumph of western civilization manifests itself in the installation of a refrigerator in his house full of Coca-Cola.

His path to Westernization culminates in the acquisition of the more striking name of G.Ramasay Muir. Ganesh’s character and attitude to life change drastically from the primitive West Indian to the sophisticated Western. By this time, Ganesh has travelled far on the road to ‘whiteness’, and his final rejection of his society comes with the change of his name to G. Ramsay Muir. Ganesh’s transformation into a capitalist and mimic man is now complete.

Another equally interesting aspect of Ganesh’s character is his Anglomania. It is made obvious as he hastens to meet Mr. Stewart. The enthusiastic English man claiming to be a Kashmiri Hindu, dresses like an Indian mendicant and is lost in his rosy vision of Hinduism. It is he who transforms Ganesh into a mystic. “ You must write your thoughts”, Mr.

Stewart said. “They may help other people. You know, I felt all along that I was going to meet someone like you” (41). Ganesh is overwhelmed and reciprocates to their relationship by dedicating his autobiography to “Lord Stewart of ChiChester/Friend and Counsellor/of many years” (42). The absurdity of the whole issue can be appreciated when one remembers that Ganesh had met the English man only twice before.

The novelist exposes Ganesh’s literary pretensions too. He presents Ganesh as sick with self-love and given to tall talking. For example, his conversation with his wife, “How much book I buy last week, Leela?”, asked Ganesh, to which his wife replied: “Only three, man. But they was big books, big big books. Six to seven inches altogether” (15).

Writing is the only means Ganesh has for imposing some sense into his chaotic world, though at that point in his development he does not grasp the implications. The acts of writing and reading open up a new world of thought for Ganesh and increase his understanding of his own world. It is because he had to know about the past before he can investigate and explore the present that he develops an interest in practical psychology and in Hindu philosophy. He understands that an understanding of English Empiricism and Hindu metaphysics becomes indispensable for his future undertakings.

The mythology of the East is combined with that of the West as Ganesh attempts to save the life of Hector, an African boy who believes that a cloud is following him. Ganesh converts his bedroom into a study in which he places a picture of goddess Lakshmi in a prominent place. Below the Goddess, he places a candle and burns camphor and incense. Thus he allows the tenets of

Hinduism and Christianity to merge. The combined strengths of both worlds are used to exorcise the demon from Hector, so that the child can become psychologically liberated. Thus, in one bold stroke, Ganesh makes a final break with his feudal past by liberating a young boy from the crippling superstitions of the past. After this he promptly acquires his new name G.R.Muir, Esq., a symbol of his new identity.

Mystic Masseur presents the picture of the West Indian society, its crises and challenges in a systematic way. As M.K. Naik points out, “Naipaul’s main aim in *Mystic Masseur* seems to be to exploit the comic absurdity in the lives of the transplanted Indians in the West Indies” (1-2). So he makes his protagonist bring together the symbols and knowledge of the various cultures of Trinidad – Hindu, Moslem, and Christian, modern and traditional. Ganesh even uses English, local dialect, Hindi and a smattering of Spanish, according to circumstances. He is the hero of the people, an example of the people especially Trinidadians of the Indian Diaspora, remaking themselves, in ways that are necessarily crude, brutal and comic.

Yet Ganesh wins sympathy because he is not an outright fake. There are some genuine human qualities in him that deserve commendation. For example, his attitude to religion. It can also be traced to Hinduism’s tolerant stance:

> He was no bigot. He took as much interest in Christianity and Islam as in Hinduism. In the Shrine, the old bedroom, he had pictures of Mary and Jesus next to Krishna and Vishnu; a crescent and Star represented iconoclastic Islam. ‘All the same God’, he said. Christians

> liked him, Muslims liked him, and Hindus willing as ever to risk prayers to new gods, didn't object. (139)

The blend of the East and the West in Ganesh makes him " a sharp character". In *Middle passage*, Naipaul observes: "Trinidad had always admired the 'Sharp Character', who, like the sixteenth century Picaroon of Spanish literature, survives and triumphs by his wits in a place where it is felt that all eminence is arrived at by crookedness (78).

It is this aspect of the society of Trinidad that Naipaul has tried to capture in the character of Ganesh. Naipaul's major preoccupation in the novel is the disintegration of the East Indian community and the identity crisis that emerge out of it. The novel throws light on the crucial role played by Western education and the cultural disintegration of the East Indians. Western education created a duality in their lives. This duality is clearly evident in the character of Ganesh who follows the traditional profession of a mystic but wears western clothes and makes use of western Science to cure his clients.

The story of Ganesh comes through a dual perspective. On the one hand, there is Ganesh's own account of his successful career and on the other, there is the boy narrator's perspective, which contradicts Ganesh's version. Being the author, as well as critic, Naipaul becomes an alter ego for Ganesh, his mystic masseur. Naipaul's underlying delight in the character communicates itself to the reader, and one finds oneself relishing the mix of naiveté and charlatanism, simplicity and artfulness, genuineness and duplicity in Ganesh, hailing him as a hero because of his trickery, rather than his success.

In the character of Ganesh, Naipaul very satisfactorily presents the problem of reconciling two conflicting views of life. It is the dilemma that he often refers to in his novels. The infernal struggle the colonials invariably have to face in the continuing war between tradition and Westernization. During Ganesh's early career as a masseur, it appears as if, events simply happen to him. He remains passive and makes no effort to order or control them. He even marries Leela Ramlogan because her father has decided that he should. His attitude is mildly fatalistic, justifying his lack of initiative and success by reference to God's will, a typical Caribbean view of life.

The success story of Ganesh is really the story of the disintegration of the East Indian community, which under the conflicting pull of the Eastern and Western worlds makes the final choice in favour of the western civilization. The reader ends up with the feeling that it is in Ganesh Ramsumair that Naipaul is able to meet his alter ego as he makes him go through all the inevitable roles one is doomed to enact, in a crude and rustic island like the Caribbean and has convincingly used him as a pawn to present all the striking and biting views he harbours, against the land of his birth.

While Naipaul has produced several works, it is *House for Mr.Biswas,* his magnum opus, that has given him name and fame indisputably. The novel deals primarily with the protagonist's struggle to establish himself in a hostile environment through the ownership of a house and also with the decline of Hindu culture under the impact of Westernization. Like Achebe, Naipaul too feels greatly concerned about the subordination of the Eastern culture to the Western, but unlike him, Naipaul oozes satire and cynicism to present his point.

Naipaul makes no attempt to present Mr. Biswas as a conventional heroic figure. In fact, it becomes apparent that the protagonist in *House for Mr. Biswas* partakes many of the traits of an existential hero. As one accompanies Biswas in the journey of his life, one realizes that Biswas is at odds with the world around him. He is like the modern man, absolutely alienated from society, and believes that there is no room for human values in a world where each individual has to struggle and suffer. Mr.Biswas, like Joseph Conrad's Jim, and like Naipaul's own Mr. Stone, lives in perpetual fear of insignificance and alienation. He chooses, at every step, the best step available to him but soon finds that he has been living in a world of illusion. And though he endeavours to find reality, it always eludes him.

Biswas's perpetual quest for a house as home, conceptualizes the challenges and anxieties experienced by the diaspora. A house of his own, in this sense, constitutes for him a sense of belonging. This disturbing sense of exile, alienation and uprootedness are the malaise originally experienced by exiles like Naipaul and his father. In an extended sense, the feeling presages the many journeys undertaken by Naipaul himself and his arrivals at no fixed destinations.

For Naipaul, his father is the pivotal figure in his life. It is the ache for his father's frustrated hopes and the desire to atone for it in some way, that is seen as the powerful drive in his works, particularly up to the writing of *House for Mr. Biswas.* The story is deeply moving, sad and funny and based apparently on Naipaul's father's life. That the deep feeling for his father is a vital emotional impetus behind Naipaul’s work, is further substantiated by an interview-based article by Mel Gussow who found in one of Naipaul’s note-books, the following lines, “And before I died, before I became so removed from my talent, I wanted to write a book about my father and my background, the anger and terrible ambition, the sense of loss and defeat that made one want to be a writer” (22). Another poignantly revealing line said, “Out of the debris of one life, the career continues through me” (22).

The house in the novel stands for what life has denied to its lowborn hero in a poverty-stricken colony. Throughout the narrative, Mr. Biswas is presented as being haunted by the feeling of instability and oppression since his childhood as he is rendered homeless and frustrated by the accidental death of his father, Raghu. Naipaul gauges the personality of Biswas carefully and minutely. He is irascible and high-strung in disposition, often at fault in his quarrels with his wife Shama and her family. But he is also brave and tenacious and his wit generates a play of humour, which pervades the novel. Though the whole story is comical, it is of a different cast from Naipaul’s early books.

The story points to the tragedy of a man who wears himself out, trying to fight against and finally adjust himself to the profound changes in his society and in his personal outlook and, who, before he is forty, considers his career closed and rests his ambition on his children. Mr. Biswas himself achieves little but his success lies in the fact that he leaves his children in a better position to go on and carve a place for themselves in a changing society. He is the first generation casualty of the tremendous transition in his immediate culture and environment. He begins with nothing and achieves only a little.

There are signs at Biswas's birth itself that his life will be a part of the grotesque pattern of events to follow. Just as predicted, his father dies prematurely. He drowns in a mistaken attempt to retrieve the body of Biswas from a pond, who has actually been hiding under the bed at home. It is predicted that Biswas will grow up to be a liar, a lecher and a spendthrift. Time proves him incapable of lechery; poverty preserves him from extravagance and he is incapable of falsehood since he constantly faces the harrowing facts of his condition. Fate allows him no respite from his sense of littleness, which plagues him all his life.

Mr. Biswas, it seems, is persistent in his desire to comprehend the meaning of existence and make sense of his milieu. It is significant to note that here for the first time, Naipaul illustrates the rebellion of a weak, mediocre man, because writing about the West Indian society Naipaul has always undervalued the quality of rebellion in a world that he rejects as mediocre.

Rebellion in Mr.Biswas is defined by his condition as a cultural, psychological and social orphan. Biswas assumes that because he is oppressed, he can be justified in his actions. This assumption enables him to justify some of the less pleasant aspects of his revolt such as kicking the pregnant Shama in the belly as he sees each new child as another trap. In fact he develops nausea at the idea of birth itself. "Almost immediately he began to hate her. Her pregnancy was grotesque; he hated the way she sat down; [. . .]. He hated it when she puffed and fanned and sweated in her pregnant way" (274). This nausea never quite abandons him. Once when he threw out Shama, he tells her, " Take your children and go away" (277).

Later on, as he tries his hand at writing short stories, he finds himself a recurrent theme: “The hero trapped in marriage, burdened with a family, his youth gone, meets a young girl. She is slim, almost thin and dressed in white. She is fresh, tender, unkissed; and she is unable to bear children. Beyond the meeting the stories never went” (345). What he wants then, is a cessation of the entire process of birth and hopes for a sexless, sterile world in which he can be alone: “He tried to think of landscape without people: sand and sand and sand; cast white plateau, with himself safely alone, a speck in the center” (267).

Biswas’s greatest crime is to have tried to be an individual. He ignores his in-laws, the Tulsis, who bring pressures on his aspiring individuality. The occasion when he gifts his daughter a doll’s house is enough to understand the relationship or the lack of it within the house. The incident seems to have upset the equillibrium of the whole house. The in-laws retaliate by tearing the doll’s house apart: “None of its parts was whole. Its delicate joints were exposed and useless. Below the torn skin of paint, the hacked and splintered wood was white and raw” (219). Biswas feels that it is he who has been torn apart and surprisingly this encounter only leaves him tired beyond irony and beyond speech. “And suddenly his rage had gone. His shouts rang in his head, leaving him startled, ashamed and tired. He could think of nothing to say” (220).

Though it seems at first that Biswas has finally bowed down before his powerful in-laws, this inner weariness also can be a dimension of rebellion. It appears in the form of a sudden appropriation of silence that mocks the rhetoric of protest. It is the malice at his heart, which paralyses both speech and pre-meditated action. Even at this juncture, Biswas lacks the strength to take the final break from the Tulsis and gains it only at the end when, after another paralyzed silence, he decides to leave Hanuman House for good. Gordon Rohlehr points out that, "Tulsidom, depends for its existence on the psychic emasculation of men and on the maintenance of their sense of inferiority" (189). Biswas, however, refuses to join the herd and adopts a combative stance from the very beginning.

To spite the Tulsis, he joins the Aryans, a group of revisionist Hindu missionaries from India. He uses it as an opportunity to preach against all the doctrines the Tulsis hold dear. Mrs.Tulsi is particularly displeased because Owad, her younger son, is trying to get into the catholic college and she fears that Biswas's involvement with the Aryans may jeopardize Owad's future. As for Biswas, his ambition in life, at this stage, seems to be to thwart his mother-in-law in all her endeavours. For him Tulsidom becomes the miniature form of his society and any fight against them is in fact the fight against the society, as it does not afford a non-entity like him any respectability or self-esteem.

Biswas is also slightly jealous of Owad, who is to leave for England for higher education. When Shama talks about Owad's going abroad, Biswas's response shows his exasperation and anguish, " 'Cambridge!' Mr. Biswas exclaimed startled by the word, startled to hear it so easily from Shama. ' Cambridge, eh? Well, why the hell he didn't go? Why the hell the whole pack of you didn't go to Cambridge? Frighten of the bad food?' "(350).

About this time, the uncertainty and inconsequentiality of his own life begins to dawn upon Biswas. He realizes that he has achieved nothing in life. He reflects, “Suppose that at one word I could just disappear from this room, what could remain to speak of me? A few clothes, a few books. The shouts and thumps in the hall would continue; the puja would be done; in the morning the Tulsi store would open its door” (131).

Biswas’s struggle with society in the form of the Tulsi family continues till the end and is never really resolved. The close communal life of the traditional Hindu family is remarkably conveyed by the author, along with Mr. Biswas’s struggle against it. Fights, arguments and reconciliation abound in all detail as the Tulsi family-life is intricately analyzed. It is a life based on established rituals and sentiments. The hypocrisy and mercenary outlook of the Tulsis, antagonize Mr.Biswas because to accept the Hanuman House and its rule would be to have the soul of a servant and to acquiesce to slavery.

In time, the Tulsi family decays and Biswas’s escape is made easier. As the larger family-ties disappear, those of Biswas’s own immediate family increase in importance; His relationship with Shama, Anand and Savi become distinctly modern by the end of the book. They treat each other as different and equal human beings rather than father, husband, wife and children, their traditional relation to each other. By the time of his final illness, even Shama surprisingly has deserted the old pattern:

> [Mr. Biswas] didn’t now care to do anything against his wife’s wishes. He had grown to accept her judgment and respect her optimism. He trusted her. Since they had moved to the house, Shama had learnt a new loyalty to him and to their children; away from her mother and sisters she was able to express this without shame [. . .] and to

> Mr.Biswas, this was a triumph almost as big as the acquiring of his own house. (168)

Biswas's single-minded struggles to free himself from the suffocatingly tradition--ridden world of the Tulsis have been relentless, though his fight looks like an ordinary man's obscure struggle against overwhelming odds. Throughout his life, he has been trying to seek and assert his own independent identity. When asked by Govind, another Tulsi son-in-law, to give up sign-painting, Mr.Biswas replies: "Give up sign-painting? And my independence? No, boy. My motto is: Paddle your own canoe" (107).

Sign-painting may seem to be a futile act of no importance, but to Mr.Biswas, it is a way of preserving his identity and independence. This very urge finds its complete manifestation in his keenness to acquire a house of his own. And through the ownership of this house he decides to strike back at his in-laws and the society which reject him mercilessly.

Early in life, Biswas had been taught to recite his multiplication tables beginning "ought oughts are oughts" and this idea that "nothing will come of nothing" haunts his life. There are two great obstacles Mr. Biswas has to overcome in order to achieve more than 'ought'. The first is to conquer the fatalistic, passive attitude of his, bequeathed by his ancestors; and the second is to break away from his oppressively traditional society, itself in the process of decay.

The hostility or the indifference of fate is an idea handed down in Mr. Biswas's family. The maternal grandfather greets Biswas's own birth as a manifestation of the indifference of fate, “Bipti’s father, futile with asthma, propped himself upon his string bed and said as he always did on unhappy occasions, “ ‘Fate’. There is nothing we can do about it’ ” (15).

Mr. Biswas spends most of his life struggling against these forces, holding on to his optimism and tenacity and survives, physically and mentally. He lives his whole life, until he buys his own house, in a state of semi-permanency. He is never really at home anywhere and has no stable relation with anyone until late in his life.

Yet, despite this, Biswas has a singularly tenacious hold on life, a refusal to give in, no matter how difficult things are. This tenacity in Biswas, pervades the book and gives it the final sense that Mr.Biswas’s life, though a tragedy, is far from bleak. This comes partly from Naipaul’s own vitality of creation and partly from the clear recognition in the author and his character that his family will survive. This combination of hard-headed realism about his hero and sympathy for his struggle, is effectively conveyed by Naipaul in these lines:

> And now Mr. Biswas began to make fresh calculations, working out, over and over, the number of years that separated each of his children from adulthood. Savi was indeed a grown person [. . .]. Anand was more than half way through college. Soon, Mr.Biswas thought, his responsibilities would be over. The older would look after the younger. Somehow, as Mrs. Tulsi had said in the hall of Hanuman House when Savi was born, they would survive: they couldn’t be killed. Then he thought: ‘I have missed their childhood’. (533)

The character of Mohan Biswas, the puny, insignificant hero with his all-consuming and towering aspiration to own a house, and his pitiable background impart the striking success to the novel. Biswas's complex and insightful story is the story of the community he belongs to. The novel is said to have a direct bearing upon the important modern problem of the "Crisis of identity" (Srinath 33). The crisis originates from the excruciating historical experience of slavery of various kinds. The novel explores the consciousness of the people who constitute a destitute culture and "carry about them the mark in their attitudes and sensibilities and convictions of the slave, the unnecessary man" (Walsh 71).

It is clear that Mr. Biswas's persistent desire to understand life and to assert his identity in a chaotic world have been repeatedly thwarted. Persons like him are not allowed the luxury of stability and identity in the world they inhabit. It may be noted that Biswas himself is aware of his ambivalent position. He tells his son: "I am just somebody. Nobody at all. I am just a man, you know" (279).

This, then, obviously is the fate of men like Mr. Biswas, who are historically displaced and have the misfortune of living in a derelict land. Society offers very little possibilities to each one of them and he has therefore no option but "to balance his personal inadequacies against the contradictions of existence itself" (White 92). His elaborate poses, day-dreams, assertion of self and evasion of responsibility are the result of the cultural, social and psychological nowhereness produced by his position as an untalented second generation Hindu in the poverty-stricken colonial Trinidad. He is most appropriately an orphan. Beneath his self-laceration, play-acting and the assumption of the grotesque mask, lies a fear of the future and of objects and people. “The future he feared was upon him. He was falling into a void and that terror, known only in dreams, was with him as he lay awake at nights [. . .]” (227).

Biswas’s rebellion may be of the small and the weak but his quest is none-the-less worthwhile. He tries to convince people like Govind that his fight is really theirs and his revolt is actually the one they should be making by and for themselves. The purity of motive, truth, instinct and necessity marks Biswas’s struggle against an apparently indestructible system as phenomenal and makes his rebellion an affirmation of universal value.

No one can deny the danger of regarding Biswas as a figure representing the Caribbean predicament. He is strongly individualistic and his limitations quite grave because he has been created by a writer who has a more contemporary sense of the themes of void, loneliness and absurdity, quite prevalent in modern European literature.

Naipaul’s first three novels such as *Mystic Masseur*, *Miguel Street* and *Suffrage of Elvira* end on a negative note with the protagonist’s rejection of their societies. But *House for Mr. Biswas* endorses a positive approach to the problem of displacement. Biswas tries to overcome the limitations imposed on him by putting up a relentless struggle against the forces that try to suppress his individuality. His struggle is a long and traumatic one but he is successful in his negotiation for space and finally fulfills his dream of having a house of his own – a stupendous achievement for a man of such limited and mediocre circumstances. As against the heroes and anti-heroes of Naipaul's novels, who finally reject their society, Mr. Biswas represents the multitudes who endure and make it home almost.

Biswas' ploy to rise above his mediocrity is by inventing things. He does not lose heart and remains firm in his belief that, "He lived in a land where romance was possible" (79). In no other character of Naipaul does one find such a profound optimism and faith in life. Referring to Biswas's unquenchable hope, Kenneth Ramchand observes: "But if Mr.Biswas finds his world a deterrent to ambition as well as engulfing and repulsive, the faith in life with which the author endows him is greater than the fictional character's impulse to escape (204).

Biswas's death is given the least importance in the novel. The emphasis lies elsewhere because Biswas died an accommodated man and has been successful in claiming a portion of the earth as his own thus leaving behind a proof of his existence. It is in the dignity of his death that Biswas's triumph lies.

While Ganesh in *Mystic Masseur* evokes humour and sympathy, his characterization somehow precludes intimacy. But in penning Mr. Biswas, Naipaul has been able to present a hero in all his littleness and still preserve a sense of the man's inner dignity. Viewed against the background of the society explored in Naipaul's novels, Biswas's achievement appears heroic. As Francis wyndham says "*A House for Mr. Biswas* is as subtle and comprehensive an analysis of the colonial situation as anything in imaginative literature" [462).

There is no “ lived happily ever after” end to the story and Naipaul’s form remains uncompromisingly true to his vision of life. Having fulfilled his life’s mission, Biswas is given only five years to bask in his achievement. But in spite of all its tragic undertones, the novel remains the most warmly humane of Naipaul’s works. It has the quality of felt-reality and an emotional resonance that Naipaul has not been able to recapture in any subsequent work.

Mr. Biswas imparts to the readers a taste of the endless struggle of a mediocre individual against the overwhelmingly merciless Caribbean society. As such the book remains intimately attached to its creator as it lays bare a father’s thwarted hopes in the Creole world and the son’s helplessness and anger at his frustrated hopes.

Naipaul’s *Mr. Stone and the Knight’s Companion* is widely recognized as a creative sensation as it appears to be a total departure in theme as well as in setting from the preceding Trinidadian novels. Here, for the first time, he writes about things that he can only observe as an outsider, whereas up to now he had been writing about things he knew in his bones about his own native land. The suburban English setting he creates “ is solid and palpable, genuine in feeling and authentic in details [. . .]” (Walsh 77).

It is no coincidence that the first and the only book Naipaul has written about English characters in an English setting, took shape in the distant Srinagar in India. He has been living in England at the time. Distance from his realm of experiences has always been necessary to him. So he chose to visit Srinagar to bring Mr.Stone into life. He declared in an interview with Mel Gussow, “You’ve got to get some sort of distance between yourself and your experience in order to use it well. I can only write about a place when I am away from it. The experience must be complete and I must be able to look back" (9).

Landeg White sees Naipauls's theme in *Mr. Stone* as " the fraudulence of the big city and the irrelevance of its apparent order" (133). The passage in *Area of Darkness* provides a key to the theme of this novel:

> London remains Dickens' city – how few writers, since, appear to have looked at the city! There have been novels about Chelsea and Bloomsbury and Earl's court; but on the modern mechanized city, its pressure and frustrations, English writers have remained silent [. . .]. It is the theme, in the words of the novelist Peter de Vries, of city people who live and die without roots, suspended ' like the fabled mistletoe, between the twin oaks of home and office' (197).

"Suspended without roots between the twin oaks of home and office", is an accurate description of Mr. Stone's life. The rootlessness that he is vaguely becoming aware of at the start of the book contributes to his disturbance and unease. The same feeling impels him to get married and inspires his scheme of the "Excaliburs". This rootlessness leads him finally into further disillusionment and despair. "There remained to him nothing to which he could anchor himself" (149), is how Naipaul leaves his hero towards the end.

It is clear to everyone familiar with Naipaul's work before and after *Mr. Stone* that he wrote this novel to allow himself to explore from a different angle certain observations he had made about human beings. There is no doubt that Naipaul’s view of mankind has been strongly conditioned by his West Indian background. The character of Mr. Stone, therefore, contains some elements of his favourite heroes like Ganesh and Mr. Biswas. Ganesh, Mr.Biswas, Ralph Singh, Willie Chandran and Mr. Stone are all potentially creative individuals whose environment makes it difficult for them to express their creativity. But while Ganesh and Mr. Biswas struggle against a background without standards or order, Mr. Stone is actually stifled by the rigidness of the very order of his community. The one thing that is common to them all is that all of them desire escape. Ganesh, Biswas, Ralph and Willie from chaos and Mr. Stone from the weight of his ossified order.

Mr.Stone’s life in the London suburb is depicted as placid and orderly. He is surrounded by “ reminders of solidity, continuity and flow” (20). As one reads his history, one perceives that the natural flux of life has not affected Mr. Stone at all. He has been with the same firm, Excal, for thirty years; he has lived in the same house for twenty-four years and takes pleasure in its “Time – created shabbiness [. . .] feeling it right that objects like houses should age with their owners and carry marks of their habitation” (22). In the same vein Mr. Stone enjoys the feeling that he has known his friend Tomlinson for forty-four years. Yet three years before his retirement, one encounters the same placid and contented Mr. Stone as an insecure man, beset with doubts and fears, coupled with a sense of failure and futility.

Surprisingly, at the time of his retirement, Mr. Stone is discovered as feeling rootless as any exile. It appears as if he has begun to have intimations of mortality. Till then there has been nothing to disturb the smooth flow of his peaceful life. But all on a sudden he is “ overcome by a sense of waste and futility and despair” (18). Even familiar sights fill him with unease. His house-maid Ms. Millington, who has been with him for twenty- eight years and has been for him one of the reassuring reminders of the steady and continuous flow of life’s experiences, now strikes him as a woman “ slowed down by age and by flesh which was bulky but not robust”, a woman who “was soon to die” (23).

It is at this juncture, and in this disturbed state of mind that he meets the widow, Mrs. Springer, and marries her as a means of escape from a lonely and colourless life. The name Mrs. Springer is surely meant to be ironic because marriage to Mrs. Springer does not bring renewal of spring in Mr. Stone’s life. At the end of the novel, when he tries to find a personal reassurance in the return of spring saying, “We too will have our spring”, his wife Margaret dismisses the thought as “a lotta rubbish” (116). Mrs. Springer, in spite of her optimistic name, is realistic enough not to believe in the advent of spring in her stale life.

Naipaul’s portrait of this marriage is masterly and unexpectedly sympathetic. It is, in fact, a fairly successful marriage. The initial discomfiture and regret between the couple gradually pass into a relationship based on habit and a getting accustomed to each other so that once Mr. Stone is moved to say: “You are part of me Margaret. I don’t know what I would do without you” (*59*). Like his marriage, which is a passionless coming together of two lonely souls in mutual need, Mr. Stone’s scheme to help the old and forgotten in his office is another attempt on his part to reach out to others. By such a gesture, perhaps he hoped to defy his own state of isolation and rootlessness.

It is on a belated honeymoon trip a year after his marriage that the incident that provoked his humanitarian instincts takes place. He happens to encounter a helpless, retired old man pensioned off from work after forty years. He appeared to be a man reduced to caricature by his loss of position in the world and utterly under the control of the women in his life. The strange man's utter helplessness shocks Mr. Stone and he begins to have visions of his own life after retirement. As a result, he at once decides to do something to ease the pain of loneliness in people of similar predicament. This experience leads him into the one creative act of his life--that of the 'Excaliburs'.

He devices the scheme whereby the retired Excal staff can keep themselves active by keeping in touch with each other. But before his private vision can become official policy, Whymper, his colleague, offers to ' lick it into shape', the phrase used by Whymper himself. In Whymper's hands, Mr. Stone's noble idea becomes gradually detached from the concern and fear out of which it was formed and is turned into a venture in public relations.

Mr. Stone's scheme does find success as expected. It is well – received as it fulfills a need and is effective. But somewhere along the line Mr. Stone himself gets left behind and becomes unnecessary to the working of the scheme. Stone is filled with helpless rage, as he perceives that other people had made his idea their property and they are riding on his back. They have taken the one idea of an old man, ignoring the pain out of which it was born and now he is no longer necessary to them. "Even if he were to die, The Whympers and the Sir Henrys would continue to present Excaliburs. He would be forgotten together with his pain" (225).

He thus feels dissociated from his success. It pushes him down to a feeling of emptiness and darkness. Driven by restlessness and fear of imprisonment at home after retirement, he hopes that he may yet do something serious and valuable. He makes enquiries about the deferment of his retirement. These are stalled with gentle humouring by his superiors. Even earlier he had seen that, though transferred from the library to the office of the new unit as Head, he remained to everyone "a gentle, endearing man nearing retirement, of no particular consequence" *(*127). This absence of "consequence", he sadly encounters wherever he goes and whatever he does. This plunges him into further gloom and disappointment.

Naipaul, in this work, is more interested in Mr. Stone as a human being than as an English man. One finds that when old age and thoughts of death come to Mr. Stone, he reacts with a sense of unease. He becomes snappish and begins fantasizing like all average human beings. And it is only as a desperate bid for assurance that he marries. One is reminded of Eddoe's comments on Hat's sudden display of a weakness for women in Naipaul's *Miguel Street*: "It have some men like that. They getting old and they get frighten and they want to remain young" (161).

Marriage brings only an apparent calm to Mr. Stone's life, disturbed by a sense of void, futility and waste. To him, Time seems to be flying by, devouring his life. "Every ordered week reminded him of failure, of the uncreative years once so comfortingly stacked away in his mind" (58). To counter-act the feeling of futility, Mr. Stone starts living in retrospection and disregards the present. However, he feels a pang of regret for the disregarded present which naturally becomes a wasted past.

He attempts to seek meaning and affirmation outside himself, but neither the marriage nor the scheme, though successful in their own way, can provide Mr. Stone with the comfort he seeks. After the failure – in – success in his attempts to link himself to his fellow human beings he, “saw that all that was not flesh was of no importance to man. All that mattered was man’s own frailty and corruptibility. The order of the universe to which he had sought to ally himself is not his order” (58).

When he comes to regret the sharing of his ‘idea’ with his office, Mr. Stone realizes the truth, “Nothing that was pure ought to be exposed” (118). Exposure merely leaves the pure open to corruption and destruction. In *Mimic Men*, Ralph Kripal Singh too discovers that man’s attempts to align himself with things outside himself in a bid for assurance always end in failure,“ It is so, whenever, moving out of ourselves, we look for extensions of ourselves” *(*22) which is indeed a futile and foolish act as is proved by many of Naipaul’s protagonists.

Andre Deutsch, the publisher, describes the novel as “A ruthless study of the human condition”, in the blurb. There is no comfort or reassurance for Mr. Stone in the novel. There is only a relentless reminder of the imminence and inevitability of extinction. Mrs. Springer complains that he is becoming slower and absent – minded in old age. There are also other signs of his imminent fate that begin to confront him at the time. His friend of forty- four years association, Tomlinson, dies suddenly. Ms. Millington, the housemaid becomes too decrepit to be retained. The old cat, which he had once regarded as an enemy but had later come to have a subtle affection and admiration for, is soon to be killed. These are the sinister signs of change that he has been unprepared for in his otherwise tranquil existence.

Like the tree in the yard, he had begun to associate the cat with spring and renewal. When he learns that it is to be destroyed he feels pity and anger but does nothing to rescue it. With a kind of sad satisfaction he gets used to the idea of saying. " You will soon be dead like me" (142). When he does not see the cat one morning, he realizes that "the black cat, so whole until the morning before, had been destroyed" (142). He is filled with a fear that makes the hair on his arms stand on end. While " The year would soon be racing to its summer height", he feels " left out of this cycle with which just a year ago he had felt himself so happily in tune" (142).

The novel ends with Mr. Stone returning to an empty house and waiting for Margaret. Though the author allows him no hope for the future, all is not lost because one is able to observe that Naipaul grants his hero a bit of faith in people and life in the end. Mr. Stone at the end of the story is left with the faith that " In time calm would come to him again" (160).

The novel begins and ends with Mr. Stone sitting alone in the dark. At the beginning, he is shown as lying in wait for a predatory cat which haunts his house and at the end, he is seated in his study waiting for his wife to return from a shopping expedition. In between is the brilliant episode of the one original idea of his life which is betrayed by the compromises and the incomprehension of the people who use it.

Within this pattern, Naipaul has linked his interest in the struggle between an active and passive role in life and analyses and documents the process of growing old and the relation between ideas and action. The result is a work of considerable complexity. Mr. Stone is himself aware of the complexity of his situation. He saw it in the project of the Knight's companion or the "Excaliburs" as he named it and which had contributed so much to his unhappiness. The only pure moments and the only true moments for him were those he had spent in the study, writing out of a feeling, the depth of which he realized only as he wrote.

Like Naipaul's other main characters, Stone also finds respite in penning down his frustrations as a way of escape from the chaos he finds himself in:

> All passion disappeared, [. . .] all that he had done and even the anguish he was feeling now, was a betrayal of that good emotion. All action, all creation was a betrayal of feeling and truth. And in the process of that betrayal his world had come tumbling about him. There remained nothing to him to which he could anchor himself. (149)

The displaced colonials of the earlier books of Naipaul are shown as cherishing England as the ultimate refuge from all the ills that beset their own deprived and barren lives in their homelands. *Mr. Stone and the Knight's Companion* exposes this as a hollow myth. After living in England for so long and experiencing similar deprivation in a more acute form, Naipaul, through the unique personality of Mr. Stone tries to establish the fact that Man in metropolitan London is as vulnerable and as susceptible to all the pains of living as that of the residents of Miguel street or Isabella, or for that matter, ‘the area of darkness’, India.

Even the seemingly brash and confident Whymper reveals an uncertainty and rootlessness matching Mr. Stone’s. It is similar to the ordeal faced by Willie or Ralph. Stone’s attitude to the young Whymper is one of “a concern that was almost parental and at times was like pity” (108). But, ironically, Whymper envies Mr. Stone, his age: “I wish I were like you, Stone. I wish my life were over. I wish everything had already happened. I can’t bear the thought of having to go on” (114). Thus while the book is about loneliness and fears of old age, retirement and death, Naipaul’s point is that these are the real problems of life itself, irrespective of the place.

Mr. Stone’s perception of the city-dwellers as confined to their separate lonely cells seems to be on par with Ralph Singh’s vision of London in *Mimic Men*. The feeling of emptiness, of being physically lost, which Naipaul describes in *Area of Darkness,* is echoed also in Mr. Stone’s response to the city, “What strange things must happen behind the blank front doors of so many houses! [. . .] with people suspended next to and above and below one another, going through all the motions of human existence” (*53*). *Mr. Stone and the Knight’s Companion,* thus, projects the universal truth that loneliness and rootlessness are fundamental to all men.

Naipaul’s vision in this novel is made explicit through the central character. The inevitable compromises, the tedious routine work and the pressure of other interests, plunge Mr. Stone into disillusionment and his life falls into darkness. There is no comfort for him even in the temporary spurious involvement in the activity of the world in the form of ‘Excaliburs’. Ultimately he finds comfort in the truth that all things in this world are ephemeral:

> He stripped the city of all that was enduring and saw all that was not flesh was of no importance to man. All that mattered was man’s own frailty and corruptibility. The order of the universe, to which he had sought to ally himself, was not his order. So much he had seen before. But now he saw too, that it was not by creation that man demonstrated his power and defied this hostile order, but by destruction. By damming the river, by destroying the mountain, by so scarring the face of the earth that nature’s attempt to reassert herself became a mockery. (158 -59)

Mr. Stone, thus, differs from others in living in a society whose ethos is one of activity, though destructive. His fatal mistake is that he is content to play a role of quiet passivity and finds himself the odd-man out. He is reminded daily of this by the view from his bathroom window, of trees and flowers growing and changing; and by his neighbours, Monster who forever walks around wielding a watering-can and Male, always hanging out of windows, painting or sawing or hammering or running up ladders, making improvements to his den and above all Whymper, whose activity and lust for life are positively frenetic.

It is into such an active and vibrant world that “Excaliburs” pushes Mr.Stone and he is temperamentally unable to cope with it. It is obvious that his distress at the corruption of his idea by action is partly due to his hostility towards any action at all. He is unable to relish all the flashy externals, the pretentious name, the mock-medieval ceremonies, and the favourable publicity that are the work of Whymper. Stone is aware of Whymper's enthusiasm, and is uneasy about being a passive spectator but is unable to change his passivity.

No wonder then, Mr. Stone is disturbed by the coming of spring and the advent of the symbolically named Mrs. Springer erupting into his life:

> Communing with his tree, he could not help contrasting its serenity with his disturbance. It would shed its leaves in time; but this would lead to a renewal, which would bring greater strength. Responsibility had come too late to him. He had broken the pattern of his life and this break could at best be only healed. It would not lead to renewal. So the tree no longer comforted. It reproached. (45).

These are Mr. Stone's thoughts, yet there is no indication that Naipaul disagrees with them. Indeed, the sad but strong emotion roused by the final picture of Mr. Stone in the novel indicates only his agreement, "He was no destroyer. Once before the world had collapsed about him. But he had survived. And he had no doubt that in time calm would come to him again. Now he was only very tired. In the empty house, he was alone" (160).

As one reads the novel, one is occasionally struck by a certain similarity between Mr. Stone and Mr. Duffy, the character in James Joyce's *Painful Case*, who allows his passion for order, routine and an uncomplicated life to ruin not only his life but someone else's as well. Mr. Stone too lives by routine and finds comfort in the simplicity of his life. But, unlike Duffy, Stone is aware from the beginning that the narrow boundaries that he and the society have constructed around themselves exclude an abundance of life.

In fact, Mr. Stone does have sufficient reason to expect that his wife, Margaret, will provide some social and intellectual stimulation to his already dull existence. He is attracted to her because she has the strength and originality to say socially outrageous things like, “ The only flower I care about is the Cauli flower” (11). She seemed to him to be a social rebel who might help him express his own unconscious hostility to socially sacred truths.

Margaret, at the beginning of the novel, is remarkably like Sandra of *Mimic Men,* in her gift of the phrase. As Ralph Singh eventually does with Sandra, Mr. Stone also discovers that Margaret is not what he had expected her to be. Instead of helping him break out of the prison of social routine, she moulds herself after him completely and becomes an extension of his self. Not only does she encourage him to keep up the empty routine of his former life, but also reinforces it by inducing him to undertake other socially acceptable formalities. She pushes him to be the Master to the housekeeper, cajoles him to take up gardening as a hobby, and hosts many dinner parties. These parties at which wine is sipped like liquor are pathetic imitations of the life-style of the higher classes, meaningless and dull to Mr. Stone but to be endured. The only change Mrs. Springer brings about in Stone’s life is that she brings him closer to the black cat.

The cat, like the tree, is another symbol of Nature’s ability to renew herself and to prove her virility and energy. As one thinks back on the novel, one realizes that Mr. Stone’s original antipathy to the cat, which at first seemed like an ordinary idiosyncrasy, is in fact the result of his embarrassment and envy of the cat’s vigour and vitality. It is significant that the war with the cat fades into the background when Mr. Stone is himself more creative. By observing the cat, he comes to realize that its society has cut itself off from the wide world of nature by choosing for it a comfortable narrow little life. But little does he realize that, in his case, it is not nature that has cut him off, but his own doubt whether spring will come.

Mr. Stone acknowledges that Margaret is being realistic when she answers, “I think it’s a lotta rubbish” (116) to his suggestion of a renewal of spring in their lives. No doubt she is, because she, her husband and many others like them have ceased to believe in spring and the value of renewal. Mr. Stone’s yearning for spring is pathetic because it expresses doubt rather than conviction and Margaret senses and understands this since she has no conviction herself. However, the ultimate destruction of his plan in Whymper’s hands means winter for Stone, with no promise of spring. Society has succeeded in exiling Mr. Stone from the universe of Nature.

In his earlier works, Naipaul has written about the problems of trying to be creative in a society which is without order. Mr. Stone makes it clear that creativity is as difficult in a society that is too highly ordered, in which natural responses are replaced by stereotyped social ones. In *Mimic Men*, too, Naipaul presents a situation in which his protagonist detaches himself from both a chaotic and highly ordered society in order to free himself to create an honest work of art.

In *Mr. Stone and the Knight's Companion*, Naipaul discovers in his hero, the rootlessness that matches his own. By projecting on to Mr.Stone, his own problems of assessment, Naipaul lays bare another kind of displacement. Mr. Stone's problem is that he can no longer make sense of the rituals with which he is surrounded. He is a man for whom the gap between the solid world and the inner life has suddenly become too great. The order of a lifetime has come to strike him as mere theatre.

Naipaul suggests the point in a discussion of English fiction in *Area of Darkness*, "[. . .] but in England, where narcissism applies to country, class and self ,[fiction] has been reduced to the image of the bank clerk, always precise, always punctual, who farcically erupts into misdemeanor (207). Mr. Stone's constant uncertainty about the levels at which other people are operating surely echoes Naipaul's own position and angst in England.

Naipaul's preoccupation in the novel is the fraudulence of the big city and the irrelevance of its apparent order. Even in A *House*, escape to London is seen as a solution. But Mr. Stone begins where Mr. Biswas leaves off. All that is shown as desirable in *A House* such as a secure position in an ordered society with a set of dependable modes and conventions is now profoundly questioned. All that Mr. Biswas's house could represent is now dismissed as costume and scenery, because a house even in London, is no substitute for companionship and no shield against death. If Naipaul's other heroes could read the history of Mr. Stone, they would recognize as illusions their dreams of escape to a larger society like London. Mr. Stone, himself an Englishman, appears to be equally displaced and concerned about his identity and security as the protagonists of the other novels of Naipaul.

In the dark hall, when he encounters the kitten, Mr.Stone realizes that he feels no longer antagonistic towards the poor creature and he uses the word ‘Pussy’ almost in a whisper. “Fear blended into guilt, guilt into love” (160). The action helps him to realize and accept “calm would come to him again” (160).

The end of the novel suggests that all is not lost as Mr. Stone continues to associate himself with the activities of the association and the reaction of Ms.Millington, his old housekeeper, suggests that the scheme is after all working well, notwithstanding the various blunders and errors in executing it. Naipaul’s comment on the change in Millington’s condition is quite remarkable, “Whereas before she was an old servant whose inefficiency and physical failings were getting more and more troublesome, now she became precious. She added luster to the establishment” (71).

Mr.Stone and the Knights companion is not a novel of despair but like *House for Mr.Biswas,* it is a novel of the struggle of the little man or the faceless man, to achieve some sanity and order in an ever-hostile environment. In his awareness of his own impermanence and disorder, Mr. Stone somehow acquires a symbolic stature, an archetypal picture of Everyman. The character of Mr. Stone is yet another significant gift of V.S. Naipaul, who invariably accords some kind of recognition and acknowledgement to the achievements of his dramatis personae though they are usually dubbed as “mimic men” in his novels. The book and its hero project truly and convincingly the empty life of its creator in the metropolitan London.

Naipaul's novel *Mimic Men* is about its hero Ralph Singh's yearning and search for order in his life and the eventual achievement of the same. His whole life which is spent moving from one "little bastard world" to another "little bastard World" (122) has been devoted to this search, though he has not always been conscious of it. One meets him first as a foreign student in London living in a household of other displaced persons like him. They live on the fringe of London's reality, wanting desperately to make contact with the city, but finding themselves unable to become one with it.

The story retracts to Singh's school days in Isabella, his native land, which is the first of his 'little worlds'. Singh hails from a family enjoying a privileged position in the society as the island's bottlers of Coca-cola, a foreign product. One sees that in this world, each boy cultivates a fantasy life in order to mitigate the narrowness of his real existence. The second 'world' of Singh is the newly independent Isabella, hamstrung and self-deceiving because of its economic dependence on wealthy countries. The last of Singh's succession of 'little worlds' is that of the hotel room in London to which he retreats as a recluse and tries to put his life in order by writing his memoir. It is as unattractive as all other worlds, but it is a convenient place for him to achieve the detachment that he considers very necessary to him.

In his hotel room in London, as a recluse, Ralph Singh finds in himself something constant, which permits him to transcend the meaningless flux of his various bastard worlds. He is able to make real contact with real things around him for the first time in life because he has at last geared up enough courage to peel off the numerous layers of masks he wears and submit himself to his own scrutiny.

The narrative is in the form of dramatized reminiscences of Ralph Singh, the exiled politician. The novel presents a detached understanding of a violated, colonial society. According to Walsh, the novel explores “the ways in which the conscious individual in a given society establishes modes of mediation between himself and his experience” (60).

The Mimic Men, seems to suggest that Naipaul’s protagonists are what they are because of the extenuating circumstances of chance and environment. They may appear to be enacting their lot in the larger comedy of life with ease and laughter, but truly each one of these poor inhabitants of the Third World scenario is in fact living an excruciatingly painful existence. In Singh’s words,

> It was my hope to give expression to the restlessness, the deep disorder [. . .] the overthrow in three continents of established social organizations, the unnatural belonging 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. (32)

The subject of the novel is thus more than politics or marriage or race. It is nothing less than a vision of disorder, the placelessness and the breakdown of human relationships in the world of the mimic men.

Naipaul, true to form, presents a lurid picture of the West Indian society. It is a society hopelessly disorganized and torn asunder by its conflicting loyalties. Though it is a small world, its issues are more complex than in any normally civilized society. Here "everyone's motives remain unclear" and these "motives and alliances shifted rapidly" (218). The narrator, Ralph Singh, describes it as "a haphazard, disordered and mixed society" (66), a small community with its "upper element crisscrossed with marriages, inbred already" (192).

The people of the island of Isabella, are presented as having "their feeling for the stylish, [and] their tolerance of what they felt to be absurd" (26). So long as they remain in the island, their life is the life of perpetual self-deception and hypocrisy: "We began in bluff", writes Ralph. "We continued in bluff" (208). Those who try to get out of this rut have a greater danger to face. They go out, and get absorbed in "the contamination of the wider world" (197).

The mimic men of the novel, the West Indians, are a "melodramatic race" (52) who has to encounter "its own racial contradictions" (78). They always lead the life of mental and physical violence and this life can hardly be conducive for any creative work. Ralph Singh reminiscences:

> I had ceased to feel I could form part of [. . .] we had all managed to withdraw from this fragmented world[. . .]. I belonged to a small community, which in this part of the world was doomed. We were an intermediate race, the genes passive, capable of disappearing in two generations into any of the three races of men. I visualized it as existing within a walled, impregnable field. (56-7)

Ranjit Kripalsingh or Ralph Ranjit Kripal Singh as he prefers to be known, is the only son of a Hindu family on the fictional Caribbean island of Isabella. He is a man with an uneasy childhood, a disturbed youth, a broken marriage and a failed political career behind him. He reveals himself as a man with a psychological wound that makes him incapable of love or intimacy. Completely narcissistic, he is incapable of forming meaningful or lasting relationships. He has, too, a passion for order and coherence which finally defines itself as an interest in history and impels him to write his own personal history in search of order and meaning in the apparent chaos and disorder of his life. Ranjit Singh, throughout his life, seems to make an effort to stand back and look at his own actions in perspective. Singh gives a flippant account of many events in his life as he examines the fragments of his past and strives to arrange them in a meaningful pattern.

According to Ralph Singh,

> Flippancy comes easily when we write of past pain; it disguises and mocks that pain. But observe how weighted down I was with secrets: the secret of my father, who was only an embittered schoolteacher, the secret of that word *wife,* the secret of my name. And to this was added the secret which overrode them all. It was the secret of being 'marked'. (94)

For Ralph, reality and order are not to be found in his island. "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" (118).

So, he begins to live a suspended life and "was consciously holding himself back for the reality which lay elsewhere" (118).

Ralph Singh does not completely escape the tendency of the East Indians of isolating themselves from the rest of the community. Even within his family fold, the young Ralph experiences a sense of anonymity and loneliness akin to that of his father and of Mr. Biswas and Anand in *A House for Mr.Biswas.* Surprisingly, like Naipaul himself, all these characters find themselves on the fringe of an overwhelmingly dominating maternal family.

Ralph seeks to align himself with his mother's family, shunning his broken, bitter father, but as he grows older, the feeling of estrangement from the family becomes stronger. Ralph's father attempts to overcome his feeling of placelessness and frustration by escaping into mysticism, leading the life of a hermit. As for Ralph, he flees from Isabella. Unfortunately, London to which he flees proves to be in utter disorder. He had pictured London as part of the true, pure world. Now he finds it to be a larger Isabella with its own set of mimic men and its own insecurity. London rudely awakens him to the truth that, "even as I tried to put words to what I felt, I knew that my own journey, scarcely begun, had ended in the shipwreck which all my life I had sought to avoid" (7).

Naipaul does not portray Ralph Singh's experiences as that of a West Indian only but as that of a typical modern man who might be confronted anywhere in this World. Through Ralph, he depicts man as living in constant fear of change, insignificance and alienation. "How right our Aryan ancestors were to create gods. It is with cities as it is with sex. We seek the physical city and find only a conglomeration of private cells. In the city as nowhere else we are reminded that we are individuals, units. Yet the idea of the city remains; it is the god of the city we pursue in vain" (18).

Mimic Men allows the reader to have a clear picture, yet in an embryonic form, of the maladies and evils, which are later to loom large over the postcolonial settings. They are, the tendency of the children to mimic and their eagerness to disown and escape from their past and reality; their tendency to live masked, unreal lives to the extent that they conceal their real names and live with false identities. Ralph Singh gives himself a new name just to sound extraordinary and to compete with Deschampneufs, who has a six-part name. Singh's own name was Ranjit Kripalsingh. He breaks Kripalsingh into two and adds Ralph and starts signing his name as R.R.K.Singh. So he became Ralph Singh at School.

There is much in his shipwrecked life to reckon with such as an uneasy childhood, a painful youth, a broken marriage and an abortive political career. Living alone in the suburban London hotel room, Ralph Singh is trying to salvage what he can from his shipwrecked life. "It is the moment which really closes that section of my life which I have been chronicling these past fourteen months. An absurd moment, but from it and by it I measure my recovery" (250).

Ralph Singh turns to narration as a means of the final emptying of his past self in order to start a new life afresh. He resorts to it as a means to bridge the gap between his Aryan ancestors and the modern West Indian sensibility. He has lived different roles in different worlds, all of which is a combination of the desire to escape and the desire to impose order on his life. The roles vary from that of the Aryan Chieftain of his childhood fantasies, the playboy of London school days, the childless husband who relied too heavily on his wife, the successful businessman, the failed politician and finally the recluse in a London suburban hotel. As he has the capacity to choose his identity precisely, Ralph is able to be in control of the choices he makes in his life.

Mimic Men through Ralph's numerous experiences exposes the fact that London has failed him and that visions of order can only be visions of the past. The society of Isabella that Ralph Singh describes is, "horribly man–made; [. . .] exhausted, fraudulent, cruel and above all, not mine" (50). In such a society, only fragmentation and loss are possible as he discovers after independence. Only chaos can spring from such social arrangements.

Against this background, political independence is perceived as nothing more than the culmination of play-acting on the part of both the leaders and the people. Both are depicted as children and the entire political process as a game. The terrible realization that they could have effected social transformation seems to give the people a sense of emptiness. The narrator, Ralph Singh feels a "terrible" sense of "exhaustion, even distaste: [a] dissatisfaction that nags and nags and at last defines as apprehension and unease" (199).

According to Naipaul and Ralph Singh, colonial people are doomed forever to be pale reflectors of the dominant power. So hopeless is the case of the inhabitants of Isabella that their once vibrant call for nationalism is reduced merely to “an emotive sound” (220) and the people to a state of mimicry. As Ralph Singh concludes, “ 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” (146).

Naipaul reveals convincingly the merciless world of Ralph Singh, and the pain he suffers as he attempts to move from one stage of development to another. Thus the act of writing, which at first is perceived by Ralph as a “substitute for what it then pleased me to call life” (244), becomes the instrument through which he begins “to impose order on [his] own history, [and] to abolish that disturbance [within him]” (243). As he says: “It never occurred to me that the writing of this book might have become an end in itself, that the recording of a life might become an extension of that life” (244).

As he writes, the process of creation begins to take place: “One order, of which I form part answering the other, which I create” (245). Eventually, the very act of writing, despite “its initial distortion, clarifies and even becomes a process of life” (251). The crisis Singh experiences in his personal life is nothing more than the crisis that the individual subject undergoes as the society moves from a colonial to a post-colonial status.

The story is told in the first person by Ralph Singh as the self-searching, self-accusing individual who is keenly aware of the shortcomings of the society he is describing and of his own complicity in helping to create or perpetuate these shortcomings. Ralph Singh is a West Indian and is therefore himself a product of this “little bastard world” that he describes. His problems in finding himself, and in working out his relationship to his island and to the world in general are indeed much complex.

In *Mimic Men*, Naipaul is primarily interested in the development of Singh’s personality as he wrestles with the difficulty of finding reality, conditioned as he has been to settle for mimicry. Naipaul’s technique is to emphasize his growing suspicion of the concrete world and the growing need with which each individual has to isolate and define himself if he wishes to have any permanence in this changing, artificial and synthetic world. The individual must be his own touchstone. Naipaul seems to be asking himself how a society which is profoundly mimic can produce anything which is not itself mimic.

At one time, Ralph flees from the tainted life of his European immigrant friends and seeks the true world that keeps evading him. His feeling of alienation and loneliness only intensifies. He sees himself as “a cell of perception, little more” (27) and restlessly moves from room to room, from district to district, unsuccessfully searching for the ideal world which he conjured up in the classroom of Isabella Imperial. His disillusionment with the inhabitants of London extends to the city itself. “I would play with famous names as I walked empty streets and stood on bridges. But the magic of the names soon faded. Here was the river, here the bridge, there that famous building. But the god was veiled. My incantation of names remained unanswered” (19).

It is at this point when his sense of placelessness and isolation have led him to the verge of a nervous break-down that Ralph resolves to return home to Isabella. “I abolished all landscapes to which I could not attach myself and longed for those I had known. I thought of escape and it was what I had so recently sought to escape from” (31).

This resolution is not carried out until two years later for it is at this point that he meets Sandra, the English girl who becomes his wife. In his state of mental anguish, he is immediately attracted to her strong hold on reality and her tough independence. He takes her to Isabella, and for a short while, his feeling of isolation and anonymity disappears, even though his mother is not wholly receptive to the idea of his inter- caste marriage.

So, Ralph once again resides in the island he had resolved never to see again, with Sandra as a talisman against his former fears of his native place. So absorbed is he in his own emotional and psychological needs that he fails to see that Sandra, too, has turned to him out of a similar need --that she too had wanted, through him, to escape a future of drab ordinariness. In Isabella, she needs his support and guidance but he fails to see her need. Ralph’s mother rejects Sandra and Sandra reciprocates in the same vein. Moreover, Ralph had neither informed his mother of his marriage nor prepared Sandra for the hostile reception that surprises and shocks her.

Once again Ralph resorts to escapism and leaves home. Ralph and Sandra align themselves with a neutral, fluid group which comprises young professional men who have all studied abroad and returned home with foreign wives and are expatriate European and American executives. Eventhough relationships are artificial and insincere within this unanchored group, Ralph and Sandra are able to identify themselves with them.

Not too long after their arrival in Isabella, and after Ralph becomes extremely rich through real estate speculations, petty rivalry and jealousy bring about a strained relationship within the group, which leads to a re-awakening of Ralph’s old fears. He once again becomes aware of the unreality around him and panics at his inability to get at the hard and the concrete where everything becomes simple and ordinary and easy to seize. In Sandra, he no longer has an oasis, for her toughness and independence prove to be the veneer of an equally unanchored, troubled spirit.

In an island like Isabella, the artificial masks that people wear make it practically impossible for any real human relationship to develop or endure. People push others into objects they want them to be, lacking any understanding or regard for their individual dignity. In Ralph’s case, he imagines Sandra to be a positive and strong person because he needs someone like this to prop himself up. But actually she is also an insecure and vulnerable person who hides behind a mask of cynicism and aggressiveness. Their marriage fails and the reasons are obvious. Not even sex provides a bridge or a bond between individuals under such conditions: “We seek sex and are left with two private bodies on a stained bed. The larger erotic dream, the god, has eluded us. It is so whenever, moving out of ourselves, we look for extensions of ourselves” (18).

The failure of Ralph Singh’s marriage is a departure from Naipaul’s treatment of marriage in his earlier novels such as *Mystic Masseur* and *House For Mr. Biswas* in which Ganesh and Leela and Biswas and Shama gradually and successfully develop their loveless marriages into opportunities for learning to respect and understand each other. In *Mimic Men*, Naipaul describes a number of sexual encounters explicitly, something he has never attempted before. The scenes, which are cold and passionless, reassert Naipul's attitude in his earlier books that sex introduces more barriers between people than it brings down.

When Ralph marries Sandra, he had desired her "confidence, ambition, rightness" (69), the very qualities that he sought in the English landscape. But he slowly discovers that Sandra carried her own darkness. Once he perceives her insecurity and sense of placelessness, his love for her begins to dissolve. He remarks,

> She had begun to get some of my geographical sense, that feeling of having been flung off the world [. . .]. She told me she had awakened in the night with feeling of fear, a simple fear of the place, of the absent world. The very things I had once admired in her—confidence, ambition and rightness-- were what I now pitied her for. (69)

When his marriage flounders, Ralph makes one final effort to find an anchorage in the form of a political career. When even that fails, he listlessly abandons himself to the final nothingness in the anonymity of his London hotel. It is Browne, a former schoolfellow, who suggests that Ralph can benefit from his father's reputation as a political and religious leader. Ralph grabs at the idea and drifts into active participation in the political affairs of Isabella, which has been on the threshold of independence. He decides to contest the elections and surprisingly his victory in the election comes with ease.

Browne, the folk leader, who becomes the Prime Minister after the elections, wishes to obliterate all traditions and values which remind the Isabellans of their colonial bondage. But Ralph's attitude is that since the colonial society is moulded by foreign traditions and values, order can be maintained only by retaining them. In the colonial form of Government with which Ralph identifies his grandfather, he sees a type of order appropriate to their circumstances. Of his grandfather he says, " My mother's father was no doubt an undignified figure, an object of easy satire. But atleast in the end, within the framework of our old order, benevolence and service were imposed on him. And he was never totally ridiculous as the men we put in his place" (191).

There is irony in Naipaul's treatment of Ralph and Browne, the upstart politicians. For Naipaul, both Ralph Singh and Browne are mimic men and hence he is sympathetically aware of the situation in which they find themselves. Naipaul writes sympathetically, " The career of the colonial politician ends brutally. We lack order. Above all, we lack power, and we do not understand that we lack power [. . .]. For those who lose, and nearly everyone in the end loses, there is only one course: flight. Flight to greater disorder, the final emptiness: London and the home countries" (*8*).

Ralph Singh quickly learns about the hollowness of his island's independence when he becomes a politician. For a time, he deludes himself with the belief that the smell of the sweat of the masses is a more real source of power than the money of the foreign investors. This leads him to romanticize his role as leader and liberator. He tries to find virtue in the poverty of the people that reduces them again to the level of slaves. “ Whatever was said, the end was always the same: applause, the path made through the crowd, the hands tapping, rubbing, caressing my shoulder, the willing hands of slaves now serving a cause they thought to be their own”   (198).

The mature, self-analyzing Ralph, who is writing his memoirs, understands this:

> So long as our dependence remained unquestioned, our politics were a joke. A man like my father, extravagant as he was, had been a passing disturber of peace. He fitted into the pattern of dependence, as did those who came after him, taking advantage of the limited constitution we were granted just before the end of the war. (190)

Naipaul has presented the predicament in newly independent yet economically dependent countries honestly and sympathetically through Ralph Singh. The reader is made to see clearly the plight of the politician who finds himself condemned by circumstances to play a role which can only perpetuate the bastard status of his little world. Ralph realizes at his own cost that it requires more than flags and politicians to create real independence. “These politicians were contractors and merchants in the towns, [. . .], small people offering no policies, offering only themselves. They were slightly ridiculous figures; stories about their illiteracy or crookedness constantly circulated” (190).

Ralph takes four years to complete the process of education in the ‘School of Politics’ and to get disillusioned. He is gradually made the scapegoat in various affairs of the Government and is disgraced. Many of his acts were misjudged and he is branded by his own people as “a racialist and a radical, a dangerous man, a troublemaker” (223). He detaches himself from his colleagues and only one alternative remains for him-- flight and exile in London. He views his marriage and the political career as parenthetical acts – “aberrations, whimsical [and] arbitrary acts” (183). In the final reckoning, Ralph’s life seems to be an aimless wandering from frivolity and lack of judgment to irrelevance and intrusion, and to inevitable failure. In his own words, “From play -acting to disorder: it is the pattern” (184).

The withdrawal from the metropolitan life in England to the London hotel as a recluse gives Ralph the necessary impetus and perspective with which to look at the world. It enables him to rewrite the history of Isabella and his personal and political experience of exile, with the awareness of the debilitating legacies of colonialism. He succeeds in achieving some degree of order from this process. He gains self-awareness and finds self –enlightenment at least in a small measure.

Mimic Men is a return to the world of the first four novels of Naipaul but with a difference. While the first four are all Trinidad based, in *Mimic Men,* Naipaul makes his fictitious island, Isabella, a representative Caribbean Island. In the earlier novels, England has been presented as the ultimate dream of fulfillment of the Trinidadians, who felt their native land to be incomplete, unreal and denying of opportunities. Some, like Ganesh of *Mystic Masseur*, the boy narrator of *Miguel Street* and Anand in *House for Mr. Biswas,* actually manage to escape to this haven. Their stories are, however, not carried beyond this point and the readers are not told how they fared in the Promised

Land. It is only in *Mr.Stone and the Knight's Companion,* a novel without a single non-English character, that an indirect comment on the dreams of the characters of the four novels is made. Mr. Stone, in spite of being English by birth, is not spared too. Through the varied experiences of his characters Naipaul clearly shows Man to be as vulnerable to loneliness, to fear, to a sense of futility and failure and as doomed to mimicry in England as in Trinidad.

One cannot grudge an author's right to project his own views through his characters and to use his own personal experiences as material for his fiction. But such an attempt invariably ends up in each character being identified with its creator. So, it becomes impossible to ignore the correspondences between Ralph Singh and his creator. The similarities between the two are far too many and far too close to avoid comment. Ideas, sentiments, likes and dislikes have been transferred untrammelled from author to character in *Mimic Men.*

Ralph Singh's intellectual and emotional development and the conclusions he draws about himself, his society and human experience in general are exactly those of Naipaul himself. The loneliness and isolation that drive Ralph to the verge of a nervous breakdown is, in fact, close to Naipaul's own experience in London as described in *Area of Darkness*. "I came to London - And I was lost. London was not the centre of my world. I had been misled; but there was nowhere else to go [. . .]. Thrown more and more into myself, fighting to keep my balance [. . .]. All mythical lands faded and in the big city I was confined to a smaller world than I had ever known" (42).

A similar statement is heard from Ralph, " My life has never been more physically limited than it has been during these last three years" (251). He too feels lost and lonely in the city, "I felt all the magic of the city go away and I had an intimation of the forlornness of the city and of the people who lived in it" (7).

Ralph remarks at one stage, " I travelled from small town to small town, seeking shelter with my sixty – six pounds of luggage, always aware in the late afternoon of my imminent homelessness" (249). His situation recalls Edward Said's comment, "The exile knows that in a secular and contingent world, homes are always provisional" (365).

Like Naipaul at the end of his Indian sojourn, Ralph also realizes that he carries his alienation within himself and that the place is irrelevant. He comes to accept his rootlessness, and his placelessness as final and it makes him a free man-- no longer seeking to attach himself to anything outside himself. His isolation ultimately becomes his strength, as for his creator. Naipaul portrays Ralph as an unformed individual who can fit into any role assigned to him by others with the least regret or remorse. One hears him saying, "We become what we see of ourselves in the eyes of others" (20).

Naipaul's handling of his hero in this novel is very subtle. Ralph is tentative and groping as the novel opens. Sometimes he is even dangerously like the poseur of his fantasies but as the process of writing educates him, and as he approaches the truth about himself, his tone gradually changes and he becomes more tolerant, more confident and more humble: "It gives me joy to find that in so 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" (251).

What is hopeful and encouraging about Ralph's isolation in the different worlds and roles he lives is that it is not an end in itself. "I have cleared the decks, as it were, and prepared myself for fresh action. It will be the action of a free man"(251). This freedom is significant because throughout the novel, one gets the feeling that Ralph Singh has been imprisoned in his successive roles and worlds. Ultimately, it appears that even the bastard world can prove to be a stimulus to a personality which is aware of its own reality.

Far from being hopeless about the predicament of the modern West Indian and modern man, Ralph, by his example, shows how modern man can transcend and be extended by his plastic world. Ralph Singh in *Mimic Men* finds in his own personality an "elemental complexity" (36), which helps him put the plastic world in perspective. In his final analysis, " So this present residence in London, which I suppose can be called exile, has turned out to be the most fruitful" (248).

According to Landeg white, *Mimic Men* releases Naipaul from the cycle which began in *Miguel Street* and continued through *Mr. Stone and the Knight's Companion.* It opens the way for fresh discoveries and for fresh achievement as his world is now intact within him. The author, along with his character, appears to have come to terms with his rootlessness at least temporarily. When Ralph Singh says, "I have cleared the decks, as it were, and prepared myself for fresh action. It will be the action of a free man" (251), he speaks for Naipaul as well.

In *Half a Life* Naipaul continues his pitiless attitude towards the Third World. The author grants to the novel's protagonist, Willie Somerset Chandran only half a life which alone seems to be possible for the people of colonial and post-colonial countries. It is in this character's failed fulfillment of his life that Naipaul licks his own wounds.

Half a Life can be considered a distillate of aspects Naipaul touched upon in previous works-- the sorrows of exile, the inseparable inclusion of his family history in the stories, the powerful maelstrom of post-colonialism leading to what Naipaul once termed 'half-made societies and half-made nations'. All these themes are bundled in the story of W.S. Chandran, who drifts through three continents and three half-finished sketches of existences, until in the end, at the age of forty one, he tells his sister Sarojini, about his pathetic attempts and failures: " I have been hiding from myself. I have risked nothing. And now the best part of my life is over" (138).

The publication of the novel had effaced the enigma of "barring Nobel" phrase from the flaps of Naipaul's books. It is really a fortunate book and far less grim too. The novel is, in a sense, the essence of all that Naipaul is known for. It bares open the tragic flight of the unaccepted people longing to belong. In the novelist's own words, he has "tried to make it easy and light and a small book, and yet full of things" (Dhondy Oct-12). According to Dhondy,

> Having taken about "a quarter of a century", *Half a Life* has come after four decades of *A House for Mr. Biswas.* It is a very powerful work of imagination. It takes us through three different settings and three different eras and we meet people in different ways. We follow its central character, Willie, from pre-independence India, to post- war London, to a Portuguese Province in Africa. (Dhondy Oct. 12)

The work contains deliberately transposed versions of three fundamental aspects of Naipaul’s own life. They are encapsulated in each of the three sections of the novel. The first part set in India tells the story of a father, who by his choices and attitudes greatly influences his son’s life; the challenges of launching into a career of writing is set forth in the second part set in London; and finally, the third part set in Portuguese Africa exposes the ambivalence of people who live half- lives under a colonial regime.

The reader is introduced to Willie Somerset Chandran who awakens one day to the realization that his middle name sounds alien. The clarification regarding this from his father unleashes a torrent of memories, unfolding before him a complicated picture relating to his roots. This revelation breeds contempt in the mind of this twenty-year old son for his father and subsequently, for himself. Since then begins Willie’s attempts to run away from the shadow of his past.

But, unfortunately for him, the past is like a shadow that he could never shirk off. In the vain attempt to wash his hands off the past, he always stakes his present and future as well. The cultural as well as social alienation that Willie Chandran undergoes in England and then in Mozambique takes its roots in the cultural alienation of his birthplace, which is more pronounced than paternal alienation.

Cultural alienation seems to be in Willie’s blood. Willie’s father, the Senior Chandran, in his youth had revolted against the austerity and discipline imposed on him by his father and marries a low-caste woman, an incident that caused quite a stir in his times. The father, who controls the reins of senior chandran’s life, forces his son to study for B.A. degree because that promised a safe and secure future. The son, in his turn, hates literature but is forced to pursue its study, as it is part of the curriculum. The emptiness of this pursuit keeps gnawing at his heart. Years later he tells his son Willie, “I was in a great mess feeling that we were all living in a false security, feeling idle, hating my studies and knowing that great things were happening outside” (9).

It is not with impunity that one breaks one’s traditions. In Willie’s father’s case, tradition takes its revenge by pulling him back to its clutches in the end. Circumstances finally drive him to take sanctuary in a temple and become a mendicant despite all his contempt for tradition and old-fashioned conventions. In the transformation of Willie’s father from a dreamy-eyed rebel to a mendicant, tradition completes a circle by taking him back to the point where his ancestors lived and which once he had strongly detested. Willie, however, does not notice the hard compulsion of his father’s confession, “ There was no escaping the role now ” (32).

Throughout the novel one notices that Willie is moved by a strong contempt for his father because he has given him only a half-status in society. His father’s mistake in marrying a low-born woman lies like a curse on his son. Being a half - Brahmin, Willie cannot relate fully to the low-caste, and being a low- caste mother’s son, he is not completely and whole-heartedly accepted in the Brahmin community. His unacceptability or half-acceptability leads him to the rejection of parental authority.

The story thus focusses on the ‘halfness’ of Willie’s personality, and the incompleteness of his life for which he despises his father. But while Willie blames his father for his halfness, he fails to see the dilemma of his father as a youth. He also does not realize that his father too had become a victim to circumstances. His father had tried to create an image for himself but then he got imprisoned in that image and lost his identity completely.

Willie hopes to rebuild his future against the establishment. In the beginning, he hopes to reverse the cycle of history and search for a meaning in his life away from the settled passivity of his parents. The break from the past pushes him into a limbo, in which he keeps dangling for many years to come. In trying to break out of the established conservative mould of his life, Willie sets for himself another more complicated one from which there seems to be no escape.

Willie Chandran, thus, is doomed to live under a shadow. His cultural background and awareness of his incompleteness have bred inhibition in him. To escape this, he hides himself under a false ancestry only to realize that he cannot kill his reality because at all crucial moments his background and his halfness become apparent and give him away. Being the son of a man who disobeyed the caste rules and married a girl from a lower caste, it is not surprising that Willie fails at life as well as love. Even his sexual frustrations are not his own; they are the frustrations of a society, of a race and of a culture which can never be whole.

Upon receiving a scholarship Willie flees the narrowness and hypocrisy of his family and embarks on a journey to England. He lets himself drift into the literary bohemia of the late fifties, and ends up copying his father's behaviour with regard to constantly inventing new stories about his background. His writing produces results which his life is not able to. He borrows heavily from the American movies around which he creates his Indian stories, and succeeds in producing his best narratives.

He makes the paradoxical discovery that borrowed settings, borrowed stories and imagined characters “far outside himself” are in fact easier to handle when writing and enables him “to be truer to his feelings” than “direct tales from his own life or the life around him” (86). He is however seized by compunctions and self-doubt about his fictional “game” when he meets Ana his first reader enthusiast, “But if she came and questioned him too closely about his book he might find himself giving the game away and the woman or the girl with the Portuguese-sounding name might understand that the Indian stories in which she had seen aspects of her own African life had been borrowed from old Hollywood movies and the Maxim Gorky trilogy from Russia (124-25).

Years later, on an estate in the Portuguese colony of Mozambique, Ana tells him that she has been fascinated with the motif of the fabricate life in his short stories because she came to recognize her own life in them, “That was just before I met you. I think you will see now why your stories spoke to me. All the bluff, the make-believe, with the real unhappiness. It was uncanny” (156).

Ana, from her own “ half and half position” gives him “this new feeling of being accepted” (125-26) completely. She makes possible a feeling of wholeness in him for the first time “as a man and to be in his own eyes complete ” (126) “And everything that had been hard before with the others was pure pleasure with her” (126). Ana guides him to satisfaction and he decides to leave London and visit a province of Portuguese Africa with her.

In Africa, Willie’s boredom and placelessness drive him towards Graca. Ana is shocked to learn about Willie’s entanglement with various women and his sex-seeking outings with Alvaro, her estate manager. To add to the ruggedness of life, there outbreaks a social war in their immediate vicinities. Stuffed with guilt and fear, Willie asks Ana to divorce him. Gathering enough courage, he tells her:

> 'I know you did everything for me. You made it easy for me here. I couldn't have lived here without you. [. . .]. But now the best part of my life has gone and I have done nothing'.
>
> 'You are frightened of the war'.
>
> 'And even if we go to Portugal, even if they let me in there, it would still be your life. I have been hiding for too long'.
>
> Ana said, 'Perhaps it wasn't really my life either'. (227 – 28)

It is here the novel ends.

Filled with various fateful and helpless incidents the novel appears to give a sad and grim reading. At the same time Naipaul does not leave the reader in pessimism. He gives his hero Willie enough choice to bring a new meaning to his life, though the novel is about displacement, exile, anticipation and waiting. The novel abounds in characters who are exiles in their characteristic modes, who have no proper place in the world and are all searching for the fullness of their lives. In their quest for fullness and self-realization they find themselves clamped to unforeseen situations. Having no other choices they continue to thrive on whatever comes their way.

Willie is the most fitting example of this halfness of life. The sense of alienation keeps haunting him wherever he goes and whatsoever he does. His sexual extremes in remote nooks of the world are nothing but attempts at self-discovery. Yet with will-power and ambition, Willie too can carve a niche for himself like Mr. Stone or Ralph or Ganesh or Mr. Biswas or like Naipaul himself, in the given circumstance.

The major theme running through the novel and supported by its structure is that of exiles living a half-life. The story of the first forty years of the life of Willie Chandran seems to suggest that man's search for wholeness is only half-successful anywhere. Willie finds out that he is accorded only half-a-life whether in London or in Africa or in India.

Willie's real life lies in waiting for something to happen, like the characters in *Waiting for Godot*. "All that he had now was an idea-and it was like a belief in magic - that one day something would happen, an illumination would come to him and he would be taken by a set of events to the place he should go" *(Life 121*-22).

Half a Life takes its name after its theme – "characters caught in a cusp of history, ambition and love; characters who live at half throttle and without complete self-knowledge" (Chaudhuri 2001). As Dhondy declares, " This time Naipaul's objective is to make people understand that many people are living only fractions of life; to make them feel, 'It's me' "(Dhondy 2001). And convincingly enough, Naipaul excels in doing it. The book transcends the reader into that half and half world of nowhereness where fullness remains a far-off dream. Naipaul makes Willie go through the trials and dilemmas that he has himself been going through all his life, in full measure. Willie becomes the author's alter ego more strongly and truly than any other character of his, since the time he sets foot in London. The disappointment and anger are as much

Naipaul's as they are Willie's.

Towards the end of his Nobel Lecture "Two worlds" on December 7, 2001 in Stockholm, Naipaul emphasized how much joy he has experienced during his life as a writer: "I am glad to have done what I have done; glad creatively to have pushed myself as far as I could go [. . .]. But the greatest miracle for me was getting started. I feel – and the anxiety is still vivid to me – that I might easily have failed before I began" ("Two Worlds" 2001).

But Willie Somerset Chandran, the protagonist of this novel is not allowed to experience this miracle. Willie fails right at the beginning itself. In London, Willie, an inexperienced immigrant roams the streets in rain and fog until, out of the blue, he stumbles across a free-lancing job with the B.B.C, as Naipaul himself did. Unlike Naipaul, however, Willie is not very decisive; neither does he have the will to use his talent to pursue the presumptuous as well as the vague wish to become a writer.

The story of Mr. Biswas reaches a full circle while that of Willie Chandran does not. *Half a Life* ends almost on a note of disillusionment for Willie. There is no elation of achievement as in *House for Mr. Biswas* where the hero gains a sense of identity. Here, there is a total loss of personality because in this novel, Naipaul concerns himself with people living artificial lives and hence there is a sense of being lost. Like Mr. Biswas, Willie also is born with handicaps. But his handicaps are not physical but social.

Willie's sister, Sarojini touches at the truth when she asks, "You will get a little teaching job and hide away here for the rest of your life?" (116). Hiding away is what Willie has really been doing all his life. The only worthwhile achievement in Willie's life is that he has won a girlfriend through his published stories. But once again, Willie runs away from life. He follows his wife to her home in Portuguese Africa to live under her protective wings. It takes him eighteen long years to realize that "I have been hiding for too long" (228). Though, in the end, there is his acceptance of failure, there is no hint as to what he could do to make good the damage done. It is for him a painful realization indeed that he is forty-one and has achieved nothing.

Allied with that of exile and alienation is the theme of cultural tradition in the book. Naipaul remarked to Farrukh Dhondy in an interview, "My concern in the book [*Half a life*] is also the historical side of things. Willie runs away from his background and even when he gets to Africa, this Portuguese Province, he is reminded of the background from which he came" (Dhondy 2001).

One's origin always remains with one. This could, perhaps, be the truth behind Naipaul's obsession with India. Like his hero, he too has never succeeded in shedding his origin completely in spite of his tall declarations against the country of his origin. The bonds of tradition are too strong to break. All along, Willie remains aware that the life into which he has been initiated is not really his own. "At the same time now, some half-feeling of inanity of my life grew within me and with it there came the beginning of respect for the religious outlawing of sexual extremes " (211). Rooted thus, in his own cultural tradition, Willie finally fails to establish any fulfilling relationship through his escape from caste and class.

As one glances through the book, one is struck by the thought that the once mercilessly sarcastic Naipaul has become lenient. More than forty years ago, he prefaced *Middle Passage* with the brutal words that there were no people in the colonies in the true sense of the word, with character and purpose of their own. In *Half a Life*, he seems to have reversed this opinion because Naipual allows his sad protagonist a few cheering sexual experiences and two successful years of loving his wife Ana. In this sense, Willie does achieve something in spite of the odds.

There is a host of writers whose theme revolves round the anguish and pain of Diaspora but what makes Naipaul truly great is his sensibility. His fictional characters are moved not as much by anguish as by angst. His first-hand experience of the same gives him an edge. His works derive a strength from his own life and the Swedish Academy has very correctly recognized this in its Nobel Citation: 'his authority as a narrator is grounded in his memory of what others have forgotten, the history of the vanquished' (Thursday, October 11, 2001). It is indeed heartening to note that the Nobel was bestowed on him after *Half a Life*, the work whose protagonist can claim the closest resemblance to his author.

Fiction, for Naipual, although an autonomous discipline, involves far-reaching conclusions about many aspects of society and he believed that it is the duty of the writer to see that such details are conveyed in a literary, elliptical fashion and not in the form of a thinly disguised treatise on the Social Sciences. One must bear in mind that Naipul is writing about an idiosyncratic society, a real society about which he feels considerable worry and concern.

In Naipaul's analysis, creativity and self-appraisal are the answers to the third world problem of intellectual second-ratedness. In his novels, writing is seen to be an activity leading to self-knowledge. Quite a number of his protagonists have a fascination for letters. It is through his writing that Singh in

Mimic Men attains self-knowledge, which is a pre-requisite for an authentic consciousness. However, writing has to be guided by the spirit of analysis, otherwise, it becomes just another act of mimicry as it is in the case of Ganesh, the masseur.

Arthur Koestler has described the sort of dilemma that writers like Naipaul face, in his essay, “The Novelist’s Temptations” with his image of,

> The creative artist as a man immured in a room with a curtained window, subjected to the alternating temptations of drawing the curtains and ignoring the life of the teeming streets beneath him and so constructing aesthetic abstractions, or of peering from the window, over balancing into the street below and becoming a political propagandist. (Koestler 22-23)

But Naipaul solves the problem by keeping the window ajar, and observes reality through it steadily and transmutes it into the stuff of art. The reader of Naipul’s fiction comes away from his works with the single overwhelming image of truth and reality in his mind. Naipaul’s settings and characters, like his own uncompromising nature, are delineated ruthlessly and with utmost correctness. Yet their creator never even once chooses to denounce them as ‘waste’, though he laughs at them mercilessly.

From the perusal and study of the above-mentioned characters, one understands that Naipaul does not permit anger to usurp his creativity or despair to undermine his awareness. He does not conform to the type of West Indian protest novelist though according to him “no writer can be blamed for reflecting his society” (Naipaul 75).

It may be remembered that it is not the intention of the author to create ‘heroic’ characters. A colonial society suffering from an acute sense of lethal dispossession and disinheritance very rarely does that. On a superficial level, Naipaul’s characters may look like crude distortions or eccentrics. Naipaul once said that his characters were really based on men and women fostered by the society:

> Trinidadians are more recognizably ‘characters’ than people in England. Only a man’s eccentricities can get him attention. It might also be that in a society without tradition, without patterns, every man finds it easier ‘to be himself’. Whatever the reason, this determination of people to be themselves, to cherish their eccentricities, to reveal themselves at once, makes them easy material for the writer. (TLS 15 Aug.1958)

His protagonists and their experiences, Naipaul claims, are intensely personal to him. They are the outcome of his effort to come to terms with his own displacement and to understand his place in the world. Naipaul’s heroes are men who, armed only with a flair for eccentricity and an extra dimension of sensitivity, feel incapable of reconciling themselves to the world in which they are born. The East Indian community generally accepts and hence it survives. But Ganesh, Biswas, Ralph and Willie refuse to accept. They are hell-bent on escape. Naipaul’s novels, like his heroes, are the comic and tragic aspects of the search for identity and wholeness. His characters, therefore, naturally reflect V.S.Naipaul, the man, in many ways.

CHAPTER IV

NAIPAUL'S VISION AND STYLE

V.S.Naipaul is, beyond doubt, a great master of fiction and literary device, a craftsman of style and imagery. His art consists in reducing complexities to simple images and creating original descriptions that are pregnant with suggestive possibilities. The author tries constantly to understand human condition. He appears to be worried about man's inclination towards lying and self-deception in his works.

Naipaul's achievements outstrip his inadequacies. Few writers match his literary skill. The simplicity, grace and dignity of his prose, the eye for concrete detail, the humour and charm of his early novels, the fine sense of irony, the neatness and clarity of his exposition and above all, his ruthless honesty, all taken together, make him perhaps the most lucid witness of a world in the throes of moral and spiritual uncertainties.

In all his writings Naipaul has focused on individuals attempting to escape fate. For Naipaul, fate belongs to a world of magic, myth and ritual where only the past exists but not history. According to him, it is history that provides a sense of wholeness and belonging to both people and nation. As such his heroes beginning with the boy-narrator of *Miguel Street* up to Willie Chandran of *Half a Life* wade th different phases of life and experiences in search of their non-existent histories. The boy-narrator in *Street* is only too aware of his lack of history and ancestry that he defends it proclaiming,

> A stranger could drive through Miguel Street and just say, 'Slum' because he could see no more. But we, who lived there, saw our street as a world, where everybody was quite different from everybody else. Man-Man was mad; George was stupid; Big Foot was a bully; Hat was an adventurer; Popo was a philosopher and Morgan was our comedian. (15)

The stuff of *Miguel Street* is made up of such poignant tragic-comic experiences that only a truly humanistic artist like Naipaul can be really aware of them.

Naipaul's manner of writing in general and the characteristics of his prose in different phases of his career are noteworthy. He owes allegiance to no institution, doctrine or religion. Hence he does not feel obligated to spare anyone. His commitment is to his own vision of life. His magnificent prose, the lucidity of language and felicity of expression grant him an unparalleled position in the world of letters. Harbans, the Hindu candidate in *Suffrage*, is forced to think beyond the interests of his community during his electoral campaign. When he visits Elvira after winning the election and becoming an M.L.C. , the Elvirans immediately understand that,

> He wasn't the candidate they knew. He was in a double-breasted gray suit [. . .] He looked pre-occupied, kept his eye on the ground, and when he hawked and spat in the gutter, pulled out an ironed handkerchief and wiped his lips—not even wiped them, patted them—

> in the fussiest way. (196-97)

It is the language that charms the readers even when they differ from the author on some of his observations.

Naipaul is involved with 'the here and now' of his world, for he sees the flight from reality manifested all around him—especially in the neurosis which afflicts the everyday lives of ordinary Trinidadians and in the psychic make-up of the Indian personality. His scorn for the gulf between the written and spoken English in the West Indies is projected in the dialogue between Ganesh and his wife in *Masseur*. Ganesh, the masseur is ashamed of his spoken dialect. He tells his wife,

> 'Leela, is a high time we realize that we living in a British country and I think we shouldn't be shame to talk to people language good'
>
> Leela was squatting at the kitchen *chulha,* coaxing a fire from dry mango twigs. Her eyes were red and watery from the smoke [. . .]. (71)

The contrast between Ganesh, waterlogged with literary aspirations and his wife squatting on a mud floor, is a valid comment on the artificial lives lived by the average Trinidadian. Naipaul is distressed by the fantasy which the Trinidadians live out in their day-to-day lives.

Writing for Naipaul is basically an ordering of experience. To him, a writer's imagination ceaselessly processes and engages in the ordering of his experiences. Landeg White writes, "Naipaul's is a shaping rather than an inventive imagination" (24). Fact is shaped into fiction and fiction itself is seen as an understanding of the factual world. Literature and life interpenetrate, fiction and non-fiction complement and counterpoint each other. Many of his novels are well outside the limits of what one expects from a traditional work of fiction. Some are historical, some personal and some traditionally novelistic.

Naipaul's work is of utmost relevance in today's world in which everyone is, in one sense or the other, an exile. Naipaul's single English protagonist, Mr.Stone of *Knight's Companion*, reflects the rootlessness and gloom of modern life. With a feeling of emptiness, Stone observes, "the mists gathering in the school ground; the day dying with the feel of the death of the holiday, it seemed that the world was in abeyance" (31). Naipaul's imagery, here, evokes a sombre stillness and lifelessness which capture Stone's mood of utter desolation. The experience of being an exile in his own native land paves the way for a better understanding and awareness in Mr. Stone. In Naipaul, it has meant a clear-eyed assessment of his position as a writer.

The impetus behind Naipaul's writing is to understand his own situation. It is through his writing that he arrives at a vision of modern homelessness as a product of historical forces and to an acceptance of his own homelessness as final. He has also arrived at a perception that his own plight is not singular but is typical of the postcolonial world. The perception and anguish at his own displacement and rootlessness is central to his creative talent and it has been the stimulus as well as the subject of his work.

Unlike those who dream of imaginary homelands to adjust to the trauma of displacement, Naipaul has opted for homelessness. He chose to occupy this uncertain zone as a comfortable position to speak from. As a man without a nation, choosing residence in a nation that is not his own, he defies ‘nationness’ itself. He is the mimic man who turns his master’s tools both against the master and his own people. He is the man without a home, a stranger, at home in a homeless universe.

In Naipaul’s vision of the world, pessimism may be said to be a central strain, while his commitment to truth is uncompromising. As his vision matures, it becomes increasingly pessimistic with his own growing sense of disillusionment. As an observer and interpreter of ex-colonies, he is unsparingly critical and exposes the inadequacies of such societies, which he believes to be the outcome of the unconscious acceptance of the norms and values of the colonizing culture.

Naipaul’s early novels happen to be the liveliest of all his works. Yet one can sense in them the pain and distress even in the midst of laughter. Naipaul himself acknowledges the fact in an interview, where he says, “Even my funniest novels were all begun in the blackest of moods, out of a sense of personal anguish and despair” (*Newsweek* 18 Aug.1980). It is the personal nature of anguish experienced by him that defines his attitude and sets the tone of all his novels.

Though there is much laughter in *Miguel Street*, one of his early novels, the stories demonstrate that the world is a stupid, sad place and the narrator realizes this through the character of Laura, the prostitute. She is the most vivacious and gay person in the street, but when her daughter becomes pregnant before marriage, her defences crumble and she begins to cry : “And for the first time I heard Laura crying. It wasn't ordinary crying. She seemed to be crying all the cry she had saved up since she was born; all the cry she had tried to cover up with her laughter" (115). The narrator's comment shows that laughter is only one of the masks of bravado that the characters wear to hide the bitter realities of their lives.

Landeg White quotes Naipaul's statement in an interview, "If through the comedy you can't see the central tragedy, then the comedy isn't very good" (33*).* True to his words, Naipaul never allows his readers to lose sight of the central tragedy in the comic lives of the residents of Miguel Street.

The Swedish Academy praised Naipaul's distinct style in which the customary distinction between fiction and non-fiction are of subordinate importance. The thematic and genre aspects of Naipaul's works reveal a cosmos of borderlines. The subject-matter of his novels and travel- writings is the constant negotiation of where the individual is situated: country or city, inside the community or outside, within tradition or outside and in the colonized world or postcolonial societies. The truth that emerges out of these writings is Naipaul's stance on displaced individuals, uprooted and without a distinct place called 'home' but longing for it all the same.

Many of Naipaul's fictional figures are at the mercy of social and political forces and also their own personal compulsions. They remain 'unhoused' in themselves and are, therefore, located on the borderlines of fixed and shifting identities, living half-lives prescribed by the colonial and postcolonial experience.

Naipaul’s first real achievement, *House for Mr. Biswas*, opens with the image of an old, derelict man completely at the mercy of what he believes is his destiny:

> Bipti’s father, futile with Asthma, propped himself up on his string bed and said, as he always said on unhappy occasions, ‘Fate. There is nothing we can do about it . . .’
>
> No one paid him any attention. Fate had brought him from India to the sugar estate, aged him quickly and left him to die in a crumbling mud hut in the swamplands; yet he spoke of Fate often and affectionately, as though, merely by surviving, he had been particularly favoured. (15)

The author’s attitude is tender but ironic. Survival is the only objective of the old man and he does it with the passive acceptance, which Naipaul sees as the dominating trait of the Indian personality.

The full impact of Naipaul’s work cannot be gauged in a vacuum but must be seen against the background of the social forces he scrutinizes. Naipaul consciously invokes comedy in order to say something deeply and seriously felt regarding a social predicament. He claims in an uncharacteristically cautious fashion that his work aims at social comment and criticism. He does not seek to produce social propaganda but sees the act of literary creation as being deeply involved with the desire to produce observations of a sociological nature. According to him, “the novelist works towards conclusions of which he is often unaware; and it is better that he should be” (*Passage* 5).

The dual role of the narrator as an “involved witness and omniscient observer” (Kamra 123) provides Naipaul with ample scope and full freedom to delineate his characters in a vivid and subtle manner. Most of his characters are made available to the reader directly as the narrator enters their consciousness and exposes them. There is an ironic contrast between what the characters think and feel and what they say and do. In addition to the peep that one gets into the psyche of the characters, they are also subjected to further assessment through their perceptions about one another.

In *Mystic Masseur*, the narrator weaves the story of Ganesh, the masseur-cum-mystic-cum-writer-cum- politician. He reveals that Ganesh’s career from the quack masseur, to a fake mystic, to a phoney author and finally to a corrupt politician records an allegory of “the history of our times” (18). Ganesh’s innovative election campaign is quoted as,

> He held no election meetings, but Swami and Pratap arranged many prayer meetings for him. He worked hard to expand his *Road to Happiness* lectures; three or even four taxis had to take the books he required. Quite casually, in the middle of a lecture, he would say in Hindi, ‘It may interest one or two of you in this gathering tonight to hear that I am a candidate for the elections next month. I can promise nothing. In everything I shall consult God and my conscience, even at the risk of displeasing you. But that is by the way. We were talking, you remember, about the transmigration of the of souls [. . .]’ (199)

At every turn, the reader meets with the sardonic, yet true comments about the activities of Ganesh on his journey towards success.

It is easy to deduce that Naipaul's impatience is directed towards the intellectual and cultural parasitism and the mimicry of the West, which are the maladies common to all the ex-colonial societies of the post-imperial period. In the early novels the same shortcomings are viewed sympathetically but in the later ones his criticism becomes markedly acidic. It is as though Naipaul has started to feel that it requires something more vigorous than sympathy to ease the ex-colonials out of their complacent attitudes.

Two contrary statements made by him support such a presumption. In his conversation with Israel Shankar, in 1971, he said: "As you grow older, you understand people a lot more; you have greater sympathy with people, you enter into them much more" (54). Seven years later, one hears him saying to Drozdiak, "My sympathy for the defeated, the futile, the abject, the idle and the parasitic gets less and less as I grow older" (*Time* 27 Feb.1978). It becomes obvious that Naipaul's brutal analysis of the postcolonial societies is meant as a kind of shock treatment which he believes is necessary to pull the ex-colonials out of their complacency and make them accept responsibility for themselves because it is only then that de-colonization in its real sense can become possible.

Upto *House*, Naipaul's major concern seems to be to reconstruct his past and establish his home identity because a home was then perceived as a major limitation. Subsequent to his disappointment with India, however, Naipaul begins to perceive the concepts of identity and home in a new light. Homelessness is now seen as a boon rather than a bane because a whole world of possibilities opens up to people without a side. It is Naipaul's notable achievement that “he has made the Caribbean experience an integral strand in the pattern of human condition” (Singh 348).

His novel, *House for Mr.Biswas,* depicts the success story of its hero within the limited environment of Trinidad. The novel, in a sense, presents the social history of the East Indians in Trinidad. *House* is epic in scope and tells the story of Mohan Biswas from birth till death. There is a general agreement among critics that Hanuman House is a miniature version of the plantation system introduced by the colonizers. The description of the organization of the Hanuman house in the novel justifies the analogy:

> The organization of the Hanuman House was simple. The daughters and their children swept and washed and cooked and served in the house. The husbands under Seth’s supervision worked on 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. (97)

Naipaul, here, suggests that traditional institutions like the extended family are equally responsible for perpetuating dependence and passivity by suppressing individuality. They are the major deterrents to the development of personality. He has once described the joint family in which he grew up as “a microcosm of the authoritarian state where power is all important” (Michener 108).

A similar tone of the ironic detachment as well as the third person omniscient point of view that Naipaul adopts, serve to expose the vices of the society and secure the readers’ censure in *Suffrage of Elvira* too. *Suffrage* is a sustained piece of narrative, while the novels preceding it were episodic and loose-knit. His skill as a novelist surfaces in passages where Naipaul subtly exposes the vices of the society and at once directs the readers' response. The presentation of the characters is such that none of them, except perhaps Foam, elicit a sympathetic response from the readers:

> Things were crazily mixed up in Elvira. Everybody, Hindus, Muslims and Christians owned a 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. Someone had told them that Lakshmi, the Goddess of Prosperity, was being honoured; they placed small earthen lamps on their moneyboxes and waited, as they said, for the money to breed. (66)

While portraying the disintegration of the East Indians, Naipaul provides a close view of the society. In a society dominated by materialistic values, it is inevitable that conventional customs should yield to political interests and his attempt is to expose the pervasive influence of social beliefs on political moves in Trinidad. While Naipaul's view about culture is progressive, there is at the same time a regret at the passing away of the old order. In *Area of Darkness*, he confesses, "the thought of the decay of the old customs and reverences saddened me" (36).

It is not as if the author does not find any redeeming qualities in the Colonies. Naipaul recognizes the noble qualities of loyalty and tenderness in the characters of Foam and Herbert in *Suffrage*. Foam's loyalty to Harbans and

Herbert’s tenderness towards the puppy would never have found a place in the novel otherwise. The idea the author seeks to put across is that though noble human qualities are as much present in Trinidad, as anywhere else, they cannot flower in the stultifying colonial environment of places like Trinidad.

After the first four novels, there seems to be a new awareness in Naipaul about the responsibilities of a writer. Consequently, there is a marked difference in approach, tone and themes in the later ones. One notices a broadening of vision as Naipaul moves outside himself and explores other cultures and societies. In his later works the familiar Naipaulian themes of alienation, identity crisis and mimicry are viewed in a broader perspective. Naipaul is, at the same time, preoccupied with the broader postcolonial themes of power, freedom and neocolonialism in the emergent nations of the Third World and hence one finds these later novels to be intensely political.

A striking feature that characterizes Naipaul’s later fiction beginning with *Mimic Men* upto *Bend in the River* is its intensely political nature. There is a clear shift of focus to the post-imperial Third World scenario so much so that individuals are reduced to political beings and social situation as a whole is described in terms of power politics.

In all of Naipaul’s works, inferiority of postcolonial societies remains a fixed idea. One finds a reiteration of this idea in *Flag on the Island* too when Blackwhite tells Frankie that had Churchill been born on the island, even he would have ended up “importing sewing machines and exporting cocoa” (132). Naipaul intends to make it clear that the society plays a major role in moulding an individual’s potentialities by providing avenues for development. Ralph

Singh in *Mimic Men* also learns the lesson the hard way. When he becomes a politician he realizes too late that unskilled mob cannot be the source of real power. “I no longer seek to find beauty in the lives of the mean and the oppressed” (142).

When Naipaul decides to direct his gaze towards postcolonial societies other than Trinidad, his novels become progressively bleak. This tendency reaches its climax in *Guerrillas* and in *Bend in the River*. These novels hold up an utterly desolate vision of the world. In *Guerrillas*, desolation is writ large on the landscape itself. Set in a drought-ridden Caribbean island, the book opens into what sounds like Eliot’s “*Waste Land”*. The people who inhabit this ‘waste land’ are quite in tune with it. They are derelicts, morally and intellectually barren.

In contrast to the arid barrenness of the backdrop presented in *Guerrillas*, the background of *Bend* has a choking fertility though the vision of the world remains essentially the same. It is the vision of a world undoing itself. *Bend* also holds out little hope and ends on the terrifying thought that “nowhere is safe now” (282). In the novel there is a considerable difference in Naipaul’s treatment of Africa. Not only is he more sympathetic but there is also a sincere attempt on his part to analyze and arrive at an understanding of the problems that grip post-independent Africa. The portrayal of African characters caught in the slipstream of history has also been done in a convincing manner.

Jimmy’s character in *Guerrillas* is launched as a foil to expose the farce and futility of the Black Power Movements in the Caribbean islands. The title of the novel carries ironic overtones. It is evident from the ineffectual way the guerrillas presented in the novel function. Naipaul makes it plain that in inorganic and racially divided societies like the Caribbean, there can be no authentic internal source of power. In a picaroon society like the one depicted in the novel, everyone is a guerilla —“a privateer” (Neil 27)--- fighting for his own little cause.

The guerrillas one meets in the novel -– Roche, Jane, Jimmy and the boys at the Commune--- are derelicts who have no sense of purpose in life and only just “carry-on”. The impermanence of the world is reinforced through Jimmy’s realization that, “There are no more mansions. I suppose like everyone else, I fooled myself that there was a mansion waiting somewhere for me [. . .]” (87). Like their quest for identity and freedom, Naipaul’s characters’ search for power also meets with failure. For Jimmy the quest ends in a fiasco and for Jane it proves to be fatal. Roche only just manages to escape from the island and save himself. To Naipaul, the post-imperial world has no centre. Both the former colonizers as well as the colonized are at the margins of power but each identifies the centre with the other.

Naipaul’s vision, thus, offers little hope to the third world societies that have been maimed beyond repair. Through his depiction of London in *Bend*, he puts forward the view that displacement and alienation are a universal predicament in the post-war world. One must learn to live with this ultimate truth. Salim, the hero of the novel, arrives at this piece of wisdom the hard way and he decides to rejoin the world because, “The world is what it is: men who have nothing, have no place in it” (143).

In Naipaul’s terms, then, the solution is to be had at the individual level through self-de-colonization -- by overcoming the colonial mentality of idleness and irresponsibility. The difference between Jimmy and Salim lies in the fact that the former is unable to break away from the colonial state of dependence and vents out his frustration in an empty gesture of violence, whereas Salim, because of his acquired habit of self-appraisal, knows where exactly he stands and his insights make him take the positive step of rejoining the world.

In *Bend*, Ferdinand’s parting words to Salim encapsulate Naipaul’s vision of the world. “Nobody’s going anywhere. We’re all going to hell and every man knows this in his bones. We’re being killed. Nothing has any meaning. That is why everyone is frantic. Everyone wants to make his money and run away. But where?” (281-82).

In spite of the pessimistic vision it imposes, *Bend* is a much more rewarding novel compared to *Guerrillas*, due to its human concern. Through the rich array of characters, Naipaul successfully delineates the complexities of modern life and demonstrates his dexterity in his sensitive handling of the characters.

As Naipaul’s art matures, an increasing importance is given to ideas and he becomes more concerned with thought, meaning and philosophy. Simultaneously, style and structure lose importance. This is apparent from what Naipaul himself says on the subject. “As you grow older you begin to write more profoundly; You are thinking less of the way the words lie on the paper, and more of the meanings, the timing, the emphasis—not thinking of style or language at all; just the effect [. . .]. I am more concerned with thought, meaning, philosophy” (*Times Literary Supplement* 2 Sept. 1994). For the most part, the mood that haunts his later works is one of existential despair. As Sashi Kamra observes, “It is similar to existential absurdity; of anguish at living in an unrelated meaningless world; in a void” (37).

On the whole, the later novels hold out little hope for the third World countries and what emerges is a bleak apocalyptic vision of the world. The faint glimmer of hope seen at the end of *Mimic Men* dies out in *Guerrillas*. At the end of *Men*, Singh has arrived at self-knowledge and is prepared to begin life afresh, while *Half a Life* concludes with Willie’s positive gesture of involvement. In *Guerrillas*, however, hope is totally withdrawn. *Bend*, despite its pessimistic portrayal of Africa, concludes on a positive note with Salim rejoining the world.

Travel, indeed, proved to be an important stimulus for the further development of Naipaul’s art. For, it not only helped him to overcome his uncertainties but also enabled him to find his vision. This explains the marked shift in emphasis from the earlier preoccupations of a rather personal nature, to the broader and more general ones that emerge in the works belonging to the second phase of his career. In addition to the broadening of vision, there is an essential difference in approach that draws a clear line between the novels of the two phases.

Significantly, Naipaul’s writings in the post- independence period tends to be serious and reflective. He examines the postcolonial societies and the conclusions he arrives at therein find a restatement in his novels. In these works, Naipaul surfaces as a writer of the post-imperial crisis. His despair is effectively conveyed in the grim and humourless tone one finds in the later works. His vision of the world, henceforth, becomes progressively bleak and the tone, accordingly, more and more grim.

Naipaul is a traveller, a cosmopolitan with a universal philosophy. He is a specialist when it comes to describing societal changes and intolerance, fanaticism and religious fundamentalism and defeat and failure. But he is also the minimum hope for the remnants of a culture's pride and self-respect. He collects stories that become scenic remembrances in his books. They are the scripts taken out of real life and are also the researched history combined with imagination as is manifest in the description of the world pulsating with life in his pages.

The critics Dissanayake and Wickramagamage write about his skills in observation in *Among the Believers*:

> He has the well-trained and sensitive eye of the artist with which to record the breath-taking beauty of these short summer landscapes in the mountainous regions of Himalayas. His eye for the telling detail is extended to his descriptions of the people too. So it is that he manages to outline vividly a portrait of the Afghan herdsman whose manner and physique obviously intrigue him. (84)

Before, during and after his many journeys, Naipaul has made overt and covert observations on nations, cultures, communities and races which have forced world-wide attention on him and his work. His books testify to his power as a shrewd delineator of people, settings and situations. They reflect his unusual talent for the telling detail and penetrating observation based on it.

Naipaul's travel passages include ethnographic details and literary images, written in a journalistic style. In his travel passages, he gives both authenticity and literariness to his narrative and embeds them with shades of ironic tones of disapproval.

The passage from *Free State* puts forward his use of ethnographic detail and narrative skill in a very convincing and realistic fashion: "At a twist in the road ahead, where the bare verge widened and rose and fell away, half a dozen domestic animals stood together, silhouetted against the sky. But two turned out to be naked children. Dull-eyed, disfigured with mud, they stood where they were and watched the car pass" (205). The grotesque representation abounds in cynicism and satire. It may be noted that Naipaul's images, compulsive and naked, are also extraordinarily and extravagantly wrought out. There is no room for humour. He is more blunt and critical and chooses to employ darker shades of cynicism.

Certainly the tone has changed since *Miguel Street.* One can see the new tone of extreme pessimism embedded very firmly in his travel narratives. He has incorporated his travel paradigms into his fiction. He has also integrated strands of irony, themes of pessimism and dissolution of his fiction into his travel writings. The passage from *Middle Passage* illustrates his new technique clearly:

> Pursuing the Christian—Hellenic tradition, the West Indian accepted his blackness as his guilt. He never seriously doubted the validity of the prejudices from which he suffered, for he had inherited the prejudices of the culture to which he aspired. In the French territories he aimed at Frenchness, in the Dutch territories at Dutchness; in the

> English territories he aimed at simple whiteness and modernity, Englishness being impossible. (68)

The new Naipaul has become more blunt and critical. The sentences are short, the ideas compact and the prose convincing. On the back jacket of *An Area*, Nicholas Mosley praises his inimitable style, "A highly skilful writer [. . .] he spins his webs, his patterns, not so much to entrap the reader, as to make him think for himself" (*Listener* 22 Mar.1968).

In formal terms, Naipaul experiments along the boundaries of fiction and non-fiction in his travel-writings. While his novels are characterized by his own experiences and the ethos of the community he belongs to, in his travel-writings he frequently tries to keep himself out of the picture but still constitutes the soul of the narrative. He exhibits his power of narrative by making his readers share the inevitable irony and paradox of modern life torn by its quintessential self-division and inner conflict.

Hence his travel-writing exhibits varied aspects like his unerring observation, aggressive mode of assessment, concern for the weak, sympathy for the suffering, and his genuine evaluation of men, manners and development of the country he visits. And above all, they express in vehement terms his intolerance of lethargy, irresponsibility and passivity. He comments in *India: A Wounded Civilization,*

> The poor are needed as hands, as labour; but the city was not built to accommodate them. One report says that 100,000 people sleep on the pavements in Bombay; but this figure seems low. And the

> beggars: are there only 20,000 in Bombay, as one newspaper article says, or are there 70,000, the figure given on another day? (56)

The author's unerring observation and sense of justice come out convincingly in the words.

Middle Passage, his first travel-narrative, also testifies to the fact that he is no longer indulgent but has become more blunt and critical. The passage from the book makes an obvious representation: "So we started tramping through the hot dust. The smell of dog-dirt was inescapable, as was the sight of starved mongrels locked in copulation, their faces blank and foolish. Few of the children I saw were without some skin disease; one or two were deformed" (111). Naipaul mercilessly offers here the journalistic pithy statement -- the fact and the detail. His condensed, short, factual and right to the point style perhaps sounds jarring and distressing.

In his first travel book on India, *Area of Darkness,* Naipaul uses a similar technique of including ethnographic details and literary images to project his impressions of disillusionment about his ancestral land. The lines, "A child was squatting in the mud of the street; the hairless pink-skinned dog waited for the excrement. The child, big-bellied, rose; the dog ate" (215), depict strongly the author's distaste and horror of dirt and lack of hygiene which he experienced in India.

Another poignant passage exposes his disappointment and anguish at the loss of a dream that was India. "Nowhere do I see the India I know: those poor fields, those three-legged dogs, those sweating red-coated railway porters carrying heavy tin trunks on their heads [. . .]" (71).

When Naipaul visited India again in 1975, he addresses it as "a wounded civilization". Thus, the Trinidad Indian says in *India: A Wounded Civilization*, "No civilization was so little equipped to cope with the outside world; no country was so easily raided and plundered, and learned from its disasters" (8). The author points his fingers at the Indian habit of passive acceptance of denial, degradation and destruction. Dealing with the intellectual depletion of Indians, Naipaul says that it is the outcome of the ignorance and mean-mindedness of the natives. The lines, "It may be said, rather, that for too long, as a conquered people, they have been intellectually parasitic on other civilization" (134), focus on the intellectual fragility of India. The author's innate cynicism helps in aggravating his anger towards the land which he chooses to view with a western eye.

Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey is claimed to be his most crafted travel narrative in terms of the integration of travel strategies and techniques along with fictional elements. The book advocates Naipaul's theory of 'universal civilization' skillfully. Here, he examines the western prejudices against the alternative cultural and political ideologies offered by Islamic fundamentalism. Yet his critical eye seems to be as sharp as ever as is evident in the passage:

> These women, wives, were workers; they were beasts of burden like the women of the Dakota Indians, Parkman saw on the Oregon Trail in 1846. But these Afghans and all these mountain tribes, lived in terrain that only they could master. Noone could say of them, as Parkman

> could say of the Dakota Indians, that they were going to be wiped off the face of the earth. (187)

The imaginative and creative use of caricatures remains an important feature of Naipaul's works. He uses it as a socio-critical tool. Throughout his work, from his early Trinidadian novels to his latest African, Indian and Asian adventures, the use of caricatures has been one of his formidable signatures. His sense of humour is evident even in the midst of terror and torture. It is one of the ways in which a true artist can portray and refine his rage and emit his opinion in a world of turmoil. Naipaul's caricature of the dog in the novel *Bend* reads as follows:

> And then a large Doberman came bounding out at me. The man with the fork said, 'Don't worry. He'll miss you. He can't see very well. A foreigner's dog. He gave it to me when he went away'. It was as he said. The Doberman missed me by about a foot, ran on a little way, stopped, raced back and then was all over me, wagging his docked tail, beside himself with joy at my foreigner's smell, momentarily mistaking me for somebody else. (260)

The dog for Naipaul is a 'colonial dog'. He is a subject of the colonist, wagging his tail in obedience, careful always to please his master. Above all, the sentence "He can't see very well" oozes Naipaulian satire unmistakably. The dog certainly is a mocking representation of the colonized who is generally easily confused, fooled and lacks any clear-cut vision of the situation.

It is Naipaul's strong conviction that in the context of his themes, the use of caricatures abounding in irony and satire would help more than the propagandist tendencies adopted by most of the West Indian writers.

In Naipaul's works, there is a constant awareness of the past of the West Indies steeped in slavery. But it is only one of the many strands that informs his larger vision. However, it has enabled him to find a place among writers of the mainstream. He has created many memorable characters and incidents. Mr. Biswas's relentless fight against an uncompromising fate, Mr. Stone's futile search for purpose in his old age, Ralph Singh's ultimate picture as an almost defeated recluse, Salim's helplessness and Jim's wickedness, Sandra's and Jane's pitiable search for an anchor in their lives are some of the frames which refuse to leave the minds of the readers.

Naipaul's prose is highly readable and his style is distinct to the point of being inimitable. An interesting feature of Naipaul's prose style is its slow and stately rhythm:

> It was only early spring and on some mornings there was fresh snow o the mountains. The lake was cold and clear; you could see the fish feeding like the land animals on the weeds and on the lake bed and when the sun came out every fish cast a shadow; the clouds fell over the mountains, sometimes in a level bank, sometimes shredding far into the valleys. (*Area* 106)

The measured tone reflects aesthetic solidity and grants to it the status of fact. Naipaul stands out for his restraint and purity of style in comparison with the unbridled excess of some of his contemporaries.

Naipaul's success lies in the fact that he has convincingly forged a distinct authorial voice of his own through his eclectic, experimental play with various literary forms. This has resulted in his success in handing down his own unique way of 'looking' which differs from book to book. Describing the plight of slavery in Surinam in *Middle Passage,* Naipaul quotes Stedman to illustrate his own idea of slavery in the island:

> Yet one needs a strong stomach to read Stedman today. The Surinam he describes is like one concentration camp, with the difference that visitors are welcome to look around and make notes and sketches. The slave owner had less on his conscience than the concentration camp commandant: the world was divided into black and white, Christian and heathen. White might conceivably expected to show some scruples in his relations with black; but the Christian had no such inhibition in his relations with the heathen. (203)

Naipaul works in transparent modes, documenting concrete particulars in a spare style so that he provides his readers with immediate access to actual situations. He does not believe in making them work their way through levels of interlocking images to find meaning. It is this simple elegance of his prose style that has earned him the reputation of being a deft and discerning witness. The press release of the Nobel Prize comments, that "he transforms rage into precision and allows events to speak with their own inherent irony" (Press Release 11 Oct.2001).

Naipaul strongly believes that literature is an expression of society. His fictional world is concerned with the realistic portrayal of individuals, cultures and societies. His recurrent themes are colonial psychosis, clash of cultures and search for identity. But this truthful portrayal of the various weaknesses of the society does not lack in art. His works are beautifully laced with poetic beauty and grandeur.

Naipaul is of the opinion that an artist is to construct something meaningful out of brute reality. Hence, his main business as a writer is to neglect utterly the dream and fantasy of romantic euphoria and put in their place, the dry and hard facts of day-to-day life. One can very well see that his works are the testimony to his success in fulfilling his mission as a writer in undisputable terms.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Naipaul has diligently used his art for self-expression. He accomplishes it through a stringent analysis of the world around him. He does not use his fiction as a tool of revenge against the malefactors of freedom and individuality. In fact, he depicts societies and individuals, as he understands them —affected by the decay and disorder prevalent in their culture. Hence, all his characters are delineated as living under great stress and tension, painfully aware of personal failures and fearing the loss of status and identity in their immediate surroundings. In K.H. Kunjo Singh’s words, “Although his characters have freedom as their goal, choice as their weapon and self as the agent of experience, they have no fixed nature or reality with which to identify themselves with their environment”(251).

Naipaul has been able to go a long way in diagnosing the ills of the contemporary society, even if the ills and malice projected and the remedy suggested by him may seem partisan and not adequate. He has allowed himself to be guided always by the zeal to portray the contemporary reality in uncontaminated terms. He seems to be obsessed with the reality of the West Indian life. He once described India as the featureless “area of darkness” (*Area* 38). According to him, this featurelessness characterized the West Indian life and characters too. He tries to [illegible] a specific character to it, “In Trinidad, to be an Indian was to be distinctive, difference was each man’s attribute”(*Area* 46).

Living for Naipaul has been writing. Naipaul’s works chart his departure from the restrictive background of the Caribbean island to the open cosmopolitan culture of the large world of England. He compensates for the smallness of his background by inculcating a broader yet demanding vision of the world. No wonder then that he is almost always argumentative, judgmental, and merciless as he remembers and re-visits the dark corners of his mind. There is no completeness to him. He is full of the bits and pieces he has picked up from here and there.

Naipaul never ceases to astonish with the intensity of his intellect. His success lies in his powers to create images of the reality of the colonial experience out of the featureless men and women he has encountered on his island. This is his major contribution to the understanding of the predicament of the modern man. The uniqueness of Naipaul is that he is both an insider and an outsider to his subject matter.

Apparently, Naipaul has had no tradition of literary discourse to rely on, though he began by writing against the Trinidadian background. He could not draw on the associations and resonance of English literary works nurtured on the natural social settings of its own. As a result, he had to construct a distinct human background of his own special locale for his reader, which made it necessary for him to look outward. The moving forces of his novels and essays are thus mostly postcolonial social order and culture.

In Naipaul’s novels, the physical and the cultural setting acquire a significant role. It is not merely a lifeless background against which human beings act and react. It is a potential means of shaping their destiny and character. Thus, the major theme presented in the novels is the predicament of Indian immigrants to the West Indies and the desperate plight of their descendents who failed to strike roots in the land of their birth.

Naipaul's treatment of the issue is exhaustive and is the outcome of his own first-hand experience. His approach to the problem in the early novels is humorous and innocent but it comes to acquire a complex turn in his mature novels. His views may look biased and overtly sophisticated at first. But nobody can doubt the genuineness of his intentions and the candour of his vision.

The picture of the doomed society of the Caribbean that Naipaul portrays with his no-holds-barred attitude rings true in all essential points. It is the picture of a half-made society with a mixture of cultures that one sees looking out of his canvas. The author is a member of this society and writes about it with an insider's knowledge, though at the same time, he denounces it vehemently. His reaction to the land may sound ungrateful but Naipaul is driven to such a stand because he is acutely conscious of the severe limitations under which he and his people have had to live. He states clearly in his incomplete *Autobiography*:

> In England I was also a colonial. Out of the stresses [. . .]. My very particularity – which was the subject sitting on my shoulder—had been encumbering me. The English or the French writer of my age had grown up in a world that was more or less explained. He wrote against a background of knowledge. I couldn't be a writer in the same way, because to be a colonial, as I was, was to be spared knowledge. It was to live in an intellectually restricted world; it was to accept

> those restrictions. (*Gentleman* 9 Feb.1984)

When he shifted to England, Naipaul seemed to have had only one goal in his life and that was to escape the label of being a West Indian. But life in the cosmopolitan city of London taught him the grim truth that once a colonized, always a colonized. Even in the city, one is forced to live a restricted, half-life and like Willie Chandran of *Half a Life* one's happiness lies in the acceptance of the same.

Naipaul is never hopeful about an organic, ordered and meaningful society developing out of the mixture of races and creeds and out of groups of people bound neither to each other, nor to the land, which is the bane of all Third World nations. It is and would remain a society fragmented and inorganic. In such a society, people must learn to live with their rootlessness—to accept their placelessness and not run after the chimera of some social set-up in which they can fit in.

The severing of bonds with the physical world around one is a sure sign of rootlessness. Naipaul's protagonists have all discovered the fact at the cost of their own lives. In their failures and rootlessness in London, they are all one with their creator. The snapping of bonds with the cultural and physical background has a ruinous effect. It can lead to conditions that may make a civilization fall like an uprooted tree. In *Mimic Men*, Ralph Singh describes one such tree as, "A tree in the park groaned in a series of accelerating snaps and then slowly collapsed, rocking to rest on his branches. It was a great tree, one of those with a history" (182). This is precisely the fate reserved for all mimic men who, especially like the Indian immigrants in the West Indies, have to lead a life of double standards.

Naipaul today has been elevated to the stature of a global citizen, unattached, non-aligned, anti-colonial, unafraid to view reality and to label it absurd. With ethnic credentials, Oxford outlook, and Brahmin aloofness, he drifts through the Third-World, exposing the failures of those struggling to escape the colonial legacy. The bitterness and hostility are the outcome of his unquenchable care and hope for his people and the incorrigible bleakness of his vision.

Naipaul shares the angst and ache of all the writers belonging to the half-made societies of the post-colonial world. In his *In A Free State,* Naipaul confesses that all his life he has felt exposed and futile due to his ‘halfness’ or nowhereness. Mr. Biswas’s son Anand also had the feeling of being “led to inadequacies, to self-awareness and a lasting loneliness” (*House* 413). Such a degenerate social set-up without history or a proud past can produce only characters like the opportunist Ganesh Ramsumair, the escapist Ralph Singh, the ambitious Mohan Biswas, the absconder Willie Chandran or for that matter, the blood-thirsty Jim or the unsure Salim. Naipaul, on the other hand, has nevertheless made commendable efforts to put up “a resistance to annihilation” against all odds, “in the face of shapelessness” (White 20) both in his personal life and career.

The impressions of distortion and eccentricities in his protagonists and less important characters also result from Naipaul’s ironic mode of depicting them and it seems to be the one that the novelist purposely seems to strive at. He has done what he could to give a much-needed jolt to the complacent sensibility of his people.

Naipaul, with acute sensitivity, presents in his works the picture of the life of drift lived by an expatriate. He universalizes the common prospect of all expatriates. His view is corroborated by his protagonist Indar, another expatriate, in his *Bend*. “I belonged to myself alone. I was going to surrender my manhood to nobody. For someone like me there was only one civilization and one place—London or a place like it. Every other kind of life was make-believe”(157).

Naipaul, thus, places his characters in complex circumstances and makes them mouth goals and ambitions that are later proved to be foolish and false. All of them desire a better future in a different land that is invariably London, only to realize that freedom in their world is associated with insecurity, violence and revolution.

Though Naipaul upholds the tradition of autobiographical writing, he gives it an enriching touch. His works voice and project his own life in different dimensions. The backdrop of his West Indian memories is the source of inspiration for his earlier fiction. When that exhausts, he relies on the present life which guides and moulds his literature. Rejecting the land of his birth, being disappointed with the sole dream that was India, he falls back to the only alternative left to him—London. Thus, Mr. Stone, the only native English character, erupts into life through his imagination, living Naipaul’s life in London. When his restlessness urges him further to wander round the world, characters like Jimmy, Salim and Willie Chandran jump out of his pages, projecting his views on the Asian and African Third World scenario. The novels in the last phase, the products of his extensive travel, can be said to revolve around his own self --that self, however, is representative of the contemporary life.

In Naipaul’s case, the experience of inner alienation turns out to be the driving force of his writing and in the end even leads to a position of strength. To have a vision and to write from a position of strength is the unique gift of Naipaul. Shaped by a wish to paint a whole culture and the outlines of the world within the individual and the regional, Naipaul is able to find the right tone in his novels and travelogues.

Naipaul is a neutral witness, uninfluenced by cultural trends, who allows events to speak for themselves. The wounds that he opens up in his stories and travel-narratives are many -- the shame of poverty, the insecurity of childhood dependencies, the loss of a father, the void of expatriation and so on…. The writings remain the reminder of a small island community. They dramatize the perils of the acceptance of an alien religious faith and articulate a growing cynicism that questions the value of all established norms. The people living half-lives in Naipaul’s fictional world are doomed to view things as concealed traps which thwart the joyful fulfillment of individuality.

Up to *House*, Naipaul has been trying to find himself, identifying his home and his identity, the one a mirror for the other. The life of its protagonist Biswas is the story of the Indian Immigrants’ dilemma. It depicts the exile’s desire to strike roots and attain an authentic selfhood. In the process, it also reveals the ethnic and social history of a community showing how communities are shaped by larger socio-cultural forces. And he does it by taking the reader through the inner world of his hero, Biswas. In *Mimic Men*, he makes an attempt to readjust his perspective to that of the exile who looks outward instead of homeward, the free man who imposes order on his freedom by giving it the form of memoirs. This adjustment to the condition of an exile and his acceptance of the alien place is completed in *Free State* which suggests Naipaul's own condition of permanent exile alienated from home. And after this work the setting has always been alien, man being portrayed as an urban guerrilla. Even the Trinidad of the novel, *Guerrillas,* is a foreign landscape. Finally, the home, which Salim builds in *Bend*, is Africa, which can never be home at all.

Naipaul in his early novels uses as their subject the cultural confusions and comedy that paralleled the emergence of the East Indian community into the wider society of Trinidad as his subject. In the later novels, he tries to reflect his own attempt to define his identity within the postcolonial world. His achievements result from a profoundly analytical vision. He seems to have developed over the years, the knack of observing his characters and society both from inside and outside, without the excesses of criticism or sympathy. One finds in the mature Naipaul an understanding of what makes people and nations what they are. While economically emphasizing selected details, the later novels offer a sense of life observed and meditated upon in depth. There are, however, no fixed positions that are identifiably Naipaul's. The sympathies and perspective change and each novel has a life and form of its own.

Naipaul has proved beyond doubt that he is extremely gifted in travel writing which elucidates his studies of other cultures and races. He still reigns supreme as the writer of stupendous novels and autobiographical writings. He has earned the Nobel Prize through these works for there is much to admire in his fiction and self-explorations. He presents himself as a conservative, fastidious and truth-telling traveller in his works.

Naipaul harps on an absence of debt or affiliation in relation to the circumstances of his development and education in the context of the cultural displacement that was one of the consequences of colonialism. This may be one of the reasons why his work can be seen to be shaped differently from the work of other writers. He describes himself as writing in a vacuum.

> Having emerged from a small colony and lacking a settled culture such as other writers feed on, he feels unsupported and betrayed by his native society. Nevertheless, he returns repeatedly to his origins, to tell the story of his life over and over again in a variety of forms. This belies his belief that his origin provides unsuitable material for literary treatment. While he often writes dismissively of the unimportance of Trinidad, Naipaul acknowledges that it has been important to his literary output. It is not the land as such but the attitude of the mimics living in it that he directs his venom against.

On reading Naipaul, one is able to deduce that he has converted his liability of having no tradition into an advantage. He has succeeded in using this privilege to acquire the intellectual freedom which has aided him all along in perceiving the world undistorted by conventional ideologies and current sentimentalities. It is this intellectual freedom and lack of any sense of obligation at the personal level to any particular place or culture which makes Naipaul an impartial judge of the situations wherein disorder and chaos loom large. He minces no words in depicting a truly realistic picture which very often sounds condemning and contemptuous.

To Naipaul, the novel offered a convenient channel as a form of social inquiry. His fiction can be perceived as a homogenous and artistic blend of a creative interpretation of the past while offering a rich criticism about the contemporary life. Hence, it emerges as an authentic account of the agony and the pride, the trials and tribulations of his people.

While Naipaul's fictional form is consistently conventional he makes it produce the effect of novelty by adapting to it the sophisticated techniques of fragmented narration, flashbacks and interior causerie to show the states of mind of his characters. He makes us of his imaginative talent to deal not only with the general themes of identity, rootlessness and cultural difference, but also with his own dilemmas as a permanent exile, about the uprooted self and elusive home and the psychological and political aspects of alienation.

Responding to his critics, he once said, "People have a myth about me which is very damaging to me—that I'm reactionary, totally out of sympathy with progressive movements, that I'm heard-hearted and cruel—none of which is true" (Miller 696). But despite his protests, anyone familiar with his nonchalance will know that his critics are not wholly wrong in their assumptions. Yet on knowing and enjoying Naipaul's works, one understands that he can indeed appear hard-hearted and cruel but only when he observes deliberate self-deception. He apparently has no sympathy for those human deceits, meant to serve national or ethnic pride. He has a philosophical vision of a world where there are no mimic men living half-lives, where there is human dignity and universal humanism. He feels it is the duty of an artist to express his vision unadulterated.

It is true that Naipaul’s vision is fiercely pessimistic, singularly unsentimental and somewhat lacking in charity and sympathy but it is also curiously idealistic. He elevates the act of perceiving or the process of observing what reality is, to the status of an artistic act of faith.

Naipaul’s oddities make for his unpopularity which is unjust and, at the same time, unavoidable. One feels that he is prejudiced and that his quirkiness is intense. Just as with many of his august predecessors, Naipaul’s idiosyncrasies can also be regarded as his achievements. They register as genuine signs of suffering and can very nearly persuade one to believe that only someone so prejudiced can be so fair.

The Naipaul, who leaps out of his writings, seems to be unsure whether the ultimate departure from the earth would lead to arrival again but he seems to be sure of the fact that all earthly arrivals would ultimately lead to departure. And therein lies the enigma of his life, rhetorically remaining unanswered.

The irredeemable wanderer journeys through the western world, “a prophet without God marked with blessed purity, uttering his malevolent incantations as he interprets the fate of those barbarous peoples in the remote parts of the globe, confident that he and his work will be rewarded by those with whom he is aligned and whose ideas he promulgamates in a not-so-conscious manner” (*Critical Quarterly* 18 Mar.1976).

Through all his generic and aesthetic experiments, which show a creative disrespect and liberty with regard to established norms and forms, Naipaul's message seems to be that whatever the individual's place in social and political systems be, life's goal and orientation have constantly to be reinvented and rediscovered. He leaves the reader with the overall feeling that his voice as a writer is unique. His work can be seen as literary illustrations of his open-minded, continually improvised exploration of this inimitable, innermost fibre of himself.

In a literary career, spanning 50 years and 29 genre-defying books, he has shown a terrifying passion for truth, which is merciless, like the compelling sentence of his novel, *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"(143). He rightly deserves to be called the provocateur par excellence. Even at the ripe old age of 75, Sir Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul continues to shatter a million myths, in his terrifying pursuit of truth.

This study is a humble effort to provide a variety of historical, literal and biographical contexts which may help one to understand Naipaul's writing in a better vein.

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