

'HYBRIDITY' OR 'MIMICRY': THE DILEMMA OF CULTURE AND IDENTITY IN V.S. NAIPAUL'S *A HOUSE FOR MR. BISWAS* AND *THE MIMIC MEN*

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Abstract:

Being an Indian Brahmin, uprooted from the land of his ancestors, Vidiadhar Suraj Prasad Naipaul has a complex personality. His grandfather was migrated to Trinidad from India as an indentured labourer. The huge Diaspora from China, India and other countries as indenture labourer, raises the obvious question of their national and political identity in the Caribbean island when they achieve independence. This paper deals with the cultural dislocation and identity crisis of these diasporic people, and identifies the primordial historical background of the Caribbean people, the wave of modern western culture and the imbalance hybridization of cultures that make them 'mimic' men and alienates them from their origins. This paper also locates the ambivalent position of Naipaul regarding 'mimicry'. He believes in the hollowness of 'mimic man' who lost their originality, creativity and thinking ability by imitating the colonial authority, again he believes that the mimicry of the colonial language by the postcolonial writers is a way of resistance to colonial authority. This paper is a brief endeavor to articulate all these issues based on Naipaul's two novels- *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1969) and *The Mimic Men* (1967).

Keywords: Hybridity, Mimicry, Culture and Identity

Introduction:

In an interview given to Ronald Bryden on 22 March 1973, Naipaul remarked:

All of my work is really one. I am really writing one big book. I come to the conclusion that, considering the nature of society I come from, considering the nature of the world I have stepped into and the world I have to look at I could not be a professional novelist in the old sense... (quoted in Ray 2002:(V))

V.S. Naipaul is a natural novelist. He had decided quite early in his life to take the vocation of a writer as his religion like Stephen Dedalus (see Joyce, *A Portrait*). For this, most of his books reflect his very authentic personal experience of an uprooted Caribbean adrift in the waves of multiculturalism. He grasps for identity, a cultural home, a place of his own; but stoops to the status of 'mimic man'. The pain and displacement of his own history enables him to treat his own alienation as an instance of the question for identity and location of culture of the colonial Caribbean as well as the post-colonial society.

Naipaul focuses on the disorientation of 'culture' and 'identity' of the Caribbean people. The present day population of that area consists of many racial groups who came to the island as immigrants. In the world of cultural confusions, colonial Caribbean people without any roots in the island are more vulnerable to exploitation than those colonial societies who have their own 'stable' indigenous culture. In this area, the hybridization of different cultures often results in the mimicry of the colonial power.

The identity crisis of the Caribbean springs from the agonizing historical experience of slavery and the psychic encounter with the Creole¹ and western culture. The Caribbeans' carry about themselves the mark, in their attitudes, sensibilities, and convictions of the slave, the 'unnecessary man' (Walsh 1973: 71). They had been so obsessed with their inferiority that they accept western values as absolute and subservience to those values is their natural response. There is no 'sharing' or mutual exchange of cultural values between the western culture and the Caribbean culture. "The¹ western" culture practices its power and authority in the name of 'modernism' and 'civilization'. The mere mimicry (imitation) of the western culture disintegrates and disorients the Caribbeans and makes them hollow and fragmented. Their attempts to discover their roots and find a viable center for their existence reduce to failure. They lose their own individuality and see themselves through the eyes of the colonial authority: ...the European self reduces the colonial other to an object, an entity devoid of an identity, because colonial subjectivity has been derived, there can only be a hollow colonial mimicry of colonial self. (Weiss 1992:76)

Chinua Achebe in his 'The Novelist as Teacher' says, "The novelists' duty is not to beat this morning's headline in topicality, it is to explore the depth of human condition." Naipaul in all of his work deals with very divergent issues to portray the real picture of the post colonial world: the half-organized third world countries, fear of extinction, loss of history, disintegration of personality, sense of alienation, homelessness, rootlessness etc. He dives deep into the psyche of the colonial Caribbean people and explore the split in their selves and identity due to the subservience of colonial power. He wants to make them conscious about their own situation.

In *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961), Naipaul depicts Mohun Biswas's crisis of identity that manifests itself in self-assertion and self-affirmation. He has an intense yearning to assert his own identity, to build his own home. But the disintegration of his traditional values and the influences of western civilization fix his role as a 'mimic man'. He mimics the heroic masculinity of the west to establish his own identity and is reduced to the position of a clown. His borrowed identity alienates him from his society, family and even from his inner self. The anguish of the protagonist and his search for subjectivity, a home, are proved to be uncertain. Though he owns a house in Sikkim Street at the end of the novel, he cannot pay the debt that he has to make for buying the house. His death in a borrowed house implies that the identity is still in process, based on borrowed culture.

In *The Mimic Men* (1967) Ralph Singh is also a prototypical colonial character, confused by the plural but unequal society he is raised in, and for whom identity is a primary issue. He adopts 'European' or 'Western' views, and mimics memoirs, stories, lives, landscapes that are not his own. Ralph's identification with the West affects his identity. He abandons his own family, gets married to an Englishwoman, and adopts colonial education. His mimicry creates an alienation from his own culture that results in fragmentation and vulnerability of his inner self. Like Bhabha, Naipaul also believes in the ambivalence of colonial mimicry that disrupts the clear-cut authority of colonial dominance. The postcolonial writer can create reality and identity by adopting

¹ Originally, referred to a white (man) of European Descent, norm and raised in a tropical colony. The term has usually been applied to postcolonial societies whose present ethnically or racially mixed populations are products of European colonization.

colonial language. Naipaul imitates English language but juxtaposes it with Hindi words, local reality, and thus he asserts cultural alterity. This mimicry of English language is a kind of resistance as it subverts the authenticity and dominance of English language.

'Post-colonialism pursues post national reading of the colonial encounter by focusing on the global amalgam of cultures and identities consolidated by 'imperialism' (Gandhi 1998:129). It is a challenge for the postcolonial writer to construct an identity for the postcolonial people which is often suppressed by the colonial encounter. In *A House for Mr. Biswas* and *The Mimic Man*, Naipaul portrays a very vivid picture of Caribbean history, colonial encounter, and the disintegration of Caribbean culture. He warns the Caribbeans about their hollow mimicry of the Western culture that has demoralized their souls. Naipaul wants them to come out from their complacent state and to re-create their place and identity in the new world. As literature is one of the powerful medium to establish one's identity, Naipaul wants that the post colonial writers' should use English to transmit their own thoughts and feelings and to introduce their own culture and identity to a world audience.

Hybridity, Mimicry and Ambivalence:

In post-colonial theory, hybridity, mimicry and ambivalence have become touchstone for debates over colonial discourse, anti-colonial resistance and post-colonial identity. 'Post colonial studies have been pre-occupied with hybridity, creolization, mestizaje, in-betweenness, diasporas and liminality, with mobility and crossover of ideas and identities generated by colonialism' (Lomba 1998:173). 'Hybridity commonly refers to the creation of new trans-cultural forms within the contact-zone produced by colonialism' (Ashcroft et al 2004:118). In multicultural societies, hybridity implies the mingling of separate and discrete ways of living. In idealized point of view hybridization occurs on a level ground of equality, mutual respect and open- mindedness.

Postcolonial writers attempt to show hybridity as an anti-colonial tool regarding identity, culture and language, because in hybridity, 'the sense of mixing', breaks down the strict polarization of imperialism. They regard hybridity as the mutual trans-culturation of the colonizers and colonized culture, but the celebration of hybridity generally refers to the establishing of colonized culture. As Leela Gandhi says, 'The West remains the privileged meeting ground for all ostensibly cross-cultural conversations' (1998: 136). Hybridity by its assimilating policies negates the imbalance and inequality of the power relations and masks cultural differences. 'There is, however, nothing in the idea of hybridity as such that suggests that mutuality negates the hierarchical nature of the imperial process that it involves the idea of an equal exchange' (Ashcroft et al 2004: 119).

There are some recent debates to illustrate widely divergent ways of thinking about this issue. Fernandez Retamar, a Cuban writer invoked hybridity as an anti-colonial strategy. In a landmark 1971 essay, Retamar writes, 'our *mestizo* America is unique in the colonial world because the majority of the population is racially mixed, it continues to use language of our colonizers', and 'so many of their conceptual tools . . . are also now our conceptual tools' (Quoted in Lomba 2001: 27). For Retainer "Caliban" is the most appropriate symbol of hybridity:

. . . the most venerated word in Cuba- *mambi*- was disparagingly imposed on us by our enemies at the time of the war for independence, and we still have not totally deciphered its meaning. It

seems to have an African root, and in mouth of the Spanish colonialists implied the idea that all independentist as were so many black slaves . . . The independentist as, white and black, adopted with humour something that colonialism meant as an insult. This is the dialectic of Caliban. (Quoted in Loomba, 2001: 174-175)

Again, Robert Young regards hybridity as an influential term in imperial and colonial discourse. 'Hybridity has been seen as part of the tendency of discourse analysis to de-historicise and de-locate cultures from the temporal, spatial, geographical and linguistic context. It leads to an abstract globalized concept of the textual that obscures the specificities of particular cultural situation (Ashcroft et al 2004: 120). But, colonialism does not seek to replace or exclude other forms such as historical, geographical, economic, political etc. Robert Young argues that hybridity became a part of colonialist discourse of racism. He differentiated between the unconscious process of hybrid mixture and a conscious politically motivated hybridity.

Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity in recent post-colonial studies is the most influential and controversial. According to Bhabha, colonial identity is always a matter of agony. Like Fanon, Bhabha suggests that hybridity is the necessary attribute of 'colonial condition'. For Fanon, the colonized subjects fall in psychic trauma when they realize that they can never attain the whiteness that they have been taught to desire.

Bhabha's analysis of colonizer/colonized relations and their interdependence and mutual construction of their subjectivities is based on hybridity. Colonial hybridity is a strategy premised on cultural purity. But, Bhabha contends that all cultural statements and systems are constructed in a space that he called 'third Space of enunciation' (1994: 37). Cultural identity always emerges in this contradictory and ambivalent space. And for this, Bhabha argues, no hierarchical purity of culture is possible. He says in his essay "The Location of Culture", "It is significant that the productive capacities of this third space have a colonial or postcolonial provenance. For willingness to descend into that alien territory . . . may open the way to conceptualizing an international culture, based not on the exotism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity (1994: 33). It is the in-between space that carries the burden and meaning of culture and this is what makes the notion of hybridity so important" (Ashcroft et al 2002: 119).

Bhabha's notion of hybridity has some similarities with Bakhtin. Bhabha argues that the colonial presence is always ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference. Bhabha argues that 'colonial discourse, unlike other forms of authority, does not discriminate between 'self' and 'Other' or 'a home culture' and 'an alien culture', but a 'self' and its 'doubles', "a mother culture and its bastards" (1985:150). In a move that seems to downplay the violence of colonialism, Bhabha maintains that what is disavowed is not "repressed but repeated in hybridity" (Childs 1997: 134).

Mimicry or repetition is now a more active force connected to hybridity. In post-colonial societies evolving out of slavery and exploitation, where there is no mutual trans-culturization possible, hybridity is often reduced to mimicry. Mimicry is a strategy of colonial power and knowledge.

Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as "o *subject of a difference that is almost the same but not quite*"¹ (1994: 86). When colonial discourse encourages the colonized subject to 'mimic' the colonizer, by adopting the colonizers cultural habits, assumptions, institutions and values, the result is never a simple reproduction of those traits. Rather the result is a blurred copy of the colonizer that can be quite threatening (Ashcroft et al 2004: 139). As Bhabha says, "hybridity is the introduction of cultural relativism or synthesized position resolving the dialectic of two cultures but a return of the content and form of colonial authority that 'terrorizes' authority with the *ruse* of recognition, its mimicry, its mockery"(115). Mimicry, therefore, describes the ambivalent relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. The ambivalence of two powers describes the fluctuating relationship between mimicry and mockery. Mimicry is ambivalent, because it requires a similarity and dissimilarity. It relies on the colonized becoming like the colonizer but always remaining different as Thomas Macaulay's famous 1835 "Minutes on Indian Education" implies, "We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of person, Indian in blood and color, but English in taste, in opening, in morals, in intellect."

Mimicry also unsettles colonial discourse. According to Bhabha colonial discourse is compelled to be ambivalent because it never really wants colonial subjects to be exact replica of the colonizer (Ashcroft et al 2004: 13). Bhabha argues that the "menace of mimicry that its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority". For Bhabha, this gap marks a failure of colonial discourse and is a site for resistance that destabilizes the colonial subjectivity and unsettles colonial centrality:

Resistance is not necessarily an oppositional act of political intention, nor is it the simple negation or the exclusion of the 'content' of another culture, as difference once perceived ... [but] the effect of an ambivalence produced within the rules of recognition of dominating discourses as they articulate the signs of cultural difference. (1985:153).

The debate on mimicry regarding literary style began in the nineteenth century among Western scholars. During twentieth century, Fanon and Naipaul further criticized this phenomenon. For Fanon, the colonized loses his /her autonomous cultural identity under the influence of mimicry. Naipaul, on the other hand, takes the position that there is no alternative to becoming 'mimic man' and a central tendency of a colonial power. This analysis informs his view on cultural power as well as writing. Naipaul talked for snatched the underlying insecurities of colonial culture that unsettles the colonial power attempt to assert a stable position over the colonized. Naipaul's approach to mimicry bears some parallel to the work of Homi k. Bhabha that the performance of mimicry is masked by ambivalence. The ambivalent and multi-layered notion of mimicry is found in *The Mimic Men*. Naipaul opens with a very vivid description of the completing of mimicry:

I paid Mr. Shylock three guineas a week for a tall, multi-mirrored, book shape room with a coffin like wardrobe ... I thought Mr. Shylock looked distinguished like a lawyer or businessman or politicians. He had the habit of strolling the bot of his ear inclining his head to listen. I thought the gesture was attractive; I copy it. I knew of secret events in Europe; they tortured me; and although I was trying to live on seven pounds a week, I offered Mr. Shylock my fullest, silent

companion." (7)

The deeply ironic passage uncovers the way mimicry works. The complexity of potential insurgency of mimicry emerges in this above passage. The narrator not only copies the habits of the landlord, but also mimics the guilt of post war Europe concerning the Jews, a guilt that is embedded with the name of Shylock. Ralph (the narrator) encouraged to mimic a person who exploits him. The very irony of the passage suggests a mockery under the surface. It is not the mockery of Shylock but of the whole process of colonization that is being enacted in the narrator's mimicry and cultural understanding. Ralph is here an appropriate object of colonial chain but he is also an inappropriate colonized subject. He thus, can beyond the control of the colonial.

The Burden of Caribbean History and Naipaul's own Dilemma over Home:

The yearning for home, for identity and stability is deeply embedded in the human psyche. V.S. Naipaul, a Caribbean writer, carries around a yearning for the wholeness of home and the crisis of the self-questioning at heart. He seems to bear all the layers of history: his Indian roots, his difficulty of being born in Trinidad, his cosmopolitanism etc. which make him like an uprooted person 'adrift in two worlds to none of which he could really belong' (Ray, 2002: (v)). A kind of historical over awareness, a sense of being in the shadow of the past, as Nietzsche argues, places heavy burdens on the self consciousness of the individual, denuding life of originality and creativity. For Naipaul historical awareness is no doubt like a burden, but it impedes the development of healthy self consciousness that helps him to struggle against the loss of a secure sense of self, and against extinction.

Diana Athill records Naipaul's disaffection for Trinidad with its reality of maladjustment in a colonial multi-cultural society, "a materialist immigrant society continually growing and changing, never setting into any pattern, always retaining the atmosphere of the camp ... not an expanding society but a colonial society, ruled autocratically if benevolently...." (The Telegraph, 21-10-01). In fact, 'in the Caribbean the European imperial enterprise ensured that the worst features of colonialism throughout the globe would all be combined in the region: the virtual annihilation of the native population of the Carib and Arawaks; the plundering and internecine piracy amongst the European powers, the deracination and atrocities of the slave trade and plantation slavery; and the subsequent systems of indenture² which 'stranded' Chinese and Indians in the Caribbean when the return clauses of indenture contracts were dishonored' (Ashcroft et al 1989: 144).

The play of multiple colonialisms in the region began in the earliest of the seventeenth century. The piracy of the Spanish Main by the British, French and Dutch led to Northern European colonization of most of the region except Cuba, Puerto Rico, Santo Domingo, and Trinidad. The rapid formation of the area into the center of a sugar plantation economy was predicated on a massive influx of labour, dramatically escalating the Atlantic slave trade which brought up to ten million Africans to the Western hemisphere over the course of four centuries.

² Indenture is a kind of agreement, which involved transporting people from large population rich areas (such as India, China, and Africa), to areas where they were needed to service plantations.

During the first decade of the nineteenth century, when slavery was outlawed by the European powers, the demand for cheap agricultural labour in colonial plantation economies was met by the system of indentured labour. Naipaul's grandfather was brought to Caribbean island as indenture labourer during 1800s and he 'carried his village with him'. Naipaul writes, "The Half of us (Indians) on this island of the Congunes (in Trinidad) were pretending perhaps not- perhaps only feeling, never formulating it as an idea- that we brought a kind with us, which we could as it were, unroll like a carpet on the flat land." (Nobel lecture). The Trinidadian Indian was bound by customs and conventions. The present-day population of the Caribbean consists of a variety of racial groups all more or less in ancestral exile - from China, Africa, India and the Middle East. This huge diasporic population faced the obvious question of national, political and cultural identity when the third generation of the Caribbean met independence from the colonial power.

The prospect to establish an independent cultural and literary identity is thus, very difficult in the Caribbean than in other post-colonial societies. With the indigenous Caribs, Arawaks and Amerindians all but annihilated, there was no pre-colonial culture to turn to, and with such an ethnic admixture still living in the region, the problem of a common cultural base is acute. In the Caribbean plural culture there can be no single notion of 'Caribbeanness', rather there is a growing acceptance of syncretic model of cultural definition that is inclusive and accepts the diversity, hybridity and mimicry as the foundation of cultural identities. This displacement and disposition of cultural identity and the sense of alienation creates a kind of self-awareness that enables Naipaul to rediscover his 'identity' and 'self'.

Naipaul, a third generation Indian born and brought up in an extended Hindu family in Trinidad, was bound by customs and conventions, rites and rituals. The family always abounded in *pundits*, was trying jealously to guard the fossilized Indianness and Hinduism against the possible contamination and hybridization with an alien culture. But, in that immigrant society memories growing dim, there was no guiding test. What the Trinidadian Indians do is the mimicry of the Indian culture. The family gradually disintegrates under the hegemonic pressure of the former European culture. Naipaul's predicament is that of one, caught in the various threads of multicultural society. 'On the one hand, there was the colonial west Indian picture of slavery, exploitation and squalor, on the other hand, the East Indians' anxiety for acculturation with Creole world and his aversion to the crass materialism of the west Indians. His identity is problematized under the disparate socio-cultural forces which occasioned his escape into the metropolitan center of London for pursuit of a writing career' (Quoted in Chakrabarti 2002: 3).

Naipaul carries his world, the burden of his history, but only finds the truth about himself in the process of writing. His writing is populated with sympathetic characters, and the disillusionment of the past as he says in *Finding the Centre* (1984), 'A writer after a time carries his world with him, his own burden of experience and literary experience (one deepening the other); and I do believe - especially after writing prologue to my autobiography- that I would have found equivalent connections with my past and myself wherever I had gone' (10). In *A House for Mr Biswas*, for example, the life of Mr Biswas is the life of Naipaul himself. Like Naipaul, Biswas belongs to a decadent culture. Broken away from his historical and cultural roots, he has moved from house to house to gain independence and security. A House is not simply a shelter; but the

seat of family and culture and identity for which every rootless person strives. Biswas' searching for identity is seen in the development of the various stages in building several houses in the Chase, in Green vale, at Shorthills and in Sikkim Street. He has invested his hopes in major projects which end in disaster and mental distress. Just as Naipaul unwillingly returns to England beaten by life, Biswas also suffers from a mental break down and returned to Tulsi House.

The dispossession and displacement of cultural identity and alienation create a kind of self-awareness that enables Naipaul to re-discover his 'identity' and 'self'. He carries around an urge for the wholeness of 'home' and 'self- questioning at the heart' which is also found at the heart of all postcolonial people. Naipaul seems to find his home through writing, through the ability to imagine him, and through writing to respond to his own history, culture and identity.

Cultural Confrontation; Hybridization and Disintegration:

The Caribbean is a pluralistic, post-colonial and ruthlessly competitive immigrant society where different cultures came into close contact with Western culture. But, rather than mutual transculturation and balanced hybridization of the cultures, the sub-cultures seem to have been dispossessed, disinherited and disintegrated under the hegemonic pressure of Western policies-modernization, civilization etc. They (the Caribbean) accept and imitate the western culture, language, customs and outlook. As C.L.R. James pointed out in *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (1962) that the West Indies has never been a traditional colonial territory with clearly distinguished economic and political relations between two different cultures. There was no native culture. The aboriginal Amerindian civilization had been destroyed and every succeeding year, the labouring population, slave or free, incorporating into itself more and more of the language, customs, aims and outlook of its master.

Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas* is regarded as the best spiceman of cross-cultural creativity. The story of the Tulsi household in the novel is the story of the consolidation of Indian diaspora in Trinidad (a Caribbean island), its perpetuation and its final disintegration and confrontation with the waves of western culture. Hanuman House (Tulsi House) was a timber and corrugated-iron building in the High Street at Arwacas and it stood there like an alien fortress. Hanuman House represents the old Hindu culture which had incorporated to Trinidad by *Pundit* Tulsi and by thousands of other Indians who had emigrated from India to Trinidad. The house is a miniature India and its members tenaciously preserve the memory of their native country. It holds on exclusively to immigrant Hindu way of life in the first and second generations but yields to a syncretism in the third generation when the Creole world outside steeply into the Tulsi household and it disintegrates.

Mrs. Tulsi is very keen to preserve the Hindu culture of which she and Seth think themselves to be custodians. The daily *puja* or worship, and the various rituals prescribed by the religious orthodox are regularly performed. Household worship makes use of fire and water for purification; food offerings, incense, flowers etc. The family has acquired a *pundit* in one of its son-in-laws. But the sacred Hindu religion in the novel gradually reduced to business and bargains and dissipated under the onslaught of extremely materialistic western culture. Bruce Mac Donald has noted the geographical barriers as the root causes of diluted Hinduism, as "the

thinking of his society had already moved towards the west and away from India. Hinduism has not completely broken down, but it is succumbing to the 'seepage' from the surrounding society" (1975: 43-44).

Trinidad Hindus, unanchored as they are, feel unsafe religiously for religion is a great source of fortitude at critical times and this sense of insecurity among religious minorities engender inferiority. Towards the end of the novel when *Pundit* Hari dies, and no one can be found to replace him, Mrs. Tulsi, a preserver of Hindu culture, too bends in her faith. Naipaul mentions, "For every *puja* Mrs. Tulsi tried a different *pundit*, since no *pundit* could please her as well as Hari and no *pundit* pleading her faith yielded. She sent Sushila to burn candles in the Roman Catholic church; she put a crucifix in her room; and she had Pundit Tulsi's grave cleaned on all Saint's Day" (522).

Naipaul sarcastically presents the complete picture of hybridization and the disintegration of religious values in the novel. The younger Tulsi son, Owad worships the Hindu deities though he wears cross, an emblem of Christian faith. The observance of the holy rituals has been diluted with hybridization, hypocrisy and superstitions. The family Hindu deity 'Hanuman' seems to be replaced by Christ. Naipaul shows ironically:

The elder god did wear a crucifix. It was regarded . . . exotic and desirable charm. The elder god wear many charms and it was thought fitting that someone so valuable should be protected. On the Sunday before examination he was bathed by Mrs. Tulsi in water consecrated by Hari, the soles of his feet were soaked in lavender water, he was made to drink a glass of Guinness stout, and he left Hanuman House, a figure of awe, laden with crucifix, sacred thread and beads, a mysterious sachet, a number of curious armlets, consecrated coins, and a lime in each trouser pocket. (125)

Again, Govinda's wife Chinta uses Hindi incantation in combination with a candle and a crucifix. When sickness strikes, Hindi prayers, Indian and African superstitions and western science are all called upon to contribute their healing and curative influence. The family now celebrates Christmas day as their religious festivals: "The Tulsi celebrated Christmas in their store and ...in their home. It was a purely Tulsi festival". (119)

Another mark of hybridization is, it crumbles the solidarity and unity of Tulsi joint family and disintegrates it into nuclear families. Pt. Tulsi's enigmatic relation with India compels him for joint family system. So, he keeps his in-laws at home after their marriage. Warner Lewis' observation characterizes the family: 'As head of the class in Trinidad, he [Pt. Tulsi] provides, after the style of the princely great houses of India, a sanctuary of for the succeeding generations of the family. It is perhaps the fault of nature and of circumstances that cultural anomaly arises out of this' (1973: 94).

Tulsi family maintained a united front against all outsiders. It believes in the ideal of family solidarity. Every member of the family has his/her own duties to perform. Later some members of Tulsi clan certainly imbibe new ideas and adopt new modes of life. Mr. Biswas is obsessed

with his freedom and identity and rebels against the traditionalism, rigidity and communal life of Hanuman House. He finds pleasure in establishing his own identity. He separates himself from the other Tulsi members by reading books by such authors as Marcus Aurelius and Samuel Smiles etc. W.C. Turtle who is a firm upholder and defender of old Brahminical culture in the novel, has fallen under the deep influence of western civilization and its literature, music and art: "W.C. Turtle was all for modernity. In addition to the gramophone, he possessed a radio, a number of dainty tables, a morris suite." A symbol of this man's modernity is his purchase of a four-foot high statue of a naked woman. Then Shekhar's getting married to a Christian girl and leaving Hanuman House is a great blow to the family solidarity. Mrs. Tulsi feels compelled to compromise with the alien western culture. She feels compelled to send her son to a Roman Catholic educational institution. She goes to live in Port of Spain to look after her younger son. Thus, cultural confrontation between the rigid orthodox Tulsi family and the modern Western civilization breaks down the solidarity of the Tulsi family.

Linguistic habit of the members of the Tulsi family is also changed gradually. Hindi is now spoken much less than before. As Naipaul says, "Though the children understood Hindi they could no longer speak it. They started using words like 'Mummy' and 'Daddy' instead of 'Mai' and 'Bap'" (426). Language is related to identity of the Caribbean people. Biswas differentiates himself from the Tulsi members by reading English literature and by speaking Creole.

In *The Mimic men*, the intermingling of cultures, hybridity and creolization provide no stability but make the society fragmented, inorganic. Naipaul has shown deep sense of powerlessness of this hybridized colonial society, "The bigger truth come: that in a society like ours, fragmented, inorganic, no link between man and landscape, a society not held together by common interests, there is no true internal source of power"(206). Isabella is an artificially created society, designed for colonial profit, in which people from different cultures have been forced to live together. As there is no mutual hybridization of cultures, it provides no alternative or comfort to the people. Ralph acknowledges:

[T]he restlessness, the deep disorder, which the great explorations, the overthrow in three continents off established social organizations, the unnatural bringing together of people who could achieve fulfillment only within the security of their own societies and the landscapes hymned by their ancestors ... the empires of our time were short lived, but they have altered the world forever; their passing away is their least significant feature. (52)

Here, Naipaul's narrative suggests that comfortable hybridity in these colonial dislocations cannot be possible.

By showing the disintegration of the Tulsi households in *A House for Mr. Biswas* and the fragmented social structure of the society in *The Mimic men*, Naipaul portrays the brutal texture of Caribbean culture which is trapped in the various threads of multicultural interactions and colonial mechanics. Here, in a colonial society, the hybridization of cultures does not mean the sharing of different cultures but the establishing of one particular powerful culture. In the

Caribbean society, the Western culture influences the people in such a way that they deny their own culture and happy to live in a borrowed culture.

The Quest for Identity: Mimicry and Alienation:

Taking an overview of world literature on December 1999 at a seminar in Bareilly, Professor Mohit K. Ray said that quest for identity is going to be a major researching theme for some years to come. Identity is an especially topical issue in the contemporary study of ethnicity, race, class, gender, sexuality and sub-culture. The quest for identity, in fact, is one of the most important factors in the life of an individual as well as that of a nation. Paradoxically, the concept 'identity' itself is in crisis. Identity becomes an issue, as Kobena Mercer puts it, "when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty" (Quoted in Brooker 1999: 109). The project to establish an 'independent' cultural and literary identity in the pluralistic immigrant Caribbean society, where there is no single notion of 'Caribbeanness', is probably more uncertain and fraught than in the other post-colonial societies. The dispossession and displacement that the uprooted, marginalized, diasporic Caribbean people are subjected to, bring them into a state of agony and they found that mimicry is the only way out. Caught up in that limbotic (see Dante's *Inferno*) situation the immigrants lose not only their native place but also their identity. All their efforts to ascertain their identity by sending roots in culturally alien society prompts them to try various alternatives to gain status and fixity. Their search for identity, a face, alteration of heritage and language strives towards accumulation. Naipaul takes the reader into the dimly lit corridors of the 'Caribbean's inner world. He seems to believe that in such a picaroon society evolving out of slavery and colonialism, no balanced or comfortable acculturation is possible, and 'mimicry' of the colonial authority is obvious. There exists no opportunity to start afresh and there are no new and unsettling conceptualizations of identity to discover. The imitation of the colonizers' cultural habits, values and assumptions make them *hollow man* and create a dehumanizing and alienating impact on their social, cultural, political and the linguistic identity.

For Frantz Fanon, mimicry is the result of a colonial indoctrination process through which Caribbean man and woman denied an autonomous cultural identity, have been coerced into seeking legitimacy through the imitation of western models- through the strategic adoption of 'white masks'. Ralph Singh, in *The Mimic Men* (1967), is a prototypical colonial character, an intelligent and sensitive person confused by the plural but unequal society he is raised in, and for whom identity is a primary issue. Isabella's history of slavery has left the island with a 'taint'. Ralph wishes to escape from his own East Indian immigrant history, in which he 'is the late intruder, he picturesque Asiatic, linked to 'neither' (8), serves to complete a 'little bastard world' (122). As a result, the inhabitants of Isabella compose 'a haphazard, disordered and mixed society' (55). In that bastard society as a survivor of the colonial era, Ralph faces the problem of being utterly unable to create an original identity caught between helplessly imitating the colonizer in an attempt at originally, or returning the roles that colonizer has imposed on the likes of him. Ralph's awareness of himself as a mimic man (someone trapped in position of dependence on the imperial country for his identity) is gained when he is in London. As he says, "an awareness of myself not as an individual but as a performer, in that child's game where every action of the victim is deemed to have been done at the command of his tormentor, and where even refusal is

useless, for that too can be deemed to have been commanded ... "(81). As in a theatrical stage where every action of the player originates with playwright, Ralph's action, thought, and consciousness also originates from the colonizer. Ralph Singh comes to London, hoping to achieve a spontaneous originality -the 'flowering' and the "extension of [him]self (18) - only to find that everything has already been scripted by the colonial authority and his duty is only to playing the 'role' to 'mimicking' what he has decided for him. His position as a 'mimic man' is not something that he willingly chooses; he is a 'mimic man' because he has no alternative. Singh comes to London with an aspiration to search for an original identity, but finds him reduced to an unreal, insubstantial character walking about in a too solid, too real city.

Ralph Singh's life is in parenthesis. He feels alienated in his political career, business success, marriage, which are influenced by the shadow of colonial idealism. He cannot construct any positive meaning and identity out of his political experiences in a decolonized country. His slogans are based on "borrowed phrases." He was one of the faceless politicians "made by distress and part of [distress]" (240). The lack of real power also makes Ralph's and his friend Browne's efforts at governance futile since they are stopped at every meaningful turn by those who truly hold power and authority. They realize that the government cannot run without the help of colonial officials and government aid from London (209). Ralph realizes that his companions' efforts to gain political identity will be doomed to failure and learns "that success changes nothing" (203); the island is still under the colonial yoke and they are "compelled to cater to the interests of those powerful actors that they cannot control" (Hintzen 9). This outcome conjoins with Fanon's contention that "in the majority of cases, for 95 percent of the population of underdeveloped countries, independence brings no immediate change" (*The Mimic Men*: 75). The failure to establish an identity as a politician and businessman alienated Ralph from his surroundings. Ralph writes: I see that all the activity of these existing as I have said in my own mind in parenthesis, represented a type of withdrawal, and was part of the injury inflicted on me by the too solid three-dimensional city in which I could never feel myself as anything but spectral, disintegrating, pointless fluid. (51-2)

Sexual promiscuity is a factor of imitation that is adopted by the Third World immigrants who move from the parochial society which imposes sexual taboos to a liberal Western World which is not infected with such inhibition. Ralph is a man doomed to live under the shadow of Western lifestyle which is not his own. His sexual frustrations are not his own, but they are the frustrations of the society, of a race, of a culture. Ralph is attracted to Sandra because of her confidence and her 'rapaciousness' (an imperial trait) obviously. Part of Sandra's attraction is that she is English; she belongs to British culture in a way. His marriage is simply another strategy to attract himself to English culture. Memmi writes, "A product manufactured by the colonizer is accepted with confidence. His habits, clothing, food, architecture are closely copied, even if inappropriate. A mixed marriage is the extreme expression of this audacious leap." (1965: 121). Ralph is also attracted to Stella for similar reasons. Stella's manner 'was a way of looking at the city and being in it, a way of appearing to manage it and organize it for a series of separate, perfect pleasures' (*The Mimic Men*: 231). Ralph's fascination for the colonizer's culture and lifestyle prompts him to make relationship with Sandra and Stella, but he has no emotional attachment with them. The relationship leads to frustration and disappointment, and alienates him from his own family and

society. His mother does not accept Sandra warmly as she is an English woman. He has rejected the cultural tradition of his people and his only chance for survival is to retreat into emptiness. Ralph's consciousness, imagination and memoirs are also identified by the mimicking of the West which affects him psychologically in a number of interrelated ways. One of Ralph Singh's earliest memories of school life sounds puzzling: "my first memory of school is taking an apple to the teacher. This puzzles me. We have no apples on Isabella. It must be an orange; yet my memory insists on the apple" (90). The apples, the traffic jams etc. were the "true, pure world" from which came the textbooks, customs, ideas and languages which were taught in the schools of Isabella. Western mode of education alienates the children from their original thoughts and feelings. The child's first lesson about the weight of the king's crown is a richly evocative image of dependence and otherness. Such weight legitimates power and represents order. The children imitated what they learned to read in the book. The neurosis of the mimic people is found here:

"...we here on the islands, handling books printed in this world and using its goods, had been abandoned and forgotten. We pretended to be real, to be learning, to be preparing ourselves for life, we mimic men of the New World, one unknown corner of it, with all its reminders of the corruption that come so quickly to the new". (146)

Esabella (Trinidad) starts as a British colony and it adopted the model of colonial educational system based on English educational patterns. As James H. Kavanaugh points out, schools are one of the "social apparatuses which have a heavily ideological function" (1990: 132), Ralph does "freely internalize and appropriate picture of (his) social world" (Kavanaugh 310). Ralph accepts the western European view as the only correct one. He disdains his given Indian name Ranjit Kripalsingh. He broke Kripalsingh into two and added Ralph and use to Sign his name as R.R.K. Singh which is a western one. This mimicry only serves to disorient Ralph, dislocate his sense of place and history, creating what Albert Memmi calls "a permanent duality" within him (1965: 106). As Ralph depicts, "... we denied our knowledge of this things to which offer the hours school we were to return. We denied the landscape and people. We could see out of open doors and windows" (95). They become alienated from their surroundings and accept western world as the real world.

Ralph has played a number of social roles in *The Mimic Men*. In retrospective, he asks the reader to "understand unsuitability's for the role I had created for myself, as politicians, as dandy, as celebrant." (40) Therefore, one should not be surprised at his "inevitable failure" (184). He asserts, "from play-acting to disorder: it is the patterns" (184). He finds himself in a cycle of action and reaction that continually feeds on mimicry. His failure is certain because of the fact that he feels he pretends. The colonized "can never succeed in becoming identified with the colonizer, nor even in copying his role correctly" (124). Memmi maintains, "but Ralph continues to try and play his role because he finds no authentic alternative identity: no matter where he travels, what company he keeps, and what he does, his finalities pervade every stage of his life, appearing in the recurring images of 'shipwreck', 'a final disorder', and the 'end of an empty world'. This can only be alienation, 'Dust to dust, rags to rags, fear to fear'" (1965:41). His world reached the end foretold by T.S. Eliot in "The Hollow Man"(1925):

'This is the way world ends
Not with a bang but with a whimper'.

Mohan Biswas, another mimic man in *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1969), adopts and internalizes the colonial rhetoric of masculinity and heroic personality to assert his identities. In his essay "Of Mimicry and Man", Homi K Bhabha admits that marginalization is a form of castration and that colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed and recognizable 'other' as a subject of difference that 'is almost the same but not quite' (1984: 86). The colonized subject who has internalized the rhetoric of colonial culture and identity is condemned to a life of inadequate mimicry, forced to adopt identity of a clown, a parodist who is almost the same but not quite.

Mr. Biswas' attempt to construct a stable heroic personality is constantly thwarted by wretched sense of inadequacy that comes from internalizing the imperial discourses, a discourse that insists that all colonized subjects are 'mimic' men. Mr. Biswas often evokes the image of a clown to construct his identities. The clown is a potent symbol of in-between's, neither man nor boy, railing at authorities and yet impotent and marginalized, inadequate mimicking normal manliness. The most important strategy that Naipaul adopts to render Mr. Biswas absurd is to refer continuously to unimpressive physique, his swinging calf muscles (*A House*, 353), his hairless hands, the ridiculous knob on his nose, and his rising belly. Mr. Biswas rebels against the rigid unorthodoxy of Hanuman House and he uses the word 'tough' to insult the Tulsi and makes a virtue out of his hairless hands as a sign of intellectual superiority. Here, again Mohan Biswas is simply replicating the colonial discourse of constructing the colonized subject as either emasculated or British and hyper-sexual (Chatterjee, 1999). Mr. Biswas' intense desire to adopt ideal European muscularity makes him ridiculous and alienated from other because mimicry is a blurred copy, never produces the exact thing.

Then, the ideal of European intellectual, in-control and heroic man is something Biswas would try to emulate throughout his life. In his endeavour to build a masculine identity, Mr. Biswas inevitably turns to a British writer of conduct books and novels such as Samuel Smiles and the European tradition of the *bildungsroman* or the development novel. Mr. Biswas' mimicking of Smiles' heroes and the very European tradition of the *bildungsroman* are doomed to failure from the very beginning. The very historical circumstances that have pushed the Smiles' hero to the center have pushed Biswas to the margin. Again, the naming of his puppy "Tarzan" (as a kind of alter ego) in the green vale is very ridiculous. Tarzan, a white man, is the heroic ideal of controlled masculinity. The puppy Tarzan however, turns out to be as much of a coward as Mr. Biswas and simply rules over chickens. Mr. Biswas symbolizes the expatriate experience of minority culture adapting and imitating a cosmopolitan society's ideology and morality. This gives a split identity to his fleeting self and the life of an exile. As he is too much obsessed with western ideas and ideologies he is alienated from his inner being and seems to be ridiculous.

The mimicry of the colonial identity makes the colonizer hollow at the core. Ralph Singh and Mr. Biswas are stranger to themselves. Like a fragmented self almost nomadic, Biswas "as a boy...had moved from one house to another and since his marriage he felt, he had lived nowhere" (*A House*, 8). Being alienated from society, they are passive spectators who 'see' never 'feel'. As

'mimic men' they live without stable social identities. Empty and fragmented, they simply admit in the cross-cultural current of transitional society. Their position is no better than exile, as Edward Said in his book *Reflection of Exile* says:

Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unbearable rift between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be summoned...the achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind forever. (2001: 173)

Mimicry of English Language: Creativity in Imperial Tongue:

In the preceding chapter an attempt was made to focus on how mimicry creates a partial and incomplete identity of the colonized and how this partial identity leads them to self-fragmentation and alienation. This chapter will show mimicry from another angle. 'Mimicry' can be a kind of resistance, 're-making and the creation not of a simple copy but of something subtly but distinctly new' (Boehmer 1995: 172). Naipaul adopts English language in his writing but he appropriates the language in such a way that it can reflect his thoughts and the local reality. Postcolonial writing takes the dominant language English and uses it to express the most deeply felt issues of postcolonial social experience. This form of imitation, thus, becomes a form of resistance. Here, the most effective interpretation of postcolonial resistance is resistance to absorption, appropriation and transformation of dominant language for the purpose of representing postcolonial cultural identity.

Language is a major component of identity and representation. The use of English language has opened up unresolved arguments. The question, whether dominant language can be turned around and used for subversive purposes has been central to postcolonial discourse. Braj Kachru argues that English language has been widely accepted as *lingua franca* in India because of its relatively neutral nature, since its effects in everyday use are far less inflammatory than those stemming from the contention between one or another minority language (1986). Achebe also says, 'For me there is no other choice. I have been given this language and I intend to use it...I feel that the English will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be anew English still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings' (1975: 103). Ngugi wa Thingo, on the other hand, has negated the mimicry of English language. He argues that writing in an African language is 'part and parcel of the anti imperialist struggles of Kenyan and African people' (1981a: 24). However, postcolonial writers used the language as a cultural vehicle, a medium through which they could introduce the socio-cultural picture of post colonial society.

In Caribbean context, the debate on mimicry is associated with Nineteenth Century phenomenon of 'literary servility'. Mimicry is a strategy by which Caribbean writers of different background seek to interrogate the European literary and cultural traditions that give shape to their work. Frantz Fanon for instance, urges Caribbean writers to free themselves from mimicry. For Fanon, mimicry is the result of a colonial indoctrination process through which the Caribbean denied an autonomous cultural identity and seeks legitimacy through the imitation of Western models. Naipaul, on the other hand, argues that Caribbean writers are themselves fictional Characters.

Their second hand existence living in a 'borrowed culture' (*Middle Passage*, 68), and their surrogate literature, makes them 'mimic men' of the new world (*The Mimic Man*, 175). These mimic men began to represent themselves in literary forms. Adopted from European, 'they effectively sidestepped the position of the silent object in colonialist representation' (Boehmer 1995: 172). Their generic misappropriation constantly transgresses the received and orthodox boundaries of literary men. They mix the Western genres with local contents. They reflect back to colonizer a distorted image of his world and undercut his categories of perception. They also resist the colonizers misrepresentation of the colonized.

In the medium of language and literary forms mimicry remains for nationalists and other anti colonialists and as an important mode of resistance and recreation. English is now used by the postcolonial writers. They appropriate the language 'to bear' the burden of their own cultural experiences. As Raja Rao puts it, "one has to convey in a language that is not one's own. One has to convey the various shades of omission of a creation through movement that looks maltreated in an alien language" (1971: i-ii). In the Caribbean, the suppression of the vernacular language in favor of English was used as an instrument of imperial rule. So, the mimicry of English language by the Caribbean after the independence is criticized as a form of colonial betrayal. Naipaul's mimicry of English language in his writing is 'not a betrayal of his origins, but a discovery of one's possibilities on an aspect of the inevitable of Caribbean and postcolonial literature' (Mustafa 1995: 10). To loosen the language from its colonial past, Naipaul appropriates³ and transforms English language and subjects to a process of syntactic and verbal dislocation. As Salman Rushdie writes, "We cannot simple use of the language in the way British did... it needs remaking of our own purposes" (*Imaginary Homelands*, 1991).

Naipaul, in *A House for Mr. Biswas*, uses Standard English. He applies the strategies of appropriation and transformation by adopting local idioms, and cultural references. He uses 'glossing'⁴, such as '*nakphul*- a nose flower (32), untranslated Hindi words *puja* (50), *baba* (53), '*roti*' (88J, '*maharajin*' (32), '*rakshas*' (387), etc. vernacular rhymes such as '*rama rama sita rama*'/ '*rama rama sita rama*' (291). Again, the language of conversations dialogues in this novel shows adoption of English words into the syntax of Hindi language: Oh! Bipti cried 'stop *this bickering ickering*' (28), or '*look, look why nobody ain't put anything to chock up the coffin*' (33). In this regard, the conversation between Mr. Biswas and Alec about how he (Biswas) could manage to marry Shama, the Tulsi daughter, is another important example:

"How you manage this so quick? Well, I see the girl and she was looking at me, and I was looking at she. So I give she a little of the old of sweet talk and I see that she was liking me too. And well to cut a long story short, I ask to see the mother. Rich people you know. Big house." (91-92)

Naipaul thus, is situating himself in relation to a European tradition but at an oblique angle. His mimicking of English language in his writing is not mere imitation of the colonial language, but

³ It is a process of capturing and remolding colonizers language to new usages.

⁴ Parenthetic translation of individual words.

subversion of the authority of colonial language. By using the master's tool, Naipaul introduces, the local reality, cultural identity, history, sorrow, suffering and pains of the Caribbean society and establishes his identity as a postcolonial writer all over the world. Mimicry here, is a mode of resistance and re-creation.

Conclusion

It could be concluded now that when post-colonial writers attempt to show 'hybridity is an anti-colonial tool regarding identity, culture and language, Naipaul attempts to explore the fact that in colonial Caribbean society, the effect of hybridization is not 'sharing' but 'mimicry' or 'imitation' of the former imperial power and knowledge.

In post-colonial literature, hybridity is celebrated because of its sense of mixing. Comfortable and balanced hybridization can break down the strict polarization of imperialism based on colonizer/ colonized, civilized/ savage, light/ darkness etc. Naipaul suggests that this kind of balanced transformation is not possible in Caribbean society. Caribbean society is a multi-racial, immigrant, slave colonial society with the 'drive and restlessness of immigrants'. Though the colonizers are physically absent, they ruled over the society by their hegemonic power- ideology, education etc. The Caribbean finds the society as a theatrical stage where he has to perform his/ her role as mimic man ascribed for him by the colonial authority. There is no other choice for the Caribbean.

Naipaul is cognizant of the harmful effects of mimicry in his novel, *A House for Mr. Biswas* and *The Mimic Men*, Naipaul sarcastically present a comic but pathetic view of the demoralizing position and the incongruities and foibles of the mimic men - Ralph Singh, Mr. Biswas, Browne, W.C. Turtle etc. These mimic men lose their originality and thinking ability by imitating the values and norms of imperial authority. This mimicry gives them a partial and fragmented identity that makes them alienated from their own communities, family and even from their inner selves. Their alienation is the consequences of the vivid imaginative life created and sustained by the alien influence of imperial knowledge and power. They attempt to escape into an ideal, static vision of the self and deny the continuity of life in Caribbean society. As Ralph Singh says: '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'. (*The Mimic Men*, 146)

However, Naipaul's stand regarding mimicry is ambivalent. The 'mimicry' of English language by the post-colonial writer is commendable in Naipaul's scale of linguistic values. He says, 'the English language was mine, the tradition was not'. (Naipaul 1976: 26). Naipaul adopts English language, but appropriates and transforms the language to bear the burden of his local realities. He writes his novel in English language but uses Hindi words to locate the cultural traits of the people. He also uses English words in the syntax of Hindi language. Here, 'mimicry' is no longer subservience but resistance, as it destroys the authenticity and superiority of English language. It also enables him to establish his identity as a postcolonial writer all over the world.

'Most imaginative writers discover themselves and the world through their works', (Naipaul 1981: 21). Naipaul's own dislocation from his roots enables him to understand the alienation and self-

fragmentation of the colonized people. He, by his writings wants to make colonized conscious about their hollow imitation and deterioration of their identity under the hegemonic pressure of the western culture. He wants that postcolonial writer should re-create their identities and introduce their own cultures all over the world.

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