EXPATRIATE CONCERNS IN THE WORKS OF V. S. NAIPAUL

ABSTRACT

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Commonwealth literature, a term used for literature coming from members of the former British colonial nations, seems to be losing ground with each passing day. It is a term whose genesis is political, and it has begun to fail to define the various kinds of literatures that exist in the world today. The reasons that the term ‘Commonwealth’ has failed is that it is not consistent in its presence: member countries which were once colonies of the Empire, withdraw and rejoin as they please; moreover, certain countries wish to stay away from the membership altogether; and certain others like the USA, though a former British colony, cannot be included because of a change in its status; standing in a totally different league.

All the vicissitudes of the history of a Commonwealth nation; from freedom to slavery, slavery to revolution, revolution to independence and uptill the present time was covered by the term Commonwealth Literature, which has now been replaced by a better, more practical term, Postcolonial literature.

Postcolonial literature involves the literature of a number of countries. It covers those countries which have no native past such as Canada and Australia; countries with a tribal past such as New Zealand and countries of Africa; and countries with a past rich in heritage such as Pakistan and India. Under the aegis of Postcolonial literature also comes writing from countries of the Caribbean Islands, the South Pacific Islands, Malaysia, Sri Lanka and Singapore.

The literature of the West Indies is characterized by the representation of a mixed population; of African and Asian heritage with small groups of settlers from the Empire. The literature in the West Indies originated in the seventeenth century with settler accounts of natives and other settlers. Later works offer an insight into the functioning of the colonial situation. Much later, the society itself became the subject with attention duly paid to representation of its formation and operation.
Modern West Indian literature can be said to have emerged in the beginning of the twentieth century. Writing at this time was usually a representation of the group that the writer came from; the two major groups being the smaller Asian group and the bigger non-Asian group. Lack of an intellectual environment, readership and publication houses hampered the rapid growth of the writing industry. It was because of this that the writings of early West Indian writers seldom found popularity. Those writers who gained some recognition at all were referred to as local writers, with little, if any, following abroad.

This deficiency on the literary scene brought about a great exodus of writers and would-be writers to England between the 1930s and 1960s. Writers like Edgar Mittelhozer, George Lamming, Samuel Selvon, Wilson Harris, Jean Rhys and V.S. Naipaul all belong to this cadre. West Indian writing can, therefore, be referred to as largely expatriate or exilic writing, because the major corpus of writing comes from these writers who live outside of the West Indies.

West Indian literature largely deals with issues such as racial differences, creolization, presence or absence of history and the greatest myth they have: El Dorado. In addition to these, writers also focus on roots and identity, social and historical injustices, and the creation of an ordered, new society. To write on all these issues, the West Indian writers also employ the West Indian English dialect to present an authentic picture of their society. Though critics like George Orwell feel that exile damages the productivity of a novelist because it restricts his movement and capacity to see far, the West Indian writers have proved otherwise. In their writings we see that despite being away from their native land, they create a true representation of it.

One such writer of West Indian origin settled in England, Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul, is the subject of this thesis. Born on August 17, 1932, he
belongs to Trinidad, and has an Indian parentage. His father Seepersad Naipaul was a journalist with the Trinidad Guardian and a writer in his own capacity. It is from his father, as Naipaul says, that he got the ambition to be a writer.

The dereliction of society, its intellectually impoverished condition, the restricted life of the Indian clan and community, but above all, the desire to be a writer made Naipaul migrate to England in 1950 to pursue an Oxford education. 1954 saw him emerge as a graduate, and struggling to write substantially enough to be called a writer. This status as a writer was achieved in 1957, with the publication of his first novel, The Mystic Masseur. Beginning with the John Llewellyn Rhys Memorial Prize awarded in 1957 Naipaul has won every coveted award in the world of literature including the Nobel Prize in 2001.

V.S. Naipaul began his literary career with fiction. He considers the novel as a form of social enquiry and over the years he has dealt with a number of topics and subjects in his fictional work. The early novels of Naipaul concentrated on the immigrant society of the West Indies, particularly the East Indian community, for the obvious reason of his belonging to it.

From 1960 Naipaul began to involve himself with other forms of writing such as travel writing, histories and essays. India has been his recurrent interest, the representations of which have been brought out in three books on his Indian journeys. In addition to India, Naipaul has covered, what he refers to as, half-made societies and the worlds of ‘mimic men’. He has covered also in his travel writings, South America, some African countries, and the non-Arab Muslim world. Of late he has written two novels, one a sequel to the other; which not only are accurate representations of the modern world, but take his protagonist through the process of triple alienation, whereas his focus earlier had been on double exile.
This thesis picks up the details of expatriation present in Naipaul’s works, both fiction and non-fiction, and explores the concerns related to it. In addition to this it tries to present evidence to show that immigration and exile are protractions of expatriation.

As expatriation, immigration and exile are prominent themes to be found in the corpus of Naipaul, it is necessary to have an idea of what exactly each means and how this is relevant to an understanding of the situations presented by Naipaul in his work.

The word expatriate originates from the Latin word *expatriare*, and refers to withdrawal of the individual from his native abode. This withdrawal is meant to be temporary and is supposed to end with the return of the individual to his native country. Occasionally, however, the expatriate tends to adopt the immigrant status.

Immigrant comes from the Latin word *immigrare*, and refers to the coming of a person to live permanently in another country. Unlike the expatriate, the immigrant has to adopt the society of the country to which he has sought immigration. He has to become a part of that society and adopt its customs and language as well. The immigrant looks for a new national identity and has to, therefore, represent himself as part of that identity.

Exile is from the Latin *exilium* meaning ‘banishment’. It is a very strong term and symbolizes a clean break from any previous situation. It refers to the individual giving up all his situations and making do with the exile condition, which is usually thrust upon, and never opted for. The exile knows that there is no going back ever.
The movement of an individual from the expatriate condition to immigrant status and then to exile has been presented in a number of writings of Naipaul. Each has also been separately dealt with indepth.

**The Mystic Masseur** was Naipaul’s first novel to be published. It came out in 1957 and won him the John Llewellyn Rhys Memorial Prize. The novel tells of the social progress of Ganesh Ramsumair from an unknown school teacher to masseur to mystic; then to an MLC and finally an MBE. The novel depicts through this man how personalities degenerate; it also shows the clinging of a minority Indian community to remnants of rituals and beliefs in the wake of rapid creolization.

**The Suffrage of Elvira** (1958) depicts the political scenario and elections in Elvira, a society of people from varied backgrounds. Their perception of the event is marked by misunderstandings, greed and deception. It belongs to a later period than **The Mystic Masseur**, and shows that creolization is not just a threat but has already taken over. The minority Indian community is swayed along, and very little Indianness remains behind. Westernization too presents itself as a major threat in the form of modernization here.

**Miguel Street** (1959), Naipaul’s first written work, though published third, tells, through a narrator the life of a street in the Port of Spain. The Street comprising people of various identities and idiosyncracies symbolizes the futility of a society which has no understanding of its place in the world scenario. Each narrative in the collection is linked to the other through shared characters and can be read like a novella.

**A House for Mr Biswas** (1961), Naipaul’s greatest work of his early career depicts the various stages through which the East Indian community passes on its way to creolization and modernization. It presents in detail the functioning of the
immigrant Indian community of Trinidad complete with its rituals and customs, beliefs and mannerisms. A second very important theme dealt with in this novel is the assertion of individuality in a society reluctant to hand out the same. The struggles of Mr Biswas also represent the struggle of Naipaul’s father, Seepersad, who was a journalist and a rebel in his own right, much like Mr Biswas. But Biswas, like Seepersad Naipaul, is angered by the culture he is born into and cannot escape.

**The Mimic Men** (1967) presents the reminiscences of an exiled politician, Ralph Singh. In order to reject his shameful past and Indian association, he goes to England to pursue his studies believing that a metropolitan culture will make his personality metropolitan. But the past catches up when he returns to the island. He has then to involve himself in the politics of the island, but then things go wrong to the extent that he has to seek exile in England. This novel won, for Naipaul, the W.H. Smith Award.

**A Flag On The Island** (1967) is a collection of short stories in which colonial problems and expatriate experiences are included. **In a Free State** (1971), Naipaul’s Booker Prize Winner, consists of three fictional pieces, each dealing with the expatriate experience. Two of these, “One Out of Many” and “Tell Me Who to Kill” end with their narrators choosing exile; while “In A Free State” deals with the white expatriate experience in Africa.

Naipaul’s **Guerrillas** (1975) is similar to **In A Free State** only because it deals with the insecurity of expatriate life. The expatriates here are white and reside on the Ridge in a Caribbean country, always wary of the guerrilla warfare that is rampant, and insecure of their predicaments as well as their relationships. The expatriate here is portrayed as an extremely vulnerable being.
A Bend in the River (1979) presents, through Salim, an individual alienated from his native community by attitude, desire and intellect. The fantasy that he harbours is of a perfect world, but his expatriation to an inland African country and his later migration to England make him realize that order does not prevail in the world and that the modern world is especially not equipped to cater to the fantasies of people.

Half a Life (2000) saw Naipaul’s return to novel writing after nearly two decades. The character Willie Chandran, an Indian, goes to England to get rid of his scarred past and to pursue his studies. His education fails to provide him with a profession, and fearing sinking in an unknown world, he migrates to Africa. There, Willie associates himself with the half-and-half people of the African society and fails to adjust and adapt. At the end of the novel he returns to Europe, but not to England, to live with his sister.

Magic Seeds (2004) is a sequel to Half a Life and sees Willie leave for India to join a radical political outfit on the promptings of his sister. Seven long years pass before he realizes that it is not the kind of thing he wants to do. In the end he has to choose between life in prison or an exile in England, and he chooses the latter.

In 1960, Naipaul was commissioned by Dr Eric Williams, Premier of Trinidad and Tobago to travel in the Caribbean and write a non-fictional account of it. The result came out in 1962 as The Middle Passage. The book describes the society that Naipaul lived in before migrating to England, both its merits and its shortcomings. It gives and insight into the functioning of the society and why people appear the way they are.

In 1962, Naipaul travelled for the first time to India to see the ‘area of darkness’ that had so far been only a land of fantasy for him. The result was An
Area of Darkness published in 1964. It describes Naipaul’s perception of the land of his forefathers and how far removed it was from the image he had in his mind. It is essentially an expatriate view of India. The second trip to India, nearly a decade later brought out the book India: A Wounded Civilization in 1977, and in 1990 was published Naipaul’s third book on India, India: A Million Mutinies. The vision that Naipaul held of India in 1962 has been reformed to the extent that he can now identify himself with a lot of the people he interviews.

The Loss of El Dorado (1969) and A Way in the World (1994) present a history of the Caribbean region before the arrival of Indians on indenture. The books also shed light on the composition of the West Indian society and the attitudes which result from it.

In 1981, Naipaul wrote Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey after travelling in the non-Arab Muslim world. In 1998, he went back to the same countries and wrote Beyond Belief: Islamic Excursions Among the Converted Peoples. Together, the two books present Naipaul’s views on the people he met. The book also portrays the response of these people to expatriation and immigration.

In addition to this Naipaul has, to his credit two volumes of essays; The Overcrowded Barracoon (1972) and The Return of Eva Péron with The Killings in Trinidad (1980) both of which have accounts of his travels and perception of different societies all over the world, from Africa to Fiji to the South American continent.

Finding the Centre (1984) has two articles; one deals with Naipaul’s foray into the world of writing, and the other describes his meeting with expatriates in the Ivory Coast. A Turn in the South (1989) discusses immigrant blacks in the southern states of the USA.
Mr Stone and the Knight’s Companion (1963) was Naipaul’s first novel with an English setting. The Enigma of Arrival (1989) is a quasi-autobiographical novel which is again set in England.

In all these works Naipaul has, at one point or the other discussed, some aspect of expatriation, immigration, and exile included, bringing out also the themes of rootlessness and homelessness which are subsidiary conditions of expatriation.

Chapter One of this thesis takes up the discussion of the history and social setup of the West Indies, particularly because Naipaul belongs to the West Indies. It discusses the non-fictional works The Loss of El Dorado, A Way in the World, The Middle Passage and the fictional work Miguel Street along with two stories from the collection A Flag On the Island in an attempt to present the society in its true colours.

Chapter Two picks up A House for Mr Biswas and discusses in detail the East Indian community of the West Indies, Trinidad in particular. It shows the adaptations made by the migrants to the new land, the attempts at retention of their cultural beliefs and rituals in the wake of creolization.

Chapter Three discusses three fictional pieces: The Suffrage of Elvira, The Mystic Masseur and a part of The Mimic Men, which further elaborates the migrant experiences of the Indians. The societies in these novels have now modernized themselves, and there is rapid degeneration of migrant culture, with rituals undergoing rapid transformation.

Chapter Four deals with the themes of expatriation, and exile as consequence of this. Various types of exile are examined in this chapter and an attempt has been made to show each as different from the other. Parts of The
Mimic Men; the novels, Guerrillas, A Bend in the River and the stories of In a Free State, along with the novels Half a Life and Magic Seeds are discussed here to delineate both expatriation and exile.

Chapter Five is a discussion of Naipaul’s own journey starting from expatriation through to immigration and then on to a kind of exile. In this chapter are discussed his books on India, An Area of Darkness, India: A Wounded Civilization and India: A Million Mutinies, along with the fictional work The Enigma of Arrival and the autobiographical piece in Finding the Centre.

The fierce determination to be a writer, and to be the only one of his kind, in addition to the belief that his duty is to report his response to the world, has made Naipaul produce a huge corpus of work ranging from fiction to non-fiction, travelogues, and caustic accounts peppered with criticism on the contemporary world scenario. A stalwart, in the world of literature, Naipaul, however, does not wish to claim himself in any specific category as a writer. Infact, he adamantly places himself away from each category he is hinted as belonging to.
Certificate

This is to certify that Ms. Kishwar Zafir has completed her Ph.D. Thesis on the topic Expatriate Concerns in the Works of V.S. Naipaul under my supervision. To the best of my knowledge, this is Ms. Zafir’s original work which is suitable for submission for the award of the degree of Ph.D.

(Attia Abid)
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Acknowledgements

Proclaim! And thy Lord is Most Bountiful
He who taught the use of the Pen,
Taught man that which he knew not!
(Surah Alaq: 3-5, Qur’an)

The accomplishment of this effort would not have been possible at all without the compassionate Will and Grace of Almighty Allah, to whom is known all that is in the minds and in the hearts of all His creatures.

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Kishwar Zafir
**A NOTE ON THE TEXTS**

The following abbreviations have been used to indicate the books that have been referred to in this thesis:

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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>MMr</td>
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<td>SE</td>
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<td>MS</td>
<td>Miguel Street</td>
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<td>HB</td>
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<td>MP</td>
<td>The Middle Passage</td>
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<td>The Enigma of Arrival</td>
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<td>IMM</td>
<td>India: A Million Mutinies Now</td>
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<td>Wr</td>
<td>The Writer and the World: Essays</td>
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<td>NW</td>
<td>The Nightwatchman’s Occurrence Book and Other Stories</td>
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<td>LBFS</td>
<td>Letters Between a Father and Son</td>
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<td>HL</td>
<td>Half a Life</td>
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<td>Mgs/MgS</td>
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Introduction
In an age which progresses by leaps and bounds, to stick to staid notions and idée fixes is passé. To move away from restrictive regional barriers and enter a globalised milieu has become the prerogative of every receptive individual. In such a case, the recognition of a ‘Universal Civilization’ which contains the idea of the individual, responsibility, choice, the life of the intellect, the idea of vocation and perfectibility and achievement... an immense human idea...[that] cannot be reduced to a fixed system^\textsuperscript{1} becomes a more concrete concept that can be accepted in the present scenario; for when all definitions and expressions have exhausted themselves, it is this ‘elastic idea’^\textsuperscript{2} that remains. In the world of literature too, it is not surprising to note that one set of terms in vogue is replaced by another which soon becomes an archaism.

The term Commonwealth literature is one such cliché term which is now believed to be more constrictive than liberating. The origin of the term can be traced to the Balfour Formula, presented at the 1926 Imperial Conference by Lord Balfour, which asserted that the members of the Commonwealth are ‘autonomous communities within the British Empire, equal in status, in no way subordinate one to another in any aspect of their domestic or external affairs, though united by a common allegiance to the Crown and freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of the Nations’.\textsuperscript{3} The word ‘British’ from the term ‘British Commonwealth of Nations’ was dropped in the year 1949. The Commonwealth which, then, was an organization with only Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, along with Britain, as the founding members, has fifty three members at present.

However, the very foundation of the Commonwealth of Nations is built on political ground – all members are former colonies of the Empire. And this makes it difficult to place its literature in the contemporary scenario. There are a number of countries which do not want to be members of the Commonwealth, like the Philippines; and certain others that have withdrawn from the Commonwealth and then rejoined – Pakistan being one of them; and
the USA which, though, was a part of the Empire once, is now a super power and in a league of its own, and therefore, not a part of the Commonwealth. All these conditions make it difficult for the term Commonwealth literature to be used universally, and therefore has to be replaced by a more contemporary term.

Though the Indian critic, C.D. Narasimhaiah observes that one of the conveniences of Commonwealth literature is that it ‘affords unprecedented opportunities for the critics to compare works from two or more cultures, not in the attempt to locate affinities (which is a very glib thing to do), but to learn to appreciate differences’, Bruce King prefers to use the term ‘New English Literature’ because its allows him also to focus attention on the non-Commonwealth literatures existing at present. Yet, other people prefer using the term Postcolonial literature to speak of contemporary literature. Postcolonial literature can be said to have emerged with the shedding of the term Commonwealth literature, and the beginning of the process of decolonization, a phenomenon which, according to Helen Tiffin, requires the colonial to shed his old tradition, no longer applicable to the new environment, and merge with his new world by ‘imaginative surrender to it’. More simply put, Postcolonial literature can be defined as literature produced post-independence in any country.

The writers of The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures, on the other hand, prefer to use the term post-colonial ‘to cover all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day. This is because there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression’. So, for these writers, the literatures of Australia, Bangladesh, the African countries, the Caribbean Islands, India, Malaysia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Singapore, Sri Lanka and even the South Pacific Islands are all postcolonial.
Since most of the literatures in English produced contemporarily come from the Commonwealth countries or the postcolonial world, or form a part of the ‘New English literatures’ it becomes imperative to trace the origins of such literature to study its effect on the contemporary scenario. The earliest literature produced in the colonial world, the world that was colonized by the British, was by representatives of the Empire who had been sent out to the colonies on official assignments. The result produced was in the form of memoirs and journals. Later, authorized mediators between the Empire and the natives, the missionaries, wrote literature. Occasionally, convicts from convict outposts such as Australia also penned down their experiences. Awareness of the immediate environment brought more consciousness into writing. This was followed by the literature of the revolutions which also marked the end of colonial literatures. What followed was postcolonial writing driven by a new awareness to the right of freedom. A number of voices found expression and a number of issues were picked up for analysis. This gave the writing of every country in the postcolonial era a distinctive identification.

 Literary writing in Australia had its beginnings in the recordings of landscapes, and also in disguised autobiographies of convicts, like Quintus Servinton (1930) by Henry Savery. Early Australian writers sought ideas and inspirations from their seemingly barren land to yield literature. A tone of disillusionment was markedly found in this writing, because it was indeed an onerous task to build literature in a country ‘without songs, architecture, history’. Nevertheless colossal effort was put in and this gave Australian literature a national identity which accommodated the bush, landscape, nature, and even the aborigines. It also gave Australia world renowned literary personalities like A.D. Hope and Patrick White.

 On the Indian front, though it was claimed in 1972 that ‘writing, thinking and speaking English is an unIndian activity’, yet Indian writing in English has crossed several milestones. The Big Three – R.K. Narayan, Mulk
Raj Anand and Raja Rao, who did pioneer work in post-independence writing by raising social awareness and issues, were followed by a new genre of writers who till-date are engaged in the presentation of the east-west conflict. Though a majority of Indian writers would like to believe that Indian writing has come of age, Khushwant Singh, a prominent Indian writer, believes that 'Indian writers have not yet developed the stamina to pursue their characters and themes over the long distances that the novel demands, nor acquired techniques to paint on large canvases'. This again is contradicted by the number of Indians who are felicitated for their writing by various awards.

India’s neighbor, Pakistan, has, in its writers, its own rich literary tradition. Bapsi Sidhwa is one of the pioneers of English writing in Pakistan and has among other topics, written of the Partition of 1947, which gave birth to Pakistan. She also deals with feminine issues as discussed in The Bride (1983) and the minority Parsi community to which she herself belongs. Pakistani writers have now begun dealing with cosmopolitan issues and are beginning to make quite an impact on the international scenario.

Where criticism of contemporary Indian writing consists of ‘ill-conceived airing of private feuds’ and less ‘capacity for agreement with itself’, African writers acknowledge that their written literature stems from their oral tradition, from folksongs, folk tales, myths and maxims. Having identified with this, they propose an intensive method of improvisation which would benefit all of African writing in general. The African critic, R.C. Ntiru, in his discussion, ‘The notion of modernity in African Creative Writing’, dated 1971, underlined the African problem and suggested:

African writers will do well to re-examine their conception of literature. The poets will need to accept the realistic present in order to outgrow their divided loyalties so they can move from the pastoral, pseudo-epic dramatic monologue. The novelists will need to modify their pastoral vision and redirect their sensibility to
accommodate the city which affects the whole of the national life directly or indirectly to a considerable degree. The short story writers will need to move from sketches of bad picaresque novels in order to master the art of the significant emotional movement. And the dramatists – in many ways the most effective of writers with the greatest potential audience – will need to modify many of the traditional myths and legends that form the sounding board of their plays to give dramatic expression.\(^\text{14}\)

In keeping with the above, it can be observed that African writers such as Chinua Achebe, James Ngugi and Nadine Gordimer use their skills to portray rich African heritage along with an understanding of the white presence in their world and the impending modernization of it.

In Commonwealth countries such as Canada, New Zealand and Australia, colonization by the Empire was limited to colonization of the land, and not of the people, as in India, the West Indies and African countries. Therefore, the literature produced in the two kinds of colonies also varies to a great extent. Canadian recorders wanted their representations to be free from American and British influence, in the same manner as New Zealand writers wanted their literature removed from the British and Australian experiences. However, the Indian and African writers did not object to being influenced in their writing by the writers from the Empire.

In Canadian and New Zealand writing, a conscious effort was made to write of frontier experiences, history, society and human relationships laying stress on identity and individual voice. Margaret Atwood, the Canadian poet, novelist and critic, with her stand on feminism and mythological themes has carved for herself, a niche in the literary scene of her country. New Zealand writers such as Frank Sargeson have written of suburban life whereas Janet Frame has written with a psychological bend. However, it is Katherine Mansfield who has established herself as the rebel of New Zealand literature by writing of the prevalent tensions in the relationships of the land and its people.
instead of concentrating on the traditional idea of unity like other writers of her country.

The strongest influence of politics on a literature is to be found in the case of Malaysian literature where the hurdle created by a diversity of languages like Malay, Chinese, Indian, English and tribal have to be overcome before literature can be presented to the reader. And most of the literature that is brought out has a documentary presence instead of observational, highlighting political and social events. Another feature is that it has a number of stylistic faults such as use of stereotypical syntactical frames and semantic contexts. In comparison to this, Singapore’s English language literature has undergone a definite positive development, and being older than Malaysian English writing, has succeeded in making its impact on postcolonial literature today.

West Indian literature, also considered an emergent new literature actually had its beginnings as far back as the seventeenth century, when people who had spent some time in the Caribbean began to make observations on the life and customs of the natives as well as the settlers there. So, Aphra Behn’s Oroonoko or The Royal Slave (1678) and Olaudah Equiano’s The Life of Olaudah Equiano (1789) can be said to be pioneer West Indian works, though fictional works and travelogues by Englishmen in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries such as Antony Trollope’s The West Indies and the Spanish Main (1859), Charles Kingsley’s At Last: A Christmas in the West Indies (1871) and James Anthony Froude’s The English in the West Indies (1888) are referred to as beginners of the West Indian literary tradition.

As this thesis discusses the corpus of a writer of West Indian origin, it is necessary to discuss the West Indian literature in detail. However, the social conditions and detailed history responsible for the making of the West Indian societal setup and literary tradition are highlighted in Chapter One.
All of the West Indies, which is group of islands in the Caribbean Sea, saw the emergence of modern literature in the beginning of the early twentieth century. By the time literature began to evolve properly in the 1930s, the Jamaican, Claude McKay, had already made an unprecedented move by leaving for the United States and publishing *Banana Bottom* there in 1933. V.S. Naipaul highlights the problems facing writers, including his father, Seepersad Naipaul, a journalist and short story writer, before 1950:

A reading to a small group, publication in a magazine soon lost to view: writing in Trinidad was as an amateur activity, and this was all the encouragement a writer could expect. There were no magazines that paid, there were no established magazines: there was only the *Guardian*.... My father was a purely local writer, and writers like that ran the risk of ridicule....

But attitudes were soon to change. It was local publication that brought Derek Walcott and his *Twenty Five Poems* to our attention in 1949. In that year, too, the Hogarth Press published Edgar Mittelholzer’s novel, *A Morning at the Office*, Mittelholzer had for some time been regarded as another local writer. And then there at last appeared a market. Henry Swanzy was editing Caribbean Voices for the BBC Caribbean Service. He had standards and enthusiasm. He took local writing seriously and lifted it above the local: he got Roy Fuller to review Derek Walcott’s *Twenty Five Poems*. And the BBC paid; not quite at their celebrated guinea-a-minute rate, but sufficiently well – fifty dollars a story, sixty dollars, eighty dollars – to spread a new idea of the value of writing.\(^{15}\)

The West Indian Federation was formed in 1958 to oversee development in the arts and cultural movements of the West Indies among other duties, but it disintegrated when, in 1962, Jamaica opted out of its membership. Not finding the West Indies a feasible ground to produce good literary work, a number of writers from the Islands, who were young at this time, took conscious decisions
to leave for London – a kind of centre to the peripheral world of the Islands – the first among them, after Claude McKay, being Edgar Mittelholzer, George Lamming and Samuel Selvon. These writers paved the way for others who wished to pursue the career and be successful. Success also came their way because of the extensive readership provided by the West Indian immigrants in Britain. Also, the West Indian writer never had qualms about admitting that he was made by London. George Lamming writes:

It is here [London] that one sees a discovery actually taking shape.... In this sense, most West Indians of my generation were born in England.\(^\text{16}\)

V.S. Naipaul too, does not rule out the English influence on his work:

This kind of society did not exist in Trinidad. It was necessary, therefore, if I was going to be a writer, and live by my books, to travel out to that kind of society where the writing life was possible. This meant, for me at that time, going to England. I was travelling from the periphery, the margin, to what to me was the centre; and it was my hope that at the centre, room would be made for me.\(^\text{17}\)

Except for Derek Walcott who chose not to join the literary exodus abroad, writers hardly ever chose to come back. Writers like George Lamming, Wilson Harris, Jean Rhys, and V.S. Naipaul contented themselves by writing of their West Indian experiences from abroad. Consequently, it may be said that although West Indian literature largely deals with issues such as racial differences, creolization, rural and urban cultural differences, the presence or absence of history; the common themes that all writers present are the search for roots and identity, social and historical injustices, and the desire for order and creation of a new society.

A number of other similar themes can be seen in West Indian writing, for example, the theme of childhood dealt by a number of writers. George Lamming's In the Castle of My Skin (1953), John Carew's The Wild Coast
(1958), Michael Anthony’s *The Year in San Fernando* (1965) and Wilson Harris’ *The Eye of the Scarecrow* (1965) have substantial portions dealing with the theme of childhood. V.S. Naipaul’s *A House for Mr Biswas* (1961) and *The Mimic Men* (1967) also discuss childhood extensively. More than one writer has alluded to the myth of El Dorado – a resonating myth which is used to resolve a number of propositions. But each writer has a different approach to comprehend the myth as is discussed in Chapter One.

The West Indian literature would, perhaps, also be the only kind of literature in which nearly all writers use the local dialect unabashedly. While V.S. Reid, the pioneer to use this feat, created a special form of dialect for his narrator in *New Day* (1949), it is Samuel Selvon who, in *A Brighter Sun* (1952), lifted the common man’s dialect for the purpose of introspection as well as for the narrative; something never done before.

Despite the fact that a number of West Indian writers took up voluntary exile, they never ceased to be concerned with their native society and culture. Also, it may be noted that by placing themselves away from their native land, West Indian writers have entered an altogether different milieu – that of expatriate and exile writers, like scores of writers all over the world; thereby moving away from the narrower definition of West Indian writers to the more expansive realm of expatriate writers.

Expatriate writers are also known as Diasporic writers; but Diaspora, which is a Greek word meaning ‘to scatter’, refers more exactly to the scattering of the Jews to countries outside of Palestine after the Babylonian Captivity; and is therefore not a consummate term to describe the predicament of such writers. Expatriation, on the other hand, is derived from the Latin *expatriare* and refers to withdrawal of oneself from residence in one’s native country, or allegiance to one’s native country. Diaspora, apparently has romantic bearings and is closer in meaning to exile than to expatriation. Therefore, the widely accepted term for writers writing away from their
original or native land is Expatriate writers. In the words of Aamer Hussain, Expatriation:

implies neither a forced eviction from one’s motherland, nor a deliberate rejection; there are no connotations of permanent or obligatory leave taking. There is, instead, a tremendous inherent privilege in the term, a mobility of mind if not always matter, to which we as writers should lay claim, a doubling instead of a split. 18

The writer chooses to become an expatriate when he experiences unsettlement at the physical and intellectual levels. The condition also arises because of the potential alienation of the mind from old and accepted norms. Kurt Lang defines alienation as ‘an estrangement or separation between parts or the whole of the personality and significant aspects of the world of experience.’ 19 Writers not only leave their native land because of an alienation of the mind, but also due to other things lacking in the intellectual clime of their country. There could be a shortage of readership or publication houses; or even a restricted writing environment. These are exactly the reasons why West Indian writers chose to leave. Many of them went further ahead and chose emigration instead of expatriation. A stronger sense of alienation would lead to a writer choosing exile. A noticeable factor is that a number of expatriate writers hail from the former colonial world, though there exist rare cases of an expatriate from the First World. Henry James, the American writer, who migrated to Europe to pursue a writing career is one such example.

Just as regional writers have typical strains in their writings, so also the expatriate writers who have a few common issues between them, which they all deal with at one point or the other. The issue of identity, which has been left scarred by the colonial rule is a prominent issue of discussion. The subject of cultural confrontation between the motherland and the west is another major question, which in a number of subcontinental writings, is resolved to the advantage of the former. An example of this can be seen in Kamla
Markandaya’s *Possession* (1963), where Valmiki, the young Indian rustic taken to Europe by the English Caroline, gets disillusioned and seeks return to spiritualism and his *guru*, the swami, leaving behind the materialistic west. However, newer approaches are being tried to resolve this question now. Hanif Kureishi, an emigrant writer of Pakistani parentage in *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985) has been applauded for reconciling eastern and western values instead of showcasing eastern emigrants as victims or tradition bound aliens.

While expatriate writers look to their homelands with nostalgia taking the risk of ‘being insulated into pillars of salt’, the emigrant writer seeks to establish a new amalgamation with the society to which he has migrated, discussing in his work the adjustments made to the new environment which ultimately lead to the discovery of an identity. Of the adoption of the American emigrant experience into her writing, Bharti Mukherjee says: ‘We immigrants have fascinating tales to relate. Many of us lived in newly independent or emerging countries which were plagued by civil and religious conflicts. When we uproot ourselves from those countries and come here, we suddenly must absorb… and learn to adopt the American society…. I attempt to illustrate this in my novel and short stories.’

The exile writer, belonging to a very versatile category, is where most of the writers feel they fit in today, for exile ‘begins as a condition of the mind. Its broad sources are cultural displacement and cultural shock’. A writer dons the garb of the exile in a number of ways. There are those exiles who leave their homeland at an early age, for furthering their education, or simply because of the stagnant intellectual environment there. Katherine Mansfield is one such writer. Then there are those exiles who, after having spent a good number of years abroad, return to their homelands to write of cultural conflicts, native traditions and changes brought about by colonization. Chinua Achebe, who has lived in the USA for long periods and has traveled extensively, belongs to this
genre. A growing number of writers take up physical exile literally and wholly. In this respect, Derek Walcott speaks of 'the pardonable desertion' of West Indian writers who went to London and Europe to pursue a writing career and search for a tradition and a quest for identity which the Island with its transplanted populace could not grant. It is for this very reason also, that Lamming has approved of the migration of the Caribbean writer to 'the dubious refuge of a metropolitan culture'. Finally, there is the case where the mind is in exile. This is to be found in those individuals who did not take up the chance of flight at the opportune moment. Patrick White is one such creative exile.

It can be seen from the above that even though all the situations — expatriation, emigration and exile imply that the individual experiencing them undergoes movement away from the native land; the difference between them is the degree of variation in the movement.

Expatriation is the least violent of the three terms. It retains the security associated with national identity and frequent return home. It lets the individual experiencing it remain strongly associated with the past; where the past may not be the actual past but could also be a time gone by in his present situation. Emigration is a much stronger renunciation. It implies a break from the past with the hope of starting a new life and adopting a new national identity. Exiles, on the other hand, experience a clean break; for them there is no return, at all, to the native land. The exile knows that he has to adopt the new land, come what may, and therefore, he has to make do with the situation, though it is flawed to think that the exile is always in a situation of distress. Positive creativity can be explored from within the realm of exile. In the case of a writer, it may come very much in handy:

Exile is not necessarily a limitation or a defect in a writer's vision nor does it always affect his ability to deal with his native life and experience. On the other hand, it may sometimes be an absolute precondition for him to create.
While expatriates and exiles are, by definition, individuals; emigrants are thought of as en masse. The emigrants become part of the local populace and do not stand out in any manner possible. Between the expatriates and the exiles another category exists, that of refugees. They are a powerless people, voiceless and in a state of virtual perpetual exile. They may get an opportunity to return to their native lands if conditions improve. Refugees are, therefore, a creation of, mostly, political circumstances.

Having discussed the postcolonial literary scenario and the terms associated with it – expatriate, emigrant and exile, both in terms of the individual and the writer, it becomes easier to discuss the man who is the subject of this thesis; V.S. Naipaul.

Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul; Vidia to friends, and Vido to family, is a man who fulfills the criteria of an expatriate, emigrant, refuge and exile, all at the same time, albeit each in a different perspective. Of Hindu Brahmin lineage, Vidiadhar Naipaul was born on August 17, 1932, in Chaguanas, Trinidad, to Droapatie Capildeo and Seepersad Naipaul. At the age of six, Naipaul’s family moved from the backwoods to Port of Spain; and at the age of eleven, he had pledged to leave Trinidad. Though not physical, this can be said to be the beginning of his exile. After winning a government scholarship, he left for Oxford in 1950, from where he obtained a degree in English.

In 1953, Naipaul’s father died of a heart attack, leaving to Naipaul the legacy of the art of writing – a career which Seepersad himself could not pursue whole-heartedly, because of lack of opportunities, a non-literary environment, and family pressure. ‘I am beginning to believe I could have been a writer’, wrote Seepersad in a letter to Naipaul dated March 9, 1951. To him, Naipaul owes the career that he has pursued for the past fifty one years. It is in gratitude to him that Naipaul declares time and again: ‘The ambition to be a writer was given me by my father’. The pursuance of this career has led Naipaul to win every coveted award in the world of literature, from the John
Llewellyn Rhys Memorial Prize as early as 1957 for **The Mystic Masseur** to the Booker Prize in 1971 for **In a Free State**. In addition to winning the W.H. Smith Prize, the Hawthornden Prize, the T.S.Eliot Award, the Bennett Award in 1980, the Jerusalem Prize in 1983, he was bestowed with Trinidad and Tobago’s highest honor, the Trinty Cross in 1989. In 1990 V.S. Naipaul was knighted, and in 1993, he became the first recipient of the David Cohen British Literature Prize. The crowning glory of his career was the Nobel Prize in 2001.

Having graduated in 1954, Naipaul with his ambition to be a writer, worked as editor of the British Broadcasting Corporation’s ‘Caribbean Voices’ programme, and as a cataloguer in the National Potrait Gallery, London. Though Naipaul worked as a freelancer doing small scripts for the Caribbean Services, he asserts that his professional career began with the writing of the following lines:

Every morning when he got up Hat would sit on the banister of his back verandah and shout across, ‘What happening there, Bogart’?  

The collection of short stories to which these lines belong was, however, not accepted for publication immediately because it was believed by publishers at that time, that people believed in reading novels and not short accounts. So, **Miguel Street** was published in 1959 after two novels had been published and accepted by the readers: **The Mystic Masseur** in 1957 and **The Suffrage of Elvira** in 1958.

Although he is sensitively inclined to his Trinidadian background, he strongly reacts to being labeled as a West Indian writer. He believes that his sole duty is ‘to report his whole response to the world’. Even though he has written of expatriate sensibilities in **In a Free State** and **A Bend in the River**, he does not like the terminology ‘expatriate writer’ being applied to him. Despite claiming a kind of identification with the Polish emigré Conrad, ‘who sixty or seventy years ago meditated on my world, a world I recognize today’,  

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he shuns the tag of emigrant writer if it is used for him. Although he writes of Africa, and proclaims that he would like 'to settle down in Bombay and rediscover [his] identity by losing [himself] in the millions of India', he rejects being called a representative of the third world. The only term that Naipaul would like having used for himself is 'Writer'; evidence of this can be had from the biographical note that appears in all of Naipaul's books: 'He has pursued no other profession'.

About himself, Naipaul says: 'I come from a small society; I was aware that I had no influence in the world; I was apart from it. And then I belonged to a minority group, I moved away, became a foreigner, became a writer; you see the degrees of removal from direct involvement'. This self-acknowledgement, while removing Naipaul from all constractive criteria, gives him a unique position on the literary scene: a writer who writes about all experiences, while being equally removed from all of them. He is acknowledged as and the 'Delphic Oracle' whose vision diagnoses all situations.

Since the very beginning of his career, Naipaul has striven to give voice to the man who cannot identify himself with the people around him, either psychologically or socially. In three of the first four books that he wrote in quick succession, The Mystic Masseur (1957), The Suffrage of Elvira (1958) and A House for Mr Biswas (1961), his emphasis lay on the portrayal of the East Indian community of Trinidad to which he belongs, making the critic Kenneth Ramchand comment that he wrote with 'one-sided compassion' for Indians. In 1960, Naipaul entered a new domain of writing:

While I was in Trinidad the Premier, Dr Eric Williams, suggested that I should write a non-fiction book about the Caribbean. I hesitated. The novelist works towards conclusions of which he is often unaware; and it is better that he should. However, I decided to take the risk.
The result was his first non-fiction book, *The Middle Passage* (1962). That year he went to India, the land of his forefathers, for the first time. He wrote his account of the trip in *An Area of Darkness* (1964). Subsequent trips to India brought out two other books – *India: A Wounded Civilization* (1977) and *India: A Million Mutinies* (1990), in addition to a few short narratives. Despite writing a trilogy on India, Naipaul has offended Indians across the length and breadth of the country as well as overseas by proclaiming: ‘I do not write for Indians, who in any case do not read. My work is only possible in a liberal, civilized western country. It is not possible in primitive societies’.

Just a few days ago on a visit to India, he said the British rule was the ‘luckiest and happiest thing to have ever happened to India’.* The *Mimic Men* (1967) treats the theme of exile as does *Magic Seeds* (2004). *A Flag On the Island* (1967) and *In a Free State* (1971) are collections of proficiently told short stories.

Amidst all these, appeared works which were truly novel in nature. Mr Stone and the Knights Companion (1963) was Naipaul’s first attempt at a novel set in England. 1989 saw Naipaul write his first American account, A Turn in the South, brought out after a four month journey across seven southeastern states of the United States of America. Finally, there is the quasi-autobiographical novel The Enigma of Arrival (1987) and a combination of two narratives, Finding the Centre (1984); the first of these is autobiographical; the second is a travel narrative. All these books, at the same time, also shed light on the multi-faceted persona of Naipaul because they are all drawn from his personal experiences.

The greatness of Naipaul as a writer lies in the fact that he recognizes and accepts the faults he makes in his writing. To him, ultimately, it is writing and the essence of it that matter. Though, A Way in the World, did not make it to the best-sellers list, Naipaul called it ‘the magnum opus of my opportunity’. He also acknowledges that the technique followed in the writing of The Loss of El Dorado and Mr Stone and the Knights Companion were flawed: ‘These are books that cost me a lot of pain. They didn’t come out well because I was a prisoner of a borrowed form. I wasn’t writing my own kind of book’.

The immediate issues of concern in each of the written works discussed above, have a tendency to overlap with other themes present in Naipaul’s writings, partly because they are all extracted from the personality of the writer himself. The theme of rootlessness and homelessness, not only in the direct sense of their meaning, but also expressed through various allusions have been dealt with deftly. In addition to these, postcolonial issues such as social dislocation, racism and cultural transplantation are also woven into the leitmotif of his writing. Equally aptly does he treat metropolitan issues and third world liabilities.
Rootlessness is a prominent theme found in nearly all of Naipaul's writings. It generates from alienation brought about by exile; physical, psychological or social. All of these are also representative of the individual condition of Naipaul, and give him that edge required for such a writing. Theroux says:

His is a condition of homelessness. It has the single advantage of enabling him to become a working resident – as much a resident in India as anywhere else – and allows him a depth of insight that is denied the metropolitan. For the rootless person, every country is a possible temporary home; but for Naipaul, there is no return, either to a past or a place…. Naipaul is the first of his line, without a tradition or home.40

Naipaul's own statement affirms that his writing come from his personal experience of exile and rootlessness.

One must make a pattern of one's observations, one's daily distress; one's lack of representation in the world; one's lack of status. These, for me, are not just ideas; when I talk about being an exile or a refugee I'm not just using a metaphor, I'm speaking literally…. Because one doesn't have a side, doesn't have a country, doesn't have a community; one is entirely an individual.41

The theme that has been taken up for discussion in this thesis is Expatriation, and the concerns and consequences associated with it. Expatriation, when broadened as a motif, resonates into migration and exile, parallel themes that have also been taken up in this dissertation. Each piece of fiction and non-fiction discussed deals with an aspect of expatriation and its consequences.

Chapter 1 concerns itself with the history and societal setup of the West Indies, and the necessity for people including writers, to migrate to metropolitan culture. In addition to The Loss of El Dorado, A Way in the
World and The Middle Passage, this chapter also discusses Miguel Street and two other pieces of fiction which highlight the same issue.

Chapter 2 takes up Naipaul’s magnum opus, A House for Mr Biswas. It deals with the theme of migration and the emigrants’ effort to hold on to their own in a society which is fast being creolized. It also depicts the futility of such an effort, and the resultant amalgamation, albeit restricted, with the creole society.

Chapter 3 takes up three novels, The Suffrage of Elvira, The Mystic Masseur and parts of The Mimic Men to further discuss migrant experiences and the inevitable creolization of the Indian migrant society, and the steadfast holding of the growing meaningless rituals in such a society.

Chapter 4 deals with the theme of expatriation as seen in the huge corpus of Naipaul. The chapter also deals with exile which is the furthest consequence of expatriation. The exile themes discussed in this chapter are not of only the purely physical nature, but also psychological. Through parts of The Mimic Men and the works Guerrillas, A Bend in the River, In a Free state, Half a Life and Magic Seeds, both of these motifs are explored.

Chapter 5 deals with Naipaul’s experiences pertaining to his own movement through the phases of expatriation, emigration and exile. The Indian trilogy: An Area of Darkness, India: A Wounded Civilization and India: A Million Mutinies are discussed along with The Enigma of Arrival and the autobiographical piece of Finding the Centre here.
References:

1. This term was used for the first time by V.S. Naipaul in a lecture “Our Universal Civilization” delivered at The Manhattan Institute, New York on October 30, 1990.


3. Ibid., p. 517.


13. Ibid., p. 97.


39. Ibid.


Chapter-1

The West Indian Scenario
Slavery, the mixed population, the absence of national pride and the closed colonial system have to a remarkable degree re-created the attitudes of the Spanish picaroon world. This was an ugly world, a jungle, where the picaroon hero starved unless he stole, was beaten almost to death when found out, and had therefore to get in his blows whenever possible; where the weak were humiliated; where the powerful never appeared and were beyond reach; where no one was allowed any dignity and everyone had to impose himself; an uncreative society, where war was the only profession.¹

This is the picture of the West Indies that V.S. Naipaul has largely projected in his works – both fiction and non-fiction.

The Loss of El Dorado, A Way in the World, The Middle Passage, Miguel Street, “The Baker’s Story” and “A Flag On the Island” in the collection, A Flag On the Island; and “Columbus and Crusoe” in the The Overcrowded Barracoon discussed in this chapter highlight the formation and functioning of the West Indian society; a society made up of migrants brought together under the canopy of colonialism; a society to which Naipaul himself belongs.

The Loss of El Dorado; “A Parcel of Papers, A Roll of Tobacco, A Tortoise: An Unwritten Story” and “In the Gulf of Desolation: An Unwritten Story” in A Way in the World; and “Columbus and Crusoe” in The Overcrowded Barracoon discuss the formation of the West Indian Society. The fictional readings, Miguel Street along with “The Baker’s Story” and “A Flag On the Island” from A Flag on the Island vividly discuss the result of the formation of this society. And The Middle Passage is Naipaul’s travel account of this region.

It is a known fact that Naipaul’s fiction contains as much from the non-fiction that he writes. Also, the two have strong autobiographical derivatives.
To arrive at a unity in the assimilation of fiction, non-fiction and the autobiographical, requires, what Naipaul calls, the search for truth, which he once discussed at a lecture he gave:

I begin with myself: this man, this language, this school, this time. I begin from all that and I try to investigate 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.²

For the writing of The Loss of El Dorado, Naipaul studied and researched seventeenth century documents of Trinidad's early history, guarded in a vault in the Registrar-General's Department, Red House, Trinidad; in a bid to understand 'how my comer of the New World, once indeed new, and capable of developing in any number of ways, had become the place it was'.³ The vault contained important records of the British colony, 'records of surveys and property transactions and then the records, starting later, of births and deaths, together with a copy of everything that had been printed in the colony'.⁴ The germ for this interest developed when Naipaul worked as a second-class clerk in the Registrar-General's Department, Trinidad, before he left for England on a scholarship.

Unlike Björn Landström's book, Columbus, which Naipaul believes is 'a retelling from the usual sources',⁵ the search for material as well as the writing of The Loss of El Dorado, was, according to Naipaul himself, different from the regular approach of a historian. In The Enigma of Arrival, Naipaul says:

The historian seeks to abstract principles from human events. My approach was the other; for the two years that I lived among the documents I sought to reconstruct the human story as best as I could.⁶
As is evident from “Columbus and Crusoe”, written in 1967, Naipaul does not appreciate Landström’s veneer picture of Columbus and his adventures. Columbus, Naipaul says, was a man driven, as any other adventurer, by greed and was looking ‘less for America or Asia than for gold’ (Wr, 303). Moreover, Columbus also exaggerated to a great extent his various triumphs in the West Indies. He claimed that he had exterminated two-thirds of the natives of Hispanolia in two years; whereas he had finished off only a third of them.

Of the nine narratives present in A Way in the World, which can be linked to earlier works such as The Middle Passage, The Loss of El Dorado and Finding the Centre, only two have been taken up in this chapter for discussion, as they have a direct bearing upon the history of the West Indies.

The Loss of El Dorado, according to Naipaul, began with his discovery of ‘the Picton trial in the Newgate Calendar’. The Loss of El Dorado is a book divided into two parts; both parts pointing out the futility of a land, and the greater failure it offers to those who pursue this futility. The book traces the history of the early expeditions to Trinidad, Guiana, Venezuela and the neighboring islands. It also traces the creation of a colony in this New World, and the bringing of this New World into mainstream history. Furthermore, Naipaul here, is concerned with the subjects of slavery and revolution, which he believes are the root causes for the way the society now appears. Through this book, Naipaul is, therefore, able to trace the source of corruption, frenzy, futility and racial spite; which was actually started by the greed and corruption of the people who first landed in the area.

The Loss of El Dorado covers, in short, all of the history of Trinidad, just before the arrival of the indentured Indian labourer on the scene: the Spanish attempts to colonize the land in the beginning; de Berrio’s adventures; the arrival of the English and Sir Walter Raleigh’s fanciful adventures. Poorly
organized searches for an El Dorado on the Orinoco, the arrival of the French migrants, the establishment of a British colony; and the use of the land as a ground for sparking off a Venezuelan revolution which failed to begin; and finally, the abandoning of the West Indies because it no longer had any strategic importance, resulted in a society that was marred by poverty, racialism and slave uprisings. The research done by Naipaul helps him conclude that the foundation of the society had been laid during this period of early colonization. Bruce King feels that:

Naipaul’s book shares in the anger at colonialism common to West Indian writers of his generation. There is a feeling that the past has determined the present; the effects of slavery, the introduction of oriental labour, the plantation system, the mixture of races, and a history of political instability, corruption and tyranny have left Trinidad permanently disabled.8

The history of Trinidad re-created in The Loss of El Dorado has been done after referring to extant documents, original historical compilations, and imperial correspondence; news, travelogues and letters to and from the Empire and its colony taken from ‘the British Museum, the Public Record Office, London, and the London Library’ (LED, 356). Furthermore, Naipaul, in the Postscript of the book, says that he took care that the dialogue in his work ‘occurs as dialogue in the sources’ (LED, 375) thereby giving it a more authentic presentation.

The Loss of El Dorado is divided into two parts and captures ‘two moments’ (LED, xiv) of West Indian history which Naipaul believes are very crucial. The first of these traces the pursuit of El Dorado by early conquistadors which ended in failure. The second part skips two hundred years ahead to capture, ‘the story of the British-sponsored attempt’ (LED, 3) to ignite ‘a revolution of high principles in the Spanish Empire’ (LED, 3); and the subsequent failure of the same.
The pursuit of 'a golden man el dorado, the guilded one, in what is now Columbia: a chief who once a year rolled in turpentine, was covered with gold dust and then dived into a lake' (LED, 4); this was the Indian memory that ignited the adventurous spirit, laced with greed, of the Spaniards to own something that involved much myth and less of reality, much loss and very little gain.

The most profound of all the searches for El Dorado was by the early Spanish conquistador, Antonio de Berrio, who inherited it from his father-in-law, Quesada, who had forever wanted to be the third marquis of the New World. And El Dorado, if ever discovered, would be ‘this third marquisate’ (LED, 11). Berrio made three journeys and like all other conquests to El Dorado, all three ended in failure. But in those days this was not an oddity, because nearly every other person of wealth and title made expeditions to discover El Dorado. And ‘El Dorado, which had begun as a search for gold, was becoming something more. It was becoming a New World romance, a dream of Shangri-la, the complete, unviolated world’ (LED, 17).

Eventually Sir Walter Raleigh came onto the scene, and defeated de Berrio, but the quest for El Dorado continued. Naipaul suggests that the two men, de Berrio and Raleigh, were alike in their desire to be like Crusoe, and experience being ‘the first man in the world, of watching the first crop grow... of possessing “the first gun that had been fired there since the creation of the world”. It is the dream of total power’ (Wr, 304). However, Raleigh was different from de Berrio in that he wanted to pursue this dream to raise a colony of subjugates and make it a part of the British Empire.

Raleigh like the others failed to find El Dorado; the colony that he tried to establish was entirely lawless and though he defeated the Spanish, there was little peace on the land. Dangers far exceeded the possibilities the land had to offer. There was continuous danger from the Spanish who had been defeated
and humiliated. There was danger from the uprisings of enslaved Indians; and there were also the Caribs or the man-eaters. Countless acts of revenge and counter revenge, and the shifting of power to and from the Spanish and English continued for a long time until finally the English gained ground. By this time, the desire for El Dorado was treated as ‘an act of madness’ (LED, 76) as there was much life and fortune lost in these expeditions.

Eventually, El dorado developed into a myth symbolizing failed quests and an unattainable utopia. Yet, Raleigh who after failing in the expedition at first attempt and being imprisoned in the Tower of London for twenty-two years, made a second attempt to act out his fantasy and discover the riches of El Dorado. So, Raleigh, old and infirm, returned to the West Indies; though less optimistic this time, to search for El Dorado again, and fail yet again.

The second leg of Raleigh’s adventure is covered in detail in the narrative “A Parcel of Papers, A Roll of Tobacco, A Tortoise: An Unwritten Story” in A Way in the World, by means of reconstruction of events through a dialogue between Raleigh and his surgeon; the time discussed is 1618. During this attempt too, Raleigh had made lofty promises to his subordinates to turn into reality the fantasy that he had lived with for twenty-two years: the balsam, the oysters, the cassava liquor, the subjugated Indians who would treat him as king, and the gold that he would discover.

The conversation between Raleigh and his surgeon, which also contains a detailed analysis of Raleigh’s book: The discovery of the Large, Rich and Beautiful Empire of Guiana, with a Relation of the Great and Golden City of Manoa (which the Spaniards call El Dorado) and Other Countries, with their Rivers adjoining. Performed in the year 1595, by Sir Walter Raleigh Knight (WW, 177). The surgeon remarks:

It’s a slippery piece of work, if I can use that word. You slip about, you lose your footing. It’s nice and easy and
clear and brilliant for a number of pages, and then suddenly you feel you've not been paying attention. You feel you've missed something. So you go back. You've missed nothing. It's just that something's gone wrong with the writing (WW, 165-166).

The surgeon accuses Raleigh of fabrication in the book. He points to the 'Advertisement' (WW, 166), a preface to Raleigh's book which suggests that the sand he had bought back as gold 'ore' (WW, 166) was useless; something not mentioned in the book. People had doubted and ridiculed Raleigh's sand, and he had had to produce North African gold as a last minute explanation; which he falsely claimed was from Guiana from some mountain of gold and diamonds beside a turbulent river (WW, 167). The excuse for not bringing back more gold, as Raleigh mentioned in the 'Advertisement' (WW, 166) was that he didn't have the tools or the time; though he had prepared for the expedition for so many years. Thus, exposing the truth, the surgeon beings upon Raleigh the charge of fabrication in the book:

But you had to prove that you were not a fool, that you had found something more important than gold or booty. You had found a new empire for England, an empire of willing Indian subjects. So you wrote your difficult book, mixing up fantasy and history with your own real explorations. Everything on this side of the Gulf was real, everything on that side was fantasy. That made it easy for you to write, but by this means you also created a book that no one could ever disentangle and very few would read. The story was in the title: that was as far as most people would get (WW, 177).

Towards the end, El Dorado became to Raleigh what it had become to scores before him. Just as during the first voyage, the second left many of his men sick and dead; and Raleigh became a dejected man. Between his first visit to the Caribbean and his second, a lot of changes took place. Raleigh who saw himself as a 'liberator' (LED, 53) of native Indians; and who, in his book, had
celebrated the land and the people (LED, 53) was disappointed twenty-two years later to find that the Indians had forgotten the ‘Inglish’ (LED, 80) taught by him; and this time round, he wrote of them only as ‘an anonymous aboriginal mass’ (LED, 80).

Through no fault of their own the Indians had had to meet such a fate. They had been ‘dulled by defeat and disappointments’ (LED, 91) over the preceding decades by the evoking and revoking of treaties and deals, and the rivalries of the Spaniards, the Dutch and the English. They receded into the bushes, leaving their traces in ‘stupefied descendants’ (LED, 91) who, Naipaul observes, are not quick of action and intelligence. Thus, ended Raleigh’s dream of ‘Raleana, his Indian kingdom’ (LED, 80).

With this ended, more or less, the search for El Dorado and the romance of the medieval world. Raleigh and his friend Keymis, the commander of his second voyage, ‘saw themselves as actors in great events, classical figures, even as Vera saw Antonio Berrio and himself’ (LED, 91). And these men, makers of the New World history, no more important, exiled themselves from the memories of people.

Even as the search for El Dorado had continued, the area called ‘these provinces of El Dorado’ (LED, 4) became an area of active slave trade; the sole purpose being the establishment of colonies so as to make the West Indies a trading post. Initially, the establishment of colonies was a difficult task. The land was randomly populated by the Caribs and the Indians. Though the Indians were taken in as slaves, it was difficult to pacify them, mainly because they were handled in different ways by different conquistadors. Berrio believed that it was illegal for them to be ‘sold like Negroes’ (LED, 16) because they were ‘the King’s [Spanish King’s] subjects’ (LED, 16), whereas the Negroes were ‘natural slaves’ (LED, 16). It was presumed by Spanish officials like Domingo de Vera that the Indians ‘rejoiced’ (LED, 20) on being taken as the
subjects of the King of Spain. The Indians, later, were taken up as interpreters against the Spanish by the English. The Indians were however, a difficult lot to handle: they were given to sodomy and carried syphilis.

The Indians could yet be subjugated; but it was the Caribs whom the Spanish and English alike feared. The Caribs were a man-eating tribe who would descend upon settlements without warning and wreak havoc. Naipaul quotes from a report which describes the tastes of the Caribs:

They eat the Indians they seize and they kill the Spaniards in the most cruel way possible... and when these are not available they nourish themselves with Negroes (LED, 63).

The Caribs developed trade relations with the English and the Dutch, but were a threat to the Spaniards, who, in any case, wanted to exterminate them.

Domingo de Vera had estimated the Indians to be about forty thousand in number, but by the turn of the century their number had reduced to a mere four thousand. Though some Indians remained hostile and bush like, and the Caribs still attacked, a majority of the Indians, particularly the inhabitants of Arwacas in Trinidad and the Capuchins became slaves and were baptized. They were given menial jobs. Their number remained constant at two thousand for a century or so but it proved difficult for them to flourish. By mid-19th century, they started moving further inside the bush and became all but untraceable.

Trinidad, Naipaul says, was, in the 17th-18th century, a strategic point both for the search of El Dorado, being a part of ‘these provinces of El Dorado’ (LED, 4); and South American trade. After the quest for El Dorado ceased to be the whole and sole interest of an Empire, the Spanish opened up the land in Trinidad for the French to settle with emphasis lying on the procurement of Negroes and land. Buying and selling of Negroes then became an industry. A Negro Code was issued according to which the Negroes were to be baptized
and turned into Catholics. They were given a piece of land for themselves, and had age bars and work days determined. Punishments were imprisonment, chaining and whipping but, not too severe, otherwise slaves could be confiscated. At this time, both the number of the French immigrants and their Negro slaves increased.

With the acquisition of Trinidad as a British colony, the Negro Code was re-written in 1800 by Governor Picton. This Code was entirely concerned 'only with the needs and fears of the Negro's owner' (LED, 166). The Code unleashed a reign of terror: the cruellest ever. It brought with it racial discrimination and the introduction of racial laws and made the life of the Negro a living hell. Working hours for the Negroes were extended and they were given no days off.

The arrival of Picton on the Trinidad scene let loose a holocaust like situation. Flogging and whipping were regularly meted out. Runaways had their ears clipped. Witchcraft was punishable; sorcerers were hanged. The jail was a place where there could be no hope of mercy. Negroes in the jails were put in irons or chained. Some of them were shut up in the 'cachots brûlants' (LED, 180), punishment cells which were dark windowless rooms where the temperature was 'never less than 100 degrees' (LED, 172). Here the prisoners, 'chained flat on boards, quickly wasted away and became demented' (LED, 172). Not one Negro was spared from punishment in Picton's reign. But then, Picton always believed that he was acting in the best interest of the English, though it was the opposite. The English did not want to set up the West Indies as a slave colony, because slave labour was expensive. They had wanted Trinidad 'to be a colony a free settlers' (LED, 199) which would serve British interest in trade with South America. Picton also discarded the Spanish American revolution which was a British interest for the same purpose.
By this time, the Indians or whatever remained of them had been pushed into the interior of Venezuela. Those that remained in Trinidad ‘lived in alcoholic ennui in their mission reserves’ (*LED*, 171). They were further exploited for their skills. Save a few, the rest hardly mingled with the colonizers and settlers, thereby getting reduced to an insignificant number, so much so that Naipaul records that the Indians simply vanished; and leaving behind no reminders or monuments. ‘they were not missed’ (*LED*, xiii).

The second part that is discussed in *The Loss of El Dorado* has a number of crucial characters; each playing a vital role in the formation of the British history of that region: Thomas Picton and Francisco Miranda; each in his own way responsible for sparking off the South American revolution; Picton viewed it as an opportunity to further his military career; whereas Miranda was a dedicated revolutionary. Louisa Calderon and William Fullarton, on the other hand, were both instrumental in the downfall of Picton; Fullarton for pressing charges of criminal offence against Picton; and Louisa Calderon as evidence against Picton for these very charges. There are other characters discussed too, who played their role in the shaping of the history of the colony.

Picton and Miranda were both allies in the British interest in the South American revolution. Miranda, unable to get a passport to travel, sent his agent Caro, a Cuban exile to Trinidad to act as a replacement of sorts. Picton, however, accused him of being a Spanish spy and had him watched. Caro communicated this to Miranda but, his letters were intercepted by Picton and sent to government officials in London as proof of Miranda’s disloyalty. Yet, of all the characters Naipaul discusses in detail in this second narrative, Miranda emerges as the only person dedicated to his cause. Miranda, like Raleigh, had a self-imposed image of himself which he carried around. Much of what is written in *The Loss of El Dorado* of Miranda is from the perspective of the image of failure created by the nonsuccess of the revolution.
Miranda, the man, and his actions are re-evaluated in *A Way In the World*, in “In the Gulf of Desolation: An Unwritten Story”, through two mediums: one is the letter from Sarah, his housekeeper in London and the mother of Miranda’s two sons, and his reply to it; and the other is his conversation, in parts, with General Hislop.

Both Miranda’s attempts to usher in a South American revolution ended in failure. A man with credentials that were accepted and rejected at the same time; a man with many faces and identities; ‘a lover of liberty among the Americans; a revolutionary among the French; a Mexican nobleman and a count among the grandees of the Russia of Catherine the Great; a ruler in exile among the British’ (*WW*, 241); always was acutely aware that he made no impact on the people of Venezuela. He, forever, let himself believe that he was the liberator of the Venezuelans; but he knew that they saw him ‘as a heretic and traitor’ (*WW*, 295). Towards the end of his life Miranda was imprisoned at Peurto Rico and then shifted to a prison in Cadiz. Following his death, his papers and records were sent to an appropriate British minister in 1812.

Complaints of Picton’s brutality and viciousness led to his demotion; and Fullarton was put in his place. Fullarton sent thirty-seven charges against Picton to the Privy Council in London – the chief among them being the torture of Louisa Calderon, a free mulatto. Years of trial followed and Louisa too was taken to London for testimony against Picton’s torture regime. Her scars were enough just to convict him but did not stand out as a symbol of the injustice the colonials had to bear. The trial over, Picton was acquitted and Louisa Calderon returned to the Islands to a life of anonymity.

The terror unleashed by Picton had an adverse effect on the Negro psyche. They began creating make-believe worlds; underground worlds where they played mock roles; a world of fantasy removed from reality. In this world, the Negroes took on the roles of kings, queens, princes, princesses, dauphins,
courtiers and judges. They had their own kingdoms, their rivalries; they also devised their rituals and rites; and uniforms by which they recognized subjects of other kingdoms. Such establishments and kingdoms flourished, hidden of course from their respective employers. During the day they were slaves; foolish and preoccupied in their employer's businesses; by night they turned these very working grounds into empires; they themselves became calculating and wise. Eventually the crackdown came. They were caught; their kingdoms broken up; kings and other royalty were severely punished. They were whipped and flogged; their ears were cut off. Those who were the most guilty were hanged and beheaded. 'Their bodies were hung in chains, their heads spiked; it was the end of their mockery' (LED, 278).

Uprisings were crushed and it was thought to replace slave labour which was beginning to prove expensive. Moves were made to import cheap labour from other colonies of the British Empire. Between 1804 and 1808, Chinese labourers were shipped all the way from Calcutta to work in the Botanical Gardens which the then Governor of Trinidad, Hislop, was planning to make in Port of Spain. The venture proved unsuccessful because the Chinese had no horticultural skills. They failed to adjust to the place allotted to them in the society. They were also 'addicted to opium and gambling, and were very expensive to maintain' (LED, 303), and as a result of this had to be shipped back to Calcutta.

Search for cheap labour led to the idea of bringing in Indians from India to work on the plantations, but it was not an easy task. The hitch of getting Indians to work on the plantations is cited by Hugh Tinker who records Lord Russell's announcements of February 15, 1840, according to which the transfer of labourers from British India to these places was highly improper, precisely because it might 'lead to a dreadful loss of life on the one hand, or on the other, to a new system of slavery'. Despite such scepticism, Indians were brought in from the Indian subcontinent to replace the Negro slave workers on the estates.
The practice continued till 1917 and resulted in a sizeable increase in the Indian population. The arrival of the indentured labourer brought about change upon change in the society. The Negro's position was threatened by the arrival of the Indian.

The West Indies 'became an imperial amalgam, the empire in little' (LED, 352). But the society was a limited one. The society, stagnant as it was, continued to undergo further degradation. Cocoa, tobacco, sugar; racial conflicts, the whips, the floggings, were all that the society lived and strived for. Politically appointed personages used Trinidad as a stepping stone to increase their careers and fortunes. Such combination of personal ambition, trivial pursuits and lack of vision set Trinidad on an irreversible course of mediocrity and insipidity.

Other countries around Trinidad like Venezuela progressed through the development and management of its oil reserves. But Trinidad, gradually debased to a mere 'outpost, a backwater' (LED, 330). It lost the race for being accepted as a part of the desired world; and consequently, drew further away from the Empire. So, once again, 'as after the search for El Dorado, Port of Spain dropped out of history' (LED, 349).

Although Trinidad received more than its fair share of population with the settling of the Spanish, the French, the English, the Negroes, the Chinese and later the Indians, it never developed a characteristic of its own. 'A place like Port of Spain, in the uncluttered New World, has no independent life, it alters with the people who come to it' (LED, 4). There did arise a cosmopolitan society, but one where everything appeared to be in a frenzy: in a state of permanent disorder and chaos.

There was minimum intellectual pursuit. The English were the only one to exercise their writing prowess. It was the habit of maintaining records pursued by Fullarton, Hislop and Smith that left a little bit of actual history in
recorded form. Visitors like McCallum came and wrote about the region but such writers were few and far between. History was not recorded as fastidiously as it was in the United States or Canada. The use of Spanish and French had declined considerably after the English overcame and therefore, there was no literary contribution in these two languages. This was because, unlike other colonies, which were 'peopled by the refuse of the Mother Country' (LED, 315), Trinidad was 'peopled by the refuse of the other colonies' (LED, 315) as George Smith, the Chief Justice of Trinidad, proclaimed in May, 1809.

During the 19th century, when it did fancy writers such as Trollope, Kingsley and Froude to visit Trinidad, the resultant writing was not of the lives of the people; rather it was an economic survey of kinds done from a European vantage. 'Trollope was worried about the labour shortage; Kingsley wrote about the vegetation and with tenderness about the people; Froude wrote anxiously about race and the Empire' (LED, 352). None of the writers were concerned about the living conditions of the people, who had become derelicts of a sort; the Negro becoming dull and lazy because he preferred derelicts under somebody rather than enterprising on his own; the Chinese with their slow adjustments were an intermediate race; the Indians who were brought from India preferred to live in their own secluded world and tightly knit communities; the original aboriginal Indians had all but vanished; and the whites had lost the touch of the Empire.

Trinidad became a demented wasteland where goods were imported, technology developed at a very slow pace and education was only for the poor. Tourists who visited the area found history only in the names of streets or plazas and squares. People and their histories receded into the background and what came to the front was a glorified version of the abolition of slavery. Negro slaves and aborigines had to be specially recollected from memory to associate them with the land; otherwise very little remained of the past.
But, however dark Trinidad’s history may have been, it certainly had a few positives to offer to its people. Varied communities gave Trinidad its own set of folk narratives, customs and traditions. All this amalgamated, gave Trinidad its own traditional language: the Creole; and its own set of customs. And though Naipaul speaks of the loss of history of the region in *The Loss of El Dorado*, he does mention the events and occurrences of the slave society that precipitated into anecdotes and narratives which have come down like heirlooms. Naipaul deduces that the calypso and the carnival satire comes out of the fantasy kingdoms of the slaves:

It is the silence of all serfdom a wise old sorcerer, the obeah, the drumming and the jumping up at every opportunity: this is what comes to the surface. It suggests a whole underground life of fantasy, linking creole Negroes and new Negroes, French Negroes and English Negroes (*LED*, 272).

Naipaul also strongly believes that the events and the history made in the Caribbean region had a profound impact upon European creativity and fancy, such as the development of the notion of utopia, to which all early migrants to the Caribbean raced; it was another thing that this Caribbean utopia was a myth which was shattered. The idea of Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* is another such thing that may have originated from the Caribbean backdrop.

Naipaul has been criticized for his work on the history of the West Indies, and for presenting facts in his own unique manner. The West Indian historian A.C.Wade comments on *The Loss of El Dorado*:

Naipaul is attempting to show the failure of the colonial adventure and its disruption of the West Indian traditions. Yet, as we have seen, it feels more like a metropolitan loss than ours because Naipaul never explores the lives of the Negroes and Amerindians who comprised the two largest racial groups in that area. The author’s one-sidedness is a
result of his preoccupation with the records which the colonizers left. This raises the question of how else the story of Amerindian and Negro disruption may be examined if not through the records of the European exploiters in these islands.10

Karl Miller sees the presentation of history in The Loss of El Dorado as 'a way of acknowledging that there has always been cruelty, and that there still is'.11 It can be said that using the materials that he did, Naipaul is, perhaps, not wholly wrong in reconstructing the history of the society from it. But at the same time, there are others who have chronicled Caribbean history in a different manner. C.L.R. James, whose Caribbean narrative, The Black Jacobins, which covers the San Domingo revolution says: 'In 1938 I wrote The Black Jacobins in which I showed the role that Blacks played in the creation of modern Europe'.12

However, Naipaul presents his own view regarding the writing of The Loss of El Dorado:

The idea behind the book, the narrative line, was to attach the island, the little place in the mouth of the Orinoco River, to great names and great events: Columbus; the search for El Dorado; Sir Walter Raleigh. Two hundred years after that, the growth of the slave plantations. And then the revolutions: the American revolution; the French Revolution and its Caribbean by-product, the black Haitian revolution; the South American revolution, and great names of that revolution, Francisco Miranda, Bolívar. From the undiscovered continent, to the fraudulence and chaos of revolution; from the discovery and Columbus and those lush aboriginal Indian 'gardens' he had seen in 1498 in the south of the Island... from the discovery by Columbus, a man of medieval Europe, to the disappearance of the Spanish Empire in the nineteenth century – this was the historical span of my story (EA, 169).
Presenting West Indian history from a metropolitan perspective is not the only thing that Naipaul is accused of. He is also charged with presenting the myth of El Dorado in a negative shade and that too, linking with it, Trinidad’s identity; and apparently making the blunder of presenting it shortly after Trinidad’s independence. Such a belief is held by Eric Williams, the first Premier of Trinidad. Rob Nixon quotes from Williams’ *History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago* that it would be ‘a great mistake in respect of international affairs and domestic relations, if Trinidad and Tobago were to enter on its career of Independence without a history of its own, without some adequate and informed knowledge of its past’.\(^\text{13}\) Rob Nixon believes too, that *The Loss of El Dorado* emerges ‘as a history of the absence of history’.\(^\text{14}\)

The fact however remains that Naipaul has classified El Dorado as having a negative bearing upon the Trinididian situation; he has used this negative approach to El Dorado in his fiction too. Characters like Biswas and Ralph Singh suffer from the resultant percussion of the El Dorado myth; as do the characters from *Miguel Street*, and Ganesh Pundit.

It may be noted here also that not all Caribbean writers have interpreted the myth of El Dorado negatively. Many writers believe El Dorado to be the basis of that society, and they have cultivated it to give them and their achievements a specific identity.

Guyanese writers have an altogether different approach to the myth. They treat it as an essential part of their history. They evoke, through the search for El Dorado, the return to the very origin of the earth; of the world, from where developed all civilization. Knowing the past helps them to know the elements of their ancestry, and all that has gone into the making of their being. This helps them to purge the past easily and be resurrected into a new, guilt free life.
Of all the writers who give a positive light to the myth of El Dorado, Wilson Harris, in his works, has used it to weave an altogether rich motif on individual, social, national and moral planes. But, whether it be used in the positive sense or the negative, the myth of El Dorado has an outright bearing upon West Indian literature. According to Wilson Harris:

An instinctive idealism associated with this adventure was over powered within individual and collective by enormous greed, cruelty and exploitation. In fact it would have been very difficult a century ago to present these exploits as other than a very material and degrading hunger for wealth spiced by a kind of self-righteous spirituality. It is difficult enough today within clouds of prejudice, and nihilism; nevertheless the substance of this adventure, involving men of all races, past and present conditions, has begun to acquire a residual pattern of illuminating correspondences. El Dorado, City of Gold, City of God, grotesque, unique coincidence, another window within upon The Universe, another drunken boat, another ocean, another river; in terms of the novel the distribution of a frail moment of illuminating adjustments within a long succession and grotesque series of adventures, past and present, capable now of discovering themselves and continuing to discover themselves so that in one sense one relives and reverses the 'given' conditions of the past, freeing oneself from catastrophic idolatory and blindness to one's historical and philosophical conceptions and misconceptions which may bind one within a statuesque present or a false future.\(^1\)

Irrespective of the fact as to what the myth of El Dorado implies, the society formed in the days of yore has had an intense impact, and continues to do so, upon the lands peopled around El Dorado. G.R. Coulthard writes:

The historical background in all the islands has followed the same pattern: discovery and conquest by the
Spaniards; extermination of the native Indian populations and their replacement by slave-labour from Africa; The introduction of sugar and the world of the sugar estate, both during and after slavery; and independence at varying dates (Haiti first in 1804, with Jamaica and Trinidad gaining their independence as late as 1962). All the islands have known the common experience of colonialism, exploitation, poverty and economic frustration. In all the islands racial resentments and complexes continue to be an important factor. The last twenty-five years have seen the growth of a middle class in all the islands, living largely on borrowed values (either American, British or French) and an intelligentsia seeking urgently a spiritual and cultural orientation of its own.¹⁶

This inside view of the West Indian scenario can be seen in The Middle Passage as well, which showcases the full blown case of futility rampant in the West Indies. It is a travelogue, the first written by Naipaul, of the region that he had left never to return; but return he did: to record the scenario. Through this book, Naipaul underlines some key factors that make the West Indian society what it is. It also links the being of the present attitude of the society with its past history.

But Naipaul is not just a traveller. His approach to travel writing is as different as his approach to recording history. It involves ‘observation, empathy, evaluation, self-criticism and revision – an ever-expanding method in an ever changing terrain’.¹⁷ The Middle Passage is also Naipaul’s attempt to relink the area with the events that occurred in relation to it, and give it a meaning. In other words, it can be said to pick up from where The Loss of El Dorado finishes off. From the study of the history of formation of a colony, Naipaul, in The Middle Passage progresses to the description of a society formed by years of colonization, the description of which itself is a source of dilemma.
How can the history of this West Indian futility be written? What tone shall the historian adopt.... Shall he, like the West Indian historians, who can only now begin to face their history, be icily detached and tell the story of the slave trade as if it were just another aspect of mercantilism? The history of the islands can never be satisfactorily told. Brutality is not the only difficulty. History is built around achievement and creation; and nothing was created in the West Indies (MP, 20).

The book begins with a description of Naipaul’s journey across the sea from England to the Caribbean. What is common between the attitudes of the people on board the ship and Naipaul is that they are all, because of their stay in London for sometime, biased against West Indians and everything West Indian in various degrees. There is also Naipaul’s own lukewarm attitude towards these very people, descendants of ‘men who ate “like cormorants” and “drank like porpoises”’; a society without standards, without noble aspirations, nourished by greed and cruelty’ (MP, 19). The beginning of the journey sees Naipaul and his co-passengers waiting to board a ship that had brought new immigrants from the West Indies. A disdainful attitude is to be found for the new arrivals combined with ‘interest, disapproval, pity and mockery’ (MP, 4). The people on board the ships hold elevated opinions of themselves and reject their West Indian identity because it does not carry the metropolitan tag. A co-traveller tells Naipaul: ‘When I saw that pack of orang-utangs getting off the ship at Southampton, I didn’t feel good. It was a damn frightening thing to see. You can’t blame some people for not wanting to call themselves West Indians’ (MP, 15).

To begin with, the West Indians do not live as a nation; with nationalistic feelings; rather they live as individual races and communities, each existing and striving for its betterment. Society is marred by prejudices. The society also has an acute awareness of having been uprooted from its original society elsewhere. In addition to this, groups which are not politically
or economically well placed, such as the natives who reside in the interiors or bush, have to face the worst kind of prejudice. Attitudes are different too, for them.

Before the arrival of the Asians, the African had been subjected to the brutal system of slavery for three hundred years. ‘The African, as a result; is passionate for independence, and for him independence is not so much an assertion of pride as a desire to be left alone, not to be involved’ (MP, 118). Used to slavery, they rarely took up enterprising on their own. This was left for the Asian to do, who was not a slave, and therefore, a class apart. But there is a marked difference in the attitudes of even the descendants of the African slaves. Naipaul quotes Trollope who wrote in 1860:

But how strange is the race of creole Negroes – of Negroes, that is, born out of Africa! They have no country of their own, nor have they as yet any language of their adoption; for they speak their broken English as uneducated foreigners always speak a foreign language. They have no idea of country, and no pride of race. They have no religion of their own, and can hardly as yet be said to have, as a people, a religion by adoption. The West Indian Negro knows nothing of Africa except that it is a term of reproach. If African immigrants are put to work on the same estate with him, he will hardly work beside them, and regards himself as a creature immeasurably the superior of the newcomer (MP, 62).

The West Indies is a place where even ‘Black has a precise meaning’ (MP, 5) and people have an eye to distinguish races by observing the varied skin tones and shades present even in black. There are people in the West Indies who can claim to belong to the western civilization and therefore, also claim to be linked through this to ‘the Greek ideals of virtue and knowledge and the Christian faith’ (MP, 63). While doing so, the West Indian can forget the cruelty and brutality of slavery and colonialism and accept ‘his blackness as
his guilt' (MP, 64). He can then divide and classify people on the basis of race and creed and then fight over which shade is closer to that of the white. 'In the French territories he [the West Indian Black] aimed at Frenchness; in the Dutch territories at Dutchness; in the English territories he aimed at simple whiteness and modernity, Englishness being impossible' (MP, 64).

To be associated with Europe and Europeans, dress and speak like them; and adopt their mannerisms appeared very much natural to the black West Indian. Out of this association also, grew the acknowledgement of the role of 'the native' (MP, 61), as he was labeled by the writers from the west; he was led to believe that the West Indies was the place where he had 'toiled since time begun' (MP, 61); thereby forgetting the reality that was Africa. 'Twenty million Africans made the middle passage, and scarcely an African name remains in the New World. Until the other day African tribesmen on the screen excited derisive West Indian laughter' (MP, 63), writes Naipaul.

The other large group inhabiting the West Indies, which is non-African in origin, is the Asian. These people have origins unlike the black West Indian; and they are proud of their origins. They have their own set of mannerisms, languages, dresses, religions and festivals; all brought from their countries of origin. Unlike the African they do not reject their past; rather they invoke their rituals and beliefs, customs and ceremonies; or whatever derivatives of these that remain. The Indians that came over to the West Indies were basically labourers with a few petty criminals and low ranked castes among them. These people, with a strong sense of taboos formed an endogamous group which was a world in its own right; which 'protected and imprisoned' (MP, 79) at the same time. Details of the Asian Indians will be discussed in the two chapters following this one.
Partially because of this difference in the basic mental setup, there were, and still are, conflicts between the two groups. There is enough racial spite between the two to prevent a harmonious amalgamation.

The Indians, a bigger group than any other Asian in the West Indies, invites the rivalry of the Negroes to the greatest extent. Though the two have separate areas of work and interests, yet there is a discontentment which has given rise to bitter discord. Having lived in the same society for numerous decades, they should have had little reason for animosity; but they do. ‘The Negro is a town-dweller; the Indian is an agriculturalist. The Negro with a good hand-writing and a head for intrigue goes into civil service; the Indian similarly equipped goes into business. Both go into the professions’ (MP, 76). Dissension arises when a cross over between the professions or trademark fields occur.

Each group also wants to enjoy the privilege of the other group. The Indians have an orthodox religious value system: ‘Hinduism is not organized; it has no fixed articles, no hierarchy, it is constantly renewing itself and depends on the regular emergence of teachers and holy men’ (MP, 79) whereas Islam is a ‘static religion’ (MP, 79) observes Naipaul. The Indians with their feudal systems and close knit families cannot move out of the system unless they have a strong will power to move away from their orthodox system. ‘Only the urban Indian, the Indian of the middle class, and the Christian convert were able to move easily out of the Indian frame work’ (MP, 79) and become like the Negro in modernity and adaptation.

On the other hand, the Negro wishes to adopt dignity; only to be found in the Asians, according to him. There are quite a few Negroes who are of the opinion that the Negro race does not have ‘the thrift and determination of the Indian’ (MP, 129). The Negro lives only as an individual and thinks of his individual self, because this is what slavery has taught him. So, the Negro is
more oriented to the present; and the here and the now than his Indian counterpart. The African and the creole can adopt and accommodate himself better into his environment, than the Indian, who prefers to be aloof; and makes, and receives only a peripheral influence from the society.

There are other things that drive the Negroes and Indians into competition with each other. The Indian, forever linked to India, has extensive nationalistic feelings and displays it with zeal. To compensate, the Negro has created the sect of the Ras Tafarians or ‘Rastas’ (MP, 225) in Jamaica who have embraced the tactic of ‘rejection with rejection’ (MP, 225). The group harbours a number of radical views:

Their country is Ethiopia, and they worship Ras Tafari, the Emperor Haile Selassie. They no longer wish to be part of that world which has no place for them – Babylon, the world of the white and brown and even yellow man, ruled by the Pope, who is really the head of the Ku-Klux-Klan— and they want only to be repatriated to Africa and Ethiopia…. God is, after all, black; and the black race is his chosen race, the true Israelites: the Jews have been punished by Hitler for their imposture (MP, 225-226).

The Negroes and the Indians live amidst this racial malice. They each try to assert their superiority by deciding which, by virtue of colour, is closer to the white. And, Naipaul says, to find a solution they both appeal to the unacknowledged white audience ‘to see how much they despise one another’ (MP, 78), exposing their inferior selves to each other.

At the receiving end of the hate brigade of both, are other inhabitants such as the Amerindians; for their bush dwelling life style and crude attitude; through no fault of their own. In the days of slavery Amerindians were used to hunt down runaway slaves; now in a reversal of roles, they are placed in the endangered category and are spoken of as ‘some primitive, unpredictable people, who [are] needed to be watched’ (MP, 96).
The white man and his acknowledgement is the next big preoccupation of the West Indian after racial spite. Colonialism has had a great impact on the people and the land. There is a strong desire to ape the colonizers and it is but normal to look to them for approval and identity.

‘Colonialism distorts the identity of the subject people’ (MP, 169) is what Naipaul believes. In these colonies where the Europeans have ruled for years, the identity of the people, be they Africans or Asians, recedes into the background. The relationship of master and slave between the colonizer and colonized, as encouraged by the British, has left a malicious prejudice which disrupts the functioning of a stable, unbiased society to this day. All colonies have suffered the same fate.

In Surinam, Dutch colonization ‘latterly encouraged Surinamers to think that they could become Dutchmen’ (MP, 174). For the Surinamer, ‘Holland is the centre of the world’ (MP, 168). In Martinique, a French colony, everything speaks of French influence. The Martiniquan has adopted the French language, the French food, the French love for art and even the picturesque setting of the village. France is ‘the mother country to the Martiniquian’ (MP, 201).

But underlying this adoption by the colonizer can be seen the image of a world destroyed by its lack of identity. The Trinidadians idealize everything American, as is also evident from Naipaul’s fiction. ‘Their houses, decorations, amusements and food were copied from American magazines’ (MP, 59). In Surinam the Dutch government contributed two-thirds of the money for development. The other impact the Dutch have had is that the Surinamers speak Dutch and they love everything about Holland including Dutch literature. In Martinique, where everything is French, even milk was brought from France, along with the newspapers, when Naipaul had visited. And everything that had to be exported went to France first and was redirected from there.
Even though colonialism has ended and nationalistic sentiments have taken over, yet 'the West Indies, 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' (MP, 142). As an example of this, the Trinidadian appears to have no image of his own. He is given one by others. The Americans develop in him a sense of style. And the numerous tourist advertisements give him a face, he believes, he has to live up to. He has an altogether different perception of the word 'culture':

Culture is spoken of as something quite separate from day-to-day existences, separate from advertisements, films and comic strips.... Culture is a dance – not the dance that people do when more than three of them get together – but the one put on in a native costume on a stage. Culture is music – not the music played by well-known bands and nowadays in the modern way, tape recorded but the steel band. Culture is a song – not the commercial jingle which, as much as the calypso, has become the folksong of Trinidad, nor the popular American songs which are heard from morning till night – not these, but the calypso (MP, 67).

Culture is, therefore, what the Trinidadians display to tourists because that is the way they see themselves from a tourist perspective.

In Surinam, after a long period of having adapted to the Dutch: language, afflictions, mannerisms and everything else under the sun, people woke up, all of a sudden to a wave of nationalism. A nationalistic movement was started in Amsterdam, because of the lack of adequate nationalistic motivation available in Surinam, with one of its objectives being the replacement of the Dutch language by Negro English. Naipaul holds the view that just as Christianity, which to the Surinamers is 'more than a faith: an achievement' (MP, 184-185), cannot be replaced; similarly local English of the negritude variety cannot be a substitute for a developed language like Standard
English; thereby demonstrating that such nationalistic feeling rings of hollow appeals and sentiments; and should be done away with. They should instead be replaced by a genuine appeal, and the actions that generate from them should be of the genuine kind too.

In Martinique, at the time of Naipaul’s visit, everything was profoundly French. Every operation required a French connection, without which everything was meaningless. Permission and assistance was needed from the French for the import and export of all kinds of goods. Naipaul observes: ‘Assimilation has not made Martinique an integral part of prosperous France, but has reduced the island to a helpless colony’ (MP, 207). Not much can be done without the intervention of the outside world. The people too, are driven by this feeling of helplessness which amounts to a loss of creativity. Frantz Fanon’s discussion of the underdeveloped nation’s populace can be said to hold true for the West Indian society as well:

In underdeveloped countries, we have seen that no bourgeoisie exists; there is only a sort of little greedy caste, avid and voracious, with the mind of a huckster, only too glad to accept the dividends that the former colonial power hands out to it. This get-rich-quick middle class shows itself incapable of great ideas or of inventiveness. It remembers what it has read in European text books and imperceptibly it becomes not even the replica of Europe, but its caricature.¹⁸

Having lost their way in a world which progresses by leaps and bounds every passing day, the West Indian has little option but to resort to mimicry. A slave society, where, according to Naipaul, even the vegetation speaks of domination by slavery; there is ‘slavery in the food, in the salt fish still beloved by the islanders. Slavery in the absence of family life… in the fondness of racial abuse, in the physical brutality of strong to weak’ (MP, 189). The days of the ‘cachots brûlants’ has been so soon forgotten by these people. Naipaul
presents a society that suffers from disorder at all levels, a society which has the legacy of the slave society, from which it was formed. It corrupts the mind and degenerates the society which is made up of 'the unnatural bringing together of peoples who could achieve fulfillment only within the security of their societies and the landscapes hymned by their ancestors'.

In another article, Naipaul speaks of the shortcomings of the Trinidad society:

Trinidad was small, remote and unimportant, and we knew we could not hope to read in books of the life we saw about us. If landscapes do not start to be real until they have been interpreted by an artist, so, until, they have been written about, societies appear to be without shape and embarrassing.

So, in a society which lacks a sense of history, semi-urbanization and liberalism, and habits of depending upon others for technology and craft, Naipaul says, there can be only two responses – mimicry and exile. Those who can flee to a metropole do so; those who cannot, resort to mimicry. This theory of colonial mimicry of Naipaul surfaces initially in *The Middle Passage* and; in subsequent books it helps to draw a clear distinction between the creative metropolitan people and the uncreative colonial inhabitants. Through *The Middle Passage* it can clearly be seen that the West Indian is a person who idealizes everything that comes from abroad, has a few social conventions, and has developed a sense of the mimic.

Education is an area which fails to provide as much opportunities as it actually can to the West Indian. Earlier, education was meant only for the poor, and the poor happened to be the blacks. The whites with their money, could buy themselves any kind of profession they wanted. And in any case education was not of much importance to them, even though the French had only a few things to offer besides 'ballet-girls, billiard-tables and thin boots' (*MP*, 52); the
English too, had not much besides 'horse-racing and cricket' (MP, 52) to offer. The Indians who bought land and became rich too did not have much to do with education. The blacks were thus left with this tool to forge modernization. As a result, they progressed and made their way into civil services and other professions.

The kind of education imparted did not pay attention to the country's own needs. Much of the stress was laid on the outer world, resulting in the fact that the West Indian hardly recognizes the locales of his own land until pointed out to. Very few true representations of the landscape are to be found; the others that exist are unrealistic representations of the society. Paintings for example, are the versions of what the tourists have in mind, and prefer to see; rather than what is actually present.

Limited education breeds grounds for a limited number and kinds of professions, with medicine and law being the most popular. And as depicted in Naipaul's fictional work, switching professions is as easy as anything else. One could get started with no prior professional training. The people who were the most progressive were those who dealt with finance in its various forms: 'commission agents, bank managers and members of the distributive trades' (MP, 35). This is evident from Naipaul's description of the export of Martinique's rum 'which cannot be exported direct to North or South America, but must first cross the Atlantic to Paris and be redirected from there, enriching middle-men all the way' (MP, 207). In the days when Naipaul lived in Trinidad, the cricketer was the only man and cricket was the only activity that commanded respect and helped gain a 'full stature' (MP, 35) comparable to international standards.

The delimited economy of the West Indian countries leads to further disorder and decaying of the processes which might otherwise bring prosperity. To a West Indian, opening up a brewery, starting an imported goods packing
factory is what signifies industrialization. Local products are shunned; and imported and expensive products are used simply because they suggest that the West Indies are more in tune with the modern world. In Trinidad, people prefer drinking coffee which is imported because it is ‘advertised in the magazines and therefore acceptable’ (MP, 40). Likewise local furniture is discarded for imported furniture. Naipaul quotes Trollope who had similar observations to make of Jamaica in 1859:

But it is to be remarked all through the island that the people are fond of English dishes, and that they despise, or affect to despise, their own production. They will give you ox-tail soup when turtle would be much cheaper... when yams, avocado pears, the mountain cabbage, plantains, and twenty other delicious vegetables may be had for the gathering, people will insist on eating bad English potatoes; and the desire for English pickles is quite a passion (MP, 41).

So, a society which shuns its own self, its own economic projects and its own industries, has little left, but to mimic. The West Indians mimic the world that is outside theirs. Everything of that world is to be adapted even if it does not fit into the local scene. And yet, by importing everything from the outside world: technologies, products, attitudes; and applying as little effort as possible to achieve it on one’s own terms, the West Indian likes to call himself modern; the very term implying his affinity with the latest in technology and life style. And modernity is ‘to accept anything which films, magazines and comic strips appear to indicate as American’ (MP, 40).

Such a society perpetually lives on whatever is doled out through foreign newspapers and media; in a state of fantasy, frenzy and frustration. And all of this is expressed through mimicry; to be what one, in actuality, is not.

The West Indian carries with him a guilt. He knows that he is of little interest to the bigger outside world. The Trinidadian knows and accepts that he
is ‘only a dot on the map of the world’ (MP, 36), and therefore, the outside world is his only interest. He can identify with the history of the outside world but not his own, because Trinidad, for him, has forever been in the ‘dark ages’ (MP, 36). The British Guianese are ashamed of their talent for building beautiful wooden houses; they would rather prefer concrete buildings, which in any case shows ‘the recognizable West Indian insipidity and clumsiness’ (MP, 85). They believe that using wood is a mark of poverty and humiliation. The Surinamers have hardly any appreciation for their native culture; they rather prefer to appreciate the Kloos, Mozart and Dutch literature. The Martiniquan who believes himself to be no less than a Frenchman is embroiled in his own racial problems. The Jamaicans are apt at presenting, to the outside world, the glamorous image of Jamaican tourist resorts.

Because of its years of colonialism the society has developed unrealistic values. People have adopted western and Christian names and ideologies, and shunned their own. Indigenous products are designed so as to present them as facsimile commodities of American goods. Power having come to the few is exercised in much the hyped manner. More and more attention is given to titles and the little power that the people have acquired, to achieve money and fame in as quick a way as possible.

The confusion rampant in the society can also be seen in the literature produced by it. ‘Living in a borrowed culture, the West Indian more than most needs writers to tell him who he is and where he stands’ (MP, 64). But Naipaul says that writers have failed to deliver in this case. They have, and still do, depict a society with its utter confusions and frustrations and reflect sensitivities which are not West Indian, but rather white in nature, to the extent that the West Indian cannot himself, identify with what is written about him. Naipaul believes that this is due to the lack of possession of history by the region.
Many critics believe that Naipaul’s view: ‘History is built around achievement and creation, and nothing was created in the West Indies’ (MP, 20) bespeaks a Eurocentric view of the West Indies. Naipaul counters this by pointing out that there is many a West Indian writer who strives to show ‘how removed his group is from blackness, how close to whiteness’ (MP, 64). But this apart, there are a number of West Indians who confirm that it is tough writing about the West Indian scenario.

A transcript of an interview with John Hearne that was taken in 1983 records: ‘The monotonous, brutal, farcical nature of the Caribbean history has led people towards individualism, self-centredness, self-sufficiency and sometimes towards anarchy’. Further more, Hearne says: ‘Our society is a scruffy one, a struggling society of certain values – the chief strength of which is that stubborn individualism, that refusal to accept uniformity of behaviour which can be very dangerous and depressing and can lead to mediocrity of perception. It is a society full of individualistic cases, it is just beginning to establish a sort of institutional roots. You cannot blame the society, for that is our history’.

Rob Nixon believes that Naipaul had abstained from returning to Trinidad even after the success of his early literary career precisely because of this shortcoming in the society; because he ‘had apparently not lost his fear of Trinidad as the place where writers, like his father, disappeared into the quick sands of oblivion’. However, it is clear that in the West Indies writing is more about the bearings of the society than presentation of true literature. George Lamming believes that the novel ‘as a way of investigating and projecting the inner experience of the West Indian community has been a very important discovery; next only to the discovery of the islands and the abolition of slavery and beginning of the indentured labour system; while Naipaul believes that the West Indian writing ‘has little to do with literature, and much to do with the race war’ (MP, 65).
Naipaul's talk of the uncreative environment of the West Indies in *The Middle Passage*, where writers 'have so far only reflected and flattered the prejudices or race of their colour groups' (MP, 64) can be compared to Mordecai Richler's comments about the Jewish minority in Canada who 'are still so insecure here that they want their artists to serve as publicists, not critics'.

Nevertheless, 'even if the West Indies had created nothing else, they have certainly created a people' worth writing about. Out of such an environment and people and Port of Spain, Naipaul has created a fictional work *The Miguel Street*, which depicts all of the futility and mimicry of the West Indian situation as discussed in *The Middle Passage*.

*Miguel Street* is Naipaul's very first work though it was published third. According to Naipaul himself, the germ for *Miguel Street* came from his father's stories and 'a Spanish picaresque novel, the very first published in 1554, *La sa Viso Tormes*. It is about a little poor boy growing up in Spain, in great imperial Spain, a very short book'.

The writing of *Miguel Street* did not come easy for Naipaul for it involved the discussion of all that Naipaul had left behind before he came to England. It took 'courage to do a simple thing like mentioning the name of a Port of Spain Street'. But numerous attempts later, he came up with the perfect opening for his sketches of a street, with which he himself had once been familiar. Narrative followed narrative; one sketch leading to another. Real life characters were put into the picture until a world had been created in such a way that though it was all fictional, it contained truth.

The famous first two sentences with which Naipaul begins *Miguel Street*: 'Every morning when he got up Hat would sit on the banister of his back verandah and shout across, "What happening there Bogart"? and "Bogart would turn in his bed and mumble softly, so that no one heard, 'what
happening there, Hat?” (MS, 9) helped Naipaul achieve the technique of writing. In “A Prologue to an Autobiography” Naipaul writes:

Though they [these first two sentences] had left out everything – the setting, the historical time, the racial and social complexities of the people concerned – they had suggested it all; they had created the world of the street (FC, 22-23).

The sketches of Miguel Street are drawn by a narrator looking back at the environment in which he grew up. Each story has a character which is highlighted, while the others retreat into the background, to be picked up in the other stories. Of Miguel Street Francis Wyndham says:

Unity of theme, mood, manner and background binds the stories in V.S. Naipaul’s Miguel Street so tightly together that the collection is almost a novel. The street is in Port of Spain, and Mr Naipaul takes us from house to house, concentrating on a character here, a situation there, before moving on to the next; a major figure in one episode may fill a subsidiary role in another.

Miguel Street takes after the name of the street that showcases the stories of the slum like neighborhood in Trinidad. It has seventeen stories in it, each of which shed light on the lives and ambitions of inhabitants of Miguel Street; all good for nothing people, whose lives are as absurd as their characters. Each person discussed is worthless in his own way with inutile occupations and preoccupations.

“Bogart” is the first story of Miguel Street, the inspiration of which came to Naipaul while he was struggling during his formative years as a writer. Bogart, according to Naipaul, is also based on a relationship of his. “The connection of Bogart with my mother’s family was unusual. At the turn of the century Bogart’s father and my mother’s father had travelled out together from India as indentured immigrants. At some time during the long and frightening
journey they had sworn a bond of brotherhood; that was the bond that was being honored by their descendants’ (FC, 20).

The Bogart of the street pretended to be a tailor, had an elaborate sign for his shop; but it is to be doubted whether he ever followed this occupation seriously. The Bogart of Naipaul’s past, too had Naipaul make the sign-board of a tailor over his shop, and then left it to go to Venezuela, thereby proving that adopting a profession in Trinidad required no prior training. Occupations could be picked up and dropped just like that.

Bogart’s earlier name was Patience, and ironically, for someone who claimed that ‘he never liked cards’ (MS, 9), he played all day. After the release of the movie Casablanca, he adopted both the name and the fame of Bogart. Leading a bored life in Miguel Street, Bogart would disappear for long spells and would come back a bigger drinker, with even more absurdness attached to his character. During the spells in which he was away, he would take to being a cowboy or a smuggler or would even run successful brothels. Each time he would come back with a more pronounced American accent and manner. He would play act the part of a tough personality. ‘He bought a hat, and pulled down the brim over his eyes’ (MS, 13) and stood ‘against the high concrete fence of his yard, hands in his pockets, one foot jammed against the wall, and an eternal cigarette in his mouth’ (MS, 13-14). Hat, another character of the street would play the part of Rex Harrison, Bogart’s assistant, thereby proving that people in Trinidad drew inspiration from real life characters. Even in the novella, A Flag On the Island, which was primarily written for a film company, Naipaul shows that his characters aspire for real life situations to take over their real life. References to Norma Shearer’s eiderdown used in Escape (a 1940 war film) by Selma, Frank’s description of The Coconut Grove as something that looked ‘like the film set of an old musical’; and Harry, the owner of The Coconut Grove foolishly believing that the hurricane over, all will become ‘new men’ (NW, 537) exemplify this belief.
At the end of one of his long spells away, Bogart was charged with bigamy and had to be arrested. Hat’s explanation for Bogart’s behaviour is: ‘To be a man, among we men’ (MS, 14) suggesting that such a thing as what Bogart was charged for required a lot of courage and should be aspired for by others.

Popo, who was a carpenter by profession was ‘never idle’ (MS, 15). He was always ‘making the thing without a name’ (MS, 15) and had a sign board on which he had ‘Builder and Contractor’ (MS, 16) painted, and was in dilemma as to whether he should also add ‘architect’ (MS, 16) on the board. He had the habit of sitting on the pavement with a glass of rum in his hands which he never drank. Popo was supported by his wife who did odd jobs, while Popo with his philosophy, ‘Women and them like work, man not make for work’ (MS, 17) enjoyed himself and made nothing.

When Popo went to jail for selling remodeled stolen furniture, he was considered by the street men as ‘a bigger man than any of us’ (MS, 20). And upon his release, he was given the status of a local hero. However, he returned a better man with a sense of duty.

George, like Popo, was content to have his wife work while he sat and killed his time doing nothing. He was a wife beater and did not spare even his children. When his wife died George became a drunkard and converted his house into a brothel and prospered. Like George, Man-man too was a man who never worked, but at the same time ‘he was never idle’ (MS, 38). He was so taken by words that ‘he would spend a whole day writing a single word’ (MS, 38). The narrator mentions Man-man’s fascination for words by discussing how Man-man once wrote the word ‘school’ for an entire day:

Then he forgot me, and took out a long stick of chalk from his pocket and began writing on the pavement. He drew a very big S in outline and then filled it in, and then the C
and the H and the O. But then he started making several O’s, each smaller than the last, until he was writing in cursive, O after flowing O.

When I came home for lunch, he had got to French Street and he was still writing O’s, rubbing off mistakes with a rag.

In the afternoon he had gone round the block and was practically back in Miguel Street...

Then he squatted again and drew the outline of a Massive L and filled that in slowly and lovingly (MS, 39).

Following the death of Man-man’s dog and after wandering about for days, dazed and lost, Man-man saw God and began preaching. He was an effective preacher and donned a white robe. Finally, he declared himself the ‘new Messiah’ (MS, 42) and spoke of crucifying himself by tying himself ‘to a cross. One day he actually did so, and cried, ‘Stone, stone, STONE me, brethren! I forgive you’ (MS, 44). And when people did actually begin pelting him with larger stones, Man-man got scared and withdrew himself from his stand. The narrator says:

We heard Man-man’s shout, clear and loud, ‘Cut this stupid ness out. Cut it out, I tell you. I finish with this arseness, you hear’. And then he began cursing so loudly and coarsely that the people stopped in surprise (MS, 44).

After this incident, Man-man was taken away by the police and kept away from public life for good.

Amongst the many absurd characters of Miguel Street was another man called Wordsworth, who could ‘watch a small flower like the morning glory and cry’ (MS, 46). He wrote about ‘one line a month’ (MS, 50) and had been working on a single poem for five years and planned to continue for another twenty-two. There was Big Foot who had a variety of jobs, from bus driver to
mason; and finally after leaving Miguel Street became a labourer in a quarry. Morgan, the pyrotechnicist, made fireworks that no one bought anyway. He was a man who constantly played the fool and reveled in his acts. He often beat his children and when he got into a fix with his wife, he would ‘roar like a bull and beat on the galvanized iron fence’ (MS, 78) of his yard. He was always thinking of ways to draw the attention of people around him. Titus-Hoyt was a self-appointed educator. He was a man who wanted to stay in the limelight forever. In addition to this he formed the ‘Miguel Street Literary and Social Youth Club, and had it affiliated to the Trinidad and Tobago Youth Association’ (MS, 79). When he cleared the Inter Arts degree exam as an external from the London University, he set up a coaching institute of some kind which guaranteed to pass candidates in the Cambridge School Certificate exams.

Miguel Street had other weird occupants like Eddoes, who drove a scavenging cart. He had this habit of brushing his teeth for hours. He even went to work on his cart with a tooth-brush in his mouth. There was Mrs Hereira, who had run away from her husband, a doctor, and had come to live in Miguel Street with a man called Toni, who beat her day in and day out; and sometimes even threatened to kill her. But, Mrs Hereira did not leave him because she reasoned that she loved him, even though Toni was a man given to unsensible reasoning and drinking habits. Ultimately, she did leave him for her husband, who welcomed her back.

There was Bhacku who had the habit of buying cars and giving them the works even when not required. The narrator believes that Bhacku was ‘an artist’ (MS, 122) because he tinkered with the cars ‘for the joy of the thing’ (MS, 122). When acting as a kind mechanic, running a lorry and taxis did not bring him any money, Bhacku became a pundit.
Bolo was a man who invested whatever money he had in sweepstakes. He never won a thing, but when his name was drawn, after three consecutive failures, he refused to believe that it was true that he had won. He threw a tantrum at anyone who suggested that he should go pick his draw money. Ultimately he never did, and was content to draw his pension once a month.

Edward and Hat were brothers. Edward was a painter of sorts and a self-declared artist; when the Americans came to the island, Edward started working with them like all others. Hat is a person from Naipaul's actual past brought to life in Miguel Street. Hat, of Miguel Street, has been given a more pronounced character than all others on the street. Hat's prime preoccupation was reading papers. 'He read them from about ten in the morning until about six in the evening' (MS, 20). Hat's other weaknesses included 'his passion for impossible bets' (MS, 156). While Edward was practically a clean man, Hat got into trouble with the law every once in a while. Even when Hat married and became a man with responsibilities, he continued to live as before with all the other men in the street; unlike Edward who was completely devoted to family life. Finally, however, Hat got into serious trouble with the law for the unsuccessful attempted murder of his wife who had run away with another man.

The only person, other than the narrator, who appeared to get anywhere was Elias, George's son. Elias' ambition was to be a doctor, but he couldn't succeed in becoming one. He worked hard, polished his 'litritcher and poultry' (MS, 34); but inspite of this he failed to even get through the exam for a sanitary inspectors' job. Finally, he gave up his lofty aspirations, and settled down to driving scavenging carts, justifying the work as something he 'really' (MS, 37) did like.

The narrator who relates all these stories from memory, is the only person who sets up elaborate plans for himself, but that happens when he is
mature enough. He goes through a series of transitions all through his stay in Miguel Street. As a child, he admired all the people of the street for their various absurdities, believing that this is what life is like. Like Eddoes he wanted to be a scavenging cart driver, because to him Eddoes appeared as ‘one of the aristocrats of the street’ (MS, 92); he wanted to be like Titus Hoyt at one point of time. But as he matured and his vision broadened, he no longer wanted to be like Eddoes or Titus Hoyt who now appeared ‘stupid and boring’ (MS, 165); he took up a job with the customs, developed vices and decided that he must leave Trinidad altogether to get rid of them.

The characters and situations in Miguel Street are used to strongly portray the futility of the West Indian scenario. Such a portrayal can also be seen in the other fictional work that Naipaul has written of the West Indies. In this respect, A House for Mr Biswas, The Mystic Masseur, The Suffrage of Elvira and The Mimic Men are also similar. In addition to this, the West Indian futility has also been brought to life vividly in two other works discussed here: “The Baker’s Story” and “A Flag On the Island” written in 1962 and 1965 respectively, from the collection A Flag On the Island.

“The Baker’s Story” is narrated by a black Grenadian baker in Creole English. The story is of the baker himself, who has struck it rich by opening a bakery. He talks of the struggles of his life and how he began working as a delivery boy for a Chinese bakery. After the death of the owner’s wife, the shop was sold off to another Chinese who turned it into a grocery. The Grenadian, scared of his fast approaching poverty, and unskilled; except for the knowledge of baking, decided to start a bakery of his own. However, the bakery did poor business though the baker was confident of his baking skills. He knew that his business lacked something severely, but he had no idea what it was:

You hear all this talk about quality being its own advertisement? Don’t believe it, boy. Is quality plus
something else. And I didn’t have this something else. I begin to wonder what the hell it could be (NW, 454).

Introspection led him to grasp the fact that acute racialism in Trinidad subjected its people to adopt rigid borders in their professional fields. He redecorated his shop with Chinese interiors and hired a Chinese to handle the counter business. He even adopted a Chinese name for his shop. Business picked up soon after this and the Grenadian opened up two other branches and married a Chinese who took over the management of the front office and the employees.

“A Flag On the Island”, a novella written for a film company, is the story of a middle-aged American, Frank, who returns to the Caribbean island where he had served as a soldier during the Second World War. He finds the island drastically changed; his favourite hangout has changed into a popular nightclub, ‘The Coconut Grove’ (NW, 469); his old acquaintances have undergone metamorphosis; Blackwhite, who taught at a school has become a popular novelist with a huge fan-following and has changed his name to H.J.B White; Priest, an inept preacher and an insurance salesman has switched professions to become a TV show host, Gary Priestland. There are others who have changed and this is all due to Frank’s influence on them.

The two stories, “The Baker’s Story” and “A Flag On the Island” help highlight the facts about Trinidad’s society: its set up, the effect of history on this society, and the efforts the people make to deal with their situations, a topic discussed in the two subsequent chapters also.

To begin with, the society is assimilated in a curious manner. The Negroes, the Indians, the English, French, Chinese and Portuguese all amalgamate to form the West Indian society. Of all the various races, the Indians live in endogamous communities of their own, but this is mostly to be found in the countryside. The other races are not so endogamous in nature.
People living in urban societies form a cultural milieu. Naipaul’s fiction sheds light on both the rural and the urban societies. So, Mohun Biswas and Ganesh Ramsumair, characters of A House for Mr Biswas and The Mystic Masseur live in highly endogamous communities, with Biswas never venturing out of it, while Ganesh does so. Ralph Singh of The Mystic Masseur, and numerous other Indians of Naipaul’s fiction live in the city and are in touch with many kinds of people.

After the abolition of slavery and the arrival of indentured labour, over decades the society and its people have undergone a sort of assimilation. While the Asians, an initially rigid group, have adopted creolization; the blacks, descendants of Negro slaves, have accepted and acknowledged various aspects of Asian culture. A black may sometimes take to ‘wearing dhoti and turban’ (NW, 456), a very rare sight, in rural areas they may be seen ‘putting away curry, talking Indian, and behaving just like Indians’ (NW, 456). Sometimes, they may also partake of Indian rituals and understand the functioning of the Indian system, as can be observed from what Mr Maclean (the carpenter who built a house for Mr Biswas in Green Vale) asks after the house warming pujia conducted without the feeding of the guest: ‘That is all?…. No sharing-out of anything – food and thing – as other Indians do’.

The baker in “The Baker’s Story” adopts Chinese customs as a result of his prolonged stay with them. His adoption of dressing casually in khaki pants and merino, drinking Chinese tea and not speaking much is all a result of this stay. By coming into close contact with them, he realizes that prejudices are harboured due to ignorance, and therefore, one shouldn’t believe what ‘these black people say about Chinese and prejudice’ (NW, 452).

Cultural assimilation makes him realize that one could adopt cultures and make up for what is lacking in one’s own. He, therefore, has no qualms about learning neatness and order from the Chinese, a habit that, according to
him, black children do not possess. It is this very cultural assimilation that makes Biswas yearn for a house of his own, a thing he feels, is better than the joint system of his community.

Despite this amalgamation, there are certain areas where the communities keep to themselves, like religious practices, moral sanctions and other such practices. They also have a certain set of beliefs about the kind of professions each of them should pursue. What Naipaul discusses with regard to racialism in profession in *The Middle Passage* has been exemplified by the baker in “The Baker’s Story”:

When black people in Trinidad go to a restaurant they don’t like to see black people meddling with their food. And then... though Trinidad have every race and every colour, every race have to do special things.... If you want to buy a snowball, who you buying it from? You wouldn’t buy it from a Indian or a Chinee or a Potogee. You would buy it from a blackman. If a Indian in Trinidad decide to go into the carpentering business the man would starve. Who ever see a Indian carpenter? I suppose the only place in the world where they have Indian carpenters and Indian masons is India.... And...see the names of bakers; Coelho, Pantin, Stauble. Potogee or Swiss, or something, and then all those other Chinee places. And, look at the laundries. If a black man open a laundry, you would take your clothes to it? I wouldn’t take my clothes there (NW, 457).

But there are still other afflictions that the West Indian society suffers from, a number of them can be sighted upon in nearly all of Naipaul’s Trinidadian depictions. Professional aesthetics are hardly present. People on Miguel Street, for example, just manage to scrape through life on an everyday basis, earning just enough to sustain themselves. Big Foot, a character from Miguel Street, was a bus driver and a mason at the same time. Later he becomes a labourer in a quarry.
No prior training, is required even for a job that requires skill. In “A Flag On the Island”, Priest sells insurance because preaching does not pay much; and selling insurance does not require much skill as the baker in “The Baker’s Story” believes. Priest then becomes a TV show host, Gary Priestland. There are also some others, like Bhacku, in Miguel Street who switch to easier modes of earning money because their jobs don’t pay enough for subsistence. So Bhacku, one day, decides to become a pundit, just like Ganesh, who out of the blue decided to become a pundit because his career as a masseur didn’t take off.

A score of other people come from humble backgrounds; for them the only way to break away from bondage to the land is to start small in any professional line and work their way up to the top, as is exemplified by Bissoon in The Mystic Masseur who left grass-cutting to give, away hand bills and then started selling ‘kyalendars’ (MMr, 98).

People are also forever looking for ways to earn quick money. Instead of working hard to achieve their goals, they look for professions that will earn them as much money as possible and as quickly. Hat would rather earn quick cash by betting than by working hard. People of Miguel Street like George would rather run brothels than do other things. The lazy attitude harboured by the Trinidadians is brought to light by the black Grenadian baker in “The Baker’s Story” who runs a bakery in Trinidad. He observes that Trinidadians are a laid back lot who make very little effort to progress. Infact, they are more comfortable with a hand to mouth existence. Regarding the importance of hard work the baker draws a parallel between Grenadians and Chinese:

We Grenadians understand hard work, so that is why I supposes I uses to get on so well with these Chinee people, and that is why these lazy black Trinidadians so jealous of we (NW, 450).
Added to all this is the Caribbean mindset of looking to the West for finding role models. In *Miguel Street* can be seen a very strong influence by the American, more so because of the setting of the stories in the time frame of the Second World War. The strongest to be influenced by the Americans are Bogart and Edward. Bogart though highly influenced, is slightly less Americanized than Edward. Edward wore clothes in an American style, chewed gum and took on an accent. But his behaviour was not different from that of the scores of Trinidadians of his time. ‘The Americans is people. They know about things’ (*MS*, 144) was what he believed. And even though he had never been to America, he knew that in America streets were wide and Americans lived in big houses and had big cars. He even married an American but could not save his marriage.

There are other instances too in *Miguel Street* from where it can be seen that whites were looked upon as demi-gods; and everyone including the narrator in *Miguel Street* worshipped one or the other aspect of the whites. This adulation for America and the West is to be seen in all of the Trinidadians existing in Naipaul’s fictional corpus. Biswas is awed by the fantasy that the West offers him, and this fantasy is converted into respect for everything English. Ganesh, Beharry and all the Elvirans have a tremendous adulation for the west. ‘That America, boy, is the place to live in’ (*MMr*, 67), when Beharry says this, he echoes the sentiments of all the West Indians. Trinidad is just a spot on the world map and everybody acutely realizes this. The youngest of children also realize this and therefore, are extremely surprised to find that Fort George, outside of Post of Spain, was built to prevent the French from attacking the island; they cannot believe that Trinidad could ever be of any strategic importance. Years of colonialism has instilled in the Trinidadian mind the feeling and realization of their own inferior situation. When Edward loses in a painting competition, he blames the Trinidadian judges for their lack of competency by saying: ‘What they know about anything? Now, if I was in
America, it would be different. The Americans is people. They know about things' (MS, 144). He even laughed at the idea of Trinidadians being talented. When he lost in a singing competition, he reasoned: 'Trinidad people don't know good thing. They just born stupid' (MS, 146-147).

Despite this adulation for the west, there is the poignant awareness that Trinidad and Trinidadians are failures; and are not properly treated till date by their ex-colonizers. When Elias fails the Cambridge Senior School Certificate exam, Boyee nonchalantly says, 'What else you expect? Who correct the paper? English man, not so? You expect them to give Elias a pass?' (MS, 33). The people of the street are confirmed that being colonials, they have to suffer the injustices meted out to them. But at the same time, they fail to realize their own follies, their own shortcomings. Being colonials is disadvantageous to them; more so because they believe that the situation of failure has been thrust upon them.

This situation of failure has led the people to become distrustful of each other. The people fool each other, are eternally jealous of each other's success and believe that nothing much can be done about this situation. Each person holds prejudiced views against the other. When the narrator succeeds where Elias failed to get through in any one of the tests that would lead him to fulfill any one of his ambitions, Elias, recounting the gross injustice that had been done to him says, 'You got to bribe everybody if you want to get your toenail cut' (MS, 36).

Bolo harbors his own view of Trinidadians as liars; and after being duped by a fellow Trinidadian who led him to believe that he was taking him to Venezuela to find work; Bolo remarks: 'Trinidad people! Trinidad people! I don't know why Hitler don't come here and bomb all the sons of bitches it have in this island. He bombing the wrong people, you know' (MS, 134). Even
the narrator blames his drinking habit and other vices to the place, and not to his own self.

The influx of the Americans also does not help motivate the society to make positive gains. It has, rather, made them rush madly towards a superficial level of achievement. This, in the town setting, makes the people mimics, tricksters: failures in the broader sense. Yet, despite this, the society goes on. To the outsider it appears as if native life is a picnic of some kind. To them peoples and situations appear relaxed and laid back; but reality is dismal. People do nothing constructive because it has been their situation for ages. ‘You look at these things and you say, “How nice, how quaint, this is what life should be”. You don’t see that we’re all mad and we are getting madder all the time turning life into a carnival’ (NW, 499), says Blackwhite to Frank explaining the actual West Indian situation. Echoing his thoughts, the narrator of Miguel Street, aware, like all the other people of his Street, between their world and the actual world, says:

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 (MS, 63).

The people are also aware of the fact that trickery will not sustain them for long. Like the people of Miguel Street, they are constantly reminded that the external world is more dominant than their petty materialistic world. When Hat the smartest trickster on the street goes to jail, Miguel Street realizes that to meet the challenges of the world, they need to be on equal footing, just trickery won’t do. More than most, it is Henry of “A Flag On the Island” who understands the full-scale outcome of mimicry and trickery and wishes for an apocalypse in the form of an approaching hurricane, which however, evades them.
Less amount of attention paid to education is also the cause of futility. Though Singh is the youngest of the Naipaulian characters to realize with full force the futility of the West Indian scenario; his race among the others living on the island are the last ones to realize it; the reason being that education, by the Indians, is treated not as a necessity but as an object of fancy. It is meant ‘mainly for the lower classes’ (MM, 121). While Singh is surprised at the heavy academic responsibility of letter writing, his classmates are not.

Singh sees Deschampsneufs and Browne marked for achievement and ambitions beyond his own; but this is because Deschampsneufs comes from an elitist background and Browne is black. From this, it is evident that people of other descents and specially blacks are more aware and realistic than Indians in temperament. They know that only education can open up doors for bright futures for the people of the island. That is why Deschampsneufs and Browne knew what to expect out of education whereas Singh did not.

The narrator of *Miguel Street* also realizes the futility of the West Indian situation and undergoes metamorphosis while he is still young. He no longer admires and wants to be like the people on the Street. He does not want to go in for small jobs which would pay him just enough to survive; he does not want to be a failure like Elias who took up driving scavenging carts because of lack of options. He does not want to be like Titus Hoyt, a mediocre, self-appointed tutor whose future is not secure.

In keeping with Fanon’s observation that post colonial societies develop into a ‘fancy-dress parade’ after independence, Mr Blackwhite exemplifies this in a number of ways for Frank and concludes:

> This place, I tell you, is nowhere. It doesn’t exist. People are just born here. They all want to go away (NW, 498).

Having realized that Trinidad is a land of failures and that not much can be achieved while on the land, a number of characters from Naipaul’s fiction
make a conscious decision, like their creator, to move away. Even when not thinking of the future, Naipaul's creations are so disillusioned by the land itself that they want to go back to the land of their forefathers respectively, even though they have lost all touch with it. Frank in “A Flag On the Island” observes that everyone wants to return one day to their respective lands. As soon as the war is to be over, the Americans are to go back to America; Ma-Ho, a Chinese grocer who had 'a photograph of Chiang Kai-Shek between his Chinese calendars' (NW, 468) was contemplating going back to Canton. Mr Blackwhite, influenced by the 'back to Africa' movement, as are a number of blacks in The Middle Passage, had a photograph of 'Haile Selassie' (NW, 468) to remind himself, and tell all others 'that he too had a place to go back to' (NW, 468), though he had severe doubts of the possibility of the same.

The only ways to counter this futility is to either leave the West Indies, or to exploit the situation to one's own advantage. A number of characters of Miguel Street, either because of their disillusionment with Trinidad or charmed visions of lands other than Trinidad leave the island. Bogart constantly goes to South America because Trinidad has little excitement to offer him. Morgan, the pyrotechnicist, leaves for Venezuela after a fire ruins his house and his entire collection of fireworks. Edward goes away to Aruba or Curacao to work for a Dutch oil company. And the narrator himself makes his way to England. The only people who remain in Miguel Street are those who can befool others by providing various services to them; or people who are too poor to leave Trinidad, but they too make an effort to paddle their own canoe. Titus Hoyt remains because he can make money out of trapping people into joining his school which claims ‘Passes in the Cambridge School Certificate Guaranteed’ (MS, 82).

For the influential and affluent, getting out of Trinidad is like a game of choices. In Miguel Street, all it requires to get the narrator out of Trinidad is a legal excuse. When the narrator goes with his mother to Ganesh Pundit, a
politician and the protagonist of The Mystic Masseur, a series of choices are placed before him:

‘I don’t want to study anything really. I just want to go away that’s all’.

Ganesh smiled and said, ‘The Government not giving away that sort of scholarship yet. Only ministers could do what you say. No, you have to study something’.

I said, ‘I know what I want to study. Engineering’. I was thinking about my uncle Bhacku.

Ganesh laughed and said, ‘What you know about engineering’?

I said, ‘Right now, nothing. But I could put my mind to it’.

My mother said, ‘Why don’t you want to take up law’?

I thought of Chittaranjan and his brown suit and I said, ‘No, not law’!

Ganesh said, ‘It have only one scholarship remaining For drugs’?

I said, ‘But I don’t want to be a druggist. I don’t want to put on a white jacket, and sell lipstick to women...’

Ganesh said, ‘Think. It mean going to London. It mean seeing snow and the big Parliament’.

I said, ‘All right. I go study drugs’ (MS, 167-168).

Singh is also one of the few lucky ones who are able to leave the island as is Owad in A House for Mr Biswas. But there are a few others who consider it lucky enough to just leave the small towns and villages from which
they come for bigger cities like Port of Spain and San Fernando. Lorkhoor leaves Elvira, writes a scintillating account of Harbans visit to Elvira after winning the elections from there; and makes a place for himself in a column called ‘Lorkhoor’s Log’ (SE, 218) in the Trinidad Sentinel, and shifts base to the city. Foam is happy enough to get Lorkhoor’s job of ‘announcing for the cinemas in Caroni’ (SE,219) which is better enough for him as he gets to leave his father’s dark, stuffy shop. It opens up his path for further progress which could lead him to Port of Spain like Lorkhoor, after which it may take him out of th country as happened with Ganesh.

Ganesh, the trickster is the one who exploits the rampant futility for maximum gain. He takes up massaging, when he finds that massaging opens up even bigger options to earn money, he pursues them. When all else fails to fulfill his greed, he becomes a politician. This is the ultimate his background can give him. Harbans too is like Ganesh, but to a lesser extent. He becomes a politician to exploit its wider implications.

Reading of Naipaul’s corpus it seems that futility is a never ending situation. And so, Trinidad symbolized by Miguel Street will go on forever; one set of deserters will make way for others; and what is left behind is a mass that exploits its own self for its own good.
References:


Chapter-2

The Migrant Experiences-1
The abolition of slavery and emancipation of the slaves from 1833 onwards in the West Indies was responsible for the arrival of Indian indentured labour there. India, being a British colony, was the safest bet for cheap labour. So, a huge number of labourers were transplanted from India on cheap wages to the West Indies.

Though the Indians were brought in to replace slaves, they were not slaves. They were called ‘coolies’; and were better off in comparison to the slaves, as they were allowed to live with their own cultural beliefs and customs. But, though these labourers came to inhabit an altogether new land, they failed to develop a sense of belongingness to their newly adopted land. Even with the passage of time there was very little change in the attitudes of the colonizers and colonized. So the Indian labourer remained essentially withdrawn on various planes in the very country which he had come to create. Hugh Tinker says:

They arrived as coolies, and in many people’s eyes they are itinerant coolies still. For slavery is both a system and an attitude of mind. Both the system and the attitude are still with us.¹

And when the colonizers left, the victims survived and carried with them the stigma of being unwanted citizens of the third world. But this condition was not limited to the Indians alone – the entire West Indian scenario was one of futility – the Indians only formed a small part of the whole canvas. Naipaul quotes from Froude’s comment on the West Indians:

They were valued only for the wealth which they yielded, and society there has never assumed any particular noble aspect…. There are no people there in the true sense of the word, with a character and purpose of their own.²
In a world which is inhabited by migrants from various continents, there was little chance that the Indian immigrants would be given a warm welcome. They were looked upon as intruders and were variously isolated by other members of the West Indian society. Unlike the African slaves who had by now become settlers, these 'coolies' were technically free; though their immigration was a sort of compulsion to them owing to poor economic conditions. Owing to their race, poverty, religion and culture, the Indians were demarcated till the early twentieth century. On an average, they were regarded as aliens; and they regarded themselves as transit passengers.

The Indians kept to themselves. They rarely gave up their rural occupations, seldom ventured into business; and in addition to this, kept aloof from the English education system for a very long time. The Indians also kept themselves away from the black society, fearing creolization. They united with the Negroes only during the various labour riots. Moreover, the movement for Indian independence had far reaching impact; and was felt by Trinidad Indians as well. Subsequently it gave rise to Indian cultural nationalism even in the West Indies, which further drew apart the Indians and the Negroes. The last and perhaps the most important aspect of the Indian's profile was that the Indian never failed to associate himself as still a part of India, vestigial though his situation may actually be; unlike the Negro. Quoting Trollope, Naipaul writes:

The West Indian Negro knows nothing of Africa except that it is a term of reproach.\(^3\)

He further believes:

Much of the West Indian Negro's drive arises out of his desire to define his position in the world. The Indian, with no such problem, was content with his narrow loyalties. Whether he knew his language or practiced his religion,
the knowledge that a country called India existed was to him a pole.⁴

After working on the land for a number of years some of the indentured Indian ‘coolies’ began to save money and bought their independence and their own lands, and became their own masters. They gradually also forayed into education, the government services, and the businesses; all this while trying to still keep themselves away from the general West Indian society. But, try as they might, creolization did creep into the Indian community, and brought about certain immutable changes.

Naipaul has dealt, to a great extent, with the East Indian community in Trinidad in a number of his novels. In them, he has treated the confusions prevalent in the Indian society in Trinidad as regards rituals and beliefs; as well as the degeneration of culture in a multi-racial immigrant society. About the Indian society of Trinidad, Naipaul says:

A peasant-minded, money-minded community, spiritually static because cut off from its roots, its religion reduced to rites without philosophy, set in a materialist colonial society: a combination of historical accidents and national temperament has turned the Trinidad Indian into the complete colonial, even more philistine than the white.⁵

A House for Mr Biswas is widely acknowledged as Naipaul’s masterpiece. It follows the life of Biswas, a Trinidadian of Indian origin, from birth to death, focusing in particular, the East Indian’s acquisition of an identity in the West Indian society. Biswas, the central figure of the novel is based on V.S. Naipaul’s father, Seepersad Naipaul, a journalist and a short story writer. And A House for Mr Biswas takes heavily from Seepersad Naipaul’s story “They Named Him Mohun”.

Mohun Biswas belonged to a family of a sugarcane estate worker, in the backwoods of Trinidad. He was born at the inauspicious hour of midnight and
in ‘the wrong way’ according to the midwife. The astrologer predicted that Biswas would eat up his own mother and father; and the prediction does come true when Biswas’ father, Raghu, dies by drowning in a pond while searching for Biswas. Soon after Raghu’s death, the family, comprising the three brothers and a sister got separated to earn their own living. The two elder brothers were sent away to work on the sugarcane estate. They later bought land and improved their economic situation. Biswas’ sister, Dehuti, went to stay with their aunt, Tara Biswas, being the youngest, was also accommodated by Tara, along with his mother, Bipti, in an establishment at Pagotes.

Mohun was then sent to school for a short period, before being sent to be groomed as a pundit, from where he was turned out on account of misconduct. He then was apprenticed to his uncle Ajodha’s brother, Bhandat, in a rum shop. From there he was turned out for alleged stealing. It was after this that Biswas met his school friend, Alec, who helped him setup as a sign-painter. One such sign-painting assignment took him to the Tulsi store, where he wrote a love letter to one of the shop-assistants, Shama, who was a Tulsi daughter, thereby changing his life forever. He was then trapped into marriage with Shama by Mrs Tulsi and Seth, her brother-in-law. Marriage was the actual turning point in the life of Biswas. He was destined, from then on, to slavery in ‘Tulsidom’. As William Walsh puts it:

He was not only naturally a slave, but officially one. The Tulsi family condensed into itself the character of the larger world outside. It was fundamentally indifferent but grasping. It ran on superstition and power, expressed in the Tulsi case in the mysterious matriach and in her brother-in-law the gangsterish, overpowering Mr Seth. Its system was to provide subsistence and cover in return for total devotion and the abdication of self. Its modes of behaviour were derived from a remote civilization – from India – but they were merely forms, empty of any content or value. Everybody lived at Hanuman House in a complex of
relationships and transient alliances, the purpose of which was to placate the authorities and to slide through life unnoticed. In this cruel, comic world, both crowded and solitary, bullying and servile, Mr Biswas kept alive a mere glint of independence and self by refusing to be either a suave or a mild victim. He was weak but he nourished his querulousness and kept his malice going. When it was necessary to be solemn, he was a clown, when pious he was blasphemous, when he was supposed to be appreciative he was ungrateful.\(^6\)

Biswa was a confirmed misfit. He could not bring himself to adjust to the Tulsi temperament. He was sent by the Tulsis to The Chase to look after the Tulsi store there. He went, taking his wife and his cartful of possessions. During their stay at The Chase, the couple often quarreled; and Biswas had three children during this period. Owing to inexperience, Biswas was often cheated by his customers and incurred heavy debts; and had to be bailed out of the situation by Seth.

Subsequently, he was sent to Green Vale as an overseer. Dissatisfied with his work there and his life style and his appurtenant situation, he set about building a house. However, the unfinished house was lost in a terrible rain storm, which also took a heavy toll on Biswas’ nerves. From there he was taken back to Hanuman House, the stopover he frequented on his many journeys of dependency and independency, to recuperate.

After recovery from the Green Vale disaster, Biswas made a fresh start by joining the *Trinidad Sentinel*, and began earning both money and respect. Along with this, he earned himself an identity which was different from that which was thrust upon him by the Tulsis. In the middle somewhere, he was offered a government job as a Community Welfare Officer, with a bigger pay packet. He bought a car and refurbished his appearance. What he still did not appreciate was his living in a house that belonged to Mrs Tulsi. So, to fulfill his
childhood dream of having a house of his own, he borrowed heavily from Ajodha and bought a house. Life turned the better for Biswas, in that his family bonded in a new and better manner.

Soon after this, Biswas had to give up his job and salvage his old one. But then, he suffered a heart attack which rendered him jobless. He did not survive long after that. However, he had the satisfaction of dying in his own house.

In addition to Biswas’ struggle for self-assertion, A House for Mr Biswas can be treated as an ethnographic account of the East Indian community in Trinidad; and as a description of the struggle of a society with its futility.

The plot of A House for Mr Biswas deals explicitly with the Tulsi saga. Through the comprehensive treatment of the Tulsi clan, Naipaul has depicted the struggle in the East Indian community to retain its traditionalism while at the same time trying to fit into the creole society, at least economically.

Of the numerous multitudes that had been brought to Trinidad, many were from the low caste and had been inducted into the indenture labour system. There were other people of high caste who had escaped from law, and there were some who had left after the Great Indian Revolt of 1857. Pundit Tulsi, a man of considerable repute, high caste and ancestry, faced no such compulsion; yet he had been desperate enough to migrate. And unlike many Indians who had come to Trinidad leaving behind everything, including their identity, Pundit Tulsi constantly kept in touch with his family back in India.

Undoubtedly, Pundit Tulsi was from a high caste; and was revered by people around him. The Tulsi clan came to inherit the respect that was due to Pundit Tulsi. They fiercely guarded the ‘India’ that the Pundit had brought and the very first prominent exhibit of it was the façade of the Tulsi House. Of all
the houses in Awacas that were small and had regular features, Hunuman House presented itself as ‘an alien white fortress’. It had a huge statue of the monkey-god, Hanuman, as the frontispiece, which gave it its name.

It can be said that by giving a detailed description of the façade of the Hanuman House, Naipaul depicts the history of an entire race of slave people who ‘carry about them the mark and convictions of the slave, the unnecessary man’.

In any migrant society it is not unnatural that immigrants hold onto their religious beliefs as strictly as possible initially, so as to overcome the fear of the unknown. Orthodox adherence to religion is the characteristic feature of the immigrant Indians of Trinidad, though with the passage of time, they got distorted.

To the highly religious and superstitious community of the village where Biswas is born, it is alarming that, as mentioned earlier, he is born at an inauspicious hour with six fingers and in the wrong way. The evil brought forth by his birth has to be purged and to do this, Biswas’ grandmother, Bisoondaye, hangs cactus leaves on doors and windows and ‘every aperture through which an evil spirit might enter the hut’ (HB, 16).

In keeping with the orthodox beliefs of the Indian community, a pundit is consulted to tell of Biswas’ future. Naipaul’s description here of the pundit mocks the entire lot of pundits. Naipaul’s pundits are a lot who use their religion to earn money. They are ordinary human beings, who are paid attention to only when they are performing as pundits. Whenever Hari, one of the Tulsi sons-in-law, donned the pundit’s garb ‘everyone treated him with a new respect’ (HB, 150). In addition to this, Naipaul’s pundits are depicted as having shallow Hindu beliefs. Pundit Jairam, Biswas’ tutor is depicted as having highly polemical views.
He believed in God, fervently, but claimed it was not necessary for a Hindu to do so. He attacked the custom some families had of putting up a flag after a religious ceremony; but his own front garden was a veritable grove of bamboo poles with red and white pennants in varying stages of decay. He ate no meat but spoke against vegetarianism: when Lord Rama went hunting, did they think it was just for the sport (HB, 51)?

This is in sharp contrast to the pundits in Seepersad Naipaul’s stories, from which Naipaul draws inspiration heavily.

The events described in Naipaul’s novel, A House for Mr Biswas and Seepersad’s story “They Named Him Mohun” at the time of Biswas’ birth are analogous: the pundit, the inauspicious hour of Biswas’ birth and the naming ceremony included.

Seepersad’s pundit is mentioned with due veneration. He consults his books in a genuine manner and is sincerely concerned when he cannot remember how to ward off the evil spirit. But in Naipaul’s novel, the pundit does not seem to be well versed with his work. His almanac is ‘a sheaf of loose thick leaves, long and narrow, between boards. The leaves were brown with age and their musty smell was mixed with that of the red and ochre sandalwood paste that had been spattered on them’ (HB, 16). His interpretation of the almanac is also off-handed. About keeping Biswas away from water, he says:

‘The only thing I can advise is to keep him away from trees and water. Particularly water’.

‘Never bath him’?

‘I don’t mean exactly that’. He raised his right hand, bunched the fingers and, with his head on one side, said slowly, ‘One has to interpret what the book says’. He tapped the wobbly almanac with his left hand. ‘And when
the book says water, I think it means water in its natural from’.

‘Natural form’.

‘Natural form’, the pundit repeated but uncertainly. ‘I mean’, he said quickly, and with some annoyance, ‘keep him away from rivers and ponds. And of course the sea. And another thing’, he added with satisfaction. ‘He will have an unlucky sneeze’ (HB, 16-17).

In Seepersad’s “They Named Him Mohun”, the pundit’s priority is to name the child whereas in the novel, A House for Mr Biswas, the pundit conveniently forgets this duty of his and has to be reminded of it by Bisoondaye, and when she suggests the name, he tries to partake of the credit.

‘We forget one thing, punditji. The name’.

‘I can’t help you completely there. But it seems to me that a perfectly safe prefix would be Mo. It is up to you to think of something to add to that’.

‘Oh, punditji, you must help me. I can only think of hun’.

The pundit was surprised and genuinely pleased. ‘But that is excellent. Excellent. Mohun. I couldn’t have chosen better myself’ (HB, 17).

Further decay can be seen when Naipaul’s pundit suggests use of cheap coconut oil instead of mustard oil as suggested by Seepersad’s pundit, for carrying out the ceremony. Naipaul’s pundit is also more interested in the payment he receives for the service he renders.

A similar commercialization of religion can be seen in the case of Pundit Jairam, under whom Biswas is sent for grooming. Though Pundit Jairam is an intellectual in his own right, the monetary gains he earns from executing rituals, holds more attraction for him. After the puja ceremony, Biswas, the
pundit’s assistant, would pillage for coins dropped by the devout, and after the
two got home, ‘Jairam asked for the money counted it, and felt Mr Biswas all
over to make sure he hadn’t kept anything back’ (HB, 51-52).

Religion promotes the belief in fate; and fate and superstition go hand in
hand. The belief in fate and superstition however, is not restricted to any one
particular community in the West Indies. It manifests itself in all strata of
society and the superstitious beliefs of one community are adhered to by a
number of communities in the society.

In A House for Mr Biswas, Biswas’ family, a typical Indian one, has its
own set of superstitious beliefs. An examples of this can be seen in Bisoondaye
trying to purge the evil cast at the time of Biswas’ birth by handing cactus
leaves on doors and windows. Moreover, the family has to keep extra vigil on
Biswa’s sneeze, unlucky, as foretold. Raghu would return halfway from the
road even if he remotely heard Biswas’ sneeze. The rest of the village too,
observed precaution. And finally, as was foretold, Biswas, while still young,
had ‘eaten up his own father’ (HB, 31).

Much later, when an adult Mr Biswas was being brought sick from the
Green Vale, Sushila burnt herbs to purify and protect the house, and had the
children stick ‘pins in the wicks of lamps to keep misfortune and death away’
(HB, 294). The Tulsis, in addition to calling a doctor, consulted a thaumaturge
who purified the sick room in which Biswas lay and ‘erected invisible barriers
against evil spirits’ (HB, 297). He also suggested that the family hang up aloe
vera leaves on every door and window. He chided the family for not
remembering to put a black doll in the doorway of the hall to divert evil spirits’
(HB, 297).

Other then this, there are many instances of superstitious beliefs
throughout the novel such as the sighting of Padma’s ghost, which is put down
as obeah by the Tulsis.
Fate as portrayed in the novel is the Hindu's weapon for defining his situation. And fate is a force to reckon with in the entire novel. As such, the belief in fate, according to Indian psychology, plays a very important role in the overall development of an individual's personality. And fate is instilled into the Indian scheme of things to a great extent, both consciously and subconsciously. And, no matter what, an individual placed no matter where, tends to recognize the events occurring in his life as an act of fate and something preordained.

It is the belief in fate that helps a woman endure the treatment meted out to her by her husband. It is considered useless to act against fate. Bipti has to go back to her husband, Raghu, after Biswas is born, and has to bear his miserliness. Raghu's cruelty has to be accepted by Bipti without any protest as he is her husband, akin to an overlord. Bisoondaye, Bipti's mother, can only taunt him and her father can say, 'Shameless, wicked. When I see the behaviour of this man I begin to feel that the Black Age has come' (HB, 19). They cannot say more as Raghu is the son-in-law of the family; a coveted position in the Indian family setup. So, a compromise has to be made and Bipti has to go back to her husband. 'Fate. There is nothing we can do about it' (HB, 15), says Bipti's father.

It is an act of fate that Biswas' maternal grandfather came over from India. And it is his fate that he is still in Trinidad, and cannot escape. Yet instead of trying to break free from this mindset, he looks for answers in it.

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 (HB, 15).

It is an act of fate that Biswas is born at an inauspicious hour and is to be unlucky for his parents. It is an act of fate that Tara is childless, 'but it was also
her fate to have married a man who had at one bound, freed himself from the land and acquired wealth' (HB, 31-32).

Fate is to be blamed when Biswas is kicked out from Jairam’s and Bhandat’s. Though it is Biswas’ own fault which makes him lose his apprenticeship at both places, Bipti turns to blame fate for this:

It is my fate. I have had no luck with my children. And with you, Mohun, I have the least luck of all. Everthing Sitaram said about you was true (HB, 65-66).

Biswas’ marriage to Shama is treated as an act of fate and not the result of Biswas’ failed attempt to prove himself a dandy. Through Shama, and not his sign painting job, it is his fate to have landed himself in the Tulsi family. Also, it is Shama’s fate to have married a good for nothing like Biswas. And she knows that ‘Mr Biswas, however grotesque, was hers and that she had to make do with what Fate had granted her’ (HB, 104).

When Biswas is married, and his first daughter is born, Mrs Tulsi tells him to accept it all as a part of fate. She further tells him about girls having to live with their fate and how there is nothing that can be done about it.

And when you marry your girl children you can’t say what sort of life you are letting them in for. They have to live with their Fate. Mothers-in-law, sisters-in-law. Idle husbands. Wife-beaters (HB, 200).

After recovery from the Green Vale tragedy, an unconscious act on the part of Biswas, which he believes, complies with what his fate had ordained, takes him upon a bus to Port of Spain, though he knew not what he actually wanted to do with his life. But the decision had been made, and he was without energy to go back on it’ (HB, 308).
Later on in the novel, when Biswas acquires a job in the *Trinidad Sentinel*, it too is portrayed as an act of fate rather than his exploitation of his sign-painting talent.

A chance encounter had led him to sign-writing. Sign-writing had taken him to Hanuman House and the Tulsis. Sign-writing found him a place on the *Sentinel* (*HB*, 323).

After having acquired a job, Biswas went on to achieve, through hard work, the twin goals he had set himself early in life becoming independent and owning a house. But being an Indian, with fate inbuilt in his psyche, he could not but be thankful to his stars for having gained this position in life, even if it meant, living in a house of the Tulsis.

It was an experience, so new he could not yet savour it, to find himself turned all at once from a visitor into a dweller, in a house that was solid and finished (*HB*, 333).

Biswa, who had been ordained by fate to be unfortunate and unlucky, had, ultimately, succeeded in getting a decent job and a decent home. 'Could this luck have been more complete?' (*HB*, 333). And at the fag end of his life, he often contemplated that he was lucky to be in his own house, on his own half-lot of land, his own portion of the earth' (*HB*, 8).

Belief in fate is just a small part of the wider canvas of the East Indian community life, as depicted in *A House for Mr Biswas*. Naipaul, here, has also depicted that aspect of life which can be said to be a cross over from the native land of the migrant, in this case, the East Indian, who has come to inhabit the West Indian scenario. Here, the transitional Indian generation is portrayed in their dual struggle, modernizing their mode of living without giving up their Indian identity. They are under constant pressure to modify their customs and beliefs, and to achieve this, they have to make a number of compromises, and everything else, in the wake of modernization begins to take a back seat, even religion.
A prominent aspect of the East Indian community depicted in the novel is the caste system. Practically the entire East Indian community lives in the same societal setup that is followed in its native land. The caste system and religious hostility are prevalent and kept alive with fierce enthusiasm in Trinidad too.

Biswas, by birth, is a Brahmin and ordained to be a priest, because his orthodox religious value system requires it of him. In keeping with this value system, Biswas is sent into apprenticeship to Pundit Jairam. At the Pundit’s house, Biswas was schooled in performing rites and discourses which he could not comprehend because he did not know their meaning. Often he was made to copy out numerous Sanskrit verses which he did not understand.

Mechanically he cleaned the images, the lines and indentations of which were black or cream with old sandalwood paste; it was easier to clean the small smooth pebbles, whose significance had not yet been explained to him. At this stage Pundit Jairam usually came to see that he did not scamp the ritual (HB, 53).

But on account of defiling a revered oleander tree, Biswas got the boot from his pundit schooling.

To Biswas, the caste system was more an exhibition than a theistic necessity. For Biswas, Brahminism was an object of display and nothing more, but he enjoyed the exhibitionism associated with it. As a child in ceremonies held in Tara’s house, Biswas, treated to good food and a clean dhoti instead of ragged clothes ‘became a different person’ (HB, 49). For as long as the ceremony was conducted, ‘he was respected as a Brahmin and pampered; yet as soon as the ceremony was over and he had taken his gift of money and cloth and left, he became once more only a labourer’s child’ (HB, 49). Even during his apprenticeship days with Pundit Jairam, he found himself of importance only when invested with the sacred thread and all the other badges of caste'
(HB, 51), especially when he sat next to Pundit Jairam during the feeding of the Brahmins after a ceremony. At the Tulsi residence too, it was only during the puja ceremonies that his status got elevated, and just as soon as he returned to his mean life he realized that caste was all sham.

When Biswas looks for a job, after being thrown out by Bhandat, he subconsciously looks for jobs which are appropriate to his Brahminical status. He does not want to take up tailoring and even barbering, not just because he personally does not like the jobs but because ‘he thought too how it would disgust Pundit Jairam to learn that his former pupil had taken up barbering, a profession immemorially low’ (HB, 67).

It is because of the caste system that Dehuti is shunned by Tara when she elopes with Ramchand, the yard boy, ‘for the yard boy is the lowest of the low’ (HB, 58). So, when Biswas meets Ramchand for the first time, Ramchand is hesitant in asking Biswas to eat with him, because of his low caste; though, ironically, when Biswas goes to Port of Spain to look for a job, it is at Dehuti’s that Biswas decides to say, thereby breaking all taboos of the caste system in one go. But nevertheless, Biswas feels privileged to be among them the low, and receive from them the respect due to him as a brahmin; and though it was absurd in the Main Road to think that of a man earning twelve dollars a month in addition to bonuses and other advantages, Mr Biswas was flattered that Ramchand looked upon him as someone to be flattered and conciliated’ (HB, 70). And when he sees the neatness and order of Ramchand’s house, he further realizes the shamness of the caste system of treating the people of low caste as dirty people.

Mr Biswas had never questioned the deference shown him when he had gone to Tara’s to be fed as a Brahmin and on his rounds with Pundit Jairam. But he had never taken it seriously; he had thought of it as one of the rules of a
game that was only occasionally played. When he got to Ramchand’s he thought it even more of a game (HB, 70).

Later on, the Tulsis too make it clear to Biswas that they offered him a job because he is of a good caste. And it is only his caste that gets him married to Shama and find a place as a Tulsi son-in-law.

Religious animosity breeds along with the caste system in the society. Hindu Muslim rivalry and distrust towards Christians is also present in Trinidad. F.Z. Ghany, the solicitor who makes Biswas’ birth certificate ‘made most of his money from Hindus but, as a Muslim distrusted them (HB, 42-43). The Tulsis too do not wish to have much to do with the Muslims. So, when they are searching for a bride for Shekhar, they take care to avoid picking a girl who has a ‘Muslim taint’ (HB, 230), though it is no big deal that they get him married into a Christian family. Lal, Biswas’ school teacher, was a convert to Presbyterianism from a low Hindu caste ‘and held all unconverted Hindus in contempt’ (HB, 42) and spoke to them in broken English ‘as part of this contempt’ (HB, 42). And even though the Tulsis marry their sons into Christian families they despise the Christian daughters-in-law they bring into their house.

The next web cast over the East Indian community in Trinidad after the caste system, is that of the feudal system, another carry over ‘tradition’ from India. The people living in rural areas were especially involved in this system. Most of these people were rice and sugarcane plantation workers, who usually did not have any other kind of money to secure their future. Sometimes, these labourers would manage to save some money, and when the system loosened, bought their own land and hired their own countrymen to work on them. They would also employ them for other businesses which they started Ajodha can be cited as an example of ‘a man who had, at one bound, freed himself from the land and acquired wealth’ (HB, 32-33).
Acquisition of land and wealth by some led to feudal wars. There were estate wars between the labourers and the families that controlled them. Sometimes there were wars among the people who had bought the lands. It resulted in killings, but there was no stopping these feudal wars. The future of the people who worked as labourers was very limited, unless they chose to break away from this system. Their children also had a delimited future. At best, they could be part of the grass-cutting gangs or herd buffaloes. And it was very difficult to get out of this vicious circle. While it was an act of pure fate that Biswas could come out of this circle; Pratap and Prasad, his brothers, could only get rid of estate work by saving and enterprising. Had Biswas remained in the grass-cutting gang in which he had been put initially; he could only progress to becoming a worker in the cane field. ‘And there he would remain. He would never become a driver or a weigher because he wouldn’t be able to read. Perhaps, after many years, he might save enough to rent or buy a few acres where he would plant his own canes, which he would sell to the estate at a price fixed by them’ (HB, 23). But while Biswas gained a white-collar job and a middle class status in society through his education, which made it possible for him to console himself in later life with the Meditations of Marcus Aurelius, while he rested on the Slumberking bed in the one room which contained most of his possessions’ (HB, 24); Pratap, using his feudal money and enterprise managed to own ‘a large, strong, well-built house, years before Mr Biswas’ (HB, 23).

A part of this feudal world were the estate holding families; the Tulsi family being one of them, which had its own set of retainers; among them numerous women who came at the huge functions ‘abandoning husbands and children, to cook and clean and generally serve, without payment’ (HB, 333). These women made festivals and weddings gay by their songs, and funerals somber by their wails. Soon they lost all their ‘identity and became only appendages to these families. Dehuti, Biswas’ sister, too let go of her identity
to become one of these women’. In time, no one thought of her as Mr Biswas’ sister, not even Mr Biswas, to whom she became only one of the women attached to the Tulsis’ (HB, 334).

At Shorthills too, during the near diminished estateship of the Tulsis, these retainers and dancers and musicians came, cooked, worked, ate, slept and entertained at the expense of the Tulsis.

However, the retainers did have some hold over the families that retained them. When quite a lot of them wanted their children to be educated in Port of Spain, Mrs Tulsi, fulfilling a duty that had been imposed in a different age, had to take them in’ (HB, 437). Also, the retainers had in them the power to defect as is evident from the defection during the time of Owad’s departure to England.

The Tulsi saga begins as a depiction of the closed East Indian world where tradition, culture and religion are matters of priority, but later give way to modernization and confused values. The Tulsis as a family are an important aspect of the novel. They represent the East Indian Trinidad society on two plains; one depicts the religious system prevalent among the immigrants and its hypocrisy and futility; and the other depicts the failure of the extended Indian family system, a revered aspect of Indian society, by the ravages of time, giving way to modernization which stresses upon the individual.

‘Tulsidom’ was housed in the Hanuman House. It was a world in its own right, apparently closed to adaptation as is any immigrant society initially, ‘and when the narrow doors of the Tulsi store on the ground floor were closed, the House became bulky, impregnable and blank’ (HB, 80).

Like the façade of the store which had the statue of the monkey-god, Hanuman, on its balustrade, the Tulsis appeared to be highly religious and
devout people; but they were a stagnant lot inside. This can be marked from the
description of the inside of the store which was dull and awkward:

The Tulsi store was disappointing. The façade that
promised such an amplitude of space concealed a building
which was trapezoid in plan and not deep. There were no
windows and light came only from the two narrow doors
at the front and the single door at the back which opened
on to a covered courtyard (HB, 82).

The family remained obscure as ‘outsiders were admitted to Hanuman
House only for certain religious celebrations’ (HB, 81). The House, thus, can
be seen as a symbol of the Tulsi reality. The Tulsis, representatives of the
highest Hindu caste, were expected to be a pious lot, and they did don the garb
of piety very well. The general people, and any and every new comer was awed
by the explicit display of Hinduism by the family; only the insiders knew of the
true state of decay and stagnation that lay inside.

The immigrants in the novel, represented by the Tulsis, are a lot who
very much try to preserve their Indianness. They have these rituals which they
have brought over from India which they try to observe as sincerely as possible
initially. But passage of time leads to corruption, decay and disintegration of
values and depletion in the sincere adherence to rituals and beliefs.

Time and again, in the novel, Naipaul, through the Tulsis, portrays the
decaying Indianness of the Trinidadian Indians and how this decay leads to
chaos instead of something fruitful and worthwhile. Furthermore, these Indian
immigrants create the India they come from in this very chaotic world; they try
to adhere to customs and rituals to give themselves the feel of the India they
have left behind, though, in actuality, they consider these very rituals as bogus
because they are out-dated and unadaptable to their new world.

Over the years, the Tulsi family, which began with a ‘devout’ label and
believed itself to be the custodian of Hinduism in Trinidad merged into the
social milieu and let go of the stringent religiosity that they had been associated with.

Marriage into caste was one of the stringent codices of the Tulsi family initially. At the time of Biswas’ marriage, when marriage into caste was the only acceptable thing in the Tulsi family, Mrs Tulsi traps Biswas by saying:

‘He [Pundit Tulsi] would have liked you’, Mrs Tulsi said. ‘He would have been proud to know that you were going to marry one of his daughters. He wouldn’t have let things like your job or your money worry him. He always said that the only thing that mattered was the blood. I can just look at you and see that you come from good blood’ (HB, 95).

So much did they adhere to caste purity that the Tulsis did not even bother to consider the occupation of the men they took in as Tulsi sons-in-law. Mr Biswas, too, was an easy disposal ground for one of the many Tulsi daughters, as was Govind, the illiterate coconut-seller, who had been married to Chinta, yet another Tulsi daughter.

Inspite of their views on traditionality, the Tulsis let go of a number of customs linked to Hindu marriage or dowry as is the norm. Instead, the marriage was conducted in a registrar’s office. Mrs Tulsi explains:

‘[D]rums and dancing and big dowry. We don’t believe in that. We leave that to people who want to show off. You know the sort of people. Dressed up to kill all the time. Yet go and see where they come out from. You know these houses in the Country Road. Half built. No, furniture. No, we are not like that. Then, all this fuss about getting married was more suitable for old fashioned people like myself. Not for you. Do you think it matters how people get married’ (HB, 94-95)?
It was lack of traditionality that made a blessed occasion like marriage seem unreal. It took all the seriousness out of the situation. To Mr Biswas, it seemed as make-believe as a child’s game, with paper flowers in dissimilar vases on a straw-coloured, official-looking desk’ (HB, 96).

No matter how much the Tulsis appear as the strong Indian clan, and inspite of Biswas’ thinking that Hanuman House was a world of its own, unaffected by the outside world, the Tulsi family is overcome by the ravages of time. Greed, corruption intermarriage, all happen and change the Tulsi outlook towards the world and make them susceptible to cultural changes which they had so far resisted. When the time comes to marry off the Tulsi sons, a very careful search is made among the Hindu elite of Trinidad.

The search among the eligible families had failed to provide some one beautiful and educated and rich enough to satisfy Mrs Tulsi or her daughters, who, notwithstanding the chancy haste of their own marriages, based solely on caste, thought that their brother’s bride should be chosen with a more appropriate concern’ (HB, 230).

When they fail to find a girl from a proper caste who satisfied their whims, the Tulsis, now anarchical, search for a girl ‘from a caste family who had been converted to Christianity and had lapsed’ (HB, 230). Then they look for people with wealth and businesses and finally find someone ‘in a laxly Presbyterian family with one filling station, two lorries, a cinema and some land’ (HB, 230). The eldest Tulsi son, Shekhar, after this search is married in a Registry office and goes off to look after the business of his wife’s family; acting contrary to the traditional Hindu custom where the husband is supposed to bring his wife to his home. The younger brother, Owad, also, in course of time, married Shekhar’s wife’ cousin; also a Presbyterian.
Living up to their religious fame, the Tulsis go in for elaborate *pujas* where they appear to be as sanctimonious as possible. Towards the beginning of the Tulsi saga, it can be seen that every occasion and every enterprise undertaken has to be flagged off by a *puja* ceremony in keeping with the proper Hindu system. Biswas, having being engulfed into the most devout family in Trinidad, has to fall in line too, though he hardly reveres these *pujas*. Every time he moves house, in keeping with the Tulsi tradition, he has to have a *puja* ceremony to bless his house; and it has to be an elaborate affair, keeping the Tulsi’s status in mind, thereby depleting his resources severely.

The house blessing ceremony is a popular ritual of Biswas’ time as can be seen by the Green Vale house blessing ceremony that Biswas holds without pomp. The house blessing ceremony was regarded as an essential part of the East Indian society ritual, with members of other communities acknowledging its existence.

In his thin voice Hari whined out the prayers. Whining, he sprinkled water into the hole with a mango leaf and dropped a penny and some other things wrapped in another mango leaf. Throughout the ceremony Mr Maclean stood up reverentially, his hat off.

Mr Maclean looked surprised. ‘That is all’? he asked. ‘No sharing-out of anything – food and thing – as other Indians does do’ (*HB*, 257)?

As compared to the house blessing ceremony held at The Chase, this one was a very small affair, devoid of the grandness of all other Tulsi *pujas*. At a later time, during their stay at Shorthills, the Tulsis further reduce their penchant for elaborate *pujas*, having become a part of the world of corrupted values.

Earlier, at the Hanuman House, the morning *puja* was a ritual adhered to by the entire clan, where the camphor flame was offered to every member of
the family with respect. The Tulsi brothers, who were young at that time, had been inducted into the doctrine of faith and carried out the rituals of the puja dressed up accordingly in dhoti, vest, beads and all. But with the passage of time, reverence went out of the Tulsi pujas. At Shorthills, Hari made his own temple which was ‘a small, kennel-like boxboard hut’ (HB, 401), and W.C. Tuttle’s son put up a framed print of the goddess Lakshmi in the drawing room and offered a secular prayer before it every evening. By now, the Tulsi ‘togetherness’ had given way to bitter rivalries within the family. So, Hari prayed and sounded his bell in his temple; whereas Tuttle said his prayers in the drawing room.

After Hari’s death, the duty of the puja was carried out by a number of men of the Tulsi clan and their children who cared little for the intricacies of a puja. The list of children included Anand, Biswas’ son.

Untutored in the prayers, he could only go through the motions of the ritual. He washed the images, placed fresh flowers on the shrine, diverted himself by trying to stick the stem of a flower in the crook of a god’s arm or between the god’s chin and chest. He put fresh sandalwood paste on the foreheads of the gods, on the smooth black and rose and yellow pebbles, and on his forehead; lit the camphor, circled the flame about the shrine with his right hand while with his left he tried to ring the bell; blew at the conch shell, emitting a sound like that of a heavy ward robe scraping on a wooden floor, then his cheeks aching from the effort of blowing the conch shell, he hurried out to eat, first making the round of the house to offer the milk and tulsi leaves which, unbelievably, he had consecrated (HB, 415-416).

But when he left for school, he made sure that all traces and marks of the puja had been erased.
Earlier, the Tulsis, in keeping with their orthodoxy, did not pay heed to new Indian intellectual movements like the Arya Samaj Movement which taught against idol worship, casteism, and disseminated the idea of education for women. When Biswas began to show interest in the Arya Samaj, the Tulsis were appalled. His conversion would be a disgrace to the Tulsis, the bearers of the Hindu flag in Trinidad. ‘The Black Age has come at last’ (HB, 124), was Seth’s remark.

However, everyone in the Indian community in Trinidad is confused. Mr Biswas who went ahead to become an Arya Samaji, is later in the novel, shown to be a person with confused ideologies. When Anand asks Biswas to write a prayer for him devoid of any ‘east-west compromise’ (HB, 383), Biswas, despite his Aryan aversion to Sanatanist, Tulsi-like idol worship, could not hide the honour he felt at being asked to write Anand’s prayer’ (HB, 383).

The apparent near conversion of Mr Biswas to the Aryan sect was seen by the Tulsis as an infringement of the tenets of orthodox Hinduism, a serious crime indeed, for a people who lived in a world of rituals and rites. But, like Mr Biswas, the Tulsis too are a confused lot. They held onto their native beliefs while at the same time inculcated, in themselves, Christian values and beliefs, without actually knowing their significance or their use in their own value system.

When Mr Biswas notices the elder Tulsi son, Shekhar wearing a crucifix, he remarks, ‘You call yourself Hindus?’ (HB, 125). The two Tulsi sons attended their pujas wearing crucifixes, though they did not know the meaning and importance of the symbol. The crucifix as believed to be ‘an exotic and desirable charm’ (HB, 125) by the Tulsis.

The pujas the Tulsis held for Shekhar just before his exams too was a curious mixture of Hindu and Christian rites, where Hari played the role of the holy man.
On the Sunday before examination week 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 (HB, 125).

The two Tulsi sons were given a Christian schooling. Both the boys went to the Roman Catholic College in Port of Spain about which Biswas comments:

At the Catholic college they make him close his eyes and open his mouth and say, Hail Mary. What about that (HB, 126)?

The Tulsi store became a gay place with music drifting out of the doors; a sharp contrast to the dreary and dull look it sported for the rest of the year. At home, the girls got gifts in stockings whereas the boys were given gifts in pillow cases. They had cakes baked by one of the sisters and ice cream by Chinta. And then it was all over. They had nothing more to celebrate and they did not know how to further those celebrations, and Christmas thus ended; being ‘turned out to be only a series of anticipations’ (HB, 215).
Throughout the novel, it can be seen that the Tulsi clan was, in more ways than one, influenced by Christianity. Not only did the Tulsi sons receive Christian education, but the daughters too had missionary schooling, reminisces of which could be found in Shama’s drawer even after marriage. Though she did not believe in the Bible and Bible pictures which she kept in her drawer, yet she considered it to be a part of the missionary school inheritance thereby participating involuntarily in the chaos rampant in Trinidad society. The Tulsis ardently followed Christian rituals, at times replacing their own Hindu customs with them. At the time when a Tulsi son-in-law dies and his family comes to reside in Hanuman House, they wear mourning clothes which were predominantly black, making mourning seem as an affectation. Of course the Tulsis, then highly devout, did not appreciate such a thing. So much did Christianity become a part of the Indian Hindu life that no ifs and buts are considered even while practicing Christian superstitions. Chinta, at Shorthills believed in catching a thief through the ‘trial by Bible and key’ (HB, 422):

The Bible-and-key trial lasted the whole of one afternoon. Chinta invoked the names of Saints Peter and Paul and spoke the accusations; Ms Blackie, invoking the same names, defended (HB, 423).

Alongside the incorporation of Christian liturgies into Hindu lives, the Hindus with the passage of time let go of their own complicated ordinances giving way to a number of affectations which mock the very intricacies of the rituals. Biswas’ son, Anand, is interested in the initiation ceremony just for the fun of it. It held an attraction for Anand, because of the laxation it would give from attending school. ‘His cousins had had their heads shaved, they were invested with the sacred thread, told the secret verses, given little bundles and sent off to Benares to study’ (HB, 383). Anand did not understand the need for the ritual and the ritual itself as such, but he somehow convinced Biswas into getting him initiated. However, shame and lassitude got the better of him, as he could not go with a bald head on his holiday visits, and had to stay back at
home, with Biswas giving him tedious exercises to do. Eventually the ‘evening worship of Lakshmi stopped’ (HB, 384). The absurdity of the entire custom is also confirmed by Naipaul’s own attitude:

I had no belief; I disliked religious ritual; and I had a sense of the ridiculous. I refused to go through the janaywa, or thread ceremony of the new born, with some of my cousins. The ceremony ends with the initiate, his head shaved, his thread new and obvious, taking up his staff and bundle – as he might have done in an Indian village two thousand years ago – and announcing his intention of going to Kasi-Banaras to study. His mother weeps ad begs him not to go; the initiate insists that he must; a senior member of the family is summoned to plead with the initiate, who at length yields and lays down his staff and bundle. It was a pleasing piece of theatre. But I knew that we were in Trinidad, an island separated by only ten miles from the South American coast, and that the appearance in a Port of Spain street of my cousin, perhaps of no great academic attainment, in the garb of a Hindu mendicant-scholar bound for Banaras, would have attracted unwelcome attention. So I refused; though now this ancient drama, absurdly surviving in a Trinidad yard, seems to me touching and attractive.9

As time passes the change in views pertaining to religion manifests itself in all the aspects of the system, including those of marriage and death. Biswas, according to the generation to which he belonged, held the belief that marriage was for keeps and nothing, ‘except death could change that’ (HB, 100). But in a gap of just one generation, a radical change in view can be seen, as exemplified by Sunithi, Shama’s niece, talking of getting divorced from her idle husband.

Death rituals in the East Indian community were also moulded to suit the West Indian scenario, and got intermixed with the rites of other
communities inhabiting the land. In the beginning of the novel, when Raghu dies, his funeral is an amalgamation of East Indian rites and West Indian influences.

Bipti was bathed. Her hair, still wet, was neatly parted and the parting filled with red henna. Then the henna was scooped out and the parting filled with charcoal dust. She was now a widow forever. Tara gave a short scream and at her signal the other women began to wail. On Bipti’s wet black hair there were still spots of henna, like drops of blood.

Cremation was forbidden and Raghu was to be buried. He lay in a coffin in the bedroom, dressed in his fine dhoti, jacket and turban, his beads around his neck and down his jacket. The coffin was strewed with marigolds which matched his turban. Pratap, the eldest son, did the last rites, walking round the coffin (HB, 32-33).

Even, when Sharma, a Tulsi son-in-law, dies at Shorthills, his funeral, carries the mark of both kinds of influences.

They put Sharma in a plain coffin and carried him to the graveyard, where the village had assembled to see the Hindu rites. Hari, in white jacket and beads, whined over the grave and sprinkled water over it with a mango leaf....

Sharma’s widow shrieked, fainted, revived and tried to fling herself into the grave. The villages watched with interest. Some of the knowing whispered about suttee (HB, 413-414).

Other than the rituals of death and marriage in which confusions prevailed, there are others which the Tulsis could not understand, despite they being Hindu rituals; for example at Shorthills, when the pumpkin ripened, the
women were forbidden to cut open the fruit 'because of a Hindu taboo no one could explain' (406, HB); a man had to be called to do the job.

Over the years, the most orthodox members of the Tulsi clan also changed for the liberal. Mrs Tulsi increasingly began confiding in Ms Blackie, her Christian attendant, and a Jewish refugee doctor. She also handed over frequent pointers to Ms Blackie: 'Never trust you race, Black. Never trust them' (HB, 520). And since no pundit other then Hari had ever satisfied Mrs Tulsi's whims, 'her faith yielded' (HB, 522). So, now she got Sushila to bum candles in the church; and pacified herself spiritually by putting up a crucifix in her room.

Yet another baseless dogma of the East Indian community comes forth at the point when people comment on Owad's going away to England; they consider it as a serious infringement of the basic tenets of Hinduism. Ironically, they too once crossed the high seas of India to come to Trinidad.

Forgetting that they were in Trinidad, that they had crossed the black water from India and had thereby lost all caste, they said they could have nothing more to do with a woman who was proposing to send her son across the black water (HB, 349).

It is a case of sheer absurdity that the people of East Indian origin residing in the West Indies believe and behave as if religion does matter to them, when they themselves have broken all taboos. They want to establish a society that is free from the clutches of the old world and yet at the same time look to it for moral support and for providing a solid basis to fall back on in moments of crisis.

Religion resides in the subconscious of the migrant, no matter where he is placed. Even Mr Biswas being an out and out rebel against the seemingly
hollow tenets of Hinduism, fervently relies on faith when the situation demands it.

At Green Vale, where Biswas worked as an overseer for the Tulsis, he began subconsciously lettering religious quotations on card boards which he hung on the walls. It appears highly ironical for a man who did not believe, to write:

HE WHO BELIEVETH IN ME OF HIM I WILL NEVER LOSE HOLD AND HE SHALL NEVER LOSE HOLD OF ME (HB, 211).

Furthermore, during his bouts of conjectured sickness, he would make Anand repeat Hindi hymns after him, and Anand who could not comprehend the need to recite these hymns would repeat them like charms. Biswas said:

'Say Rama Rama Sita Rama, and nothing will happen to you' (HB, 283).

When the house becomes portentous in the darkness of the storm, Biswas begins:

'Rama Rama Sita Rama, Rama Rama Sita Rama'.

'Rama Rama Sita Rama', Anand repeated....

Say Rama Rama, boy'.

'Rama Rama Sita Rama'.

The rain abated.....

The rain came again. Lightning flashed, thunder exploded and rolled.....

The roof rose and dropped, grinding and flapping. The house shook.

'Rama Rama Sita Rama', Anand said (HB, 291).
The chanting of the hymn appeared to check the rain for a while and Anand began to believe in its power. So much did the fear of the unknown scare Anand that as soon as the rain began once again he found solace only in repeating the hymn. In addition to this, Biswas too, repeated as many hymns he knew, in English as well as Hindi, leaving them unfinished and taking up yet other ones because he could not recall the proper ones according to the situation, as he was not well versed in them.

Though Biswas was not an altogether devout Hindu, and was well versed in the doctrines of his religion, yet somehow or the other, ‘he ensured that his children did not go without some kind of religious teaching; but they, like Biswas, recall religion only when the situation demands it. Otherwise, they are well off without it. When their newly built house at Shorthills catches fire, the children remember that chanting hymns may help avert the destruction.

‘Say Rama Rama,’ Savi said. ‘It will keep away anything’.

They said Rama Rama (HB, 430).

And the ‘repetition of Rama Rama comforted them’ (HB, 430).

Religion takes a back seat to other priorities in the wake of modernization, and loses, its hold on the minds of the people, as they move towards a more outgoing life style.

Earlier, in the novel, it is made evident that the Tulsi faith had certain flaws in it. During her days in Hanuman House, Chinta often interrupted her study of the Ramayana to help during the card games the sisters played. Later on, articles of faith were used to retaliate against modern influences in a very pedantic manner. In their Port of Spain house Chinta and Govind used the study of the Ramayana as a means of retaliating the din of the Tuttle’s gramaphone. When the noise emanating from the gramophone was the loudest,
the singing of the Ramayana was also high-pitched. There was no reverence in
the singing of the couplets, particularly in the case of Govind, who ‘partly
whined and partly grunted from his habit of singing while lying on his belly’
(HB, 457). In addition to this, he ‘sometimes only chuckled between couplets,
making it appear to be part of his song’ (HB, 457) taking advantage of the fact
that ‘the Ramayana singer is free to add his own rubric in sound between
couplets’ (HB, 457-458). And not satisfied with just this, he would often hurl
insults across the partition that separated his domain from Biswas’, to Biswas
who would be asking him to refrain from singing so loudly.

Other than religious beliefs there are other carry overs from India,
which, the East Indian community in Trinidad is projected as following to the
hilt, irrespective of whether they needed or not; logical or not.

Within the scope of the life of the Trinidad Indian community is dealt
the subject of gender treatment. The treatment of women depicted in the novel
is that of menial household workers, and wife beating is a norm. The woman is
treated as an object of subjugation and has to accept the treatment meted out to
her, as it is a part of her destiny.

In the beginning of the novel, when Raghu confesses to Bipti for his ill
treatment, she forgives him and is ready to go back with him because she had
no other alternative. She cannot sustain herself and it is considered a depravity
for an Indian Hindu woman to stay at her parents’ after marriage for a long
period of time. In Pundit Jairam’s house too, can be seen the second class
treatment of women. His wife’s pleas to let go the matter of Biswas’ stealing a
banana falls on deaf ears. The plea is rejected and Jairam’s wife has no power
to control the action that follows. All she can do is stand in a corner and cry.
And although Tara is not subjugated by Ajodha in any apparent manner, yet
she ate meals by herself in the kitchen.
As *A House for Mr Biswas* revolves around the Tulsi family, and as they are described as the ultimate Indian family in Trinidad, it is important that the Tulsi women too be studied under the issue of gender manifestation. The prime figure of the Tulsi House, Mai, supervised the running of the family with Seth, her brother-in-law, after the death of Pundit Tulsi. Mai looked after the business, property and family affairs along with Seth. Padma, Seth’s wife, was next in the hierarchy of power. She is depicted as a dutiful wife. Whatever Seth says goes for Padma, as a contrast to Mrs Tulsi’s relationship with Pundit Tulsi. Mrs Tulsi had an equal say in the affairs of the family. Padma’s job in the Tulsi House is to act as peace-maker in the family, a duty that was required of her, to compensate Seth’s wrath. She often patched up quarrels for ‘there was not a man in the house with whom Seth had not quarreled at some time or the other’ (*HB*, 113). Duty also required Padma to be diplomatic for she could not publicly show approval or disapproval of Seth’s actions.

Sushila, the widow, was sheltered in the Hanuman House, but her status was not defined; ‘at times appearing as high as Mrs Tulsi’s, at time lower than Miss Blackie’s’ (*HB*, 126-127). Sushila’s status was usually reduced to that of a nurse’s, ‘but Sushila was bound to it, and she had no children to rescue her’ (*HB*, 519), as is necessary for a widow to lead a respectable life in the Indian family setup.

Hanuman House is portrayed as a typical Indian house, with typical values that denote a number of Indian homes around the world. The Tulsi women, save Mai, were meek creatures whose only duty was to keep house. ‘The daughters and their children swept and washed and cooked and served in the store’ (*HB*, 97).

The Hindu society depicted in *A House for Mr Biswas* treats its daughters as burdens to be shed off as soon as the opportunity in found. The birth of a girl-child is treated as a matter of serious concern, for it hampers, in a
number of ways, the harmonious existence of the male. When Biswas’ first daughter is born, Misir, the Arya Smaj convert Biswas had befriended, reacts in no more different manner than the rest of the society. ‘“God”! Misir exclaimed in disgust “God”!’ (HB, 168). And then adds sympathetically, ‘Cat in bag; cat in bag. That is all we get from this cat-in-bag business’ (HB, 168). Savi’s birth, on the other hand, makes Mai philosophize too. ‘The Lord gives’ (HB, 165). She further tries to make things easier for Biswas to bear.

‘Everything comes, bit by bit’, she said. ‘We must forgive. As your father used to say’ – she pointed to the photographs on the wall – ‘what is for you is for you. What is not for you is not for you’ (HB, 165).

And finally, as an after thought she adds: ‘But until that time [time of death] comes, no matter how they starve you or how they treat you, they can never kill you’ (HB, 165-166). When Biswas’ second daughter is born, Mai is once again sympathetic.

However, when a woman does assert herself, it is looked upon with awe and wonder by the male counterpart in her society. It is incomprehensible for the man in the East Indian community as to how a woman can assert herself in areas other than that of the home. When Shama discusses anything and everything under the sun with Miss Logie, Biswas gets perturbed:

Mr Biswas was worried about Shama. Sitting plumply next to Miss Logic on the front seat, her elaborate georgette veil over her hair, Shama was showing herself self-possessed and even garrulous. She was throwing off opinions about the new constitution, federation, immigration, India, the future of Hinduism, the education of women. Mr Biswas listened to the flow with surprise and acute anxiety. He had never imagined that Shama was so well-informed and had such violent prejudices; and he suffered whenever she made a grammatical mistake (HB, 504).
Education for women is considered ominous in the East Indian community of the West Indies. From the beginning itself, it was widely accepted that education of women led to corruption. Seth points out the demerits of girl’s education to Biswas: ‘You want to see girl children educated and choosing their own husbands, eh?’ (HB, 123). Furthermore, he adds:

So you want girl children learning to read and write and picking up boy-friends? You want to see them wearing short frocks (HB, 124)?

But it is highly ironical that towards the end of the novel, there can be seen the furtive need for the Tulsis to educate their children, be it boys or girls; and not only this, but Suniti, Shama’s neice, takes to wearing frocks as a display of her modernity and no Tulsi objects.

Education for women is not paid attention to in the early phase of the Tulsi saga. Shama and the other girls were educated just as much as was necessary and when Shama is to be married off, her little education becomes a matter of serious concern. As if it is a negative quality of Shama, Seth wishfully says to Biswas, ‘Nothing to worry about. In two or three years she might even forget’ (HB, 90).

On the other hand, the Tulsi sons were given proper education. ‘To assist their scholarship, the best of the food was automatically set aside for them and they were given special brain-feeding meals, of fish in particular’ (HB, 104). Also, ‘Mrs Tulsi believed that prunes, like fish brains, were especially nourishing for people who exercised their brains’ (HB, 336) and therefore, Owad had the luxury of having prunes everyday.

The Tulsi women were married off at an early age, as Shama was at sixteen; and barring caste, nothing else was considered in marriage for the girls. No sooner was a man of proper caste found, than the Tulsi daughters were disposed off, irrespective of whether the husband was a coconut-seller, or an
illiterate, or even an idler; whereas in the case of the Tulsi sons, a careful search was made for the prospective bride. ‘Mrs Tulsi, her daughters, who, not withstanding the chancy haste of their own marriages, based solely on caste, thought that their brother’s bride should be chosen with a more appropriate concern’ (HB, 230).

The Tulsi sisters were expected to live according to the established pattern of domesticity and the successful organization of this domesticity. The proper running of the house, the proper running of the institution of marriage and the birth of children to complete this institution are all that really bring meaning into the lives of these sisters. Nothing else seems to matter much. Shama is no less the same:

For there was no doubt that this was what Shama expected from life: to be taken through every stage, to fulfil every function, to have her share of the established emotions: joy at birth or marriage, distress during illness and hardship, grief at a death. Life, to be full, had to be this established pattern of sensation. Grief, and joy, both equally awaited, were one. For Shama and her sisters and women like them, ambition if the word could be used, was a series of negatives: not to be unmarried, not to be childless, not to be an undutiful daughter, sister, wife, mother, widow (HB, 160).

The ritual of wife beating has been highlighted at a number of places in the novel. Wife beating was a norm in Trinidad. But, instead of being considered an act of shame, the whole ritual is glorified, and regarded by many, including the victims, as a necessity. It also had the pride of place in the institution of marriage. In this society, where wife beating thrives, there are women who are exceptions like Mai and Tara. However, on the other hand, Sushila ‘talked with pride of the beatings she had received from her short-lived husband. She regarded them as a necessary part of her training and attributed the decay of Hindu society in Trinidad to the rise of the timorous, weak, non-
beating class of husband’ (HB, 148). Even Chinta’s beatings gave her ‘a matriarchal dignity and, curiously, gained her a respect she had never had before’ (HB, 461).

The Tulsi women, like all Indian women, were groomed to obey their husbands and cater to all their needs. Shama, like the rest of the Tulsi women was groomed to do the bidding of her husband. Mood and privacy permitting, she was a devoted wife to Mr Biswas. At such times she could tolerate Mr Biswas making fun of her family and though angry, she would not be as aggressive then as she would be in the presence of the family. These were times when Mr Biswas and Shama would develop communion with each other. In the Tulsi House he would often make Shama bring his food upstairs. ‘At these times Shama was not the Shama he saw downstairs, the thorough Tulsi, the antagonist the family had assigned him. In many subtle ways, but mainly by her silence, she showed that Mr Biswas, however grotesque, was hers and she had to make do with what Fate had granted her’ (HB, 103-104).

Shama’s upbringing as a dutiful wife is reflected, when, going for her first child birth, she leaves a set of recipes for Biswas to make easy food. She darns and washes all of the Biswas’ clothes. Later, when Biswas gets a job at the Sentinel, and the family moves to Port of Spain, it becomes Shama’s duty to file his papers and reports. It is Shama who coaxes him to improve his personal appearance, while spending nothing on her ownself.

Finally, when Biswas gets his mother to come and live with him at the house he built in Shorthills, Shama, like a dutiful wife shows extreme respect to her mother-in-law and, ‘to Mr Biswas’ surprise and pleasure, she treated Bipti with all the respect of a Hindu daughter-in-law. She had touched Bipti’s feet with her fingers when Bipti came and she never appeared before Bipti with her head uncovered’ (HB, 426).
As the years pass by a change in attitude towards the women folk can be observed in the novel. Women no longer are mere objects of subjugation. They are given the opportunity to rise in society. Shama influenced, too, by this change, does nor treat her daughters in the manner in which she was treated. She makes sure that her daughters have practically the same education as Anand. For her apparent scholastic abilities, Myna, the younger daughter, is put on prunes and milk like Anand, so that she too could appear for the exhibition examination like her brother. Savi too, is sent abroad on a scholarship like Anand. And towards the end of Biswas' life, it is Savi who comes back home to support her family during the time of crisis, thus breaking the popular myth that it is only boys who support the family in the Indian societal setup.

A major issue treated in *A House for Mr Biswas* is the disintegration of the large Indian joint family system in the wake of modernization. The Tulsis, the representative family of the East Indian community in the novel too has its ups and downs. The Tulsis are overcome by the ravages of time and changes in the world. Greed, depravation, intermarriage, all enter into the Tulsi family scenario and change the outlook of the entire clan. This makes them susceptible to the cultural changes which they had so far resisted.

The Tulsi clan was a huge one. It housed a number of the Tulsi daughters, their husbands and their entire brood. Though furniture was kept to a minimum, each piece; the long, unvarnished pitch pine table, numerous unrelated chairs, stools and benches, and the drum of biscuits, points out the hugeness of the family.

The kitchen, the den of the Tulsi women was dark and had mud walls. It was soot stained and black with black doors which spoke of the huge, careless, mess like system prevalent inside the house, not to mention the disinterest of the women in running a family like establishment. 'Breakfast was tea and biscuits. The biscuits came in a vast drum, returnable to the biscuit makers: the
largest economy size, the method of bulk-purchase used by café-owners' (HB, 128). The kitchen was the scene of heavy activity only during festival time or puja ceremonies. Otherwise, food, which was usually skimpy, was doled out of the kitchen in a mess like manner to each of the husbands by their respective wives when they came home from work. As such, Tulsidom, from the very beginning appears to be a system run just for the sake of it. There steadily grows a lack of devotion to the system as time passes.

The Tulis, who were never strictly followers of tradition gave shelter to the lot of husbands who were too impecunious to lead independent lives. At this time, the relationships in the house were governed more or less by relations between two sisters and 'two friendly sisters made two friendly husbands, and friendly husbands made two friendly sisters' (HB, 105). But as time passes, it is the husbands who begin dominating the relationship scenario, each setting up a nuclear front and taking his family the individual way. At Shorthills, the husbands had their wives cook separate meals for them instead of eating from the common kitchen. Numerous instances can be seen in the novel of the husbands asserting themselves in the Tulsi family. Biswas had always wanted to paddle his own canoe. He had forever wished to own his wife and children, and had found it in the proper sense only after he landed himself a job in the Sentinel. Later, Govind also asserts himself in a very strong manner. At the Port of Spain house, Govind becomes a terror to Biswas' children and Basdai's boarders, and appeals to Chinta to control him are useless as 'the fear Govind inspired was to her a source of pride' (HB, 458).

It can be seen in the earlier part of the novel that Christmas was celebrated by the Tulis in a grand manner. The children were given common gifts. Parents could not harbour the thought of giving their children individual gifts as it would blow up into a major issue, as in the case of Biswas' gift to his daughter. Peer pressure made Shama breakup the doll house that Biswas had gotten for Savi. To get a present for a single child was considered a sin in the
a sin which Mr Biswas had committed without shame and which Shama couldn’t cope with. This act of Biswas was looked upon as an attempt to dismantle the harmony of the Tulsi clan:

‘You didn’t know what I had to put up with. Talking night and day. Puss-puss here. Puss-puss there. Chinta dropping remarks all the time. Everybody beating their children the moment they start talking to Savi. Nobody wanting to talk to me. Everybody behaving as though I kill their father’. She [Shama] stopped and cried. ‘So I had to satisfy them. I break up the dolly-house and everybody was satisfied’ (HB, 226).

But then, not able to withstand the pressure of staying together in the wake of modernization, the family in more ways than one, broke up into a number of small units; Biswas and the Tuttles being examples. Seth too, after a quarrel with the Tulsis moved his family to another house. Communal harmony inside the Tulsi clan took a back seat. The huge Christmas celebrations too, became namesake. During Christmas, in the later years, some children were given independent gifts by their parents; and Biswas’ children who no more lived in the Tulsi House got no gifts.

Lots of changes took place inside the Tulsi clan. Rites and rituals were put aside and money-influenced values came to the forefront. For ages, the Tulsis had tried to retain their Indianess, but this very asset seemed to be getting lost as values became modern. The Tulsis who had been an enclosed lot allowed intrusions of various kinds into their midst.

Interruption brought in the Presbyterian daughters-in-law; and gave the Tulsis the license to establish mother-in-law and sisters-in-law rivalries which were considered an essential part of the Indian marriage. The very reasons the sisters sought to despise Dorothy, Shekhar’s wife, seem ironical to the evident changes in morality taking place within the Tulsi family. The Tulsi sisters
disapproved of her modernity; they did not like her wearing short frocks; they thought she looked gross in them. But later on, when one of the Tulsi nieces takes to wearing frocks as a mark of her modernity nobody appears disgusted and nobody disapproves.

The Tulsi sisters considered it immoral and disgraceful for Dorothy to sell tickets at her cinema. But they do not consider it disgraceful to apply for charity as the Deserving Destitutes. They are ready to take up any and every kind of work: they tried their hand at poultry farming, selling maize flour, oranges and other stuff, but to no avail. It was then that they decided to stoop the lowest and ask for charity, forgetting their brahminical status; forgetting their prime position in their society, as the Tulsis. So, they went to Biswas to be nominated for the Deserving Destitutes Fund. But Biswas could do nothing about it, because he could not in anyway make it seem feasible for a Tulsi woman to be called a destitute, especially ‘when she lived on her mother’s estate, in one of her mother’s three houses; when her brother was studying medicine in the United Kingdom; and when another brother was a figure of growing importance in the South, his name all over the paper, in the gossip columns, in the news columns for his business deals and political statements, in his own stylish advertisements (“Tulsi Theatres Trinidad proudly present…”)?’ (HB, 447).

The Tulsis, by this time, had become highly money-minded, keeping abreast of the economic situation prevalent in Trinidad at the time. They who had always laughed at Ajodha for pursuing materialism, had themselves become materialistic. It was most evident at Shorthills. The money-minded sons-in-law vandalized the family estate for quick means of earn quick money. It was this urge to earn quick money that made Biswas sell organs and avocado pears which he picked from the estate trees on his way to work every morning. But his greed seems miniscule in the wake of the discovery made by him, of the pillages of the other sons-in-law. And Mr Biswas who continued to plunder,
enjoying the feeling that in the midst of chaos he was calmly going about his own devilish plans’ (HB, 407) was simply shocked. Try as he might, he could never match the cleverness and the vileness of the other Tulsi sons-in-law. ‘W.C. Tuttle had been selling whole cedar trees. Govind had been selling lorry loads of oranges and papaws and avocado pears and limes and grapefruit and cocoa and tonka beans’ (HB, 408). There were other ways by which Tuttle worked at earning money from whatever he could exploit out of the Shorthills estate. When he was reproached by the rest of the clan, he resorted to a show of violence, the result of which was that his family was boycotted; but it hardly mattered to them.

When the Americans came to the village, they opened up more prospects for the Tulsis to earn money. The Tulsi widows put up a little shack to sell coca-cola, cakes, oranges and later liquor, but the venture failed. So engrossed were people in making their share of money that Tuttle’s lorry which was employed in yet another money-making scheme, took the children to school way before dawn, as it had to cater to the American base at six in the morning and brought the children back at an unearthly hour of eight in the night. Govind got a motor car and operated it as a taxi in Port of Spain. Overall the adventure at Shorthills was quiet a disaster and all ventures duly made to improvise Tulsi economy proved futile.

In addition to all these issues, A House for Mr Biswas deals with another very important issue, the futility of the West Indian scenario, and its impact on all its citizens, irrespective of their background or the communities to which they belong.

The true identity of Hanuman House is that it is a microcosm of a slave society. The name of the House itself implies the mythic magnitude of its impact on its residents, Hanuman being the monkey-god, who was the servant of Lord Rama. Biswas’ attempt to escape from the clutches of the Tulsi family
are akin in more ways than one to the efforts of slaves and ‘coolies’ to escape from willful slavery imposed by colonization.

Biswas is a man who tries his best to break away from being colonized. He cannot live like the other Tulsi husbands who ‘under Seth’s supervision, worked on the Tulsi land, looked after the Tulsi animals, and served in the store’. (97, HB). There was much privilege for the husbands under this system because in return for all this, ‘they were given food, shelter and a little money; their children were looked after; and they were treated with respect by people outside because they were connected with the Tulsi family’ (HB, 97). But at the same time, their ‘names were forgotten; they became Tulsis’ (HB, 97). All this was too much for Biswas’ ego. His prime need was independence, to assert his individual identity. But the Tulsi family appeared too large, and the world too small.

Biswas is historically displaced like other men in the West Indies to whom society does not offer realistic opportunities. To add to this, he belongs to the East Indian community, a community of unanchored souls who belong neither to the original Indian culture nor to the New Caribbean culture.

The East Indian community is one that cannot let go of its native culture. Their mode of living, as exemplified by the Tulsis, presents them as the last representatives of the Indian culture. But this is also the very India that they never return to, when the opportunity arises. And they end up reluctantly, yet willingly, in the West Indies.

The Indians in the West Indies believe that they are not settlers; rather they are visitors, and that the Caribbeans are just a stop over in an incomplete journey. The Tulsi House too supports idiosyncracies of a number of old people of the community who are actually under Tulsi bondage. They foster memories of the India they have behind, and it is this memory that gives them hope to face this life of theirs. They treat the West Indies as a temporary phase,
a phase they hope which will soon end. But when the opportunity does arrive, they do not wish to return, because they are afraid to face the real India. No matter how bad life in Trinidad maybe, they fear that the worst awaits them back home. Misir tells Biswas about the fate of a fellow Arya sect member, ‘You know they send Pankaj Rai back to India? Sometimes I stop and wonder what happening to him over there. I suppose the poor man in rags, starving in some gutter, can’t get a job or anything’ (HB, 168).

India is the land these Indians so often talk about; they fantasize and long for their original customs. They talk fondly of India and contemplate a return; but when the time does actually come; when the opportunity to leave Trinidad does arrive; they always migrate to the West; to England and to America, they never return to India because it is only a part of the fantasy that they harbour. The old retainers of the Tulsi store, after their day’s work gathered to discuss their India.

It was the time of the day for which they lived. They could not speak English and were not interested in the land where they lived; it was a place where they had come for a short time and stayed longer then they expected. They continually talked of going back to India, but when the opportunity came, many refused, afraid of the unknown, afraid to leave the familiar temporariness. And every evening they came to the arcade of the solid, friendly house, smoked, told stories, and continued to talk of India’ (HB, 194).

The Tulsis, like the other Indians in Trinidad, believe that they are the last representatives of the Hindu culture and harbor a great reverence for India, as they believe also, that they are the last, true Indians surviving in this world. Deference for India and Indianness goes down the drain when Owad returns from England, and tells them tales of vices pursued by Indian Indians there.
And in one afternoon the family reverence for India had been shattered. Owad disliked all Indians from India. They were a disgrace to Trinidad Indians; they were arrogant, sly and lecherous, they pronounced English in a peculiar way; they were slow an unintelligent and were given degrees only out of charity; they were unreliable with money; in England they went around with nurses and other women of the lower classes and were frequently involved in scandals; they cooked Indian food badly (the only true Indian meals Owad had in England were the meals he had cooked himself); their Hindi was strange (Owad had repeatedly caught them out in solecisms); their ritual was debased; the moment they got to England they ate meat and drank to prove their modernity (a Brahmin boy had offered Owad curried corn beef for lunch); and, incomprehensibly, they looked down on colonial Indians (HB, 539).

The situation of arbitrary entrapment faced by the old Indian retainers in Trinidad, can be explained in terms of Biswas’ life too. Biswas, after marriage finds himself in the midst of the Tulsis. His entrapment maybe like that of the other people on the island who want to develop; look for a better future, but are tied down by the shackles of caste and creed and extended families, which offer them identity and protection in return for resignation to age old customs. This, Morris describes as the ‘order of enclosure’, a necessity that the people of the island require to identify with.

At the same time, Morris also says that Biswas looks also for the ‘order of exposure’, which his society can provide despite its own insecurity. Biswas looks to this because this is the one way of not getting trapped into the Tulsi empire.

So, Biswas is happy in the ‘enclosure’ and exposure’ that he can experiment with and experience at the same time. At first, in the Tulsi world, he feels lost, unimportant and frightened. He wants to make his family his own,
but his desire is crushed by the joint family code. He feels trapped and he yearns to break free. He does manage to, but partly, when he is put into the Tulsi store at The Chase. His customers cheat him, and in the end he has no option but to hand over the whole thing to Seth, and let him deal with the customers and ‘insuraburn’ the store. His momentary freedom having ended, he returns to the sanctuary of Hanuman House. The six years Biswas spent in The Chase were ‘so squashed by their own boredom and futility that at the end they could be comprehended in one glance’ (HB, 182). Once, lodged safely in Hanuman House, he realizes that it was ‘a world, more real than The Chase, and less exposed; everything beyond its gates was foreign and unimportant and could be ignored’ (HB, 188). And Biswas decides that he ‘needed such a sanctuary’ (HB, 188) as the Hanuman House.

But in Hanuman House, Biswas gets lost in the crowd once again. He becomes a mere appendage and is unable to assert his independence an individuality. He is then set up at Green Vale. Here, he can experience both the freedom he wants and the sanctuary he desires. He knows that he can rely on Hanuman House to take him back whenever the situation demands it. ‘There was room for him at Hanuman House if he stayed. If he left he would not be missed’ (HB, 304). When he is through with Green Vale, he has a momentary breather at Hanuman House, however critically necessary it is, before he moves on to the life of a journalist.

Biswa, like many other Trinidadians feels that Trinidad does not offer much. The society is very much make believe in nature. People are always trying to find their identity and assert their individuality. But they constantly fall back on their native culture for moral backing but look up to the west for their life style.

In A House for Mr Biswas, Naipaul has aptly drawn upon the theory of the myth of El Dorado, that Trinidad is a second hand world which was used
by the British only for its colonial value, for bringing in revenue. After being used it got transformed into a land of failures. Neither the place nor the people there have any sense of dignity with respect to their place in the world scenario. And Biswas is just one of its many characters. He is a typical product of his environment; an environment made predominantly of slaves and labourers. Biswas, no matter how hard he tries, will forever remain a mediocre.

This society of failures apes the west in all respects; save the morality which is kept conservative. So engrossed are they in aping the west that they do not, for even a moment, try to logically comprehend the impracticality in the adaptation of the western situation to their own environment. Every adaptation, therefore, appears to be a mockery.

The Trinidadians celebrate Christmas at a time when it is extremely hot. That may be alright, but they have these elaborate signs painted with things that the island never had such as hollies and snow. ‘And at Arwacas the shop-signs celebrated snow and Santa Claus. The Tulsi store was hung with paper, holly and berries’ (HB, 212) and the Tulsi’s closed down shop to celebrate Christmas.

An incident at the place where Biswas goes to eat oysters, after being beaten up, in the early period of his married life depicts the futility of the West Indian situation the best.

The oysterman was talking drunkenly, in a mixture of Hindi and English. ‘My son is a helluva man. I feel that something is seriously wrong with him. One day he put a tin can on the fence and come running inside the house. “The gun, Pa”, he said. “Quick, give me the gun”. I give him the gun. He run to the window and shoot. The tin can fall. “Pa”, he say. “Look I shoot work; I shoot ambition. They dead” ’ (HB, 139).
With the passage of time, having realized the futility and delimiting situation of Trinidad, the community makes a constant effort to move away from this West Indian futility. A number of things are consciously made to change as time passes.

Education is the only means of getting rid of the futility that surrounds the lives of people. But education too is not suited to the kind of society that exists. It is very much of a hyperbolic nature. It is western in mode and is not tailored according to the needs of the society. It very much fits the description of the kind of education discussed in Maculay’s Minute, to be imparted to Indian colonials: to make the colonials English in taste, opinions, morals and intellect.

The subjects that are taught in schools are nearly useless. They do not highlight the aspects of the very land on which they are taught, not do they teach about the society, rather, they focus on distant lands, lands that very few people ever actually get to see. The children are made to study geographical features of other countries, geysers, deserts, rift valleys and the like; but they never study about the geography of their own country. They even take oranges wrapped in tissue papers for their teachers, without knowing the reason for it.

The system of education does not undergo any kind of change over the years, so much so that, Biswas’ son, Anand, studies the same nugatory things that his father did. They write compositions so artificial in nature that they do not reflect the life styles of even half the children living on the island. When they write about seaside picnics, they write of:

grateful shade of coconut trees – glorious sunset’ (HB, 356).

Education is portrayed as the singular means of attaining a better future. The second generation of children like Owad, Anand and Savi are inducted into the western education system because it has been realized down the years that orthodox schooling yields little or no service in today’s world. It can be said that Biswas’ educating his son Anand with a keen interest is like preparing Anand for a life free from limitations like his own, so that he can leave Trinidad behind for other lands and other countries which offer intellectual growth. Also, it has been realized over the years that the Western education system paves the way for upward mobility in a society that is otherwise decadent. Biswas’ two children, Anand and Savi take up scholarships and leave Trinidad for further studies abroad, which will then help them in acquiring lucrative jobs. Had they remained in Trinidad, they would have faced a dead end in terms of self development.

As a child, Biswas read of worlds which exercise his imagination greatly. ‘He read the novels of Hall Caine and Marie Corelli. They introduced him to intoxicating worlds. Descriptions of landscape and weather in particular excited him; they made him despair of finding romance in his own dull green land which the sun scorched everyday’ (HB, 78). Though Biswas goes to books for fantasy, he gets disillusioned because it makes him compare the two worlds existing side by side, the under developed, to which he himself belongs which offers nothing by way of opportunity; and the other, distant but modern:

The heroes had rigid ambitions and lived in countries where ambition could be pursued and had a meaning. He had no ambition, and in this hot land, apart from opening a shop or buying a motor bus, what could he do? What could he invent? Dutifully, however, he tried. He bought elementary manuals of science and read them; nothing happened; he only became addicted to elementary manuals
of science. He bought the seven expensive volumes of Hawkins’ Electrical Guide, made rudimentary compasses, buzzers and door bells, and learned to wind an armature. Beyond that he could not go. Experiments became more complex, and he didn’t know where in Trinidad he could find the equipment mentioned so casually by Hawkins. His interest in electrical matters died, and he contented himself with reading about the Samuel Smiles heroes in their magic land (HB, 79).

This lack of availability of equipments to carry out experiments reflects the fact that the society was satisfied with being just marginally sustained; and therefore makes no move to improves its situation.

When Biswas begins his course of writing short stories and journalism, it leads him to fake worlds. Nothing he is taught is in coordination with what he actually experiences. When he is asked to write a description of the summer season using the following hints: ‘The crowded trains to the sea side, the chink of ice in a glass, the slap of fish on the fishmonger’s slab’ (HB, 343), he remarks, ‘The only fish I see is the fish that does come around every morning in a basket on the old fishwoman head’ (HB, 343). His composition on Autumn is nowhere near the reality of any Trinidad season.

Autumn is with us again! “Season of mist and mellow fruitfulness”, as the celebrated poet John Keats puts it so well. We have chopped up logs for the winter. We have gathered in the corn which soon, before a blazing fire in the depths of winter, we shall enjoy, roasted or boiled on the cob (HB, 343).

He was also asked to write about presumptuous things like Guy Fawkes Night which his society did not know and observe.

To Mr Biswas religion has no meaning. It is like an additional baggage which he has to carry about because he is a pundit and he lives in a society
which mimics rituals of religions it does not actually adhere to. He rejects his Hinduism on grounds that it is of no practical use in the modern world; but falls back on it whenever he faces a crisis.

In many ways too, Biswas is embarrassed by his Indianness. His adulation for England and Englishmen makes him conscious; first of all, of the futility of the Trinidadian situation, and then of the not so welcome presence of the East Indian community. He speaks English even when the others speak Hindi. When Miss Logie, the head of the Department of Community Welfare expresses her desire to meet his family, he is frightened by the very prospect of it. ‘Readers! Learners! Govind! Chinta! The Slumberking bed and the destitute’s dining table!’ (HB, 498). He is ashamed to display the chaos in the family, ashamed to display his possessions, and therefore, he lies that his children have contracted mumps.

Biswa is awed by the west like all other Trinidadians. The west offers him fantasy: shelter from the harsh reality of his existence. He has a kind of respect for the west. And like every other Trinidadian, he is awed by anything and everything associated with England. He is awed by Owad upon his return from England because Owad seems to have been there and done all. He hears Owad’s tales and anecdotes with delight and fascination, unable to easily digest that Owad had actually met contemporaries of great stature. ‘To think that the man who had met those people was sleeping under the same roof! There, where Owad had been, was surely where life was to be found’ (HB, 540). So, he makes sure that he gives enough opportunity to his children, so that they may experience what he can only hear about; and fantasize about. he sends them abroad so that they may have a better future, a future, that is not colonially restricted.

In Biswas’ society, it is predecided that there are only two ways about to develop economically and socially. One is to get education. The other is to use
the feudal money, money gotten from working on the lands or by making others work on the land. People who speculated and started off from the lands by enterprising earned more and lived better than people with white collar jobs. And since villages provided them with very few opportunities, they moved to the cities thereby climbing one rung of the social ladder. Ajodha was one of such people who had rapidly climbed the social ladder by freeing himself from the land; ‘already he owned a rumshop and a dry goods shop, and he had been one of the first in Trinidad to buy a motor car’ (HB, 32). The move to the city had made even Tara confident of her station and situation and at Raghu’s funeral, she was more at ease while expressing herself than the villagers. Even Ramchand, Biswas’ brother-in-law was markedly different from the other people Biswas had seen in Arwacas or The Chase or Green Vale. He had a set of ‘city manners’ (HB, 312), which impressed Biswas and he spoke English most of the time too. So impressed did Biswas get, that he too decided to be a part of the city. ‘He wanted to be part of it, to be one of those who stood at the black and yellow bus-stops in the morning, one of those he saw behind the windows of offices, one of those to whom the evenings and week-ends brought relaxation’ (HB, 312). When Biswas himself moves to the city, his children do not relish their periodic returns to Arwacas or the life there; or for that matter, life in any rural set up, Shorthills included.

To get rid of futility of their situation, the Trinidadians find means of earning quick money, so that they can, in one way or the other escape this futility. The influx of the Americans brought about numerous schemes and plans to earn money. Left and right people took up all kinds of petty jobs because the Americans paid well and in dollars. Having acquired these jobs, they gave them better names. False pride prevailed among these people. And in any case, they earned much more than the white-collar job holders.

Vidiadhar, Govind’s son, had said that his father worked for the Americans. ‘That is what all of them are saying
these days’. Anand said. ‘Why didn’t Vidiadhar say that his father was a taxi-driver’?

Mr Biswas didn’t smile. Govind had six suits; Govind was making money; Govind would soon have his own house Vidiadhar would be sent abroad to get a profession. And what awaited Anand? A job in the customs, a clerkship in the civil service: intrigue, humiliation, dependence (HB, 439-440).

Through the limitations of his white collar job and the futility of the West Indian scenario, there is not much that Biswas can do for himself.

Mr Biswas knew that for all his talk he would never leave the Sentinel to go to work for the Americans as labourer, clerk or taxi-driver. He lacked the taxi-driver’s personality, the labourer’s muscles; and he was frightened of throwing up his job; the Americans would not be in the island forever’ (HB, 440).

Biswas does not have feudal money to fall back on, so he cannot leave his job. But through it all, he sends his children abroad so that they have a better future and a better life. and in the end, just before his death, Biswas’ efforts towards their better future yields positive result when Savi comes back and gets a job with a bigger salary than Biswas could ever think of getting. And in the end too, the inbuilt religious instinct of the migrant returns when he writes to Anand upon Savi’s return: ‘How can you not believe in God after this?’ (HB, 589).
References:


5. Ibid, p. 80.


11. Ibid., p. 29.
Chapter-3

The Migrant Experiences-11
The migrant Indians adapted themselves to the colonial setting while clinging on to rituals and customs of a land thousands of miles away; which they had brought along with them in this transient world; as they had believed their situation would be, and this is the mindset they maintain yet; inspite of the generations who have made settlement on this land. It is from this makeup of the East Indian community in general and the Hindu community in particular, that Naipaul draws material for these novels.

The three novels discussed in this chapter The Mystic Masseur, The Suffrage of Elvira and The Mimic Men, like A House for Mr Biswas discuss primarily the East Indian Trinidad community into which Naipaul was born. Relatively new in the West Indian scenario as compared to the Africans, this community, which carries with it the experience of a rural India under the British Raj, has its own idiosyncracies. It has its own cultural adaptations to make and its own internal frictions to deal with.

The Mystic Masseur is, essentially the story of the life and actions of Ganesh Ramsumair. Ganesh belongs to a family of Indian descent living in rural Trinidad. His father is the most important man of his village; and as appropriate to his status, he finds it befitting enough to send Ganesh to a college in the town. Royalties from the oil wells sunk in the five acres of waste land and that belonged to Mr Ramsumair ensure Ganesh's stay in Port of Spain and his education. In the four years that he spends at college, he is acutely aware of his presumed shortcomings; the first being his age and the second, his Indian background.

The moment Ganesh landed in Port of Spain, he realized that he could not command the respect from the city dwellers that he did in his village. When Ganesh and his father had boarded the train at Princes Town, he had known that 'they looked important'. But this respect steadily decreased as their
journey progressed and finally, in Port of Spain, when Ganesh saw a woman laughing, presumably at their appearance, he was dismayed.

At College too, Ganesh was eternally ashamed of being an Indian. Shame got the better of him and he changed his name to Gareth; he dressed badly and his accent was that of a country Indian. As if this was not enough, he made little effort to come out of the rural Indian mode, and keeping with this, he never studied in any light except daylight.

During his first vacations, he had to undergo religious initiation, which he despised with all his heart. No sooner had he passed the Cambridge School Certificate Exam than he was expected to marry. He somehow escaped marriage and took up teaching. His first assignment was teaching a class that was ‘a sort of rest-station for the mentally maimed’ (MMr, 14). After trying hard enough, he gave up and contented himself to filling up the improvements in the Record Book. When reproached for his action, he quit in a huff, thereby ending his first career.

Back at Fourways, his village. Ganesh is happy to be in his element once again; the element that commands secular respect from the villagers for something as easy as doing nothing and pretending to be thinking. The only person genuinely interested in Ganesh is Ramlogan, who had sent the cable of his father’s death. And the only interest that Ramlogan has in Ganesh is to get his daughter Leela to marry him as Ganesh is an eligible bachelor.

While Ramlogan has his own scheme to get Ganesh to marry Leela; Ganesh himself seeks means to profit from this tie. He manages to get a dowry of ‘a cow and a heifer, fifteen hundred dollars in cash, and a house in Feunte Grove’ (MMr, 45). He then tricks his father-in-law into establishing a Cultural Institute at Feunte Grove, for ‘furthering of Hindu Culture and Science of Thought in Trinidad’ (MMr, 155). In addition to these, he tricks Ramlogan on and off.
Failure as a teacher turns him to massaging. But he is not an apt masseur and his venture fails to take off. This inspires him to take up extensive reading. He buys inches and inches, and volumes upon volumes of books on every subject; half of which he reads voraciously, and half of which give him pleasure by just being in his possession. Reading inspires him to begin writing.

Gaining little from the book, he decides to turn into a mystic masseur. He sets up shop and gets rid of evil spirits; and in turn accepts whatever his clients have to offer him, knowing that they would come anyway. His method of advertising himself in the masseur market of Trinidad is also unlike any other:

If you want to send me anything, send it. But don’t go around telling all sorts of people about me. You can’t take on too much of this sort of work. A case like this does tire me out for a whole week sometimes’ (MMr, 121).

Ganesh, a unique mystic masseur in more ways than one, progresses from a man of the masses to a businessman; below which lies the conman. But anyway, Ganesh was leagues ahead of the so-called mystics in every respect and the remarkable thing was that his shrewdness was hard to identify.

You never felt that he was a fake and you couldn’t deny his literacy or learning – not with all those books. And he hadn’t only book-learning. He could talk on almost any subject.... And he could discuss religion sensibly as well (MMr, 128).

With his growing reputation, grew his inclination towards writing. It was at this time that his first book became a best-seller. He then wrote a number of other books including an autobiography which was withdrawn from the press as quickly as it had gone to it. Ganesh also wrote a tourist guide to Trinidad to draw American soldiers present there during the war years to his specially constructed temple.
Ganesh's business as a mystic grew tremendously. He started other businesses under the canopy of this one. He got taxis to run to his work station to bring clients at a cheaper rate. He started a restaurant as a side business. He then built a temple to use it as a tourist attraction for the Americans on the island. As if this was not enough, Ganesh decided to enter politics. Though Ganesh entered politics to serve his own selfish needs, he was always very careful to lead people into believing that he was working for them; for the benefit of Hindu unity.

Being a shrewd man Ganesh uses both of his assets; the Indian attributes that he has inherited and the western values that he has inculcated in himself to fool the poor and ignorant villagers. Mysticism is his stage and religion is his instrument. When he preaches, he cleverly incorporates his desire to become a politician, in the lectures on religion he dishes out for his audience.

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 souls' (MMr, 187).

Eventually Ganesh won the elections, became a member of the Legislative Council, gave up the work of a mystic and moved to Port of Spain and got involved in politics big-time. As he gained popularity, he found references to his career as a mystic an embarrassment and withdrew all his books of pre-political years. His habit and desire to achieve recognition at all costs made him foolishly betray his shrewdness to the very people from whom he had hidden it. At a strike of sugar estate workers he revealed his true self when he failed to deliver a speech in favour of the workers' cause.
It was then that he realized that bigger stakes lay in his being a man of
the government, than being a man of the masses. So he crossed over to the
other side of the opposition and became a yes-man of the government for
which he was rewarded by being inducted into the Executive Council and being
decorated with an M.B.E., which in turn fulfilled his desire of seeing that world
which he had admired all his life. Ganesh’s manoeuvres to achieve fame is
described by his biographer as representative of a colonial’s ploys to progress.

I myself believe that the history of Ganesh, is, in a way,
the history of our times (MMr, 8).

The other important character in this novel is Leela, Ganesh’s wife, who
is, to a great extent, his comrade in his businesses. The husband and wife
relationship of Ganesh and Leela is largely based on Seepersad’s story
“Dookhnie and Mungal” which appears in The Adventures of Gurudeva and
Other Stories. However, the treatment of the sterility of Dookhnie, from that
of Leela’s is different because the former gets miraculously pregnant at the end
of the story.

The Suffrage of Elvira, the second novel discussed in this chapter is,
according to Peggy Nightingale, a study of the relation between ‘the structures
of the Indian community’.
Though The Suffrage of Elvira does not strictly
deal with just the Indian community of Trinidad, yet it deals, to a great extent,
with emigrant Indian issues. The plot of The Suffrage of Elvira revolves
around the second suffragate of Trinidad, but it elaborately discusses the
futility present in the West Indian milieu; and the place of the Indian
community in it with respect to its interactions with other communities
dwelling alongside; as also with respect to the intra community interactions.

The Suffrage of Elvira exposes the activities that build up around the
election of the Hindu candidate, Surajput Harbans, to the Legislative Council.
At the same time, the plot also discusses the lives of other equally interesting
characters such as Baksh, the Muslim leader, and Chittaranjan, a wealthy goldsmith, who help Harbans win the elections. By depicting the lives of Baksh’s and Chittaranjan’s family alongside, Naipaul depicts the interactions and tensions prevalent within the East Indian community that has come to dwell in Trinidad: along with its interactions with the rest of the West Indian community.

Harbans is a shrewd man; but not shrewd enough. ‘For years he had been able to persuade the chief engineer of County Naparoni to keep his hands off the Elvira roads’. But he is not clever enough to fool the Elvirans, who extract maximum monetary assistance from him during his election campaign. However, single handedly he cannot win the election; therefore, Baksh and Chittaranjan, who control a sizeable vote bank each have to be roped in to help him out.

Baksh, a tailor by profession, has a reputation of being rich inspite of his ‘tumbledown wooden house of two storeys’ (SE, 13) and his ‘tailoring establishment’ (SE, 13). He was a man who, in the frenzy of the election, was catapulted to power and ‘found himself the leader of the Muslims in Elvira’. (SE, 12). Baksh had a big mouth; but at the same time he was business minded to the core, as his dealing with Harbans reflects:

‘Must have a loud speaking van’ Baksh said. ‘The other man have a loud speaking van. Come to think of it, you could use my loud speaker’. He looked hard at Harbans. And you could use my van’.

Harbans looked back hard into the darkness. ‘What are you saying, Baksh? You ain’t got no loud speaker’.

Baksh stood up. Foam stopped tacking.

‘You ain’t got no loud speaker’, Harbans repeated. ‘And you ain’t got no van’.
Baksh said, ‘And you ain’t got no Muslim vote’. He went back to his counter and took up the yellow chalk in a business like way (SE, 17).

Chittaranjan, on the other hand, unlike Baksh, was ‘the most important person in Elvira’ (SE, 24), and unlike him, Chittaranjan ‘looked rich and was rich’ (SE, 24). His house was everything that Baksh’s house was not. ‘It was solid, two-storeyed, concrete, bright with paint and always well looked after’. (SE, 24). Chittaranjan was well aware of his importance and expressed it whenever possible. Harbans offered his son in marriage to Chittaranjan’s daughter, Nelly if he would channelize his vote bank to make Harbans win. However, he nullified the engagement when he won.

Apart from these characters is the younger generation; Baksh’s children, Chittaranjan’s daughter, and Lorkhoor, the Preacher’s campaign manager; who use the election as an opportunity to express their individuality and identity and get rid of their delimited life in Elvira.

Foam, Baksh’s eldest son, becomes Harbans’ campaign manager. Harbans also ropes in Dhaniram into the management committee; and also, literally, buys every vote possible in one way or the other, be it by looking after the sick, or donating for the local football team. Amidst all this, he has to counter rumors of his vote bank being sold out to the opposition.

The eve of polling day sees Harbans’ last campaign gimmick; the motorcade, a popular publicity stunt, seen even during Trinidad’s first suffragate. To ensure that polling went in favour of Harbans, the committee, took extra measures the next day. They arranged for a food van that made regular rounds to cater both officially and unofficially to polling agents, voters and other people. And Chittaranjan ‘had chosen men of tried criminality (SE, 196) to prevent polling agents from staggering the votes.
The day Harbans won the election he decided that he would never return because he had been monetarily exploited by Elivrans. But he did come back once more to honour the giving away of the whisky case by Ramlogan to the management committee. But this time round, he had a wholly changed attitude which Elvirans did not take to graciously.

Harbans didn’t wave. He looked preoccupied, 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 wiped even, patted them – in the fussiest way.

The people of Elvira were hurt.

He didn’t coo at anybody, didn’t look at anybody. He made his way silently through the silent crowd and went straight up the steps into Chittaranjan’s drawing room....

They didn’t like it at all (SE, 208).

And Harbans waited for the whole thing to finish impatiently. Not taking a liking to this new attitude, the public burnt the brand new Jaguar he had come in. Harbans left Elvira swearing never to return, preferring to control his constituency from outside its boundaries.

The burning Jaguar helped Lorkhoor get a reputation and a job for reporting the incident first hand in the Trinidad Sentinel. Foam got Lorkhoor’s job of advertising for cinemas in Caroni. Chittaranjan’s daughter got to pursue her dream in London. The only apparent loser, it seems was Chittaranjan who couldn’t get Nelly to marry Harbans’ son.

The novel, The Mimic Men, is divided into three broad parts. The first part sees the narrator, Ralph Singh, in London, examining his impression of the city now as contrasted with that of his student years; this is the part that will be dealt with in a separate chapter. The next sees the narrator discussing his
childhood on the island of Isabella. In the end, the narrator studies his political career and then returns to present day London where he is living a life of exile.

The novel opens with Ralph Singh reminiscing about his student days and his boarding house life, but the parts of The Mimic Men discussed in this chapter are only those that deal with the life of Ralph Singh in his homeland – Isabella.

Ralph Singh has an Indian background, of which he is not too proud. The maternal side of his family is rich and affluent, the owners of the Bella Bella Bottling Works; and his father, on the other hand, is an ordinary school teacher who discovers fame in being a radical by Trinidad standards.

Singh’s father’s journey on the road to becoming famous begins when he breaks ninety-six Coca Cola bottles at one go, winning accolades from the people around as their saviour against oppression. Later he assumes the role of Gurudeva and leads a semi-religious revolt against the society. Like the characters of a number of Naipaul’s novels, Gurudeva also originates from Seepersad’s character Gurudeva, in the story “The Adventures of Gurudeva” published in The Adventures of Gurudeva and Other Stories, who begins as a thug but converts to a man devoted to Brahminical values.

Ralph Singh was always awed by his father’s radical image. His reactions to his father’s activities were one of fascination added to admiration, the actions of a hero; the lone survivor of the picturesque Asiatic landscapes of Single’s fantasy. But his father’s performing the Asvamedha or the horse sacrifice shocks him into realizing the grotesqueness associated with such rituals and values, which till the other day, he had held in high regard. But the admiration for his father’s image is stronger; and therefore, Singh reconciles with this grotesqueness, as being necessary to his father’s movement.

But my memory of those days tells me that the deed in such a situation is necessary; that without it a mood is
useless and burns itself out.... And I go back to the leader and the deed. The leader intuits the necessary deed. The killing of a racehorse, a favorite for the Malay Cup, was outrageous and obscene to everyone on that sport-crazed island. Yet it became an acceptable rallying point of righteous, underground emotion. The successful leader works by intuition; such is the degree of self-violation he imposes on his followers, whom he must never cease to surprise.4

In addition to this Singh, who is always busy thinking and fantasizing about his Indian background, acutely realizes the futility of the West Indian scenario and makes an escape from the island altogether; only to come back and participate in the political scene. But his political career is short lived and dies, forcing him into living a life of exile in London.

As in A House for Mr Biswas, the migrant societies in these novels too, can be seen trying to stick as close as possible to the native culture. The East Indian West Indians follow a cultural set up that was existent during the British Raj in India, which was the first time they began migrating. Though they progress with time, inculcate in themselves western values and are influenced by creolization, they stick to their native culture for satisfying their moral values.

The setting of the three novels discussed in this chapter have rural connections which help in understanding the East Indian culture, its peculiarities and its amalgamation into the West Indian scene. Ganesh comes from Fourways, a small village where his father had five acres of land which had begun to yield oil. Elvira is a developing state with a predominantly agricultural economy. Ralph Singh’s grandparents too have a rural background of sorts with his grandmother having sold milk in the past.

Adherence to religious tenets is an important feature of Hindu Indian’s life, particularly the pundit. But as in A House for Mr Biswas, Naipaul here
discloses not only the insincerity of the godmen in Trinidad but also their ploys of exploiting the general masses to achieve their selfish ends.

The pundits discussed by Naipaul in these novels are, save one, not essentially those who receive brahminical schooling unlike Biswas. They are ordinary men who can don the pundit’s garb when and wherever they desire. Half knowledge of brahminical values will suffice as will no prior knowledge. So, a Ganesh can one day decide that he will become a mystic because his job as a masseur does not give returns. A man like Gurudeva can leave his government job with which he is dissatisfied, don the mendicant’s robe and head for the hills. Pundit Dhaniram of Elvira too is an object fit for ridicule.

Ganesh Pundit, the protagonist of The Mystic Masseur, out of the blue decides to be a masseur just because his father was. But when his practice fails to take off, he brings religion into it. He begins consoling his patients by saying that their ailments are all due to God’s work and that one should not ‘interfere in God work’ (MMr, 62). This may be taken as the stepping stone for Ganesh’s career as a mystic masseur. But his interest in actually pursuing such a career is sparked off at a family meeting where Leela suggests that Ganesh should take up work as a pundit because he knew ‘a lot more than most of the other pundits in Trinidad’ (MMr, 104). Even Ganesh’s aunt, The Great Belcher, motivates him:

‘It have a long time now I studying you, Ganesh. You have the Power all right’.

It was the sort of statement he had grown to expect from The Great Belcher. ‘What Power?’

‘To cure people. Cure the mind, cure the soul – chut! Man you making me confuse, and you well know what I mean’.
Ganesh said acidly, ‘You want me to start curing people soul when you see me catching good hell to cure their toenail!’

Leela coaxed, ‘Man, the least you could do for me is to give it a try’.

‘She right, you know, Ganesh. Is the sort of Power you don’t even know you have until you start using it’.

‘All right, then. I have this great Power. How I go start using it? What I go tell people? “Your soul a little rundown today: Here, take this prayer three times a day before meals” ’.

The Great Belcher clapped her hands. ‘Is exactly what I mean’……

‘Ganesh, you have the Power. I could see it in your hands, your eyes, in the shape of your head. Just like your uncle, God bless him. He would be a great man today, if only he did live’.

Ganesh was interested now. ‘But how and where I go start, man?’ (MMr, 105).

So, Ganesh decided to take up being a mystic. And he began to study books and manuscript given to him by his aunt in ‘a parcel wrapped in red cotton spattered with sandal wood paste’ (MMr, 106). A brief test by the Great Belcher qualified him for the career and Ganesh began practising.

To solve his very first case, Ganesh uses his Indian clothes to make the proper impression. He wears a dhoti and turban; and uses the little knowledge that he has gained from his uncle’s books to solve it. Much more than this is not required by Trinidad standards, because as Ramlogan, his father-in-law, says any kind of education can help a man establish himself as a professional.
Ganesh Pundit does not keep a fee for the services he extends to the people. But to keep his practice running, one of the many tactics he employs is by telling his clients:

If you want to reward me, I don’t mind, because I have to make a living. But I don’t want you to strain yourself (MMr, 124).

It is evident from the very onset of his mystic career and his preparation for his first client itself that Ganesh has taken up the pundit business to make money. On the face of it Ganesh’s treatment of his patients appears very pious, though it is all a trickery of sorts and lacks reverence on the whole. While arranging the room for his very first client, Ganesh hums a song from a Hindi movie and arranges the pictures in his room ‘giving the goddess Lakshmi pride of place’ (MMr, 121). It may be noted here that, by doing so Ganesh unconsciously clearly states that it is money that he is interested in for Lakshmi is considered the goddess of wealth according to the Hindu religion; but the poor public of Trinidad fails to understand this symbol.

Soon enough Ganesh has a roaring practice. He uses the little knowledge that he has gained through his voracious reading to fool the vast number of illiterates around him. People are awed by him and consider him a genuine god man. And, on his part, Ganesh would always be careful enough to appear as authentic as possible. Sometimes, he didn’t even know how he cured people, but he just went on doing so, little realizing that the false fame that he propagated, already psychologically, half cured the illiterates and superstitious who came to him. Soon, he became a rage in Trinidad.

No one could lay evil spirits better, even in Trinidad, where there were so many that people had acquired especial skill in dealing with them. No one could tie a house better, bind it, that is, in spiritual bonds proof against the most resolute spirit. If he ran up against a
particularly tough spirit there were always the books his aunt had given him. So, balls-of-fire, soncouyants, loups-garoux, all became as nothing (MMr, 127).

It was Ganesh’s treatment of his clients that set him apart from the already established mystics. The sophisticated bluff that he used to fool his clients appeared so authentic that it made him a believable man in a land abounding in fakes.

They [other thaumaturges] were nearly all fakes. They knew an ineffectual charm or two but had neither the intelligence nor sympathy for anything else. Their method of tackling spirits remained primitive. A sudden kick in the back of a person possessed was supposed to take the spirit by surprise and drive it out. It was because of these ignorant people that the profession had a bad name. Ganesh elevated the profession by putting the charlatans out of business. Every obeah-man was quick enough to call himself a mystic, but the people of Trinidad knew that Ganesh was the only true mystic in the island (MMr, 128).

Ganesh Pundit then began to use his profession as a pundit to further other businesses; each more successful than the other. He got taxis to bring his clients up to Feunte Grove, his work station, for ‘a little more than it ought to have been’ (MMr, 139) because of poor road conditions. He then ventured into the restaurant business which was run by his wife Leela, ‘and since Feunte Grove was so far from anywhere else, she had to charge a little extra’ (MMr, 141). Since Ganesh had little belief and use of the things that formed a part of the ‘silly ritual’ (MMr, 141) of sacrifice he prescribed for his clients on popular demand, he asked Beharry to stock up plenty of sacrificial material and urged his clients to purchase it from there only. Through this process too, Ganesh made a lot of money.
Another example which shows that anyone in Trinidad could become a pundit or a spiritual leader, is Mr Stewart's dabbling with Hinduism, on his own terms and conditions. When outside, Mr Stewart wore the mendicant’s yellow; and when inside his house, wore a shirt and khaki trousers with the excuse, ‘It doesn’t matter what you wear. No spiritual significance; ‘I’ve decided’ (MMr, 29). Even Narayan, Ganesh’s political arch-rival believes that he too can out do Ganesh as a mystic ‘with just a little bit of practice’ (MMr, 141).

People in Elvira too had a strong belief in godmen and mystics. Mrs Baksh takes her younger son, Herbert, to a man in Tamana for spiritual fumigation, after he is contaminated by obeah. The man beats the spirit out of Herbert, thereby putting himself in the ranks of the common thaumaturges present all over Trinidad. It may also be noted here that Ganesh’s fame spread as far as Elvira; and he had his admirers in Elvira too. Baksh was just one of them. ‘I can’t think of nobody who could drive away a spirit as good as Ganesh Pundit’ (SE, 67).

Harichand, the printer, dabbles in his own version of mysticism, and consciously imitates Ganesh in his mannerism of giving advice. Harichand considers himself as the next best thing to Ganesh and ‘had an entirely spurious reputation as an amateur of the mystic and the psychic’ (SE, 116). The period The Suffrage of Elvira covers is just post Ganesh’s career as a pundit. From Baksh’s remark upon Ganesh’s greatness, it can be clearly seen that setting up and shutting down shop for a pundit in Trinidad is as easy as can be ‘Pity he had to take up politics. Still, that show how good he was. The moment he feel he was losing his hand for that sort of a thing, he give up the business’ (SE, 84).

Dhaniram, One of the best pundits in Elvira is ‘too fond of gossip and religious disputation’ (SE, 144) at the same time. And though his calendar
shows his declining practice, it does not matter much to him as he has a steady source of income from the tractor of which he is a one-fifth share holder. Often he takes time off to play this part; and at such times not 'dhoti and sacred thread; but khaki trousers, yellow sports shirt, brown felt hat and brown patent leather shoes' (SE, 135) complete his attire. He indulges in 'vices' such as cigarette smoking also.

In The Mimic Men, also it can be seen that Ralph Singh’s father, who was a school teacher, and not a devout Hindu, donned the mendicant’s garb without any afore thought. The real motive of Singh’s father donning the role of the holyman can be seen from Singh’s narration below; from which it is clearly evident that the Gurudeva took such a step so as to hold people’s attention like his earlier bottle-breaking incident. But since the semi-literate dockworkers could respond better to a religious uprising than a political one, he exploited the sentiments of the people and started a semi-religious revolt. The main purpose of his revolt was not to advocate doctrines of religion, but to cause frenzy in the running of the politics of Isabella.

I believe that when he left the Education department – it might have been after an argument about a minute or a decision to appoint a schools inspector or even after a rebuke from an 'enemy' for having his hair cut in office hours – I believe he had in mind something like a repeat of the bottle-breaking incident, whose triumph had remained with him....Ideas had been given him; he had begun to talk. He lost control of himself and events; even at the beginning I feel, his movement ran ahead of him. What the missionary’s lady had seen in him, the aboriginal young man in the high collar, fighting his way up and out of poverty and darkness, was at last about to be fulfilled. The chance had come; he could swear he had not looked for it. It was now or never, and he must have known this (MM, 138).
After this publicity stunt, Gurudeva took to the hills, donned the yellow robe, and went on to preach his own version of religion, gave *darshans* and finally became a *sanyasi*.

Religion as depicted in the East Indian community of these novels also involves the belief in superstition, fate and the caste system. In addition to this, biased views regarding other religions have also to be contented with.

In *The Mystic Masseur*, a number of instances of superstition have been discussed. Ganesh's very first client was a patient with a psychological case, of superstition. Not only this, but Ganesh himself also believed in superstition. It is his superstitious belief that changing his attire to that of a traditional Hindu dress of *dhoti* and turban will help draw clients.

If superstition is the norm in Trinidad, can Elvira be far behind? Inspite of their inclination for an absurd kind of modernity, the people of Elvira were highly superstitious. 'Nearly everybody else in Elvira had some experience of the supernatural' (SE, 75). Surajput Harbans, the candidate for the suffrage, who had decided to contest the elections from Elvira, considered it an ominous sign to have his engine stalled twice, in addition to nearly hitting two Witnesses, and almost running over a bitch. But he was unclear as to what his accident implied.

It was only when he had driven away that Harbans thought. His first accident in twenty years. The strange white women. The black bitch. The stalling of the engine on both occasions.

It was clearly a sign. And not a good sign either (SE, 10).

But it would be wrong to say here that it is just the Hindus who believe in superstitions. It is inherent to the Indian psyche in general. So it is no fault of Mrs Baksh when she believes that acquisition of booty from the election campaign would be ominous for the Bakshes. 'She saw threats every where;
this election was the greatest. She couldn’t afford new enemies; too many people were already jealous of her and she suspected nearly everybody of looking at her with the evil eye, the *mal yeux* of the local patois’ (SE, 21). And, finally, when Baksh does arrive with the loudspeaker van, a part of the deal he had struck with Harbans in the wake of elections, Mrs Baksh is all the more frightened. She ‘was frightened by the very size of her fortune. She was tempting fate, inviting the evil eye’ (SE, 41).

Soon after this, the evil eye did have its effect. Tiger, the dog, the symbol of *obeah* itself, arrived which made even Baksh declare: ‘Is only one thing. Magic. *Obeah*. But who want to put anything on me (SE, 63)? Even the Baksh children had the superstitious temperament. After all, they learnt only from their parents. Rafiq too agreed with Baksh, ‘It must be *obeah* and magic. Last night he [Herbert] tell me it was a big big dog. And he say it was a *bad* dog’. The emphasis sounded sinister’ (SE, 66).

When Baksh discusses his case of *obeah* with the other residents of Elvira, there are a number of others who have their own experiences to relate. And every single man believes that his experience is the most sinister. They vie with each other in deciding as to whose carries the mark of the most portentous. And more than the men, it is the women who have knowledge of the *obeah*, and it is they who can differentiate correctly between an *obeah* and a sign. So, Mrs Baksh is able to guide her husband on the differences so that he can understand that the Bakshes have not been struck by a simple sign, but a bigger, more powerful *obeah*.

And finally, *obeah* declared, it was decided as per norms to get rid of the spirit that had come upon Herbert as he had brought the dog. So, Mrs Baksh took Herbert to someone who could ‘*jharay*’ (SE, 117) the boy. ‘The fellow say that the first thing to do when a spirit come on anybody is to beat it out. It ain’t the person you beating pussional, but the spirit’ (SE, 84).
Harbans, on his part, believes that the signs which he could not comprehend, would have a direct bearing upon the outcome of the elections. No sooner had he entered Elvira than unexpected things began to happen. Baksh’s demand for a loud speaker van and his negotiation for Foam to be employed as Harbans’ campaign manager all added to his apprehension about the sign he had encountered that afternoon: ‘the women, the dog, the engine stalling twice’ (SE, 19).

If Harbans has apprehensions about the meanings of the signs, Chittaranjan has his own logic of working out whether they would have an impact or not. So when Harbans shares his tale of woe with Chittaranjan, the latter explains:

You shoulda tell me, Mr. Harbans. You woulda save both of we a lot of worry. One sign is bad. But when you get two signs in one day, is different. They does cancel out one another. Just as how the dog cancel out the Witnesses (SE, 139-140).

On his part, Foam believes that the plant in Ramlogan’s yard have been struck by obeah and magic because they have roots in his yard whereas they flower and bear fruit in Chittaranjan’s yard.

And it is not just the Indians who are affected by obeah and believe in it. Christians like Mr Cuffy, too believe in it. When Mahadeo, one of Harbans’ campaigners, comes asking if, and how many of the Negroes of Elvira are sick, as part of their own campaigning strategy, Mr Cuffy drives him out crying, ‘Obeah! Lorkhoor was right. You people trying to work some obeah, Haul you tail outa my yard! Go on, quick sharp’ (SE, 75).

In addition to this there are other superstitious beliefs which are followed. Mrs Baksh, after combing her hair, curls the loose ones into a small ball and spits on it before throwing it away. In The Mystic Masseur too, when
Ganesh decides to become a mystic, it is his superstitious belief that changing his attire will change his luck. So, the day he involves himself in dhoti and turban, he remarks, ‘Well, I have a feeling. I feel my luck change as from today’ (MMr, 113).

Besides superstition, obeah, and magic, there is the belief in fate that has a strong influence on the lives of people; rich and poor, educated and illiterate alike. And it is this belief in fate that governs the actions of a number of the people.

Ganesh, in The Mystic Masseur has very strong belief in fate, and fate is responsible, according to him, for all the ups and downs in his life and career. When he loses his school job and hears of the death of his father, he correlates the two as an act of fate, and tries to deduce a significance from it. In his autobiography, he writes:

In conversation with Shri Ramlogan I learnt a curious fact. My father had died that Monday morning between five minutes past ten and a quarter past ten – just about the time, in short, when I had the dispute with Miller, and was deciding to give up my teaching job. I was much struck by the coincidence, and it was only then, for the first time, I felt I had something big ahead of me. For it was indeed a singular conspiracy of events that pulled me away from the emptiness of urban life back into the stimulating peace and quiet of the country’ (MMr, 21).

Ganesh believes that his marriage to Leela is generated by the forces of fate though it was inevitable; the reason being that Ramlogan was on the look out for a catch and Ganesh was the most eligible bachelor in the village. But, Ganesh still believes that it was ‘preordained’ (MMr, 35) that he marry Leela.

It is her fate that Leela is beaten by Ganesh. And she ‘can’t fight it’ (MMr, 52) because it is all predestined. It is Ganesh’s fate that his massaging
business fails to take off; and he contemplates seriously as to what could have
gone wrong with his destiny and he 'feared that he had misread the signs of
fate. It was only later that he saw the providential pattern of these disappointing
months. 'We never are what we want to be', he wrote, 'but what we must be'
(MMr, 63-64).

And it is not just these matters that are ordained by fate. Even mundane
activities take place under the influence of fate. When Ganesh hires the
services of Bissoon, the master salesman, who was famous for selling to even
reluctant customers, Leela and Ganesh have a discussion as to what that
implies:

'Is a sign. Is the first sign I ever believe in.... Is a sign'.

'Is more than a sign', Ganesh said. 'Anybody who could
sell a book to your father could sell milk to a cow'.

But secretly he too believed it was a good sign (MMr, 98).

And it is a sign of fate too, that Ganesh's books are unable to be sold by
even competent Bissoon. When Ganesh can't cure a patient, he interprets it as
'God work' (MMr, 62) and his clients who are staunch believers of fate accept
his explanations and take away their problems unsolved, which goes to show
that, not one, but all the sections of society were influenced by this belief in
fate.

Ganesh attributes to fate the successes in his career and believes that he
was destined for them. But it can be clearly seen as the novel progresses, that
Ganesh strove shrewdly to work towards success. Finally, even when Ganesh
meets his political downfall at a meeting of striking workers he does not hold
his incompetence as responsible for it. Rather, he blames it all on destiny.
Ganesh had miscalculated the seriousness and enormity of the strike. He had
gone to meet the workers in a 'lounge suit' (MMr, 203) and carried books of
Tom Paine and John Stuart Mill which were irrelevant to the strike. He began
his address to the workers on a wrong note, but he did not even think his actions as irresponsible. Rather, he saw the interference of 'the hand of Providence' (MMr, 203). So his failure too is the work of fate, according to him.

Ralph Singh of The Mimic Men, who is not an altogether devout Hindu too believes in predestined actions and behaviour to a certain extent.

In that period of my life which was to follow, the period between my preparation for life and my withdrawal from it, that period in parenthesis, when I was most active and might have given the observer the impression of a man fulfilling his destiny, in that period intensity of emotion was the thing I never achieved (MM, 32).

Unlike Ganesh who blames fate for his failure, Singh is conscious that his actions also do play a vital role in having shaped his life, but, he too ends up thinking of the 'if' factor prompted by his belief in fate. He ends up contemplating that he could have been in an altogether different situation had he followed a different course of action. Yet, he ends up blaming fate like the rest of his community.

But now, with a feeling of waste and regret for opportunities missed, I begin to question this. I doubt whether any action, above a certain level, is ever wholly arbitrary or whimsical or dishonest. I question now whether the personality is manufactured by the vision of others (MM, 199).

Even in The Suffrage of Elvira, it can be seen that Nelly Chittaranjan believes a little bit in fate, but this belief is overshadowed by the knowledge of the fact that she was not practical enough. She knew she was being married off because she couldn’t get into a girl’s high school. But she realizes that ‘it was her own fault’ (SE, 89) because she hadn’t prepared hard for the test.
Though in these three novels, Naipaul has not dealt extensively with the caste system, a feudal system seems to be prevalent in the East Indian Trinidad community. There can also be glimpsed a kind of emission of vanity from Singh, who is by ancestry a Rajput. Not only this but Singh is proud of his Aryan ancestry too. Singh’s maternal ancestry too has a feudal background; of people who have arisen out of a mere bottling family. And family feuds being ever so common in the East Indian community in Trinidad, there is no doubt that his family did not have any feuds of their own. Since the community had its own rules and laws for such cases, the government could not do much by interfering. Upon his encounter with Dalip, the son of the woman who lived with his father, the Gurudeva, during his denunciation years, Singh chalks out a plan of revenge.

I thought of one word – Execution. It had occurred before. We were a small community and in a very deep sense we did not recognize the law of the desert island. Our code remained private and whole. Execution, then, on the hot sand on a Sunday morning. A family affair: It could be concealed: such things had been done before. A disappearance; a gutted body sinking to the bottom of the sea beyond the reach of a fisherman’s sieve (MM, 174).

Religious animosities, too, are prevalent in the East Indian societies that are depicted in Naipaul’s novels. The Hindus hate the Muslims and vice versa. The Hindus hate Christians and the Christians mistrust the Hindus. But with the passage of time, a marked difference is to be found in the younger generation’s attitude towards the varied religious groups existing in their society. While the older generation harbors extreme hatred for the members of other religious groups, the younger generation does not at all mind co-existing.

When Haq, ‘the Muslim fanatic’ (SE, 92) chances upon Foam and Nelly’s rendezvous, he reprimands the former saying, that he should be ashamed of going out with a kaffir woman. And Foam, who doesn’t mind
religious differences, protects Nelly by saying, 'You calling she kaffir? You make yourself out to be all this religious and all this Muslim and all this godly, and still you ain’t got no shame. Dog eat your shame. You is a dirty old maquereau, old man' (SE, 2-93).

Intense religious hatred can also be seen in the dialogue of Chittaranjan and Baksh regarding Nelly’s honour.

‘And look, eh, Goldsmith, Foam better than ten of Harbans sons, you hear. And too besides, you think I go instigate Foam to go around with your daughter? Don’t make me laugh, man. Your daughter? When it have five thousand Muslim girl prettier than she. But that ain’t the point.’

‘I glad it have five thousand Muslim girl prettier than she. But that ain’t the point’.

‘How it ain’t the point? Everybody know that Muslim girl prettier than Hindu girl. And Foam chasing your daughter. Ten to one, your daughters ain’t giving the poor boy a chance. Let me tell you, eh, every Hindu girl think they in paradise if they get a Muslim boy’.

‘What is Muslim?’ Chittaranjan asked, his smile frozen, his eyes unshining, his voice low and cutting. ‘Muslim is everything and Muslim is nothing’. He paused. ‘Even Negro is Muslim’.

That hurt Baksh. He stopped pacing about and looked at Chittaranjan. He looked at him hard and long...

...He [Chittaranjan] put on his hat again, lifted his left arm and pinched the loose skin just below the wrist. ‘This is pure blood. Every Hindu blood is pure blood. Nothing mix up with it. Is pure Aryan blood’.

Baksh snorted. ‘All-you is just a pack of kaffir, if you ask me’.
'Madinga!' Chittaranjan snapped back.

They traded racial insults in rising voices....

Chittaranjan pressed his hat more firmly on his head. 'I is not *staying* in your house'. He went through the brass-bed room to the stairs, saying, 'Smell. Smell the beef and all other nastiness they does cook in this house'. He marked the rhythm of his speech to his progress down the steps: 'A animal spend nine months in his mother belly. It born. The mother feed it. People feed it. It feed itself. It grow up. It come big. It come strong. Then they kill it. Why?' He was on the last, step. ‘To feed Baksh’ (SE, 119-120).

When the East Indian community is not busy establishing the differences within, it is engaged in retaining everything Indian; names, ritual, festivals, as best as possible. The Indians try to preserve institutions like arranged marriages and dowries also.

Sections of the society in each of the novels discussed in this chapter can be observed as adhering to the traditional Indian dress code, though with the passage of time this changes. Men like Ganesh's father in *The Mystic Masseur*; important people of small towns have visiting outfits which consists of *'dhoti, koortah, white cap, and an unfurled umbrella'* (MMr, 9). Chittaranjan in *The Suffrage of Elvira* shows an inclination for the western culture, and his visiting outfit consists of a white shirt, gaberdine trousers and a felt hat. Every Sunday before Ganesh picked up his studying the would change his western attire for 'good Hindu clothes' (MMr, 72) which consists of *'dhoti, vest and koortah'* (MMr, 72). Before every mystic session, Ganesh wore his Hindu dress so that he could make a proper impression on his clients as the true representative of India.

Ganesh's as well as Beharry's wives put veils on their head when they meet strangers. The *doolahin*, Pundit Dhaniram's daughter-in-law, also puts a
veil on her head when she meets others. And Mrs Chittaranjan ‘pulled her veil decorously over her forehead’ (SE, 146) when she took the fruit basket to Ramlogan’s. But modernization does have an impact on the dress of the Indians. Mrs Baksh wears a knee-length skirt, a dress far removed from what her religion instructs. Nelly Chittaranjan, a generation removed from these women, wears frocks. Even when the women give up wearing traditional dresses, they do so only at large functions so as to depict their association with India. When women gather to celebrate the Indian Republic Day, they wear sari with ‘light glinting on silk from Banaras’ (MM, 69).

The Hindu children have to undergo religious initiation at an early age whether they like it or not or whether they comprehend its meaning or not. So, in keeping with the tradition, Ganesh had to be made a ‘real brahmin’ (MMr, 11) as soon as he came home for his first holidays.

They shaved his head, gave him a little saffron bundle, and said, ‘All right, off you go now. Go to Benares and study’.

He took his staff and began walking away briskly from Fourways.

As arranged, Dookhie the shopkeeper ran after him, crying a little and begging in English, ‘No, boy. No. Don’t go away to Benarest to study’.

Ganesh kept on walking.

‘But what happen to the boy?’ people asked. ‘He taking thing really serious’.

Dookhie caught Ganesh by the shoulder and said, ‘Cut out this nonsense, man. Stop behaving stupid. You think I have all day to run after you? You think you really going to Benares? That is in India, you know, and this is Trinidad’ (MMr, 11).
From Dookhie’s statement above, it can be seen that the event of initiation is a sham in itself and is done so only for tradition’s sake, whereas it actually is considered a wastage of time.

The rituals associated with death in Hinduism have been elaborately described in The Mystic Masseur. It is treated as a wasted ritual; one that has lack of sentiments. The activities discussed with the final rites of Ganesh’s father seem to draw upon the decadence of old world values in the wake of modernization.

The funeral of Mr Ramsumair was indeed treated as a ceremony with the village illuminated brightly and people arriving by the throngs to Ganesh’s house. Excitement was in the air. ‘Fourways seemed to be waiting for the taxi and the moment people saw Ganesh sitting in the back they began to wail’ (MMr, 18). Superficial excitement had replaced the air of mourning. People reveled in the thought of attending a funeral ceremony. Ganesh could not recognize a number of the women who had come to attend. What he did know was that many of the women who wailed were not even related to his father. Ganesh’s father was laid in a coffin, an adaptation made by the Hindus, to the West Indian regulations. The cremation too, was more of a ceremony than a ritual of mourning.

Ganesh didn’t sleep that night and everything he did seemed unreal. Afterwards he remembered the solicitude of Ramlogan – and his daughter, remembered the sad songs of women lengthening out the night, then, in the early morning, the preparation for the cremation. He had to do many things, and he did without thought or question everything the pundit, his aunt, and Ramlogan asked him. He remembered having to walk around the body of his father, remembered applying the last caste-marks to the old man’s forehead, and doing many more things until it seemed that ritual had replaced grief (MMr, 20).
Even the mourning of Mr Cuffy in *The Suffrage of Elvira* is presented in a comic manner with people paying more attention to the conveniences associated with the ritual than the actual mourning and grief. Harban’s election committee, though arranging for the ‘wake’, takes away the seriousness of the whole grieving by making it a prop for gaining votes. Like the people of Fourways, the people of Elvira too, treat funerals as ceremonial occasions rather than situations of grief.

As decadence has already set into the society and its value systems, it can be seen from these novels that funerals are more and more used to discuss relevant mundane issues than to grieve for example, Ganesh’s aunt, The Great Belcher, discusses according to her, the highly relevant issue of Gowrie’s welfare and Narayan’s fraudulency at a certain Daulatram’s funeral.

So, when Mr Cuffy dies, it is no less than good news for Harbans’ election committee.

‘One Negro was bound to dead before elections. You in luck, Mr Harbans. Lorkhoor going away tonight. And tonight self you get a chance to start paying the Negroes *their* entrance fee’.

Harbans was too stupefied by his good fortune to react.


Chittaranjan remained poised. ‘Foam, take the van and run down to Chaguanas and get Tanwing to come up here with a nice coffin and a icebox and everything else. And telephone Radio Trinidad so they could have the news out at ten o’clock. You could make up the wordings yourself. Dhaniram, go home and get your daughter-in-law to make a lot of coffee and bring it back here’ (*SE*, 178).
The arrangements having been made, the people having been informed, Elvira gathered to pay their last respects to Mr Cuffy. Rum flowed and people lost all seriousness of attitude with it. The entire course of events taking place reflects the shamness of a ritual which had decayed and disintegrated.

People began to gather, solemn at first, but when the rum started to flow all was well. Harbans mingled with the mourners as though they were his guests, and everyone knew, and was grateful, that Harbans had taken all the expenses of the wake upon himself. Some of Mr Cuffy’s women disciples turned up in white dresses and hats, and sat in the drawing-room singing hymns. The men preferred to remain in the yard (SE, 181).

Like death, marriage has its own set of rituals that have to be adhered to. There is among these, also the stress of getting married at an early age. Though women are never spared, men are also required to face the grind at an early age. So, Suruj Mooma is pulled out of third standard in order to be married off. Leela too, like Shama in A House for Mr Biswas is married at a young age. The doolahin, Pundit Dhaniram’s daughter-in-law is a young bride, perhaps seventeen or eighteen years of age; but Nelly Chittaranjan who is expected to marry early also, is let off in pursuit of education. Early marriage does not befall women alone, men too, have the same to fear. Ganesh, like Biswas is expected to be married early.

The concept of men being expected to get married early is a carry over from the sub-continent. Marriage was on Biswas’ mother’s mind while he was very young Bipti considered Biswas’ marriage to be instrumental for satisfaction in her old age. She believed that, ‘she had only to see Mr Biswas married and her life’s work would be complete'. In the case of Ganesh in The Mystic Masseur, barely had he given the Cambridge School Certificate exam, than was placed upon him the order of getting married, by Mr Ramsumair, followed by the threat that ‘if Ganesh didn’t want to get married he must
consider himself an orphan' (MMr, 13). And Ganesh, being a rebel against society rituals, much like Biswas, 'decided to consider himself an orphan' (MMr, 13).

Marriages in this East Indian community are got into process by trapping the prospective groom and courting because of the shortage of people belonging to proper castes. Ganesh, educated and modern in outlook, and above all, of the proper caste draws the interest of Ramlogan, who is on the look out for a prospective groom for his daughter, Leela. As in A House for Mr Biswas, Ramlogan, like Mai and Seth, goes out of the way to make marriage attractive to Ganesh. He sends him small gifts on and off and makes small talk with him. He hatches plots to get Ganesh to meet Leela, and will devise all sorts of excuses for the same. 'It was an open secret in the village' (22, MMr). After all, Ganesh was the most eligible bachelor around.

Similarly, Chittaranjan looks to Harbans’ son as a prospective husband for Nelly, though he is not as smart in his appearance, as Nelly would have liked him to be. Even Ralph Singh agrees that he was an eligible bachelor by East Indian Trinidadian standards, and that his being ‘educated, degreed, travelled’ (MM, 55) rendered him a ‘catch’ (MM, 55) by all means; but his marriage to his English wife had dampened the desires of East Indian families of Isabella; and had heaped ridicule upon his mother by those families who had courted her because of their marriageable daughters.

Marriage to foreigners is considered a sort of crime, licensing the ostracisation of the culprit from the community. but with the passage of time, it gets accepted by the very society that shunned it. However, there are apprehensions involved as to the success of the marriage. Though Singh marries Sandra, he too is for sometime struck by the horror of the deed that he has done in marrying a ‘whitey-pokey’ (MM, 184). He is also apprehensive of
the outcome of the ‘dark romance of a mixed marriage’ (MM, 51), and wishes to escape as soon as ‘the awful deed was done’ (MM, 51).

The belief that marriage is for keeps also changes with the passage of time. Though Leela is unable to bear children, Ganesh does not leave her. But Ralph Singh and Sandra go their separate ways as they are unable to cope with the compromises required in their kind of an inter-racial marriage, thereby confirming the islanders’ belief that a ‘mixed marriage’ is never successful. And Singh does not regret having lost out in the marriage which goes on to show the change in the value system of the people.

Though a number of customs and rituals pertaining to marriage have become vestigeal, yet the people make a show of it for the sake of society, so that they are neither ostracized, nor looked down upon. At the same time, they modify it, and update it so that they fit into the modern scheme of things with the least bit of effort; while upholding the sanctity of the rituals imposed upon them by another country to which they are linked in an appendix like manner.

When Ganesh is to be finally married, both Ganesh and Ramlogan pretend that Ganesh had never seen Leela, ‘because they were both good Hindus and knew it was wrong for a man to see his wife before marriage’ (MMr, 37). The marriage itself is an amalgamation of old and new adopted customs. Leela’s marriage is modern and not traditional like her sister Soomintra’s. it can be said that by taking a modern approach to traditional ceremonies, people like Ramlogan and the Tulsis get away by marrying their daughters inexpensively. Also, it can be said that while adopting modern techniques, it is difficult for people to understand the reason for the adoption of different changes, but adopt they must, so they take liberties.

So he [Ramlogan] didn’t send the messenger around to give the saffron dyed rice to friends and relations and announce the wedding. ‘That old-fashion’, he said. He
wanted printed invitations on scalloped and gilt edged cards. 'And we must have nice wordings, sahib'.

'But you can’t have nice wordings on a thing like a invitation'.

'You is the educated man, sahib. You could think of some'.

'R.S.V.P?'

'What that mean?'

'It don’t mean nothing, but it nice to have it'.

'Let we have it then, man, sahib! You is a modern man, and too besides, it sound as pretty wordings' (MMr, 38).

Like Mrs Tulsi and Seth, Ramlogan too tries to talk Ganesh out of accepting a dowry, and Ganesh, like Biswas would have complied, had he not got a preview of Ramlogan’s shrewdness. As slyly as possible, Ramlogan tried to do away with the business of dowry, placing before Ganesh the excuse that it was a wasted tradition and should be done away with, whereas he actually wanted to relieve himself of the financial burden that giving a dowry would imply.

'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. When, the morning after the wedding the boy sit down and they give him a plate of kedgeree, with the girl father having to give money and keep on giving until the boy eat the kedgeree, 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 cha’acter and sensa values”?

‘Yes, sahib, the custom. But still I think is a disgrace in these modern times. Now, if it was I was getting married, I wouldn’t want any dowry and I woulda say, “To hell with the kedgeree, man” (MMr, 40).

But despite all this, Ganesh does manage to extract a sizeable dowry from Ramlogan.

The institution of marriage in the Indian system requires the women to be complacent and docile. So, just as Shama is supposed to be a dutiful wife like the rest of the Tulsi daughters, so are Leela, Suruj Mooma and the doolahin; but just like Mrs Tulsi and Tara, Mrs Baksh manages to exercise her equality while being a dutiful wife; and this is rare in the Indian marriage scheme depicted in these novels. Says Ganesh’s aunt, The Great Belcher:

‘These modern girls is hell self’, she said. ‘And from what I see and hear, this Leela is a modern girl. Anyway, you got to make the best of what is yours’.

She paused to belch. ‘All she want to make she straight as a arrow is a little blows every now and then’ (MMr, 46).

Wife beating is ethically approved of, in the East Indian community depicted in Naipaul’s novels. The bonding of a man and woman on the basis of this ritual of wife-beating is commonplace in Trinidad. It is believed to bring on a maturity and dignity into the marriage. A description of the first wife-beating session of Ganesh and Leela will serve as an example:

Leela continued to cry and Ganesh loosened his leather belt to beat her.

She cried out, ‘Oh God! Oh God! He go kill me today self’!
It was their first beating, a formal affair done without anger on Ganesh's part or resentment on Leela's; and although it formed no part of the marriage ceremony itself, it meant much to both of them. It meant that they had grown up and become independent. Ganesh had become a man; Leela a wife as privileged as any other big woman. Now she too would have tales to tell of her husband's beatings; and when she went home she would be able to look sad and sullen as every woman should (MMr, 49).

Wife beating is such a norm that it is readily accepted by both the partners in marriage as a vital organ of the marriage institution. And Leela is surprised when Ganesh does not beat her. Thus, drinking and beating one's wife is an accepted norm in the Fourways society.

The whole lot of women, and wives especially, are supposed to be a submissive lot in the Indian community of these novels. It is not expected by the menfolk that women will freely assert their views and opinions. And not only is this propagated by the men, but also by the entire set of elders. In The Mystic Masseur also, can be seen The Great Belcher's taunting approach towards Leela for being an ungrateful wife.

'Yes, Leela? I hearing right? Is how you does always talk about your husband, girl'? She nodded slowly...

'But, Leela who you is to ask your husband what he doing or what he ain’t doing? Oho! This is the thing they call ed-u-ca-tion' (MMr, 104)?

The doolahin, Dhaniram's daughter-in-law, though deserted by her husband, is expected to remain in her in-laws' house, less because she is considered a member of the house and more because she has to look after her in-laws and keep house. And when she elopes with Lorkhoor, Dhaniram is perturbed not because of the loss of honor but, as he says, 'Now it ain’t have
nobody to look after me or the old lady’ (SE, 187). Soon enough, she is forgotten when she is replaced by Dhaniram’s widowed sister, thus depicting the actual place of the women in the East Indian Trinidadian family set up.

But at the same time, violating the shackles of submissive role, Mrs Baksh displays her tantrums to Baksh, who is depicted as having a disinclination for subjugative behaviour. So Mrs Baksh can display her worst mood with him. When she discovers that it is Herbert who has brought in the dog, Tiger, she get angry, and when she learns that Baksh has been spreading the news of the acquired obeah, she picks up a fight with Baksh. ‘But you know you is a damn fool, Baksh’ (SE, 84), and Baksh quietly has to agree to this. Mrs Baksh is also strong-willed enough to control her children with a tone of inflexibility which extends over to Baksh as well.

Like Mrs Tulsi in A House for Mr Biswas, Mrs Baksh has more than just the domestic say in her family and like Mrs Tulsi, she keeps her children well informed of the ways in which she serves her matriarchal duties well enough for them to be called a well bred family, and how this should result in enhanced gratitude on their part.

Is just the sort of gratitude I getting from my own children, after all the pinching and scraping and saving I does do. And tell me, for who I pinching and scraping and saving? (SE, 60).

Even Leela, who was given the usual beating on and off asserts herself as a woman who can hold her own. Despite her conspiring, on and off, with her father to increase his fortune, she comes later, to share a better relationship with Ganesh, especially, when it is discovered that she cannot have children.

After a year it was clear that Leela couldn’t have children. He lost interest in her as a wife and stopped beating her. Leela took it well, but he expected no less of a good Hindu wife. She still looked after the house and in time became
an efficient housekeeper. She cared for the garden at the
back of the house and minded the cow. She never
complained. Soon she was ruler in the house. She could
order Ganesh about and he didn’t object. She gave him
advice and he listened. He began to consult her on nearly
everything. In time, though they would never had
admitted, they had grown to love each other (MMr, 63).

Educating a girl child is considered hazardous in a number of ways. It is
the notion of East Indian Trinidadians that an educated girl does not, in many
ways, respect her husband. So it is better to give them lesser education than the
menfolk. When Leela leaves Ganesh to go to live in her father’s house, Suruj
Mooma hints a number of times that education is responsible for such an
irresponsible act on the part of Leela: ‘That is the trouble giving education
these days, Leela spend too much of she time reading and writing and not
looking after she husband properly. I did talk to she about it, mark you’ (MMr,
80).

But everyone realizes the acute necessity of giving women education.
While Suruj Mooma laments that she was a better student and that age old
customs were given precedence over her intellectual capabilities, as a result of
which she was pulled out of school at a very young age. At the same time
Beharry hints that the Indian community could progress by letting their women
folk get educated.

‘The trouble with we Indians is that we educate the boys
and leave the girls to fend for theyself. So now it have you
more educated than Leela and me more educated than
Suruj Mooma. That is the real trouble’ (MMr, 80).

But with the passage of time, a change of sorts can be seen as regards
education. Nelly Chittaranjan is given education. She wastes away her first
opportunity to further her education and sees her doom in a loveless marriage.
She knows that she has to get married because it is her ‘own fault’ (SE, 89) that
she did not study well enough. But, marriage negotiations having failed, she gets a second opportunity to climb academically by joining the Regent Street Polytechnic in London even if her main interest lies solely in the dances held there. Liberal and modern as Chittaranjan was, he allowed her to go to London and reconciled with the idea. After joining the Polytechnic, Nelly ‘went to all the dances and enjoyed them. She sent home presents that Christmas, an umbrella for her father, and a set of four china birds for her mother. The birds flew on the wall next to the picture of Mahatma Gandhi and King George V. The umbrella became part of Chittaranjan visiting outfit’ (SE, 219-220). This shows that though Chittaranjan had earlier disapproved of Nelly’s education he had now reconciled to it.

Religion is a charming frivolity, and to be religious is a fascinating idea nothing beyond that. Though it cannot be said that the migrant Indians have given up their religious beliefs and rituals, it can, in more ways than one, be observed that strictness has gradually given way to shedding of sacred sanctions, by promotion of liberal views.

So, if in The Mystic Masseur, it can be seen that Ganesh’s Hindu sentiments are hurt at one end upon eating a cold egg-and-cress sandwich at Mr Stewart’s; he does not have qualms upon losing these very much Hindu instincts during times of anger. One such instance occurs when Leela, fed up of Ganesh’s being an unsuccessful nobody leaves him to go and live at her father’s house. Ganesh, upon discovering this, is blinded by rage but tries to make the best of the situation. ‘He went to the kitchen, picked up the jar, and mopped up the floor. Then he bathed, singing devotional songs with a certain fierceness. From time to time he stopped singing and cursed and sometimes he shouted, ‘Going to show she. Not going to write a single line’ (MMr, 79).

The Hindus in this distant land, far removed from the actual India, keeps alive their religion by keeping pictures of gods and goddesses in their homes.
The walls in Ganesh’s house are covered with religious quotations, in Hindi and English, and with Hindu religious pictures (MMr, 6). The picture given the most importance was that of Lakshmi, ‘a beautiful four-armed god standing in an open lotus’ (MMr, 6). Even Cecil’s father, Singh’s Nana, had religious pictures hanging on his walls.

But when it comes to actually observing religious practices, there is a lack of reverence. There is a lack of knowledge on the part of Singh regarding his relationship. When Deschampsneufs wants Singh to explain Hinduism to him, Singh cannot offer much. ‘These conversations were a strain’ (MM, 182).

Religious values get perverted with the passage of time. Disintegration sets in at a very rapid pace. And though people realize it and know it, they seldom do anything to prevent it, or revive what has been lost. Ganesh was a very clever man in that he exploited his religion to serve his money-making ventures, while at the same time, keeping the coveted title of pundit. His mysticism led him to establish a number of businesses which were instant hits. Though Ganesh, probably out of a sense of reverence, got himself a proper temple constructed by a British Guianese of Indian descent, he used it as a prop to earn more money. He charged a fee from the visitors to the temple, and took the American soldiers for a ‘tour’ of his temple, and benefited much.

Leela satisfied her Indian religious sentiments by painting her house in bright clashing colors. And yet it all seems that Hinduism is more to show off than to revere.

She commissioned one house-painter to do a series of red, red roses on the blue drawing-room wall. She had the British Guianese temple builder execute a number of statues and carvings which she scattered about in the most unlikely places. She had him build an ornate balustrade around the flat roof, and upon this he was later commissioned to erect two stone elephants, representing
the Hindu elephant god Ganesh. Ganesh thoroughly approved of Leela's decorations and designed the elephants himself (MMr, 144).

Finally, on the basis of his widespread popularity and reputation as a mystic of sorts, he decided to go into politics. He used his prayer meetings as platforms for fighting elections. For his campaign he held a number of prayer meetings in which he talked of religion and what not, while at the same time making a propaganda of his political aspirations. On the basis of this kind of propaganda, he managed to win the elections.

In doing so, that is, establishing himself both as a religious head and a politician at the same time, Ganesh justifies his name, which takes after the Lord Ganesh; the only difference being that Ganesh, the mystic has an insatiable appetite for fame; and for this, he uses his Indianness and his religion coupled with the little knowledge that he has gained of both to fool his clientele. No sooner did Ganesh enter politics than he totally gave up what remained of his mysticism.

It would be hard to say just when Ganesh stopped being a mystic. Even before he moved to Port of Spain he had become more and more absorbed in politics. He still dispelled one or two spirits; but he had already given up his practice when he sold the house in Feunte Grove to a jeweler from Bombay and bought a new one in the fashionable Port of Spain district of St. Clair. By that time he had stopped wearing dhoti and turban altogether' (MM, 199).

He even found references to his mystic career an embarrassment. So he pulled his autobiography out of the market and shut down his printing firm, 'Ganesh Publishing Company Limited' (MM, 201).

Blessing a new venture by performing the puja can be seen in The Mystic Masseur also. But at the same time, people involved in the ritual know
that the ceremony is not austere and have many modifications made to it. The Inaugral Meeting of the Hindu League was flagged off by a puja for which ‘Ganesh sat on orange cushions on a low platform below a carving of Hanuman, the monkey god. He recited a long Hindi prayer, then used a mango-leaf to sprinkle water from a brass jar over the meeting’ (MMr, 174). However even the youngest of the people present know that the water sprinkled is not the holy water from the Ganges in India. As time passes and reverences decrease, the gods are no longer invoked to bring prosperity and happiness. Ralph Singh in The Mimic Men holds a house blessing ceremony for removed from the same seen in A House for Mr Biswas. The house blessing that Singh hold had no puja; rather it was modern in all sense, with ample food and lights, ‘The discreet band’ (MM, 76) and a large number of guests, which made it a magnificent occasion.

Disintegration of orthodox Hindu values can be seen in The Mystic Masseur when Bissoon, the salesman, drinks water in the orthodox Hindu wary by pouring the water in the mouth while not letting the jar touch his lips, and Ganesh resents ‘the imputation that his jars were dirty’ (MMr, 97). But not only did Hinduism become unorthodox, it also got amalgamated with other religious and inculcated mixed values of sorts.

Ganesh, the mystic preached a mixture of religions to a society which was anyway confused and accepted everything as long as it was doled out on the platter of religion. In the room in which he treated his clients, there were other pictures in addition to the ones of Hindu origin. There were pictures with ‘a stabbed and bleeding heart, a putative likeness of Christ, two or three crosses, and other designs of dubious significance’ (MMr, 122). Also Ganesh was a religious cosmopolitan. ‘He was no bigot. He took as much interest in Christianity and Islam as in Hinduism. In the shrine, the old bed room, he had pictures of Mary and Jesus next to Krishna and Vishnu; a crescent and star represented iconoclastic Islam ‘All the same God’ (MMr, 128) was the
message that he wanted to give his followers. In his lectures he ‘borrowed from Buddhism and other religions and didn’t hesitate to say so’ (MMr, 149-150). And on account of this tolerant, multi-religious attitude of Ganesh Christians, Muslims and Hindus, ‘willing as ever to risk prayers to new gods’ (MMr, 128) liked him.

Like Ganesh’s society, Elvira too had a mixed one of sorts. All religions were followed and rituals observed in one way or the other by all the Elvirans, which gave the society a peculiar flavor of its own.

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 money-boxes and waited, as they said, for the money to breed. Everybody celebrated the Muslim festival of Hosein. In fact, when Elvira was done with religious festivals, there were few straight days left (SE, 69).

Elvira is full of characters with pseudo-original remnants of their own religion. Hindus and Muslim alike had deficient reverent values. It can’t be said what Dhaniram was more proud of, his Hindu background which was brahminical in nature or his missionary schooling where he procured hymns and other Christian values. ‘It make me see both sides’, he said; and although he was a Hindu priest, he often hummed hymns like ‘Jesus loves me, yes I know’ (SE, 50) and his favorite expression was ‘Armageddon!’ (SE, 50). And while being proud of his own sense of values and his various vices such as cigarette smoking, he could deliver a lecture on the down slide in values of the other Hindus around.
'In the old days', Dhaniram said talking about Nelly, and sounding Harbans father, 'you coulda trust a Hindu girl. Now everything getting modern and mix up. Look, Harichand tell me just the other day that he went to San Fernando and went to a club place up there and he see Indian girls' – Dhaniram had begun to whisper – 'he see Indian girls openly soli-citing.' He made the word rhyme with reciting 'Openly soli-citing, man' (SE, 135).

The Muslims too, are a lot with values that are far removed from the orthodox tenets of Islam. Baksh was a man who drank and yet he had the singular honor if being a Muslim leader. 'He wasn’t a good Muslim. He didn’t known all the injunctions of the Prophet and those he did know he broke. For instance, he was a great drinker... He had none of the dignity of a leader' (SE, 12). Haq, the other popular Muslim made people believe that he was orthodox and at the same time justified his drinking by saying that he was an old man. At the same time, his 'eyes flashed behind steel-rimmed spectacles when he spoke of infidels' (SE, 12) and he was quick to point out that Foam should be ashamed, as a Muslim, to go out with a 'kaffir woman' (SE, 92), Nelly.

The Bakshes, representatives of Muslim families depicted in The Suffrage of Elvira, are a lot peculiar unto themselves. Mrs Baksh wears a knee length skirt. The Bakshes name their children in a secular manner. They had girls named Carol and Zilla, in addition to boys whose names were 'Iqbal, Herbert, Rafiq and Charles. (It was a concession the Bakshes made to their environment: they chose alternate Christian and Muslim names for their children)' (SE, 21).

In keeping with the religions confusion prevalent in their community, the Bakshes too owned a Bible and made use of it to get hold of the truth. The 'Bible and key method' of catching a thief were very popular in Trinidad, and people of Elvira were no exception to this. Mrs Baksh used it to catch the
culprit who had brought the dog, Tiger into the house; like Chinta had used it to catch the thief in A House for Mr Biswas.

Mrs Baksh closed her eyes and opened the Bible at random. 'Ten die', she sighed. 'Ten die'. She put the key on the open Bible. 'Foam, take one end of the key'.

Foam held one end of the key on the tip of his middle finger and Mrs Baksh held the other end. The Bible hung over the key.

'If nobody ain't going to take back what they say', Mrs Baksh said, 'this is the only way to find out who bring the dog. All-you know what going to happen. If the Bible turn when I mention anybody name, we go know who bring the dog. Don't say I didn't warn you. Ready, Foam?'

Foam nodded.

Mrs Baksh said, 'By Saint Peter, by Saint Paul, Foam bring the dog'...

'By Saint Peter, by Saint Paul, Herbert ain't being no dog'.

The key turned. The Bible turned and fell. The key lay naked, its ends resting on the fingers of Foam and Mrs Baksh (SE, 65-66).

Children are no exception to the religions confusion that prevails all over Elvira. When Foam and Herbet go to bury Tiger's mother, 'Herbert trimmed a switch, broke it into two, peeled off the bark and tied the pieces into a cross' (SE, 124), which he put onto the grave, despite being a Muslim. To him the cross was merely a symbol of fascination and he did not even know as to why at all it was put onto the graves. Another classical example of the confusion prevailing in Elvira can be seen when people saw Tiger crossing the streets in Elvira. 'Christians, Hindus and Muslims crossed themselves. To make sure, some Hindus muttered Rama, Rama as well' (SE, 107).
In *The Mimic Men*, Ralph Singh’s father took on the role of Gurudeva, completed his own version of Hinduism with the yellow robe, *Asvamedha* and finally, *sanyas*. He even had his followers build a kind of shrine with ‘stones and shells and leaves and roots and his coconut’ (*MM*, 191) of which the coconut as a symbol appears ‘especially important’ (*MM*, 191). To his followers, he would give *darshans*, ‘a word with strong religious associations’ (*MM*, 191). But for all this new found devotion to Hinduism, he preached a confused religion with a confused message; a message that transcended the boundaries of religion onto the platform of political unrest. His teachings had shades of Christianity, but Singh insists that it was still a kind of Hinduism. ‘It was the Hindu mendicant’s robe that he wore in the hills; and for all the emblems and phrases of Christianity that he used, it was a type of Hinduism that he expounded, a mixture of acceptance and revolt, despair and action, a mixture of the mad and the logical’ (*MM*, 138).

But then, Singh himself has confused religious values. He believes that he has completed the ‘fourfold division of life prescribed by [his] Aryan ancestors’ (*MM*, 274). ‘I have been student, householder, and man of affairs, recluse’ (*MM*, 274). However, upon closer examination, it can be seen that he completed none of the roles of this division. Singh was never a good student; neither in his school days in Isabella, nor when he was in England. He was not a complete householder, as his marital life was overshadowed by dissatisfaction and infidelity, followed by separation. He could not be a successful man of affairs, as his poor political career gave him a life of exile. And as a recluse, he dreams of starting life afresh, instead of renouncing it. He is willing to exchange his life of exile for a life full of action, which, however, must be devoid of the frenzy of his early life. ‘It will be the action of a free man. What this action will be I cannot say. I used to think of journalism; sometimes I used to think of a job with the UN. But these were attractive only to a harassed man. I might go into business again. Or I might spend the next ten
years working on a history of the British Empire. I cannot say’ (MM, 274). And not only are his religious views confused, but Singh had an incestuous relationship with his cousin Sally, a serious crime in the Hindu family system.

Along with their confusions, the migrants particularly the East Indians, live out a love-hate relationship with their native lands. While they are very interested and fascinated by the history and mythical aspects of their native land, they increasingly dislike the influence of their past on their present lives.

Migrant culture dwells very much upon memories of the native land. So even when these migrant Indians do not want to go back to their native land, they make and dwell in their little Indias abroad. They are a curious kind of people, they dislike their Indianness yet they use it to establish their identity and get a secure political footage in their adopted land.

The Indians hate their Indian names and add or subtract from them thereby giving them the western touch; more so with the passage of time. So, it can be seen that while Mr Ramsumair is not ashamed of his Indianness and his Indian vocabulary, in which the word *gaddaha* features prominently, Ganesh hates everything Indian. But, though he can change his name, he cannot change his Indian habits and attitudes as easily. As an Indian country boy, he ‘still believed that reading by any light other than daylight was bad for the eyes’ (MMr, 11) so, by evening he had finished all that he had to study for the day. And towards the end of the novel, even when he finally changes to G. Ramsay Muir, and is so very particular about having it called right, he cannot get rid of his Indian look and his ‘nigrescent face’ (MMr, Epilogue). Beharry too has an Anglicized name and so does Nelly who is actually Nalini. Foam’s real name is Foreman, which is as peculiar as can be. People change their names to appear politically secular. Ganesh’s rival has the name Chandra Shekhar Narayan to use when he is with Indians and ‘Cyrus Stephen Narayan’ with ‘everybody
else' (MMr, 161). Similarly, Surujput Harbans in *The Suffrage of Elvira* is at the same time called Pat Harbans.

Ralph Singh had such an aversion to his Indian name that he built up a classical story around it. By doing so he believes that he can put his Indianness behind him, but he fails to realize that it is not just the name that classifies him as an Indian. Forever, the romantic Singh believes that if he adds and subtracts from his name, it would give it an air of extraordinariness as Deschampsneufs.

I broke Kripal Singh into two, correctly reviving an ancient fracture, as I felt; gave myself the further name of Ralph; and signed myself R.R.K. Singh... The name Ralph I chose for the sake of the initial, which was also that of my real name...

‘Ranjit is my secret name I said. ‘It is a custom among Hindus of certain caste. This secret name is my real name but it ought not to be used in public’...

... ‘The calling name is unimportant and can be taken in vain by anyone’ (MM, 100-101).

Cecil and Sally, Ralph’s cousins have their own borrowed English names.

The Indians in Trinidad believe that there is an image of their native land that they have to uphold, almost like flag-bearers. The irony here, however, lies in the fact that while doing so, they can, themselves, let go of this image whenever they desire.

‘Sahib, my people make me shame the way they does rob the man just because he have a lot of money’ (MMr, 27), Ramlogan says to Ganesh, whereas in his own businesses, Ramlogan deceives and cheats scrupulously. Upon Ganesh’s wearing a dhoti and koortah, Beharry remarks as to ‘why more Indian don’t keep on wearing their own dress’ (MMr, 113), but refrains from doing so himself. For Bissoon, Leela comments: ‘The man blight. Giving we
all that amount of big talk. Is the trouble with Indians in Trinidad. They does get conceited too quickly, you hear’ (MMr, 109-110). She later, herself ironically turns conceited when her husband becomes successful. If Soomintra can have a private accent where every other word has the suffix ‘sh’ attached to it, Leela, too, cultivates her own private version of the English language. She also bonds less with Suruj Mooma. The Great Belcher does not take too kindly to Narayan’s mode of operation. ‘Is the thing about Indians here. They hate to see another Indian get on’ (MMr, 141), whereas it is very much evident that it was intolerable for both Ganesh and his aunt to see Narayan progress. Ganesh’s very coming into politics and his attempts to become a leader of the Hindu Association is to downplay Narayan’s place in the society.

There was nothing to prevent Ganesh sending his own cables; but in India, where they didn’t know what was what in Trinidad, what chance would a cable signed GANESH PUNDIT MYSTIC have against one signed NARAYAN PRESIDENT HINDU ASSOCIATION TRINIDAD? (MMr, 154).

India is ever present in the subconscious of Indians – and Asiatics as such to look for moral support from their native background. Ganesh develops a habit of looking up everything related to India in the books that he buys. And India, is in more ways than one, very important to the Indian community in Trinidad. It is something to rely upon in times of moral or religious crisis. The rest of the time there is the rest of the world to look forward to for modern conveniences.

The Indian community as discussed in the earlier chapter are an enclosed lot. Despite the fact that Trinidad has its own system of government, the Indian villages keep alive the panchayat system which has a council of elders. Their feudal system is one which the Trinidadian government has no influence over.
When the Indians in Trinidad establish newspapers, they give them Indian names, so Narayan’s paper is called *The Hindu* and Ganesh calls his paper *The Dharma*; and they believe that a dedication to Mahatma Gandhi is the best thing, for the establishment of the standard of the paper. When they form political parties, they give them Indian names like the Hindu Association of Trinidad, and drape their meeting tables with the Indian tricolor. At the same time they try to stay abreast of Indian politics. In their political speeches, they refer to events happening in India. The characters in *The Mystic Masseur* are depicted as being deeply influenced by the Indian National Movement, which is evident from the speech that Narayan gives in which he heightens his political stature to that of the leaders of the Indian National Congress. ‘My friends, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru never wrangled with Shri Chakravarti Rajagopalacharya or with Shri Vallabhai Patel for the Presidency of the All-Indian National Congress. And so too, my friends, I have no desire to be the cause of dissatisfaction and dissension among the rank and file of Hindus in Trinidad today’ *(MMr, 184)*. In addition to this, Narayan sent cables ‘to Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Nehru and the All-India Congress; in addition to anniversary cables of all sorts: he noted centenaries, bicentenaries tercentenaries’ *(MMr, 154)*.

Interest in their native land leads them to read the literature of the country they are associated with, and this does not hold only for Indians, it is there for other Asiatics too. This is exemplified by Ralph Singh reading up his Aryan ancestry; and a classmate, of Chinese ancestry mixed with an ‘admixture of Syrian or European blood’ *(MMr, 102)* and ‘a tincture of African’ *(MM, 102)* reads up his ancestry. A number of Indians, Singh, most essentially among them, keep away from other migrant societies because of the belief that they are superior to them. Singh forever believes that he is the ‘intruder, the picturesque Asiatic born for other landscapes’ *(MM, 225)*, until his vision is lost in the grotesqueness of the *Asvamedha* performed by the Gurudeva.
When faced with the reality of the past coming to existence in the present, the Indians get shocked and wish it away. To Ralph Singh, his father performing the *Asvamedha* is a gross reminder of his past. He wills himself to forget it, he wills the people of the island to forget it; to forget its having any association with India, thereby maligning Singh's own repute; he wishes not to know his father on account of this, in fact he wishes the entire fact would fade away into oblivion.

The sacrifice of the race horse or the *Asvamedha* which symbolized the 'Aryan ritual of victory and overlordship' (MM, 152) on the one hand shows that no matter where a man adopts a new home and whether he is devout or not, he reverts to and adopts his original customs and rituals in adverse conditions. On the other hand it also shows that no matter how much one, in this case, Singh, fantasizes about the good old days of yore; on a conscious level he wants to flee the grotesqueness that raises its head, after all fantasies are only made of all the good things. Singh like all Indians does not want to identify with the grotesqueness. 'Asvamedha. Tainted oil, raw flesh. Chieftaincy among mountains and snow had been my innermost fantasy. Now, deeply, I felt betrayed and ridiculed' (MM, 153).

The west is what the Indians in Trinidad look forward to, for methods of earning money, for comforts in their lives and for values to maintain their modern life styles. And when one becomes ambitious and desires to achieve more, it is to the west he turns and not to India. So, Ganesh Pundit who has a huge fan following prefers to go to England, instead of India from where he draws inspiration for his mystical antics. The west is also where Ralph Singh heads for, in spite of the picturesque Asiatic landscapes that he fantasizes about.

The language of the Indian Trinidadians is an off-shoot of their Indian heritage, one thing that they cannot do without. As the people inhabiting the land are mainly indentured labourers or their off-springs, they stick to their
native language; and when they do speak English, they speak their own brand of it. This brand of English that they speak has a strong Indian influence in the midst of which they add odd words which are typical to their native Indian language. We find this in all the novels of Naipaul examining the East Indian community – The Mystic Masseur having the highest content of such influences and The Suffrage of Elvira, A House for Mr Biswas and The Mimic Men have lesser usage of the lexical structures of Indian languages.

The speech of every character is flavoured by the distinct Trinidad Indian English dialect used by migrant Indians which stands in anomaly to Standard British English.

In the sentences: ‘They think nothing of killing two three people before breakfast’ (MMr, 1); ‘But they was big books, big big books’ (MMr, 5); ‘Baksh you going to stand me witness that I tell you that this election beginning sweet sweet, but it going to end sour’ (SE, 63); ‘Marcus Aurelius – Aurelius’ Chinta said, retreating to the kitchen’ (HB, 233); ‘Look, look. He getting a punch’ (HB, 246); the use of words ‘two-three’; and the repetition of the words ‘big big’, ‘sweet sweet’, ‘Aurelius-Aurelius’ and ‘look, look’ can be traced to the interference of Hindi. Whereas the usage of words ‘do-teen’ for ‘two-three’ and ‘bara-bar’ for big big’ and ‘dekho dekho’ for ‘look-look’ is acceptable to the Hindi language, it is unacceptable in Standard British English, though duplicatives such as the ‘tick-tick’ of a watch do exist.

In the sentences ‘How much book I buy last week, Leela?’ (MMr, 5); ‘You know how much I does tell him not to read all the time’ (MMr, 5); ‘How much vote you giving me today?’ (SE, 48) ‘How much votes you control, Foam?’ (SE, 128), it can be seen here that ‘much’ is used in cases where ‘many’ should be used as well as where ‘much’ should be used. There is no straight-forward distinction between used countable and uncountable nouns.
This is plainly an influence of Hindi where the word ‘kitna’ is used in place of both ‘much’ and ‘many’.

There is also to be found a touch of the Indian language in the use of the word. ‘Eh’ in A House for Mr Biswas, The Mystic Masseur and The Suffrage of Elvira for example; ‘He talking brave, eh, Haq?’ (SE, 105) and ‘Sign, eh?’ (SE, 85); ‘Hari make that one up, eh?’ (HB, 162); ‘Praying to God, eh?’ (HB, 556); ‘Eh; eh you ain’t hear me calling you?’ (MMr, 3); ‘Eh, but is just like old times, eh, sahib?’ (MMr, 52).

There are certain other typical expressions used intact in the Trinidadian Indian’s speech. “Ar’e, what have we here?” (HB, 360); ‘Are bap!’ (HB, 536) are used when one is surprised. In ‘Man! Eh, manwa!’ (MMr, 3), ‘Ganeshwa’ (MMr, 41); the ‘wa’ suffix added to a word is typical of regional dialects used in the eastern parts of Uttar Pradesh and the state of Bihar in India. In The Mimic Men we see Singh’s father using ‘Aryan-waryan’ (MM, 111), this addition of the letter ‘w’ as a prefix to words is common in Hindi usage for example ‘chai-wai’; paisa-waisa’ and so on.

At other places in these novels Hindi words are used intact. For some words, Naipaul has given an English explanation for example, in The Mystic Masseur, it says: ‘“Jackass” was his [Mr Ramsumair’s] favourite word of abuse, perhaps because the Hindi word was so rich and expressive: gaddaha’ (MMr, 10), in A House for Mr Biswas, while discussing Biswas’ food, he mentions the presence of ‘lentils’ (HB, 132) whereas in The Mystic Masseur he has let lentils remain as ‘dal’ (MMr, 111). Also, he has explained that roti is ‘a dry unimaginative sort of pancake’ (SE, 60) in The Suffrage of Elvira, and that a ‘nara’ is a ‘simple stomach dislocation’ (MMr, 62). And though, in The Mimic Men, Naipaul has used the word sanyasi to describe the Gurudeva’s phase of life, he does not immediately give its meaning; but it becomes evident only towards the end of the novel, when Singh discusses his own disposition.
and mentions himself as a 'recluse' (MM, 274), which is what a sanyasi actually means.

At other places in these four novels, Naipaul has let the Hindi words be. So, men in Naipaul's novels wear dhoti, koortah and the women sometimes take to wearing saris. They do the puja and sometimes go in for the Kattha or bhagwat. They cook by the chulha and have roti, bhaji, dal, karhee to eat. They call women of brahmin caste as maharajin and men as baba and sahib. They have pundits and those who excel in this profession, like Ganesh, are also referred to as rishis. A leader like Gurudeva gives darshans to all and finally takes sanyas.

Singh calls his maternal grandfather Nana. The Tulsis call Mrs Tulsi as Mai. They call new brides as doolahin. They have their own panchayat system and when they are afflicted by sprits, they go in for a jharay session, where the spirit is beaten out of the body.

Hindi influence is also to be seen in the women referring to their husbands indirectly instead of by their names. This is seen in the use of the third person 'he', 'him' for the 'ye' in Hindi. The 'ye' is used to point out one's own husband. Leela calls her husband 'Man! Eh, manwa!' (MMr, 3) and defends Ganesh by saying 'He tell me so heself' (MMr, 75). When Chinta threatens Biswas, she says to Shama, 'I want you to ask your husband to stop provoking me. Otherwise I will just have to tell him', her husband, Govind, 'and you know what happened when he had a little falling-out with your husband' (HB, 234). When Mrs Chittaranjan, in The Suffrage of Elvira takes the fruits to Ramlogan, she says, 'he send it' (SE, 146) and 'He bring it from San Fernando' (SE, 146) – in this case, the 'he' referring to Chittaranjan. Also, instead of calling each other by their names, the people choose to call them as associates of a second person. For example, Beharry's wife calls her husband Suruj Poopa and he in turn calls her Suruj Mooma which again is influenced by
Hindi, where the former stands for Suruj’s father and the latter for Suruj’s mother. When Bissoon comes to Ganesh’s house in order to pick up the books he has to sell, he refers to Leela as ‘Ramlogan daughter’ (MMr, 96).

But despite all these Hindi influences in the English they speak, they have this desire to speak the English of the Englishman. So, even if Ganesh can write correct English and has ‘perfected his prose to a Victorian weightiness’ (MMr, 65), he is comfortable speaking only dialect, because speaking correct English requires effort. So, in keeping with his desire to be a perfect western mimic, he, one fine day, decides to speak correct English.

‘Leela, is high time we realize that we living in a British colony and we shouldn’t be shame to talk the people language good.’....

All right man’.

‘We starting now self, girl’.

‘As you say, man’.

‘Good. Let me see now. Ah, yes. Leela, have you lighted the fire? No, just gimme a chance. Is “lighted” or “lit”, girl?’

‘Look, ease me up, man. The smoke going in my eye’.

‘You ain’t paying attention, girl. You mean the smoke is going in your eye’ (MMr, 65-66).

In addition to this, he runs an unsussessful session with Beharry also, before giving it up.

‘Man, is a master idea, man! Is one of the troubles with Feunte Grove that it have nobody to talk good to. When we starting?

‘Now’.
Beharry nibbled and smiled nerously. ‘Nah, man, you got to give me time to think’.

Ganesh insisted.

‘All right then’, Beharry said resignedly. ‘Let we go’.

‘It is hot today’.

‘I see what you mean. It is very hot today.’…

‘The sky is blue and I cannot see any clouds in it. Eh, why you laughing now?’

‘Ganesh, you know you look damn funny’.

‘Well, you look damn funny yourself, come to that.’

‘No, what I mean is that it funny seeing you so, and hearing you talk so’ (MMr, 60).

Exasperated at the futility of the whole thing, he gives up the idea as quickly as it had come to him. ‘Girl, you just cook my food good, you hear, and talk good English only when I tell you’ (MMr, 66). However, this new adoption proved successful anyway, with his clients. ‘It was a strain for him to talk correctly and the woman noted, with obvious satisfaction, that he was moving his lips silently before every sentence, as though he were mumbling a prayer’ (MMr, 114).

Lorkhoor, the ‘village intellectual’ (SE, 73) of Elvira uses correct English most of the time but reverts to dialect when he is excited and angry. ‘Eh, Foreman!. You take up maquereauing now?’ (SE, 156); and even Biswas comes down to dialect, though he prefers correct English. ‘ “The next time your aunt Chinta open that big mouth” – he broke off, remembering grammar – “the next time she opens her big mouth” ’ (HB, 232), is what he says to Savi.
Like *A House for Mr Biswas*, the novels *The Mystic Masseur*, *The Suffrage of Elvira* and *The Mimic Men* also draw on the futility of the West Indian scenario; and the lack of progress of its people, unless they opt for a western value system because their native value system has been declared archaic and irrelevant to the modern situation.

There is no seriousness of profession in the society. People are forever looking for ways to earn quick money. Instead of working hard to achieve their goals, they look for professions that will earn them as much money as possible and as quickly. At the same time, they opt for professions that require as little experience and skill as possible. They have no qualms in taking up jobs such as massaging and dentistry whenever they fancy. And when the Americans arrive during the wars, they take up petty jobs with them which gets them easy money.

When Ganesh tells Beharry that he is setting up shop as a masseur, Beharry points out the excessive number of masseurs around, and how difficult it would be to find a foothold, thereby also highlighting the fact that anyone can enter any profession of his choice without being formally educated with regard to it.

‘These days nearly everybody you bouncing up is either massager or dentist’....

‘Last Christmas Suruj Mooma take up the children by their grandmooma and this boy just come up to she cool cool and say he taking up dentistry. You could imagine how Suruj Mooma was surprise. And the next thing we hear is that he borrow money to buy one of them dentist machine thing and he start pulling out people teeth, just like that. The boy killing people left and right, and still people going. Trinidad people is like that’ (*MMr*, 60-61).
In a society where there is no proper profession to follow and no proper means of achieving one's ambitions, people take up any and every profession they like, without prior training. So, Ramlogan suggests that Ganesh could take up massaging because his father was a masseur. Also, he believes all the 'learning learning' (MMr, 25) that Ganesh did in the town college is sufficient enough to establish him as a massager.

People in Trinidad, as reflected in Naipaul's novels, have very little by means of opportunities. So, they take up whatever they can to make their lives better. Many people come from families of labourers and they believe that the only way to break free from this bondage is to start small and work their way to the top as is exemplified by the case of Bissoon who was earlier in the grass-cutting gang but progressed enough to first give away hand bills and then selling 'kyalendars' (MMr, 98).

When war breaks out there is no better option than to take up jobs with the Americans. Left and right people began to take up all sorts of petty work with the Americans because they paid good money, and that too, in dollars. It was considered foolish at this time not to take up work with them. Even Leela prompts Ganesh to take up work with them. But unlike everybody, and like Biswas, he knew that the influx of the American money was not going to last forever. 'You looking at this from the wrong point of view. Your science of thought tell you that the war going to last for ever? And what go happen to Sookram and the other massagers when the Americans leave Trinidad' (MMr, 111)?

But Biswas had a stable job and everything to lose if he joined the Americans, because he did not have a background that would support him parasitically. Ganesh had no job, yet he was a shrewd man with an insatiable appetite for money and fame, and he could earn well without working under the Americans. When he was not earning, he was living off of the dowry provided
by his father-in-law. And even while he was earning soundly through his profession as a mystic, his desire for more led him to exploit the American influx by writing a guide on Trinidad, in which he described his temple as ‘a must see tourist destination’, the result of which was the huge number of American visitors from whom Ganesh charged fees for sight seeing. He also fed them in the slightly expensive restaurant that Leela ran; and profited hugely.

Had Ganesh not made efforts to paddle his own canoe in his own direction, he would have failed or at most, would have been like the ‘ten a penny’ (MMr, 1) masseurs in Trinidad. The Mimic Men, which covers a period much later to The Mystic Masseur and The Suffrage of Elvira, also highlights the lack of opportunities available for an individual to progress. Even when industrialization sets in, it is more of a sham rather than true industrialization; just namesake, as described in The Mimic Men:

We encouraged a local adventurer to tin local fruit. This was a failure. It hadn’t occurred to anyone concerned to find out whether local people wanted local fruit tinned; no one else did either. The same man went in later for tinning margarine and was a success. The margarine was imported, the tins were imported...Our margarine was slightly more expensive than imported tinned margarine, and had to be protected....

Industrialization, in territories like ours seems to be a process of filling imported tubes and tins with various imported substances. Whenever we went beyond this we were likely to get into trouble (MM, 235-236).

Just as the coming of the Americans provided the already laid-back Trinidadians the opportunities to earn money, so did the elections. The suffrage in Elvira can be taken as an example of one such instance, as Mrs Baksh said: ‘Everybody just washing their foot and jumping in this democracy business’.
So, there was Baksh who got himself a loudspeaker van. There was Foam who got himself paid for being Harbans’ campaign manager. There is Chittaranjan, who, though, not gaining anything materially got himself a prospective son-in-law. There are people like Harichand who will vote only when Harbans gets his posters printed in Harichand’s printing press. And there are people like Ramlogan who gain by giving out vouchers to the drinkers of Elvira.

The people of the Caribbean exist in such a state of limbo, that they look back to their heritage or to the west for modeling and moulding their present; from both kinds of attitudes, they gain nothing. From the past they get a reminder of their crude past and from the west they get a deep frustration of not having enough. The people are mimics. But more than mimicking the past, they mimic the west because that is where progress lies and that is ‘surely where life was to be found’ (HB, 540) as Mr Biswas believes. Trinidad is a ‘creeping nation’ as Foam remarks and the best its people can do is mimic.

The education system prevalent is highly useless, leaving the students with only half knowledge, the rest of which they have to strive to make heads and tails of; ‘Form not inform’ (MMr, 14) is the motto of the schools in the West Indies. The kind education given is of an irrelevant nature or so it seems. In his fourth standard, Singh has to write an application searching for a job, for which he remarks:

I know I am too young for employment, and I am bewildered. But no other boy is. I write: ‘Dear Sir, I humbly beg to apply for the vacant post of shipping clerk as advertised in this morning’s edition of Isabella Inquirer. I am in the fourth standard of the Isabella Boys’ school and I study English, Arithmetic, Reading, Spelling and Geography. I trust that my qualifications will be found suitable. School overs at three and I have to be home by half past four. I think I can get to work at half past three
but I will have to leave at four. I am nine years and seven months old. Trusting this application will receive your favourable attention, and assuming you at all times of my devoted service. I remain, my dear Sir, your very humble and obedient servant, R.R.K. Singh’ (MM, 98)

People of other descent, more than the Indians, realize the importance of education early on. Because they are more aware and realistic than the Indians in temperament, and know that education alone can open up doors for bright futures for the people of the island. That is why Browne and Deschampsneufs knew what to expect out of education, whereas Singh did not.

The trend of education in Trinidad, more-so for the Indians, but also valid for the other races, can be had by Ganesh’s observation in his autobiography:

If he had been born ten years earlier it is unlikely, if you take in to account the Trinidad Indians attitude to education at that time, that his father would have sent him to the Queen’s Royal College. He might have become a pundit, and a mediocre pundit. If he had been born ten years later his father would have sent him to American or Canada or England to get a profession – the Indian attitude to education had charged so completely – and Ganesh might have become an unsuccessful or a dangerous doctor (MMr, 193).

But it can be seen that a total change of thought has not been achieved as yet, even as the society progresses rapidly with time. Deschampsneufs wants to leave for Quebec so that he could take up painting, which was considered ‘effeminate in Isabella’ (MM, 155); whereas ‘in Quebec, which was French and marvelous, they would understand’ (MM, 153); this reason also exposing the scarred inside of a nation which has not yet broken free from the myth of El Dorado. Moreover, the society does not permit rational free thinking and such people dare, are condemned. Teacher Francis in The Suffrage of Elvira has
been damned for parading his agnosticism in a Port of Spain school. He had drawn a shapeless outline on the blackboard and asked his class, ‘Tell me, eh. That soul you does hear so much about, it look like that, or what?’ One boy had been outraged. The boy’s father complained to the Director of Education and Teacher Francis was dammed to Elvira’ (SE, 39) And just because Wendy Deschampsneufs is a very intelligent child’ (MM, 183) with a ‘high IQ’ (MM, 183) she has trouble getting into a normal school in Isabella.

So, be it for the Indians, or for any other race, education is a means of getting rid of the past – a poverty ridden past or the desire to get away from the second-hard world stigma. To achieve the latter, they go abroad.

Deschampsneufs and Nelly Chittaranjan go abroad for better futures. Singh makes an escape too; because he has early on, realized what Biswas realizes in his adulthood and Ganesh, in his maturity, that to go abroad is like achieving ‘a greatness beyond ambition’ (MMr, 12). It is a great thing that Indar Singh is a ‘Bachelor of Arts of Oxford University, London, England’ (MMr, 192). And this degree sets him apart from the rest of the people so much so that on his return he in referred to as the ‘pukka Englishman’ (MMr, 192). He completes this picture by wearing an Oxford blazer and a tie.

Even when they are not abroad, the education imparted in schools is so much influenced by the west, that the students’ imagination becomes westernized. The west has profound impact on the imagination of the west Indians so much so that Singh remembers giving an apple to his teacher, inspite of the lack of the presence of the apples on the island. He remarks: ‘We had no apples in Isabella. It must have been an orange; yet my memory insists on the apple. The editing is clearly at fauh, but the edited version is all I have’ (MM, 97). Even when he thinks of mundane activities, he thinks of them in terms of images provided by the west, which superimpose his own dull, drab land. So, in his mind’s eye, he can see his grandmother ‘leading her cow through a scene
of pure pastoral: calendar pictures of English gardens superimposed on our Isabellian villages of mud and grass: village lanes on cool mornings, the ditches green and grassy, the water crystal, the front gardens of thatched huts bright with delicate flowers of every hue' (MM, 95).

The westernized influence in the minds of the West Indians come as much from the extra-curricular activities they adopt for staying abreast of world events, as from the poor quality education imparted to them in their own institutions. Ganesh believes that anyone acquiring vast knowledge by himself through any means should be entitled to being called "a degreed man"... Is a thing I ain't approve of, you know: this modern method of education. Everybody start thinking is the little piece of paper that matter. It ain't that does make a man a B.A. Is how he does learn, how much he want to learn, and why he want to learn, is these things that does make a man a B.A.' (MMr, 90).

To be called a degreed man by these terms, many a Naipaulian protagonist takes to reading voraciously to stay in touch with the outside world. Biswas reads of foreign landscapes and adventures and experiments conducted by men who live in these far away land. Singh reads of picturesque Asiatic landscapes and warriors and heroes who dwell in them. Ganesh reads up everything from Hinduism to religious history, practical psychology, books on Hindu philosophy; Beharry has a curious collection of the ‘Napolean’s Book of Fate, a school edition of Eothen which had lost its covers, three imies of the Booker’s Drug Stores Almanac, the Gita and the Ramayana’ (MMr, 59). To complete the intellectual personality, Naipaul has endowed his protagonists with the art of writing. Biswas is a writer of short stories, besides being a journalist. Ralph Singh toys with the idea of penning down a voluminous book on the history of the British Empire, but settles upon an autobiography. Ganesh is the most prolific of all Naipaulian writers with a wide selection of subjects touched upon.
It can be seen from these novels that books occupy the fancy of many a Trinidadian. But for all their liking for books, the people treat books as any other decoration item, less to be read and more to be displayed as a sign of intellectualism, over the lesser privileged people belonging to small towns and villages. It is also used as a means of contact with the outer world. The Mystic Masseur reflects how books in this part of the world are picked and adopted by their cover value rather than their reading content. Men are believed to process intellectual capabilities by the number of books they keep. Suruj Mooma believes that her husband is more interested in reading than running a shop. Beharry is not happy ‘unless he reading four five book at the same time’ (MMr, 59), which are kept under his pillow; never mind that he hasn’t ‘read one book to the end yet’ (MMr, 59). Leela is forever marveling ‘at this husband of hers who read pages of print, chapters of print, why, whole big books’ (MMr, 73), never mind that he bought books keeping in mind their size only.

Whenever Beharry and Ganesh talk of books, they talk of the count of books and not their content. When he planned to buy books of Everyman Library, Ganesh said:

‘Nine hundred and thirty books. Every book about one inch thick, I suppose?

‘Make about seventy-seven feet’.

‘So with shelf on two walls you could find room for all’.

‘I prefer big books myself’, [says Beharry] (MMr, 68).

When Ganesh gives the count of his books to the narrator, he mentions the latest number of books he had bought.

‘Is my only vice’, Ganesh said: ‘Only vice. I don’t smoke. I don’t drink. But I must have my books. And, mark you,
every week I go to San Fernando to buy more, you know. How much books I buy last week, Leela?’

‘Only three, man’, she said. ‘But they was big books, big big books. Six to seven inches altogether’.

‘Seven inches’. Ganesh said.

‘Yes, seven inches’, Leela said (MMr, 5).

Nearly every Saturday, Ganesh went to San Fernando to buy ‘six inches’ (MMr, 129) of books which he read randomly.

Furthermore, Ganesh learns to appreciate books because of the quality of paper rather than the matter of the book. He was bedazzled ‘that paper could be so beautiful’ (MMr, 70) and have ‘so many of glorious smells’ (MMr, 70). Soon, he had become ‘a connoisseur of paper-smells’ (MMr, 71). From here, he also developed a passionate interest in the type of the book. So now, he could like and buy, and dislike and reject a book because of its type. He did not like Penguin books ‘because they were mostly printed in Times’ (MMr, 77) which appeared cheap to him. He rather preferred the works of Aldous Huxley which were in Fournier, and which he regarded as ‘the exclusive property of Mr Huxley’ (MMr, 77).

So much does the externals of a book matter that when Ganesh gets his very first book printed, he is disheartened to find that it had only ‘thirty small pages; and it was so thin nothing could be printed on the spine’ (MMr, 86). The next important thing in a books is the dedication. It doesn’t matter to whom a book is dedicated as long as it can draw curiosity by the fanciful use of words. Ganesh dedicates his first book to Beharrey because he is the one ‘who asked why’ (MMr, 84); but Ramlogan, Ganesh’s father-in-law does not like it and reminds him ‘And you mean, sahib, you mean you give the man the book rather than give it to your own father-in-law, the man who help you burn your father and everything? Was the least you could do for me, sahib. Who start you
off? Who give you the house in Feunte Grove? Who give you the money for the institute?’ (MMr, 91). Ganesh then, dedicates his autobiography to ‘Lord Stewart of Chicester/ Friend and Counsellor / Of Many Years’ (MMr, 31), who he has known for a very short time.

The writing of a book is solely for the purpose of earning money. But the books have to be simple, keeping in mind the readership in Trinidad says Beharry:

‘Look, Ganesh. You must always remember the sort of people it have in Trinidad. Every and anybody not educated up to your standard. Is your job and is my job to bring the people up, but we can’t rush them…

‘Yes. The people here just like children, you know, and you got to teach them like children’

‘A primer like?’…

‘Yes, man. That self’ (MMr, 83).

Even The Great Belcher advises Ganesh to write an Almanac or a Book on fate which will help rake in lots of money, as long as it hits the pulse of the Trinidadians. Keeping this in mind, Ganesh goes on to become the author of best sellers. None of these books were masterpieces, they simply sold well because of Ganesh’s popularity as a mystic.

When Ganesh first began selling his books, it was difficult, because people wanted them for free, because they had no value for education the books only had a decorative purpose. Therefore, people did not want to spend money to acquire them. Some others bought Ganesh’s books as charms. But ones Ganesh achieved fame, these very books sold like hot cakes. Even now people did not buy them for their reading value, and it did not have much that the people already did not know. In his first book, topics as the ones mentioned below were covered:
Question Number One. What is Hinduism? Answer: Hinduism is the religion of the Hindus.

Question Number Two. Why am I a Hindu? Answer: Because my parents and grandparents were Hindus (MMr, 97).

The desire to ape the west in matters other than education has its roots in the realization that the West Indies is 'backward to hell' (SE, 13) as Baksh puts it. Western influence is therefore a feel good factor for the Trinidadians. Any sort of connection at all with the west is looked upon as a matter of extreme greatness. Even being touched in little ways by the west is significant in itself. So, just as Biswas is happy to get exercises of one of those English correspondent courses from England, Ganesh too believes himself to be exclusively privileged to receive a letter from an American firm, and has the letter framed in 'passe-partout' (MMr, 64) and hangs it on his wall. In addition to this, the Trinidadians believe that America and England are the ultimate places to be in because they abound in greatness. Reflecting the feeling of his fellow countrymen, Beharry remarks: 'That America, boy, is the place to live in' (MMr, 67). And getting there is 'a greatness beyond ambition' (MMr, 12).

So while Ganesh uses his traditional Indian garb to draw the clients, he believes in using western gadgetry to increase his own comfort. Leela wants her house furnished with carpets, morris chairs, spring cushions; and Ganesh sets about fulfilling her desires by first getting a refrigerator and then setting up a modern toilet with a musical toilet paper rack which plays 'Yankee Doodle Dandy' (MMr, 145). Even people of Elvira, a part of Country Naparoni, 'the smallest most isolated and most neglected of the nine counties of Trinidad' (SE, 7) believe in being modern. In keeping with this passion for modernity Chittaranjan has a brightly painted house and Baksh can put up a 'Californian-style' (SE, 13) house whenever he wishes to. He keeps the designs from 'American magazines to show the sort of house he wanted' (SE, 13), but Trinidad could not afford to give such an opportunity to him. Ramlogan does everything possible with the Canadian Healing Oil except consume it orally.

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The Elvirans prefer western dresses instead of their traditional ones. Harichand will always knot the tie no matter how hot it is; just as the doctor at Cuffy’s funeral wears a Harris tweed jacket despite the heat to prevent his connection from England being severed. Even when politicians come to power, they put on their best suits to display themselves. For the Trinidad communities, the words of one of the acquaintances with whom Naipaul put up on one of his Indian sojourn holds true: ‘I am craze for foreign…. Just craze for foreign’.6

Mimicry is just not limited to aping the west, but its off-shoot can be seen in people who suddenly hit upon wealth and make it big. They begin harbouring a kind of revulsion to the kind of life they previously led; or even towards people who are in the station in which they themselves previously occupied. When Leela is not rich, she has to bear the torture of her sister flaunting her money. ‘Soomintra got plumper and looked richer, and it was a strain for Leela not to pay too much attention when Soomintra crooked her right aim and jangled her golden bracelets or when, with the licence of wealth, she complained she was tired and needed a holiday’ (MMr, 74).

But when Leela’s husband acquires money, it is Leela’s turn to flaunt hers in front of Suruj Mooma. She takes to wearing saris instead of skirts and shows off her money and richness to Suruj Mooma; and like her richer sister, begins, too, to complain of her tiredness and her need for a holiday. Suruj Mooma does not like this and complains to Beharry. And yet she claims that she is not jealous of Leela. However, when she comes into money, she and Leela become the best of friends. Money has befriended money. The two give each other advice on the latest available decoration items, furniture, facades for their homes and shops and discuss everything else under the run.

Mrs Baksh, for the small moment of glory and power granted her, has a mimic manner of her own to put up as do her daughters. in the motorcade meant to be a part of Harbans’ campaign, the Bakshes were given a car to
themselves Mrs Baksh dressed the young Bakshes in the best attire, with Carol and Zilla carrying ‘small paper fans from Hong Kong’ (SE, 189). When Herbert and Rafiq wave to poor children, Zilla remarks, ‘Herbert and Rafiq, stop low rating yourself’ (SE, 189). In The Mimic Men, Singh’s sisters imitated the rich Sally’s mannerisms and affectations. Even Singh’s mother had her own theory’ (MM, 134) about lower classes.

All in all Trinidad is the land of the confused. And according to Naipaul, the secret of the Trinidadians survival is mimicry. ‘The mimicry changes, the inner world remains constant’ (AD, 55). The younger generation too, feels stifled at the prospect of having nothing by way of progress in Trinidad. They hate their lands because of the little opportunity it provides. And Naipaul, through his mimic men, reflects the deepest and strangest forms of hatred possible in people coming from this unprospective land, which finds expression through the hatred his characters exhibits for their kith and kin.

At certain times, Singh wished everything he knew to be washed away; to be left all alone; he particularly had this fear that his house, old as it was in structure, could not withstand the ravages of the climate. After particularly rainy afternoons when he would return home he would be relieved to find his house intact; but at the same time, he could not keep down disappointment: ‘the disappointment of someone who had been denied the chance of making a fresh start, alone’ (MM, 165). Even Foam hated his situation. He hated ‘the stuffy dark shop, hated the eternal talking, which was all he was allowed to do, hated Elvira, at moments almost hated his family’ (SE, 41).

The people know that the only way to get rid of the delimited future is to go away to those faraway places that they admire so much. To do this they should have access to lots of money, or education which will give them scholarships; both of these, providing them opportunities of escape from this land and helping to wipe out their past. The move to the city, the mimicry of
the lives of the rich and affluent are just milestones which have to be crossed in the long journey to experiencing the outside world.

Not only does education suffer in the West Indies, but so does politics. The political scenario is extremely dismal. People do not know how to exercise their democratic rights. Anybody can become a leader of the people. He could be a liar and a ‘big mouther’ (SE, 12) like Baksh, or a cheater like Harbans who, for innumerable years, ‘had been able to persuade the chief engineer of County Naparoni to keep his hands off the Elvira roads’ (SE, 9). A leader could be ‘a businessman of God’ (MMr, 141) like Ganesh or a man like Narayan who slanders other’s reputations in his newspaper. A man like Singh can be expected to take up leadership just to carry on his father’s legacy.

There are no set methods for campaigning. Ganesh does his campaigning through a series of prayer meetings instead of proper election meetings. Ganesh uses slogans such as ‘GANESH WILL DO WHAT HE CAN, A VOTE FOR GANESH IS A VOTE FOR GOD; sometimes even plainer statements, GANESH WILL WIN AND GANESH IS A MAN OF GOOD AND GOD’ (MMr, 187). One of Ganesh’s other campaign gimmicks was the ‘Bhagwat, a seven-day prayer-meeting’ (MMr, 191), where between his talks on religion, he would enlighten people on how he too was contesting for elections.

Even in Elvira, the methods of campaigning adopted by the candidates is varied. Lorkhoor campaigns for the Preacher with the help of a loudspeaker van from where he gives extempore speeches; Foam does the same for Harbans. The Preacher’s personal mode of campaigning is’ walking about “quiet quiet and brisk brisk” from house to house. He ain’t stick up no posters or nothing’ (SE, 19). It did not take Ralph Singh much more than ‘Browne and [himself] and The Socialist, all together’ (MM, 207) to ‘put on end to the old order’ (MM, 207).
Though Ganesh’s elections were the first universal suffragate held in Trinidad, and the one mentioned in *The Suffrage of Elvira* depicts the second general election, it had made people many of the fact that much could be gained from the elections. People believed that the elections were another instrument meant to give power to the individual and the next best opportunity to earn money after the coming of the Americans. People do not know what to expect out of the elections. All they can think of is getting the maximum possible out of the candidate, as he needs th votes desperately.

During the suffrage in Elvira, everyone supporting Harbans expects to extract something or the other out of him, so much so that he realizes that no one was ‘fighting for’ him. All Elvira—Preacher, Lorkhoor, Baksh, Chittaranjan, Dhaniram and everybody else—all of them were fighting him’ (SE, 55).

Even the electoral process depicted in *The Suffrage of Elvira* is a satirical caricature of a second hand country fighting its own futility. To begin with, individual decisions are not what counts in the voting process here—the division in class, religion and race are used to create vote banks. These vote banks when created, are swayed into voting for a candidate who meets their requirements, irrespective of the fact whether the candidate in actually capable enough of handling the position he is contesting for.

People do not know who to vote for, so they will vote for anybody they are asked to vote for, provided they have been bribed correctly. People do not even know how to cast their votes and create frenzy at the polling stations—so unlettered they are in the ways of democracy. When voting day arrives, the citizens of Elvira have to be instructed in the art of making an X’ (SE, 195)

‘No, old man, they ain’t want tow X’. ‘Ah, maharajin, it ain’t a scorpion they want you to draw. Is a X. Look...’

‘No, man. They ain’t went you to vote for everybody. You just put your little X by the heart. Do your part, man’ ‘You
want to kill him or what? Not inside the heart, man' (SE, 195).

The election campaign in The Suffrage of Elvira has also been represented comically so as to depict the absence of seriousness of politics in Trinidad. All of Elvira has a gala time during the elections. The Preacher helps Hindus in various ways to win votes from them. Harbans, on the other hand, helps a number of Christians and Hindus to extract votes from them. In addition to this Harbans' election committee arranges a motorcade with a van carrying 'food – roti, dalpuri and curried goat' (SE, 190). Another van carried the beverages. Polling day arrives and everybody takes leave for the day. There is a food van meant actually 'to feed agents and other accredited representatives, but many other people were to benefit' (SE, 195) also.

Ordinary citizens of Elvira recognize the sorry state of politics. They know that it is not serious, but merely farcical. Mrs Baksh remarks: 'Everybody just washing their foot and jumping in this democracy business. But I promising you, for all the sweet it begin sweet, it going to end damn sour' (SE, 41). Dhaniram thinks that elections are a funny thing, and Teacher Francis, though broadminded enough, believes that democracy is 'another British tricks to demoralize the people' (SE, 89). the candidate Harbans himself says: This democracy is a strange thing. It does make the great poor and the poor great' (SE, 164).

The three novels studies in this chapter may be seen as a depiction of the stepwise progress in the career of a colonial politician. While Harban's story is that of a man who fights an election, wins it and is put into the Assembly; Ganesh story depicts how a man moves once he is inside politics. And Singh's political story depicts how a politician's career reaches a peak and then falls like a pack of cards.
Ganesh uses politics to get rid of past limitations to enter a world where he is the all powerful person. Harbans too uses politics to make the most of the power given him. As soon as Harbans is elected, he does not need Elvira anymore and leaves ‘intending never to return’ (SE, 205). Ganesh undergoes a metamorphosis too, forgets his colonial background, changes himself to G. Ramsay Muir, is offended when called Pundit Ganesh, and is well on the way to making the most of his political career. However the life of a colonial politician is short. Crunch time comes and he is ‘supplanted’ (MM, 6) by other politicians, ending up like Ralph Singh.

From the study of these novels we gather that colonial countries, harbouring people with colonial minds are made up of ‘mimic men’ who belong nowhere – men who are in transit. As Ralph Singh, just one of the many colonials who know their truth, puts it:

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 remainders of the corruption that came so quickly to the new’ (MM, 157).
References:


Chapter-4

Expatriates and Exiles
Expatriation and exile are two motifs that Naipaul has dealt with extensively in his work. By definition, as discussed earlier, the two are very distinct from each other; though only a very fine line can be drawn to identify when one turns into the other.

The greatest advantage that expatriation has over exile is that it is subject to personal choice and is invariably less traumatic. Exile, under all circumstances, is forced; the object of a given situation and not the result of freedom of choice. And therefore, exile, under all circumstances is painful and traumatic.

Expatriation is a matter of individual preference; and has a number of privileges associated with it: the first and foremost being the sense of freedom exercised by the expatriate with respect to his arrival and departure. There are other added benefits too. While the expatriate has renounced his native land, he is backed by a sense of security that arises from his having a national identity, as also the security of going back to it if all else fails. The good thing Naipaul notes about expatriation is that the expatriate has two places to inhabit: 'one place always made bearable by the prospect of departure for the other'.

Exile, on the other hand, according to Edward Said is 'a condition of pathos, anguish, severance and abandonment, a destructive and jealous state wherein the victims must endure circumstances that are felt to be provisional yet are often endlessly protracted'. Exiles, as discussed earlier are of a number of kinds. A few exile situations arise from political consequences; and a few arise because a person is motivated to choose exile over all else because there are no suitable options left. And though expatriates are fundamentally different from exiles, many a time, conditions arise that force an expatriate to adopt exile.
The works of Naipaul that have been taken up in this chapter are: the expatriate and exile themes in *The Mimic Men*, *Guerrillas*, *A Bend in the River*, *Half a Life*, *Magic Seeds*, *In a Free State*; the narrative, “The Crocodiles of Yamoussoukro” and excerpts from Naipaul’s journalism between 1967-1984. All these help shed light on expatriation and expatriate behaviour; and exile and exile behaviour.

The portions of *The Mimic Men* that have been dealt with in this chapter are those in which Ralph Singh is seen in London for the first time when he has come out to study; the second time, when he has come to London on political business; and the third time, when he comes there to a self-imposed exile. Each trip to London gives him a different perspective of his own life.

*Guerrillas* is a fictional account of the life of Michael Abdul Malik, a man who became a ‘black Power “leader”, underground black “poet”, black “writer” ’ (Wr, 142) after fourteen years of life in England, portrayed by Jimmy Ahmad. The two other significant characters in the novel are Peter Roche, a white South African, and Jane, his English lover. Peter opts for the Caribbean with the illusion that his book on his torture and imprisonment in South Africa would be well known, and the belief that he could help the island people. But he becomes disillusioned during the course of his stay, having realized that the book is totally unknown in this part of the world. And not only this, but his firm, Sablich, has had a checkered history because of its association with slave trade. Jane has her own preconceived ideas about Roche and his work and the island. But then she too becomes disenchanted with it all. The novel ends with the murder of Jane, and return of Roche to England.

The other and perhaps more important perspective that the novel covers is the uncertainties of expatriate life as experienced by the transitory expatriates on the Ridge, a suburb exclusively for them. All the white expatriates are rootless and insecure, and panic at every report of guerrilla
activity that reaches them. They all wish to return to England or to go some place where they will find security and are constantly competing with each other to achieve this.

A Bend in the River, an African novel of Naipaul, deals once again with the expatriate sensibility. It depicts the life of Salim; a man who is an Indian by descent but not an Indian, a Muslim but not an Arab, an African but not an African native. Cut off from each group with which he is associated, he has discovered his solitariness early on in life, particularly when his friend, Indar, teaches him that it would be fruitful if he lets go of the past and moves on:

We have to learn to trample on the past... it shouldn’t be a cause for tears, because it isn’t just true for you and me... Everywhere else men are in movement, the world is in movement, and the past can only cause pain.  

So, while the rest of the world moves out of Africa, Salim moves inland to ‘the back of beyond’ (BR, 128) to take over his friend Nazruddin’s shop, all because he feels that, he will be successful like Nazruddin. Moreover, he believe that like the Africans, he can feel the difference between ‘the world of the day and the world of the night’ (WR, 296):

In day light, though, you could believe in that vision of the future. You could imagine the land being made ordinary, fit for men like yourself. . .

But at night, if you were on the river, it was another thing. You felt the land taking you back to something that was familiar, something you had known at some time but had forgotten or ignored, but which was always there (BR, 9-10).

Moreover, Salim felt: ‘In the deepest forest was the greatest security’ (BR, 10), and this gave him the will to view his presence in this part of Africa
in a positive light. In town, Salim interacts, with expatriates and a few Indian families who had cut themselves off from their own communities in their own ways. He also meets the expatriates in the Domain, a residential compound exclusive of the town.

The white expatriates in this novel, and in fact, all expatriates are like the ones in Guerrillas, hounded by insecurity due to guerrilla activities of rebel Africans. They are preoccupied with the thought of leaving as it increasingly becomes difficult to adjust. All the expatriates, be they in the town or the Domain are unable to exert themselves fully, either in terms of intellectual growth or in terms of security. They are all strugglers and amidst the raging political strife, they try to hold on to life. And when unable to do so, they look forward to leave, like the Belgian secretary in Father Huisman’s lycée. Father Huisman, a dedicated teacher, is killed and all his love for Africa, and whatever ideals he stood for end with him.

In the town, Salim buys a house from a Belgian lady who, after trying to compromise with her African situation, has left. When things get from bad to worse, people, including the ones in the Domain think of leaving. They go to South Africa, and Salim too goes to London to hunt for future prospects and a better life, both in terms of prosperity and security.

Half a Life is another of Naipaul’s novels that deal with Africa as a subject; but it principally deals with the journey, through life, of Willie Chandran, an Indian who leaves India at the age of twenty to pursue studies in England. At the end of his college term, when Willie has not yet found a profession and a foothold in London, he tries writing a book of short stories to sustain himself. In due course, he meets Ana, an African expatriate; and when his book does not help him find fame and career, he leaves for Africa with Ana for an easy life, as he presumes. In Africa, he has not much to do, but he continues to live there for a long time doing nothing; socializing with people
who are not originally African, but are living there and cannot wait to get away to the bigger, more real world, because life in Africa is full of insipidity and insecurity. At the end of eighteen years, Willie realizes that he has been 'hiding for too long', not living a complete life. He then leaves his wife, Ana, and goes back, not to India, but to Germany, where his sister is.

_Magic Seeds_ picks up where _Half a Life_ ends. Willie Chandran, back in Germany, is as aimless as ever. He is undecided about his further course in life and his philosophies. He is then encouraged by his sister, Sarojini, to join an underground movement in India run by a revolutionary she admires, Kandapalli Seetaramiah. The revolution is devoted to the lower class, and Willie begins to look forward to joining it. But things get messed up in the beginning itself and he ends up joining a rival faction. Though he instantly realizes that he has made some mistake and has come to the 'wrong revolution', he does not make an attempt to correct anything.

After staying in it for seven long years, Willie realizes that the revolution he was a part of had nothing to do with the ideals it advocated. The revolutionaries were successful in establishing their hold only over helpless villagers who lived in villages far away from government reach. But their success was limited, they could never hope to make waves in the long term. Moreover, the philosophy of the revolution was unclear. Success was not measured in terms of constructive achievements, but destructive activities.

Willie remained aimless through all these years; his life was boring and his work was merely that of a courier delivering messages here and there. Finally, he found an opportunity to escape, but that too was masterminded by another tired revolutionary, Einstein. Abstracted as ever, Willie 'confused the idea of surrender with the idea of amnesty' (_MgS_, 152) and was surprised and annoyed at the same time with the pronouncement of a ten year jail sentence.
It is Willie’s sister who manages to dole him out of this situation, but the solution is a permanent exile back in England. In London, he moves in with his friend, Roger, deciding to take things as they come, and not attempting to shape them any further.

_In a Free State_ begins and ends with extracts from a journal of Naipaul himself; and has three stories in the middle, each dealing with a different aspect and outcome of expatriation.

The Prologue, “The Tramp at Piraeus”, is an extract from a journal discussing Naipaul’s own experience on a Greek steamer from Piraeus to Alexandria. On board the ship were Egyptian Greeks who had been expelled from their homelands, and were returning for a brief visit. There were Egyptian students returning from Germany; and a number of other neutral people ‘travelling only for the sights’. Among them was also an English tramp who claimed to be ‘a citizen of the world’ (FS, 30). Owing to the disturbance and inconvenience he created for his fellow travelers, he was victimized by them.

The Prologue, by appearance, like the tramp, seems to have little to do with the stories present in the collection. But an analysis of each gives the conclusion that each one of the stories has a victim like the tramp, who, though claiming to have an experience of the world is unable to defend himself and is forced to take refuge by locking himself in a cabin.

“One out of Many” is the story of a domestic, Santosh, who is one out of the many of his kind in the city, yet he is contented with his life working for a diplomat, because it is better, in all respects, than his earlier life in the village where he would have to restart work as a porter if his employer, the diplomat leaves for Washington on official assignment. He begs to accompany his employer, to America. Once there, he decides that he can be an independent person, all on his own, so he escapes; only to become an illegal migrant, one of the many of this kind, who remain in hiding, with constant fear of being
jailed and deported. Ultimately, he decides to become a citizen by marrying a ‘hubshi’ (FS, 52), and becomes one out of the many who follow the same course to legalize their status.

“Tell Me Who to Kill” is the story of two brothers who have come to England from the West Indies. Dayo is there to study; while Dayo’s brother, the narrator, has made it the sole purpose of his life to take care of his younger sibling. The overpowering attachment of the narrator to his brother, and his subsequent betrayal by marrying a white; the narrator’s slogging, day and night in a factory to pay his debts; and his disillusionment with his life resulting from the agony of living in an alien, ‘enemy’ (FS, 98) environment, which to him, England is, drives him to the point of hysteria.

In “In a Free State” the entire action takes place during the drive from the capital of a newly independent African country to the Southern Collectorate, an area four hundred miles away. The two characters involved are English expatriates. Bobby works as ‘an administrative officer’ (FS, 99) in the Collectorate and had gone to the capital to attend a seminar on African community development which had ‘more English participants than African’ (FS, 99). Linda, ‘one of the ‘compound wives’ (FS, 106) is given a lift by him and together the two drive back to the Collectorate. Bobby and Linda are linked to each other by the fact that they are both escaping from their mediocre English lives: Linda from the typical middle class English life, and Bobby from being referred to as ‘ “one of Arthur’s young queers” ’ (FS, 152) by his psychiatrist’s wife. The drive is an eye opener of sorts for both. It makes Linda realize that she should step up her preparations in the white exodus to South Africa. And Bobby, who believed that Africa had given him freedom and an identity, and who was happy with his transplantation into this alien culture, is simply shocked to be viciously attacked by the soldiers of rebellion.
Like the tramp in the Prologue, Bobby becomes a victim of senseless brutality and has his hand fractured. The distressing realization, 'the knowledge that what had been whole all his life had been broken' (FS, 233), added to the insolent behavior of his houseboy, which actually is his version of response to the political temper of his tribe, makes Bobby unconsciously acknowledge that Africa only offered illusions of safety and security; but did not provide it realistically. So, he decides to fire his houseboy which will secure a little safe ground for him before he too leaves with the other expatriates.

Other than these novels, references for this chapter have also been taken from Naipaul's articles; "Michael X and the Black Power Killings in Trinidad", which discusses the life of Michael de Freitas or Michael Abdul Malik, a Black Power leader, and prototype for Jimmy Ahmad, the protagonist in Guerrillas; "Jacques Soustelle and the Decline of the West" which discusses the exile of Soustelle who was dismissed from de Gaulle's cabinet and the Gaullist UNR Party in 1960. His action in favor of Algeria caused him to be blamed for attempting on the authority of the State. Exiled from 1961-1968, he returned to politics after he was granted a pardon. The third article discussed, in this chapter is "The Crocodiles of Yamossoukro" which analyzes expatriate life on the Ivory Coast. Naipaul's views in this narrative are built upon the various interviews and conversations he had with expatriates there, who gave the illusion that the Ivory Coast was 'France in Africa' (Wr, 232), although it actually is a place where 'France and Africa would still be like separate ideas' (Wr, 232). "The Corpse At the Iron Gate" was written by Naipaul in 1972. In this, Naipaul discusses the exile of Juan Pefon who became the Argentine President in 1946. Because of an anti-clerical campaign that he led, Pefon was exiled in 1955. He fled to Paraguay first and then to Spain in 1966. He was recalled to Argentina after seventeen years.

Discussing his own expatriation from Trinidad, Naipaul says:
Because in 1950 in London I was at the beginning of that great movement of peoples that was to take place in the second half of the twentieth century.... This was a movement between all the continents.... Cities like London were to change. They were to cease being more or less national cities, they were to become cities of the world, modern-day Romes, establishing the pattern of what great cities should be, in the eyes of islanders like myself and people even more remote in language and culture.

By discussing the character of London, Naipaul, at once, also justifies the desires of his characters from the third world to escape their native lives and settle in London, even though they themselves know very little of the city. Ralph Singh of the *Mimic Men*, Willie Chandran in *Half a Life*, Salim of *A Bend in the River*, and Dayo, the narrator's brother in the story, "Tell Me Who to Kill", all decide to go to London because they believe it to be the centre of the world.

Expatriation along with the reasons given above, also includes the desire to escape to landscapes which are different from one's own. The move of Europeans such as Peter Roche and Jane in *Guerrillas*, and Sandra in *The Mimic Men* to exotic islands is an example of this kind. Sometimes an expatriate opts for expatriation to a second country after not being satisfied with his primary expatriation. Arlette and Andrée, expatriates Naipaul met in the Ivory Coast, moved to France from their respective West Indian islands before moving on to the Ivory Coast. Among expatriates are to be found a few who opt for exile because they begin to believe that in exile lies the best option.

Expatriation is the result of a number of causes. The primary cause identified is the desire to leave one's native land because of the realization that life abroad is better: it may be for economic, social or even political reasons. A large number of people worldwide migrate for the purpose of attaining material
satisfaction. In “The Air-conditioned Bubble: The Republican in Dallas” written in August, 1984, Naipaul observes that a large number of Indians migrate to the United States for this very purpose:

Indians immigrated to the U.S.A. to pursue their “dream”: achieve fully their potentials in this land of “opportunities”. They came in pursuit of their dreams, visions, happiness and to achieve excellence (Wr, 441).

Naipaul also believes that one of the other reasons that makes expatriation desirable is ‘attraction’ for a particular kind of life style, something that goes beyond the need for just education and the acquiring of skills. In the same light can be viewed the expatriation of the Iranian physician Naipaul got acquainted with on board the plane to Tehran in August, 1979. The rich people of insecure developing economies, and businessmen from Arab, South American, West Indian and African countries believe that the United States is a safe haven for them: ‘a sanctuary’ (AB, 21) in terms of economic well-being.

Expatriation has become such a widely accepted phenomenon that a lot of effort is put into the research of suitable places and means of expatriation, so that in many cases it appears to be tailor-made to fit the requirement of the applying candidate. In Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey, Naipaul observes the phenomenon of expatriation in Pakistan:

The business was organized. Like accountants studying tax laws, the manpower-export experts of Pakistan studied the world’s immigration laws and competitively gambled with their emigrant battalions: visitor’s visas overstayable here (most European countries), dependants shippable there (England), student’s visas convertible there (Canada and the United States), political asylum to be asked for there (Austria and West Berlin), still no visas needed here, just below the Arctic Circle (Finland). They went by the planeload...
Abroad the emigrants threw themselves on the mercies of civil liberties organizations. They sought the protection of the laws of the countries where the planes had brought them. They or their representatives spoke correct words about the difference between poor countries and rich, South and North. They spoke of the crime of racial discrimination and the brotherhood of man. They appealed to the ideals of the alien civilizations whose virtue they denied at home (AB, 96).

People from politically disturbed countries opt for expatriation due to reasons of personal security. At the time when Naipaul was visiting Argentina in 1977, he observed that people of Argentina wished to leave the country because of the rampant political instability there. He noted that the people of Buenos Aires were a ‘shocked and damaged people’ (Wr, 393) who believed that flight was their only means of survival in a land rendered unfit for living due to military regimes, guerrilla warfare and barbarism. Cultural degeneration of a country that otherwise had a labeled ‘history of glory: of a war of independence with heroes, of European expansion, wealth, civilization’ (Wr, 394) was what made Argentines want to escape the land.

There are some people who seek expatriation because they have, in some way or the other, become misfits in their own society. A Pakistani woman officer, whose sect was declared as non-Muslim by the Pakistani government, who met Naipaul in Karachi in 1979, explained that she was giving her children an English education because it would help them get jobs in foreign countries. Similarly, a newspaper editor, Mr Jaffrey, an Indian, Naipaul met in Tehran during the same time said that he had sought to leave India because he was told that ‘that as a Muslim he had no future in the Indian Air Force’ (AB, 32). So he went to Pakistan where he had further trouble due to his Shiite faith, which made him come to Iran, after having spent ten years there.
In Naipaul’s fiction, it is always the lack of something in their respective countries that makes the third-world characters seek expatriation. In The Mimic Men, Ralph Singh learnt at a young age that Isabella was ‘an obscure New World transplantation, second hand and barbarous’. At the same time he was made to understand, at the school-going age that ‘the first requisite for happiness was to be born in a famous city’ (MM, 127). In addition to this, he was influenced, to a great extent, by his teachers who had been to the great lands he read about and was fascinated by. All these reasons compounded into a desire to go to England to receive higher education.

Willie Chandran, of Half a Life wanted to go abroad, influenced by his mission school teachers, who were far removed from the caste practices of his country. He came to harbor the belief that abroad he wouldn’t have to face the kind of discrimination that his parents, particularly his mother faced, coming from a lower class. The reading of American comic books gave him the idea of far flung lives and the notions of easiness in them. And finally, at the age of twenty, he, ‘only with the fantasies of the Hollywood films of the thirties and forties that he had seen at the mission school, went to London’ (HL, 51).

A similar vision of London is shared by the narrator of “Tell Me Who to Kill”. The shortcomings of his native West Indian land, the limited future that his landscape offers its people, makes the narrator believe that the west offers a lot in this respect. The narrator who has also not had the privilege of being sent to the city to receive education, believes that his brother, Dayo, has acquired a lot from city life: the use of polished language and good dressing; and therefore, should, by all respects, be sent to England to receive higher education.

It, therefore, can be concluded that the shortcomings of one’s native land are the major and root cause of expatriation. And this is not to be found only in fiction. Naipaul confirms this fact through the article, “Michael X and the
Black Power Killings in Trinidad”, which appeared in 1979, which explains the fact that it was his tormented childhood on the island of Trinidad, that made Michael de Freitas or Michael Abdul Malik see London as a haven, and decide to leave. Jimmy Ahmad, the fictional version of Malik, in the novel Guerrillas, too, had sought London to escape his limited island background. Salim of A Bend in the River too decides to leave Africa after his business venture fails owing to guerrilla activities.

While it is the desire to leave the poverty and squalor, and economic and political conditions that prompt a third world native to seek expatriation, it is the desire to move out of the restricted, piquant social lives, ‘the anguish of London’ (MM, 58) and ‘the life reduced to insipidity (MM, 58) that makes the European want to settle in exotic lands.

For the want of such a change in life, Sandra is ready to marry the exotic Singh and travel to Isabella. In “In a Free State” too, we see Bobby and Linda who have come out to Africa because they could not make it financially, socially or physically in England, which for them is nevertheless, always home. Bobby came out to Africa looking for an easy life, which would give him perpetually less opportunity to exert himself ‘fully as a human being’ (FS, 158), as he desired after his ‘breakdown’ (FS, 151) during his time in Oxford. Linda had come out with her husband, ‘an old radio man’ (FS,122), who was reduced at the BBC to merely ‘putting out rubbish’ (FS,122) and hopes to do better in Africa as a neo-colonist. A similar desire is harbored by Raymond, ‘the Big Man’s white man’ (BR,145) in A Bend in the River who fantasized himself to be of as great an importance as the Roman historian, Theodor Mommsen. It is his sheer good luck to be chosen as the President’s chronicler. But realizing that life in Africa is ‘fluid’ (BR, 222), he has to be constantly on the look out for newer vistas, like Linda’s husband, Martin, who keeps sending out ‘feelers here and there’ (FS, 123).
As English expatriate, Philip, who Naipaul met in the Ivory Coast had come out to Africa for reasons of pure pleasure; ‘for the sun and the easy life’ (Wr, 270). Philip told Naipaul that there were people whom he knew who came to Africa for as many reasons as possible. While some came on missionary purpose, some came ‘to get away from personal distress, emotional entanglements’ (Wr, 270).

Peter Roche of Guerrillas, after his South African adventure decides that his next adventure ground should be the Caribbeans. Jane, the Englishwoman, who decides to follow Peter to the West Indies, does so because she wants to find drama and stimulus that is lacking in her London society. To her the new nations offer excitement; a new order. She believes that these islands have become the centre of the world from where all actions emanate.

Hakim Jamal and Gale Benson, the prototypes of Peter and Jane, left their respective countries to live in the commune established by Michael Abdul Malik because they believed that it would be worthwhile for them to invest in the island’s black cause.

In addition to these, Naipaul has also discussed those expatriates who want to be in a win-win situation always. They pursue expatriation just to be on the winning side of the turn of events, because they do not want to be losers. Living in a native third world country is one such situation that has to be gotten rid of immediately. Indar of A Bend in the River is such a kind of person:

I’m tired of being on the losing side. I don’t want to pass. I know exactly who I am and where I stand in the world. But now I want to win and win and win (BR, 180).

Nazruddin, Salim’s family friend, too is such a kind of person. Long before the people of Salim’s coastal area realize that life on the coast is no longer prolific, he had gone into the interior of Africa. When the situation in the interior
become bad, he moved to Uganda and then onto Canada. It is solely his foresightedness that helps him detect plausible winning solutions; and it is this very foresightedness which makes him finally settle in London, where he continues to enterprise.

The expatriates that Naipaul meets in the Ivory Coast discussed in “The Crocodiles of Yamossoukro” are also of this kind, though they are not typically like Nazruddin. The expatriates of West Indian origin like Arlette, the Martinique expatriate, who worked in an arts department of the University in Abidjan, and her friend, Andrée from Guadeloupe, did not consider the West Indies as home; they, rather, considered themselves as French, which was their first expatriation experience; and kept away from West Indians, who according to Arlette were ‘small-minded people’ (Wr, 293), with very small ambitions and no drive to excel. Similarly, Janet, whose Guyanese family had settled in England, spoke of being ‘from England’ (Wr, 269).

There are other places in his work where Naipaul has spoken of those people who have been forced into expatriation owing to dire political circumstances. Refugee movement is one such kind of expatriation. In such situations, it may be possible to return but no fixed immediate time can be appointed to it; though, in the long run, it is highly possible that such an expatriate would want to return to his native place. Dr. Keita, whom Naipaul met in the Ivory Coast, had been forced into such a kind of expatriation along with his family. The cause was the terrorist activities in Guinea in 1964, where ‘people like himself, professional men, educated men, men of the cheferie, were being picked up and killed “like cattle”, locked in cells and left to die, without food or water: the famous “black diet” of Guinea’ (Wr, 278-279).

Having discussed the kind of expatriates to be found in Naipaul’s work, it would be easier now, to identify typical expatriate behaviour.
The man who moves out of the third world country to the west has a preconceived notion of the west, which he believes he should see when he lands there. More often than not, he expects to be dazzled by the ways of the metropolitan world.

Singh comes to England believing that he will find everything his teachers spoke about, and which he consequently fantasized witnessing, like being stuck ‘in Liege in a traffic jam’ (MM, 157), or skiing ‘on the snow slopes of the Laurentians’ (MM, 157). To Ralph Singh, life first appears charming because everything is new and different as compared to the ‘drabness of his own background’ (MM, 78). At first he is preoccupied with the business of settling down. His first cultural shock is in the form of the silent cremation of his boarding house owner, Mr Shylock, in contrast to the ‘enlivened’ (MM, 4) the Isabella afternoons. At this time in life Singh tries to search for, and identify his dreamland of ‘ideal landscapes’ (MM, 9).

Willie too, had thought of London as a ‘fairyland of splendour and dazzle’ (HL, 52) since childhood. But upon arriving, it is difficult for him to perceive London. The Buckingham Palace and the Speaker’s Corner did not appeal to him as they had in the mission-school books. In addition to this he had a number of shocks both on the campus and off it. He knew about names of places and personalities without knowing what they really stood for. He had ‘no idea of the scale of things, no idea of historical time or even of distance’ (HL, 58).

Santosh, the protagonist of “One Out of Many” receives a cultural shock on a larger scale than Singh or Willie, probably because he was a domestic, and ignorant to an extent. His journey of ordeal begins as soon as he lands at the airport at Bombay. He finds it difficult to assert his individuality and identity. The outbound journey of Santosh is like an anecdote, but it really
must be looked upon as a tragic realization of the reality of a complex world, a world far removed from Santosh's.

The docile Santosh has to board the aircraft with a multitude of bundles because the airport authorities ‘made a fuss’ (FS, 18). There was no one on board who was like him in appearance and he began to feel out of place immediately; a feeling that lasts for the rest of his life. He grows frantic at the thought of not being able to spit out his ‘betel-nut mixture’ (FS, 18). Having drunk Champagne from the trolley of drinks, out of sheer ignorance, he feels thoroughly sick. Vomiting all over his bundles, and squatting in the lavatory to overcome his urgent needs, he wishes ‘the plane would crash’ (FS, 19).

‘Nightmare’ (FS, 19), is how he labels the series of landings and takeoffs and transits; the question answer session related to his loot of ‘the little packets of pepper and salt, the sweets, the envelopes, with scented napkins, the toy tubes of mustard’ (FS, 20). Once he touches down in Washington, he is shocked to see the ‘wild race’ (FS, 21) of the ‘hubshi’ (FS, 21). He was already feeling ‘forever enclosed, forever in the hissing, hissing sound of air-conditioners’ (FS, 21). On the very first day, deciding to go out for a breath of fresh air, he gets lost in the building itself and drives himself to near hysteria.

The narrator of “Tell Me Who to Kill” finds London a ‘mystery land’ (FS, 75) and feels alienated immediately. He manages to settle down and find a job; but the whole exercise appears to be mechanical, and he comes to harbour the belief that it is not actually his life; that he ‘throw that away’ (FS, 76).

Salim, the protagonist of A Bend in the River chooses to leave because he finds his life on the east coast of Africa, among his Indian community, a sham of sorts. He believed that if he continued to stay on, he would lead a languid life like his family and ancestors. Like his friend, Indar, he begins to believe that the challenge brought about by the upheaval in Africa is like a ‘tide of history’ (BR, 22) which would wash everything away, eventually
wiping them all out. And Salim no longer wants to ‘submit to fate’ (BR, 22) like his ancestors.

But, while everybody is going abroad and leaving the country, Salim believes that he will strike gold if he goes in the opposite direction. So, he goes inland to start a business which he buys from Nazruddin. Salim’s perceptions and expectations from his new place are no different from that of an expatriate’s. Though, being warned of the fact that the town did not have much to offer, Salim, nevertheless expected it to sustain him.

Meanwhile, Salim’s friend Indar, left for England for even more obscure reasons. He believed, like so many others, including Willie Chandran, that England would, after education, give him a ready life and a tailor-made profession:

The word “university” dazzled me, and I was innocent enough to believe that after my time in the university some wonderful life would be waiting for me (BR, 165).

When things go from bad to worse in Salim’s town, he decides to head for metropolitan London. London, to Salim is a dreamland, a land of which he has forever fantasized. He had grown up to believe that Europe played a major role in asserting the identity of a person. He also believed, like Sarojini, Willie’s sister, that it was the Europeans who had actually given the Asians the idea of identity. His decision to leave is confirmed by his belief that he would be seeing ‘the Europe of great cities, great stores, great buildings, great universities’ (BR, 269).

However, Salim is not like the other characters who go to England on the spur of impulse. He knows that London was a place where he had to find a new identity, his old one in Africa, nearly wiped out. It was a place where he had come to take refuge, like others, because Africa could no longer help
sustain him. He was there in London like the millions, who came to find work and live because it offered more than their respective native countries did.

Salim's friend Nazruddin, explains also that a number of expatriates have symbiotic relationships with the places they have chosen for expatriation. Arabs, he believes, have such a kind of relationship with Europeans. The Europeans need oil, and the Arabs want their goods and property; and at the same time, safe places to keep their money, because Arabian countries do not themselves offer this kind of a security to them.

Naipaul's mouthpiece in this novel, Nazruddin, also explains that economic security is what people from economically unprivileged countries look for when they choose expatriation, and this is a widely accepted phenomenon.

All over the world money is in flight... Koreans, Filipinos, people from Hong Kong and Taiwan, South Africans, Italians, Greeks, South Americans, Argentines, Colombians, Venezuelans, Bolivians, a lot of black people who've cleaned out places you've never heard of, Chinese from everywhere. All of them are on the run.... You mustn't think it's only Africa people are running from (BR, 214).

Expectations apart, the difficulty arises in the settlement of the expatriate to his new surroundings. The greatest of efforts is required to make changes in the expatriate's own personality so as to suit the environment in which one finds oneself.

Lieni, the Maltese immigrant, the caretaker of the boarding house where Singh had put up in his student days, always tried to portray herself as 'the smart London girl' (MM, 10) in keeping with the theme of mimicry. She even helps Singh create an image of the dandified colonial to suit the London
scenario and impress people around him; especially the island boys to whom status was of a ‘significant’ (MM, 19) matter.

Other than Lieni, Singh interacts with numerous other immigrants, all of who have come to London to fulfill their dreams. The christening party of Lieni’s child brings together various typical immigrants with characteristic features for example, ‘the Frenchman from Morocco who worked all day in his room, kept to Moroccan temperature with a paraffin stove’ (MM, 13). All of these are two-dimensional people who have come to London to seek the metropolis which always eludes them. For these people, the only means of contact with London had earlier been the BBC radio service of England, the ‘voice of metropolitan authority and romance, bringing to mind images, from the cinema and magazines, of canyons of concrete, brick and glass, motorcars in streams, lines of lights, busyness, crowded theatre foyers, the world where everything was possible’ (MM, 47) as Singh remarks.

In a London where Singh gets tired of the same trips, the same sights, the same buildings with the same names, he feels lost, and as quickly, disordered and disoriented. He had escaped his island thinking that he would find ‘the beginning of order’ (MM, 17). Moving from place to place, seeking new sights and new experiences, as far as the European mainland, he found that ‘none charmed him, and the restlessness remained’ (MM, 30). Ultimately, he goes back to using the symbol of shipwreck to describe his situation in London, as he once did to describe his situation in Isabella.

Willie Chandran of Half a Life had to learn and adopt new mannerisms and attitudes. And he too, like Singh, created an image of himself which would impress people; a false identity, a distorted version of his background. He sought to ‘re-make himself and his past and his ancestry’ (HL, 60) so as not to be a misfit. He mixes with colonials because they have backgrounds similar to him. And initially, he finds this bohemian life quite attractive.
It was a little world on its own. The immigrants, from the Caribbean, and then the white colonies of Africa, and then Asia, had just arrived. They were still new and exotic; and there were English people – both high and low, with a taste for social adventure, a wish from time to time to break out of England (HL, 72).

Part of his training from life was to become aware of people who would want to relieve him of his money and be aware of people with dual identities like Percy, a college friend he makes. With time, he began to get a feel of things around him. He no longer thought that the Bohemian parties that he attended with Percy and his, girlfriend, June, ‘seemed metropolitan and dazzling’ (HL, 111).

In “One Out of Many”, though there are no dire circumstances or desires which compel Santosh to go to Washington, there is the fear of his becoming, once again, a non-entity of the hills to which he belonged. Once his departure was assured, he was pleased to see the expression of jealousy among his friends on the pavement. And though, he is initially frightened and does not like the closed environment he has to put up with in his employer’s apartment, he is overjoyed to have an entire pantry to himself instead of the small cupboard he had in Bombay.

In “Tell Me Who to Kill”, though the narrator is uncomfortable with his loneliness and his inability to adjust, he begins to adapt to the sights and sounds of London. And this makes him temporarily forget his difficult island life. The most satisfactory moments are those that he spent with his brother, Dayo, in his basement room. To him, his island life seems to be ‘far away, like another life’ (FS, 78). And then, there are other things that he begins to like about metropolitan life. He likes the working environment in his factory and its regulations and the regular pay. And saving money helps him feel ‘safe’ (FS, 80), ‘strong’ (FS, 81) and secure.
Money gives the narrator a new high. He wants more and more of it, something he could not think of in his native land. Work becomes an obsession with him. He takes a secret pleasure in working hard. And he feels that ‘because the money make me strong I can put up with anything’ (FS, 81). And earning money makes him feel that he has fulfilled his ambitions keeping in mind his island’s standards: ‘Life in London! This was what people say at home, to mean everything nice’ (FS, 81).

Salim of *A Bend in the River* set up shop at the bend upon the river believing that the forest offered a security of sorts. He is charmed by the simple African life but living it out with them is an altogether different task. Adjustment to African life is demanding and he has to constantly put up with people such as Ferdinand who are excruciatingly demanding and believe that it is their right to do so, since they are the natives, and he the visitor. There are also other expatriates who live exasperating lives like Salim, always in fear; and then, there are the Europeans who play the subdued role of colonized colonizers under the authority of the Big Man.

Expectations give way to adjustments and adjustments make a person realize that expatriation is taxing. The expatriate is forever comparing and contrasting his new landscape with the older, native one. As Rushdie says, sometimes expatriates ‘straddle between two cultures’ while at times they ‘fall between two stools’. The attraction of the newness of the landscape appeals to the expatriate psyche as much as the familiarity and intimacy of his native life. But there always remains the struggle between the whole-hearted acceptance of either.

Singh’s escape from the chaos of Isabella and his enchantment with London soon goes sour.

In the great city, so solid in its light, which gave colour even to unrendered concrete – to me as colourless as
rotting wooden fences and new corrugated iron roofs – in this solid city life was two-dimensional (MM, 18).

The crowd, the noise, the traffic makes Singh think of the quiet life in Isabella. He then draws a comparison between his native land and the great metropolis he is in:

No cocoa trees! No orange-and-yellow immortelle flowers! No woodland springs running over white sand in which dead golden leaves and fresh red flowers have become embedded! No morning rides (MM, 35)!

Despair and disillusionment with metropolitan life is not to be found only in Naipaulian protagonists. Several diasporic writers bring this theme into their writing. To take an example, Bharti Mukherjee’s protagonist, Tara, in A Tiger’s Daughter too, sways between the reminiscences of her life in Calcutta, and her metropolitan life in New York:

How much simpler to trust the city’s police inspector and play tennis with him on Saturdays. How humane to accompany a friend editor to watch riots in town.¹¹

In New York, on the other hand, she is intimidated by what she sees:

New York...had been exotic... there were policemen with dogs prowling the underground tunnels.... The only pollution she had been warned against in Calcutta had been caste pollution, New York was extraordinary, and it had driven her to despair.¹²

In the same manner, Singh contrasts the simplicities of his island life with the complexities of city life. It is then that Singh draws a conclusion which befits the excogitation of all the expatriates being studied in this chapter:

All landscapes eventually turn to land, the gold of the imagination to the lead of the reality (MM, 9).
The beginning of Santosh’s story, “One Out of Many”, also helps to draw a difference between what is expected of the expatriate experience and what actually is acquired:

I am now an American citizen and I live in Washington, capital of the world. Many people, both here and in India, will feel that I have done well. But (FS, 15).

The ‘But’ shows that contrary to common perception, Santosh is standing on the other side of the predicament. The ‘But’ is the situation in which he himself is; and with the use of this word, Santosh tries to quell the very general illusion that everyone who settles in America, which has the ‘capital of the world’ (FS, 15) has been given a special boon.

Going to an exotic country does shock people. And not only are Naipaul’s protagonists recipients of cultural shock, but also his interviewees, on the various journeys he makes, who claim to have received their share of cultural shock. Shafi, the Malaysian youth exchange worker who went to the United States on a cultural exchange programme recounted to Naipaul how he had been shaken by his American experience. The programme organizers arranged his boarding with an African because they both came from underdeveloped nations. Shafi could not eat all kinds of food the organizers provided because, being a Muslim, he was forbidden by religion to consume any and every kind of food, cooked in any and every manner. He could not pursue the kind of leisure activities he was expected to. Recounting his experiences, Shafi said:

I felt that most of the experience I am going to face in America is not my – culture, is something foreign to me, that things there – whatever is yes in America is no to us in Malaysia, and whatever is no in America with us is yes (AB, 242).
From day one itself, Santosh too began comparing and contrasting his experience of Washington with his life in Bombay. Having the habit of walking about barefoot across town, he does the same in Washington only to be rejected service at one cafe’ with a reprimand: ‘We don’t serve hippies or bare feet here’ (FS, 24). He is first enchanted, and then immediately repelled to see the ‘half-caste appearance’ (FS, 25) and ‘bad Sanskrit pronunciation’ (FS, 25) of a group of bearded, barefooted men in saffron and girls in saris who were ‘chanting Sanskrit words in praise of Lord Krishna’ (FS, 25). He feels instantly, for them, ‘the sort of distaste we feel when we are faced with something that should be kin but turns out not to be, turns out to be degraded, like a deformed man, or like a leper, who from a distance looks whole’ (FS, 25).

After his initial day out, when Santosh had wasted his meager allowance on coffee, cake and movie, he tries to believe that he is a ‘prisoner’ (FS, 26) of circumstances. He does not like going out of the apartment, which any way never felt ‘real’ (FS, 26) to him, unlike his Bombay chambers. His only outings were the trips to the supermarket. He took to watching a lot of TV to improve his English; and this led him to think, that the Americans on the streets were ‘people temporarily absent from television’ (FS, 28). He was afraid of the hubshi; they took an interest in his ‘weed’ (FS, 28) and he, in turn, thought of them as ‘people of the open air, with little to do’ (FS, 27). And he is mortified of the hubshi maid in the apartment above who begins taking interest in him:

It is written in our books, both holy and not so holy, that it is indecent and wrong for a man of our blood to embrace the hubshi woman. To be dishonoured in this life, to be born a cat or a monkey or a hubshi in the next (FS, 29)!

While Santosh constantly makes efforts to adjust to changes in his life, he remembers his life in Bombay, and his friends, who were people like him: people of the pavement who ‘read newspapers, played cards, told stories and
smoked' (FS, 15) with him. He remembers his morning walks beside the sea, ‘The sudden ocean dazzle, the moist salt breeze’ (FS, 16). In moments of loneliness and crisis, he can only turn to the bronze gods in the living room. And when the inevitable ‘adventure’ (FS, 33) with the hubshi takes place; feeling shocked and tainted, he decides to do penance by ‘rolling about naked on the floor of the bathroom and the sitting-room and howling’ (FS, 33). He then draped a dhoti length cloth and ‘lit incense sticks, sat down cross-legged on the floor and tried to meditate and become still’ (FS, 34). He even considered fasting. All these reactions and actions are a part of the training which he received from his Indian culture, which he has not let go even after coming to an alien cultural environment.

As time goes by, it slowly dawns on Santosh that he can venture out from his employer’s shadow. He sells his ‘weed’ (FS, 28) and with the money obtained, he buys a green suit for which he has no use; but it is all a part of his assumption that he is now ready to be his own man, and not stay as merely ‘a small part of his [employer’s] presence’ (FS, 31). After his adventure he realizes that he is no longer the same man he was in Bombay. He has been given the idea that he looks appealing despite his presentation. The discovery of his good looks sends him into introspection of his ragged outlook and appearance, his place in the society and his needs: ‘the apartment, my cupboard, the television set, my employer, the walk to the supermarket, the hubshi woman’ (FS, 30). And as his awareness to exert his own presence increases, he feels that he no longer wants to return to Bombay. He is glad to meet Priya, the restaurant owner, because he reminds him of his friends back in Bombay with whom he exchanged stories and philosophies.

Deciding that he likes Priya because he likes ‘the mystery of the man’ (FS, 40), Santosh decides to take up the offer of employment from him. He now strongly realizes that he can, now, never become ‘part of some one else’ presence again’ (FS, 36), and so he chooses to escape. He begins working
illegally in Priya’s restaurant after having bargained with him to pay him double his previous salary. He has a nice, big room to himself. But there is a constant fear that lurks. He is stuck among a number of immigrant waiters whose main concerns are to get ‘green cards’ (FS, 41). Santosh, too, realizes that without a green card, he is lost, illegal. This makes him go into hiding. He is afraid to meet other people, he is afraid to go out, and he detaches himself from active life.

To add to his woes, his former employer parcels him the green suit which Santosh had left behind; this now makes him realize the seriousness of his actions. He also realizes that not only has he succeeded in asserting himself, but in the course of it, he has been discarded at the same time:

I hadn’t escaped; I had never been free. I had been abandoned. I was like nothing, I had made myself nothing. 
And I couldn’t turn back (FS, 48).

He now realizes full circle that he is alone, that there is nobody to stop him from doing what he wants, that he is a ‘free man’ (FS, 50). But he has the constant fear of being ‘denounced, seized, jailed, deported, disgraced’ (FS, 41).

The acknowledgement ‘I was a free man; I had lost my freedom’ (FS, 43) speaks of the plight of Santosh. Even when he has begun to earn quite a good amount of money, he realizes that he cannot do much with it, save buy clothes, but then he has not much need of them. He has the freedom he desired, but when he ventures out, he has the fear of being picked up by the police, yet he cannot will himself to go back to the life he earlier had.

Unlike Santosh, the narrator of “Tell Me Who to Kill” does not have an appreciation for his native land or the memories it offers. He is not rooted in an original culture like Santosh, but from a hybrid East Indian community of the West Indies. He has no memories of his cultural background and those he does
have, he does not want to hold onto. Yet he constantly compares his new environment with his older one.

And since his earlier environment does not have much to offer by way of positives, he tends to believe that England has given him much more. He likes it that in England he can comprehend the meaning of freedom of existence. When he works in the factory, he feels, 'you lower nobody; nobody mock you' (FS, 79), unlike way back on his island 'where people treat you rough and generally get on as though work is a crime and punishment' (FS, 79). But when he throws up his factory job in favor of establishing his own business, we get a hint that he does this not only because he has money, but also because he has been subjected to racial discrimination of sorts, probably from the ‘insulting illiterate girls’ (FS, 85) working there. Even when he opens his roti and curry shop, he is subjected to discrimination by ‘English louts’ (FS, 84) who eat and don’t pay, and damage the crockery and cutlery. With all the ‘prejudice and regulations’ (FS, 84) around him, he begins to feel that his business was a foolish idea.

The centre of the narrator’s existence is his brother, Dayo, who is still upto fooling him. Dayo, the idler, is not as ambitions as his brother, but has always pretended otherwise. The narrator who accepts his ‘own ignorance’ (FS, 79) believes that his brother deserves a second chance, and can resume regular studies under his care. Even later, when he discovers that his brother is still lying and is still idling in truth’ (FS, 89), he cannot bring himself to reprimand him. He feels that Dayo has nowhere to go; that he is helpless. Forgetting his brother’s feeling or rather laying them aside he feels that leaving London along with Dayo is the best option; he has this overpowering attitude to set his life right. But Dayo is man enough. He has been made a stronger, more confident person by his expatriation, unlike the narrator who believes that Dayo is the anchor that holds him in London.
While the English have their prejudices against people from the colonies, the narrator too is full of hatred towards them. He has come to London with an initial dose of hatred; he believes that the entire English race is the actual cause of his not being able to develop into his own ideal of an educated, successful man. He believes too, from the very onset, that they are a threat to his brother’s well-being.

Though he has himself developed relations with Frank, he is in a dilemma regarding what his attitude towards him and his countrymen should be. Frank has always seemed to patronize him and the narrator does not like this, but Frank, like Dayo, is the other anchor that he holds on to for his survival. But at Dayo’s wedding with a white woman, he places Frank ‘on the other side’ (FS, 95) with the enemy which he believes the entire English race to be.

At the wedding ceremony, he does not like it: ‘No turban, no procession, no drums, no ceremony of welcome, no green arches, no lights in the wedding tent, no wedding songs’ (FS, 95). But this is not a nostalgic comparison. It crops up simply because he associates this with something better than the custom of the church and men in suits with white roses, of the English; the enemy, the people whom he hates.

It is the first time I am in a church and I don’t like it. It is as though they are making me eat beef and pork. The flowers and the brass and the old smell and the body on the cross make me think of the dead. The funny taste is in my mouth, my old nausea, and I feel I would vomit if I swallow (FS, 96).

In the case of Willie Chandran in Half a Life, despite the number of adaptations that he made to fit into the English metropolitan life, he felt unsure about his place in the scheme of things. To him, India had not given the security that he believed it should have. He didn’t like to be reminded of India.
The very sight of any letter received from home reminded him of the dirt and squalor and poverty of India; and his place in it, had he stayed behind; one ‘without hope’ (HL, 111). At the university he edited portions of his life and his identity. ‘It excited him, and began to give him a feeling of power’ (HL, 61), with which he could impress his fellow students.

It was his sister, Sarojini, who tried to bring an awareness into Willies life, of the futility in which it lay. Willie had never thought of what he would do in the future. He had, so far, let his life run its own course. He didn’t like the idea or have the will power to go back to India to marry someone like Sarojini; as Sanad Shivpal of *A Time to be Happy*, who despite his anglicized, ‘un-Indian’ upbringing strives towards an involvement with the people of India by marrying an unsophisticated, non-westernized daughter of a college lecturer. At the same time, Willie did not want to inherit the struggles of his firebrand uncle; neither did he want to stay in London and teach in a low grade school of a relatively irrelevant locality, because that was where he would no doubt be placed due to racial prejudice. In addition to this he was highly unsatisfied with his lack luster social life. He constantly imagined that a ‘moment’ (HL, 122) would come when he would be rid of the grind of daily boring life and be marked for higher, better prospects.

Ana, the woman who came into Willie’s life through a letter of review about his book, was herself an expatriate from Africa. Willie felt linked to her because of the various incidents and stories she told about her African life; how one had to leave one’s country to achieve; to become someone. He felt united to her, also because he thought that the ‘situation in her country might be something like his at home’ (HL, 128). It was Ana’s desire to get away from the ‘bush’ (HL, 129) and learn ‘English English’ (HL, 155) instead of ‘South African English’ (HL, 155) that led her to come to London. Life in Africa, for Ana, was severely restricted in terms of education and social growth.
At the end of his college term, Willie having found no job and not knowing what to do, looked for an easier option: migration to Africa with Ana, though Ana did not like the idea of going back to the bush at all. To Willie, however, going away to Africa was just another expatriation. He did not want his departure to become permanent. A part of his mind explained to him that his stay in Africa was not to be forever, and he readied himself for a comeback even if it was much later.

He might have luck again; there might be something like the chain of chance encounters he had had; but they would lead him into a city he didn’t know (HL, 132).

Like London, Africa could not comfort him. He had an unknown fear of it. To begin with, on the outward journey itself, he was worried sick about the loss of his English, and the idea of learning an alien language. No sooner had he reached than he wished to flee, because he believed that he would not be able to adjust. He thought, ‘I am not staying here. I am leaving. I will spend a few nights here and then I will find some way of going away’ (HL, 133). And soon afterwards, he thought, ‘I don’t know where I am. I don’t think I can pick my way back. I don’t even want this view to become familiar.... I must never behave as though I am staying’ (HL, 135).

It was, however, not always a dark struggle for Willie; life had its adventures too. He mixed with affluent people in the society he had adopted. Time and again, incidents of his African life reminded him of India. He couldn’t judge which life was the better one; and this confusion led him not to involve himself completely with Africa. He didn’t even get used to Ana’s house, always feeling like a ‘stranger’ (HL, 157) in the house among the strange awkward grandeur and furniture of the house. So high did his disillusionment with Africa run, that he went through the rituals of life without introspection.
Willie was like those other ‘half-and-half’ (HL, 161) people in his social group who, were not full-blooded Portuguese. Not only had they inherited a ‘half-and-half world’ (HL, 160), but they themselves also led only half real lives, each person of the circle portraying himself only in the way he wanted others to see him and perceive him. Each was like a ‘character’ (HL, 161) in a play.

And yet, Willie stayed on in Africa for eighteen long years, living out life just for the sake of living it. At the end of eighteen years, after a nasty fall, he decided that he would no longer put up with the struggle of adjustment, and would move on to another life, another world perhaps. During his illness after the fall, he had a letter written to his sister whose address he had always memorized ‘for just such a situation’ (HL, 136).

Salim of A Bend in the River is a man who bargained for his expatriation believing that it would serve his interest. He wanted to escape the end of the peaceful life in the coastal area where his family had lived for generations.

I had to break away. I couldn’t protect anyone; no one could protect me. We couldn’t protect ourselves; we could only in various ways hide from the truth...To stay with my community, to pretend that I had simply to travel along with them, was to be taken with them to destruction (BR, 22).

So, it is a kind of hiding from the truth that makes Salim go inland. However, the unsettlement that he sees makes him realize the futility of his trip, of his presence in the small town, but there was little he could do about it.

Salim believed that he had a feel for the African way of life. But, in town, day in and day out, he witnesses the degeneration of the Africa that he had come out to, at the hands of rebellious natives who want to ransack the town and drive away the expatriates. There are times when he feels stranded,
with the acute realization that he has ‘no family, no flag, no fetish’ (BR, 63) in this part of the world. And without this security, he is exposed to dangers of all sorts, both real and imagined. The trees around his house are trees that he remembers from his days on the coast, from ‘another life’ (BR, 59). But here, they remind him painfully of his solitude and inactive life: ‘They were familiar, but they reminded me where I was’ (BR, 59).

Moreover, the people in town are ‘neither settlers nor visitors, just people with nowhere better to go’ (BR, 99). These people are not ‘welcoming’ (BR, 30) and have their own resigned lives and individual wars to fight due to the guerrilla aggression. Therefore, they do not trust themselves or other newcomers.

In town, Salim also meets people who have developed an urgent desire to want to leave. The Belgian secretary cum teacher of Father Huisman’s lycée, whom Salim meets, is a man who accepts openly that he cannot do much about his time in Africa because his idea of life was being destroyed by his very presence in Africa where he did not have much work to do and was starving.

I’m leaving. I’ve got to go.... I don’t want to go into the bush (BR, 68).

Towards the end of the novel, Salim, acknowledges that coming to the town at the bend in the river has not given him anymore security than his coastal area. He now strongly realizes that he has, in reality, cut himself off from all, that he is, like his Indian friends, Shobha and Mahesh, ‘empty in Africa, and unprotected, with nothing to fall back on’ (BR, 266). And he has this indepth satisfaction, all this time, that though Africa has been his homeland, he is not an African by descent.

Africa was my home, had been the home of my family for centuries. But we came from the east coast, and that made
the difference. The coast was not truly African. It was an Arab-Indian-Portuguese place, and we who lived there were really people of the Indian Ocean. True Africa was at our back (BR, 12).

Salim has never, in all his life, ceased to condemn their slave like attitude to life and their lack of creativity. So, it is then, that he opts out of life in Africa, for London where he believes that he can still pick up the threads and still create an identity for himself like the millions who go to London to do the same.

Upon reaching England, Salim finds that it is not the dreamland that he has forever believed it to be. He realizes, just as his friend, Indar did, that expatriation to the metropolis requires much more. It requires one 'to reject the ideas of home and ancestral piety, the unthinking worship of his great men, the self-suppression that went with that worship and those ideas, and to throw himself consciously into the bigger, harder world' (BR, 210).

Expatriation, Indar discovers, requires one to face a lot of other issues such as racial discrimination. Indar understands that he was discriminated by the English counselors who gave him job offers in companies with ‘connections in Asia or Africa’ (BR, 167) just as Willie Chandran realized that if he stayed on in London, he would be sent to an area like Notting Hill because he would fit the bohemian scene there.

The movement of Europeans to exotic lands, as discussed earlier, is primarily to experience adventure, and does not have much to do with economic security. And they have it at the back of their minds that they always have their metropolitan cities to go back to if their adventure fails.

The Europeans Naipaul meets on the Ivory Coast make it a point to keep some point of their foreignness intact so as to let the mark of difference in their status remain. Foreign culture in kept as ‘too foreign’ (Wr, 241) with little
effort made to suffuse it or exhibit it alongside native culture. And as a result of this, foreign cultural evenings which were meant to propagate foreign culture, among the natives remained exclusively foreign affairs, poorly attended by natives. Even in "In a Free State", it is seen the expatriates are only shown that much of Africa which is appealing to the senses; the Africa that is 'décor' (FS,100), to be found ‘in the tourist-shop displays of carvings and leather goods and souvenir drums and spears’ (FS, 100). The bush, or the interior is tucked away.

Ambassador as expatriates, Naipaul comments, in keeping with the ordinance of expatriation, should have visions which ‘shouldn’t run too far beyond that of the local people with whom they have to deal’ (Wr, 234). Furthermore, Naipaul adds that even the presentation of local native life by an expatriate to another expatriate are glamorized versions of the actual, so much so that there is a difference between what is told about and what is seen. The expatriates in Africa are no different. Even though they may know ‘African Africa’ (Wr, 234), it is not this that they put forward to a visitor, rather, ‘the Africa they present to the visitor is the Africa connected with their jobs’ (Wr, 243).

The expatriates make a conscious effort to keep away from adopting the real land and its people to which they have come. They believe in maintaining a distance that is safe, a distance that will not let them get really involved with native life. In Abidjan, Naipaul met a middle-aged European who conducted himself in this manner. He had worked all his life in Africa and had lived for many years in the Ivory Coast without being interested in the actual African life and reserving comments about Africa and Africans to himself. ‘He was not concerned to score points off Africa. But his acceptance went with a correct distancing of himself from the continent and its people. And for him that perhaps was the charm of the expatriate life: the heightened sense of the self that Africa gave’ (Wr, 283).
Even when the expatriates do claim to associate themselves truly with the people and the landscape they have adopted, they still keep some part of themselves private to maintain the difference. They do not reconcile with the possibility of ever becoming native. In adverse situations, they often go back to their original culture and remove themselves from the native with the excuse that they are not natives.

While Philip, an English expatriate married to a black Guyanese from England, claimed that he was the 'African side' (Wr, 234) of his marriage and his wife, the English; however, when asked about his personal views regarding 'personality cults' (Wr, 235) in Africa, he separated himself from being labeled as an African on this account and gave a biased English expatriate view: ‘You must understand that Africans like the cult of personality better. It is what they understand. A multiplicity of parties and personalities confuses them. I’ve seen this happen’ (Wr, 233).

One of the glamours of expatriate life is to maintain the feeling of involvement without being actually involved. Of expatriates in Africa, Naipaul writes that it is a privilege ‘being in Africa, being a non-African among Africans. Discomfort and danger would add to the sense of the self, the daily sense of personal drama, which a man living safely at home might never know. Africa called to people for different reasons. Everyone who went and stayed has his own Africa’ (Wr, 283-284); living life in Africa is like a huge safari experience for them.

Detachment from a land and its people comes easy for an expatriate who is anyway separated from the natives by culture and lifestyle. Often events and happenings are perceived in a different light by the natives and the expatriates. In an article, “Heavy Manners in Grenada”, Naipaul wrote in 1984, about his trip to Grenada ‘seventeen days after the American invasion, and three or four days after the airport had been opened again to civilian traffic’ (Wr, 461),
Naipaul discusses about an ‘American “internationalist” ’ (Wr, 467) worker, Michele Gibbs, from Chicago, who had come to Grenada because she believed she had a cause to serve. She had been there for three years, serving the Grenada revolution ‘helping with education, doing her revolutionary paintings and writing and publishing her revolutionary poems’ (Wr, 468).

Though Gibbs felt that she had done her bit for the revolution, she was thought of by natives as ‘having a holiday’ (Wr, 469) like other American internationalists, believed to be serving their own selfish cause. Gibbs had felt that Grenada was home and though ‘she had hoped to live there forever’ (Wr, 468); after the invasion, she had no more cause left. It was only fit that she went ‘far, far away’ (Wr, 468) now, but even this was interpreted by the natives as a sham excuse for serving her own ends.

Similar psychological behaviour is to be seen exhibited by the European expatriates in Naipaul’s fiction. Singh, in The Mimic Men, personally believes that it was very courageous of Sandra to travel so far out to a life and situation so alien to her:

I thought that she was courageous to have come so far to a life of which she knew nothing. Until this journey she had never traveled or stayed in a hotel (MM, 56).

Sandra, who had, on the other hand, wanted to remove herself from the drabness of London life was histrionically rejected by Singh’s mother because she was a ‘whitey-pokey’ (MM, 193) according to the island phrase. Having gone through the rituals of rejection and reconciliation by the natives, she tried to settle herself into the surroundings and did very well initially. She began to appreciate light island clothing and took to wearing saris occasionally as was the customs of her in-laws’ Indian community. The adaptation to this culture was easier for her because she moved and lived in an expatriate circle and not a typical native environment.
Not only does Sandra have to put up with an alien environment, she also, time and again, suffers from the syndrome of isolation and hurt which find expression through remarks such as ‘I suppose this must be the most inferior place in the world.... Inferior natives, inferior expats’ (MM, 71). This ‘feeling of fear, a simple fear of place, of the absent world’ (MM, 71) makes her view everything with distaste. Life soon runs out of excitement for Sandra. She has to meet the same set of people over and over again, go to the same places, do the same things to entertain herself.

At the same time, Sandra did not want to go back to London because ‘it remained the country she had wished to get away from’ (MM, 72). There she had no family or friends she could go back to, because she had led a secluded life. Out of boredom, she takes to going to Miami, on and off; a new short term mode of interest and entertainment. Back in Isabella, she had nothing to do and became increasingly disenchanted. Finally, boredom and insipidity got the better of her; and resulted in her leaving the island and her own turbulent marriage for good; for perhaps newer places and newer adventures.

Raymond, the middle-aged European historian who works for the President in A Bend in the River has to keep eulogizing the President in order to retain his job. The expatriate sensibility of detachment in him makes him believe that one should not make an attempt to change the order of native things, rather, one must ‘only carry on’ (BR, 158) and be a passive observer. Exactly the same sentiments are shared by Peter Roche in Guerrillas who, through the passage of time on the island, has begun to realize that his only duty is to maintain and correct relations with natives on behalf of his company, Sablich. He feels that he hasn’t been allowed to get totally involved with the natives, and with those whom he did, he realizes that it was a folly; which results in his wishing that ‘life had taken another turn’.15
Like her prototype, Gale Benson, Jane in *Guerrillas* came to the West Indies believing that she could find a cause to serve. While Benson had come over in pursuit of whatever a foreign landscape could offer in terms of excitement, Jane too had been led by the belief that ‘the future of the world was being shaped in places like this, by people like these’ (G, 44). And like Benson, Jane too realized the futility of her action, that ‘she had come to a place at the end of the world, to a place that had exhausted its possibilities’ (G, 44).

Benson stayed on the island because Jamal did, but she did not, according to the people, appear ‘to be serving the general cause’ (Wr, 180) like Jamal. Also, she dressed extravagantly as opposed to the native standards. Jane too, was indifferent to the cause of the natives. Like her prototype, Jane too retained her Englishness despite her African clothes which made her appear all the more superficial and fake.

Like all other expatriates, Jane too, anticipated that she would get on with life in her newly adopted land, take time out to know the ‘breathtaking’ (G, 40) sights of the island but disenchantment came to her sooner than she had expected. The sight of the airport and the trips to it were a way of satisfying her expatriate psyche that she was privileged to leave whenever she wished, like European expatriates all over have it at the back of their minds. The sense of security that they can leave whenever they want, is what propels them in exotic countries. Gale Benson too ‘took, on her journey away from home, the assumptions, however little acknowledged, not only of her class and race and the rich countries to which she belonged, but also of her ultimate security’ (Wr, 190). Her fictional counterpart, Jane too, like the other expatriates had become restless. Moreover, the expatriate minority was unacceptable to the natives because they were thought of as leftover ‘colonials who were interested only in their own situation’ (G, 96); their attempts at survival, and extraction of maximum possible benefits from the natives and the land. They all realized, at one point or the other, the futility of their attempts to survive in such a hostile
environment, which left them feeling ‘adrift’ (G, 96). The expatriate despair is aggravated by rootlessness which makes Roche adopt the belief that he has built his life on sand.

If *Guerrillas* discovers the uncertainty of expatriate life, “In a Free State” exhibits the fact that rootlessness is not to be found only as a state of physical experience but is a complex state which involves the mind also; sometimes it also involves fear. Bobby and Linda, who have escaped their respective middle class lives and its various impositions believe that Africa can offer them better bargains. Linda believes in a ‘win-win’ kind of expatriation. Once she has ceased to find further possible prospects in the African country where she is, she is ready to leave along with her husband to South Africa. Raymond, and his wife, Yvette of *A Bend in the River* have also similar intentions. But it is Bobby, harbouring a genuine kind of love for Africa, who realizes the full impact of the meaning of rootlessness via expatriation just as Santosh does.

The African country in which Bobby and Linda are, on the brink of a revolution, offers no more security than does the West Indian island on which Peter and Jane are. The expatriate community feels safe only as long as it is composite and whole; and Bobby realizes that his love for Africa has been in vain since Africa does not offer him the kind of security that his little expatriate compound with its neutral guard offers him.

The end result of expatriation, as depicted in the works of Naipaul studied in this chapter are of two kinds: either the expatriate desires to return to his native land and settle down or chooses exile because conditions for a contented return are not feasible.

Ralph Singh, having failed to find his ideal landscape in London, feels restless enough to want to escape from it. Out of his confusion, and desire to be one among the crowd, he marries Sandra; only to instantly realize that his was
a textbook example of the ill-advised marriage' (MM, 42). Soon enough, he began to harbor the wish to go back to Isabella, the very land which he had sought to initially abandon. In fact, he soon began to look at the prospect of return to Isabella with its picture perfect cocoa trees and green landscape, thereby also fulfilling Mr Deschampsneuf's prophecy that one day Singh would indeed want to return.

You know, you are born in a place and you grow up there. You get to know the trees and the plants. You will never know any other trees and plants like that... you go away. You ask, "what is that tree?" Somebody will tell you, "An elm". You see another tree. Somebody will tell you, "That is an oak". Good; you know them. But it isn't the same. Here you wait for the poui to flower one week in the year and you don't even know you are waiting. All right, you go away. But you will come back. Where you born, man, you born. And this island is a paradise you will discover' (MM, 56).

But no sooner does he sight the docks of Isabella than he comes to face the reality that had made him want to leave the island in the first place. He finds it humiliating and associates it with his failure; the failure to achieve his desires and aspirations.

Upon his return to the island Singh hopes to find changes in native island life, but the age old customs still prevail and he has to once again play his old role: the role of a native. Once having accepted this fact, he looks around for company, but finds that the only people he can now adjust with are expatriates and people like him who have returned to the island and are detached from the natives:

The men were professional, young, mainly Indian, with a couple of local whites and coloured; they had all studied abroad and married abroad; on Isabella they were linked less by their background and professional standing than by
their expatriate and fantastically cosmopolitan wives or girl friends. Americans, singly and in pairs, were an added element.... There were no complicating loyalties or depths; for everyone the past had been cut away (MM, 57).

Initially, Singh felt revived. But the environment and celebration of 'unexpected freedom' (MM, 58) was not real. It was possible only through the achievement of superficial emotions. To move about in his social circle demanded preset attitudes and prefixed reactions. This made it possible for the circle to differentiate themselves from the natives. It was important to maintain the 'cosmopolitanism, which had more meaning here than it ever had in the halls of the British Council' (MM, 58); which also decided that they love 'champagne and caviar for the sake of the words alone' (MM, 58).

Singh then went on to join politics and prospered. Ultimately, when politics held no more place for him, he, to make a last amendment to his political image, went to England as part of a delegation. Once there he realizes that London still charms him, as it had initially. Pinning his hopes on it a second time, and being belittled again by shrewd colonial politics, he feels dejected once again. The island is a better haven, he thinks. But then, approaching the island, once again, he concludes that the island does not hold anything for him; that it does not give him the kind of refuge he expects from it.

This is the kind of dilemma that affects many an expatriate and Singh is just one of them. When Indar, the man of 'two worlds' (BR, 168) feels that London does not hold much by way of profession for him; and though he feels that Africa is 'just bush' (BR, 175), he returns to it, but not to the east coast from where he has sought escape. He goes to the country in which Salim is, marking his time as a teacher, and living among expatriates in the Domain, because that is the only kind of people he can feel comfortable with.
Even Willie Chandran, after having gone through life in Africa and a momentary breather in Germany, decides to go to India on the promptings of his sister, to join a radical underground revolutionary group of which he knows nothing. Willie pretends to behave as an expatriate who chooses to return to the native land for the love of it, simply because he believes that his vision has been radicalised. He can be seen in the same light as the protagonist of an Iranian novel, Foreigner, that Naipaul read and has discussed in Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey. Feri, an Iranian woman living in Boston, married to an American, visits Iran on a holiday, finds the country appalling to her senses with ‘thuggish’ (AB, 17) streets and unglamorous life styles of the people. Yet, upon meeting a doctor, during her illness there, her thoughts are radicalized to the extent that she does not want to go back to the ‘American emptiness’ (AB, 18) and is ready to renounce her ‘self-esteem and wholeness, and be inviolate’ (AB, 19).

Contrary to this is the return of Tara, the protagonist of The Tiger’s Daughter, who had forever felt alien in New York. But abroad she has cultivated a changed value system which she adheres to. However, the greatest irony of her return is that she feels lonely and alienated in her native country, like Willie. And like him, she is injured upon her arrival:

For years she had dreamed of this return to India. She had believed that all hesitations, all shadowy fears of her life abroad would be erased quite magically if she could just return home to Calcutta. But so far the return had brought only wounds. First the corrosive hour of Marine Drive then the deformed beggar at the railway station and now the inexorable train ride steadily undid what storm she had held in reserve.¹⁵

But Willie is not true to his return like Feri; he does not feel for India what Feri felt for Iran. And he is like Tara only because he is disillusioned at the sights and sounds that greet him. All in all, Willie is a sham. He has no
vision of his own and, acting only on the vision of his sister does he choose to
go to India, a land from which he had sought to escape. He lives on a diet of
fancies and fantasies. And he is very glad when he is told by his intellectually
inclined sister that Gandhi, in London, for the first time, was very much like
Willie.

When he was eighteen or nineteen Gandhi came to
England to study law. In London he was like a
sleepwalker. He had no means of understanding the great
city. He hardly knew what he was looking at. He had no
idea of the architecture or the museums, no idea of the
great writers and politicians who were hidden in the city of
the 1890s.... Just as Vishnu was floating on the primeral
ocean of non-being so Gandhi in London in 1890 was
floating on an ocean of not-seeing and not-knowing. At
the end of three years of this half-life or quarter-life he
became dreadfully depressed. He felt he needed help
(Mgs, 16).

Armed with the semi-actual desire of participating in the revolution in
India, he returns only to be shocked by what he sees in India. He panics on the
outbound flight itself. He finds the airport building shabby with its carpentry
reminding him of a rough beach-side restaurant in Africa. His changed value
system requires him to relearn what appears to him, after his stay abroad, as a
‘new definition of things (taxi, hotel, railway station, waiting room, lavatory
restaurant), and all its new disciplines (squatting in the lavatory, eating only
cooked food, avoiding water and soft fruit)’ (Mgs, 28).

Willie tries hard to cope with his new situation. Awaiting his enlistment
into the rebellion he begins his version of yoga, concentrating on ‘his hour-to-
hour life, looking on each hour, each action, as challenging and important’
(Mgs, 45). Since he has no vision of his own to guide him, he is awed by the
life of the villagers he initially comes across. He thinks:
They've been living like this for centuries. I have been practising my yoga, so to speak, for a few days, and have become obsessed by it. They have been practicing a profounder kind of yoga, everyday, every meal. That yoga is their life. And of course there would be days when there would be nothing at all to eat, not even this gruel. Please, let me be granted the strength to bear what I am seeing (Mgs, 48).

Even though he realizes during the course of his enrolment that he has come to the 'wrong revolution' (Mgs, 49), he still endures all that he has to go through, deciding to look upon it all as 'another chamber of experience' (Mgs, 51). Finally, having been inducted into the rebel camp as a courier because he 'looks at home everywhere' (Mgs, 74) and will therefore not arouse suspicion, he finds that his position in the movement is not as exciting and involved as he or his sister would have liked it to be. After having worked for quite a number of years for the movement, he realizes that there is no scope of growth for him or for the movement, which in reality is only a vindictive vehicle of a few self-centered people. Finally, after seven years Willie decides to quit, and surrenders, for which he is handed a ten year jail sentence.

The expatriate, as such, does not face only the dilemma of leading an unsatisfactory life in his country, but has to find ways to adjust to it in a whole new manner. Expatriate life abroad has thrust upon an individual, whole new ways of thinking and reacting, not to mention, living. So it does not matter whether Jimmy Ahmad has to flee back to the West Indies; what matters is that he is able to show people that he can live in the same manner as he did in England. He believes that one 'may not be able to make a living in England, but England teaches you how to live' (G,17). Jimmy, it can be concluded, could not let go of his English lifestyle because he believed that it was an identity better than what the West Indian society had given him. So, his house has an English interior like that of his prototype, Michael Abdul Malik. With the money that he made in London and raised for a commune in Trinidad,
Malik lived a luxurious life, one in which he bought a good home for himself with 'modern furniture imported from England, fitted carpets, radio phonograph, records' (Wr, 182), along with classics such as Shakespeare and Lenin, and excellent music which spoke of refined taste.

Michael Abdul Malik, though forced to flee London, was accepted in Trinidad as per his London reputation, Malik was the product of his expatriation as much as Singh and Willie, but they cannot be counted as social successes to the scale of Malik, who anyway believed that he was simple 'the Best known Black man in this entire white western world' (Wr, 154). So, Malik, the Black Power leader who returned to Trinidad, in January 1971, was 'made in England' (Wr, 159), which gave him friends and supporters, as well as far reaching fame and money as a supplement. A hero by Trinidad standards he had a long list of well-wishers and impressed all he chose to for gaining political foothold. Likewise, Jimmy Ahmad, the Black leader of Guerrillas comes back to the West Indies under the same circumstances as Malik’s, and basks in his cultivated London reputation, which catapults him into a leadership of sorts, in 'a place that had produced no great men' (G, 52).

However, not all expatriates think of returning back to their native land. Many, happy with the situation of expatriation choose to adopt their country of expatriation as their abode of living either by opting for a migrant status or a voluntary exile. Had Michael Abdul Malik not been forced to flee back, it is possible that he could have wanted his expatriation to turn into a voluntary exile, what with all the hatred that made him what he was, and his mother who followed him everywhere creating public scenes. His reputation of a 'semi-educated Port of Spain idler' (Wr, 154) with a checkered background was an additional wound. But in London, things went bad to the extent that he had to take refuge in his own country as a sort of political exile.
Adverse is the case of those expatriates who wish to extend their expatriation into migration, as Naipaul observes, in the case of those Indians in the United States who change their ‘Green card holder’ status to that of ‘citizens’ (Wr, 441). Their experience in the country has made them choose ‘the U.S.A. as the karambhumi – the land of karma or action’ (Wr, 441).

The fictional characters, Singh and Willie, on the other hand, are characters who are compelled to take up exile because, given their situation, it is the safest option for them. So, Singh accepts readily, ‘the offer of a free and safe passage, to London again, by air, with sixty-six pounds of luggage and fifty thousand dollars’ (MM, 264). There is however, a marked difference in his outlook towards exile at the beginning of it and at the end of it. Earlier it was a burdensome imposition. ‘When I first came here I used to think of this life as the life of the maimed’ (MM, 269). He spent his time constantly remembering the natural richness of the landscape of his native Isabella. Also though he accepts that his exile demands less from him than his active life, he knows that it is ‘rooted in nothing; it links to nothing’ (MM, 36).

Having fought the ‘alarm of homelessness’ (MM, 272) and feeling of disillusionment, he reconciles himself to his exile; by living in a hotel to keep ‘the feeling of impermanence’ (MM, 9) intact. Though he has no way out, he cannot pretend like the others to have found a kind of happiness in his situation. He can only reconcile to it, and acknowledge that he is one of those people who, ‘for one reason or another have withdrawn’ (MM, 269). And because the lot of his kind of people is large in London, he likes to keep his disgrace and, subsequently, his identity hidden from them. After compromising his situation, comes the adjustment; a kind of agreeable satisfaction that there is ‘Order, sequence, regularity’ (MM, 267) in the kind of life that he leads now. He no longer wishes to enter life as he had, but thinks of other ways in which he can experience it. He no longer wishes to reach out to either ‘ideal landscapes’ (MM, 273) or ‘the god of the city’ (MM, 273)
In the case of Willie Chandran, after having served a very small part of his jail sentence on terms of special amnesty, arranged through his sister’s contacts, Willie makes his way back to London to face a life of exile. He is disillusioned and dismayed to have to come to a place where he felt lost and could not find a life and a career. But the beginning ‘old grief’ (Mgs, 176) cannot undo the exile that has been thrust upon him. There is no other way out and he has to compromise with the strangeness of London. Concluding that his life has been ‘a series of surprises’ (Mgs, 179) over which he has had no control, he does not know what to do with the remainder of his life. He then begins to harbor the notion that his various experiences have made him a different person. The other side of his personality that creeps up from behind the facade of his persona makes him acutely realize that he has forever been homeless:

I have never slept in a room of my own. Never at home in India, when I was a boy. Never here in London. Never in Africa. I lived in somebody else’s house always, and slept in somebody else’s bed. In the forest of course there were no rooms, and then the jail was the jail. Will I ever sleep in a room of my own’ (Mgs, 185)?

When he ventures out, he is no longer excited by the hidden prospect of London that he had once sought and failed to find. Each place of the past he visited, he took it in with the vision of a changed man. Thirty years ago, the same places had oppressed him because he hadn’t understood himself, his needs and his ambitions. But now, having acted out all the whims he had had in his earlier life; the Asian college student pretending to be bohemian, the London educated man pretending to be a colonial in Africa, the expatriate Indian pretending to be a passionate patriot, he felt himself to be ‘a free man’ (Mgs, 196).

It is this other side of his personality that makes Willie realize that the people he meets all around him in London are removed from him in the sense
that they cannot be like him in mind. He believes that he has shed his materialistic self, and concludes that since these people don’t know ‘the other side of things’ (Mgs, 210), he cannot be like them or they like him. Moreover, when he goes through his own book of short stories that he had written right after college, he relives his life twenty eight years ago. This revoking of memories through the book gives him a stronger idea of his place in the scheme of things and the outcome of his personality as a result of them. He feels that:

It was another person who looked from a great distance at his older self. And gradually, playing all that morning with the time capsule or time machine of the book, moving in and out of that earlier personality ... gradually there came to Willie and idea of the man he had become, an idea of what Africa and then the guerrilla life in the forest and then the prison and then simple age had made of him. He felt immensely strong; he had never felt like this before (Mgs, 188).

With each trip he made to the places he knew, on paths he had walked earlier, Willie became a newer person, a stronger person ‘so unlike the person he had felt himself to be, at home, in London and during the eighteen years of his marriage in Africa (Mgs, 196). He becomes exhilarated that he has found the opportunity to finally live out his own kind of life; and not be what others want him to be, or what he expects others to perceive him as.

Finally, Willie is offered a job with a magazine that deals with architecture. Though he has no prior experience of this kind of work he is glad to be preoccupied with his life.

Santosh of “One Out of Many” is also one of those people who are forced to accept exile. But while Singh and Willie may find respite in their exile, Santosh’s is tormenting. To escape being jailed and deported to India as an illegal immigrant, he marries the hubshi. Through this marriage he is able to become a legal American citizen. He has gained the freedom he had so much
desired. But it is ironical that after this, his life has become compartmentalized: ‘The restaurant is one world, the parks and green streets of Washington are another, and every evening some of these streets take me to a third’ (FS, 52). Moreover, he has now to identify himself with blacks for whom he has automatically become ‘Soul Brother’ (FS, 53), a thought that is culturally intolerable for him. He has voluntarily adopted a kind of exile which is much more tormenting, in all respects, than Singh’s or Willie’s.

Santosh has also shut himself out to ‘the English language, to newspapers and radio and television, to the pictures of hubshi runners and boxers and musicians on the wall’ (FS, 52). He has finally become a legal presence to be acknowledged by one and all, as against his illegal immigrant status earlier. But, he has become exiled in spirit and mind. He does not want to indulge in anymore adventures; he does not want to socialize preferring a life of solitude. Such is the height of his disillusionment:

All that my freedom has brought me is the knowledge that I have a face and have a body, that I must feed this body and clothe this body for a certain number of years. Then it will be over (FS, 53).

The narrator of “Tell Me Who to Kill” like Santosh, has cornered himself in such a position that there is no option save exile left for him. In looking after the mediocre Dayo he has spent a good part of his life in London. Infact, Dayo is the reason why he came to London. Now he cannot return and he has never actually felt at home in London; and his homelessness hurts:

The mystery land is theirs, the stranger is you. None of those houses in the rain here belong to you. You can’t see yourself walking down those streets set down those streets set down so flat on that cliff (FS, 75).

The narrator who has forever believed that England is only a place where one goes to earn an educational degree, and a profession, thought that
his brother would return after his time there was over. He had always thought of England as the enemy, in keeping with the colonial hatred that he harbors; and when Dayo goes on to marry an Englishwoman, he hates him for it and feels betrayed. But it is ironical that he hates the whites, and, is at the same time dependent upon them for money, for friendship and for a number of other conveniences. It can be said that the narrator thinks like the Malaysian youth worker, Shafi, who concluded after his American trip that it was 'a place to go for a short visit but not to stay' (AB, 244).

It is a blow to the narrator that Dayo has left him stranded in enemy territory and it may be possible that as a result of this betrayal, he has imposed self-exile upon himself. Towards the end of the story, it says:

Because it was my idea after my trouble that nobody should know, that the message should go back home that I was dead (FS, 98).

So, the narrator, who was an outsider even in his family on the island, has further betrayed himself through his action, and has now to bear the brunt of homelessness in an alien surrounding, he has labeled as the enemy.

Salim of A Bend in the River, too, is ready to give up the remaining hopes that he had of Africa and move on to London. Salim is one of the many ordinary men who exist worldwide, who have no lofty visions or motivations and no long term aspirations. When his business is confiscated and handed over to an illiterate native, and in addition to this, when he is arrested on smuggling charges, Salim decides that it is better to leave. So his African sojourn ends in his taking a flight to England; and eventually, resignation to a barren life there, which implies that he too has chosen to go into exile.

Studying these cases of self-imposed exile, it may be concluded that exile is a permanent state, not only of the body but also of the mind. But this does not mean that there is any scope of growth in it. While Santosh and the
narrator of “Tell Me Who to Kill” feel that there is not much left in their lives and that exile means the end of all kinds of growth and opportunities, Singh, Salim and Willie survey on a positive note even in their exile.

Singh has reconciled himself to his situation and has ‘grown to relish the constriction and order of hotel life’ (MM, 267). He also feels that he has freed himself from ‘one cycle of events’ (MM-274), and looks forward to other prospects such as that of a journalist or a UN worker. Salim too believes that he can create an identify for himself in London, like the many people who come to the metropolis for just the same purpose. Even Willie Chandran manages to find something positive in his magazine job. He even begins thinking that he should take up a course in architecture or later, may perhaps find another job. Whatever it is that they would want to take up in their course of exile, both Willie and Singh believe that it will be the action of a truly ‘freeman’ (MM, 274) with a wish to ‘only celebrate what I am or what I have become’ (MgS, 196).

Jacques Soustelle was exiled from 1962-1968, for allegedly plotting for the cause of ‘Algerie Francaise, Algeria is France’ (Wr, 305). He was a prolific writer and a calm person, observes Naipaul. Soustelle, like the exiled Singh, initially found exile difficult. Infact it was ‘ “dreary and dangerous” ’ (Wr, 305) earlier, but became placid towards the end. And Soustelle, unlike Singh, was eager to go back to his country to take up further positive prospects. ‘ “I might abstain from political life. But I can’t admit being ostracized after twenty seven years in the service of my country” ’ (Wr, 313), is what Soustelle admitted, hinting at his will to take up further work. When Soustelle was released from exile in 1968, after being pardoned, he returned to active politics.

The outcome of the exile of the former Argentine leader, Juan Peron can also be viewed in a positive light. He was excommunicated in 1955, but was recalled after eighteen years by his supporters, to rule again ‘because they
wanted what he offered' (Wr, 398): Peronism Perón then went on to win the presidential election of 1873, thereby replanting himself in active politics.

For a number of Europeans figuring in Naipaul’s works, expatriation ends with a journey, either of return, or to an altogether new environment in pursuit of a new adventure. Jane, like Sandra, decides to leave the island, with the belief that as an expatriate, she is privileged to choose to leave the West Indian island anytime she wants. She does not have to bear the brunt of the situation like the natives:

Jane thought how lucky she was to be able to decide to leave. Not many people had that freedom: to decide, and then to do. It was part of her luck; in moments like this she always consoled herself with thoughts of her luck. She was privileged: It was the big idea, the one that overrode all the scattered unrelated ideas deposited in her soul as she had adventured in life,… She would leave (G, 49-50).

And having taken the decision to leave the island, she found out that she had no regrets, that she had actually ‘always been ready to leave’ (G, 175). It wouldn’t be a painful act for her. And she would have actually left, had she not been murdered like her prototype, Gale Benson, who was murdered too.

Also, it is not difficult for the expatriate Europeans living in the Domain to move to South Africa looking for better future; as it is not difficult for Peter Roche in Guerrillas, that his time on the island has been a waste. And he leaves soon after Jame’s murder without any regrets. Infact, he tears up Jane’s ticket and passport because he does not want to be held up any longer on the island to face any kind of interrogation.

From the reading of the novels and other works of Naipaul, it is also easy to conclude that security for the future is an important heading in the agenda of all expatriates and they make their own kinds of arrangement for it.
While the narrator of “Tell Me Who to Kill” is happy to see his money grow in the post office deposit; the ‘half-and-half’ (HL, 161) expatriates who Willie meets in Africa deposit their money in banks in foreign countries. The idea was that when the bad time came, they ‘would have ‘an envelope’ of ready money in at least one of these places’ (HL, 161). Even Harry in Guerrillas, while living an expatriate life on the Ridge is busy making settlement moves in Canada, so as to leave as soon as the island country suffers a set back. And Nazruddin, while in Canada, buys shares in oil wells in addition to enterprising on his own.

Exile, it can be concluded, has far more entanglements than expatriation which offers varied options. Exile is not only a physical state but also engulfs the mind and the soul of the exile, whereas expatriation is a situation removed from the mind and soul.
References:


12. Ibid, p. 34.


Chapter-5

Naipaul’s Own Journey
Time and again Naipaul asserts that all his work ‘has a kind of relationship, one book to the other’¹ and that all his work emanates from a single source: himself. Also, he believes that since a writer is a ‘craftsman’,² he has the prerogative to foray into all modes of writing.

This chapter traces and discusses Naipaul’s movement from the colonial to the postcolonial world; from expatriation to exile; both physically and intellectually as presented by Naipaul himself in his work. Since everything Naipaul writes is connected, and since everything he writes about is drawn from his personal experience this discussion will also shed light on why he feels the way he does about his situation, and how he has expressed it in his writing.

The books that have been taken up for discussion in this chapter are: The Enigma of Arrival, the Indian trilogy: An Area of Darkness, India: A Million Mutinies, the narrative, “Prologue to an Autobiography” from Finding the Centre; individual pieces such as “A second visit”, “Jamshed into Jimmy” and “In the Middle of the Journey” in addition to a few family letters which appear in Letters Between A Father and Son.

“Prologue to an Autobiography” is an examination of the events that eventually led to Naipaul taking up writing as a career. The Enigma of Arrival appears as a fictional piece but it is largely autobiographical in nature. In it Naipaul has talked about his life in England from the time he first made his passage in 1950. It is also an indepth survey of a large part of his writing career. Since Naipaul believes that autobiographies distort facts because of the realignment that is required in them, this book can be said to be closest to the extension of the narration of truth which he has propagated through out his writing career. About the book The Enigma of Arrival, Naipaul says:
I have just finished a book in which at last, as I think, I have managed to integrate this business of reinterpreting with my narrative.

My aim was truth, truth to a particular experience, containing a definition of the writing self.³

An Area of Darkness talks about Naipaul's Indian trip of 1962 and the discovery of the India that had fascinated him since childhood. India: A Wounded Civilization (1977) is written after a second sojourn to India; it analyses the changes noticed by Naipaul in the Indian attitudes he had come across on his first trip. India: A Million Mutinies (1990) highlights Naipaul's third long visit to India and probes further into the changes in these attitudes. The pieces "In the Middle of the Journey", "Jamshed into Jimmy" and "A Second Visit" have been written between 1962 and 1967. Letters Between a Father and Son is an assortment of letters between Naipaul and his family, particularly his father, which record his earliest reflections on life outside Trinidad. The title of this collation was suggested by Naipaul's father, Seepersad himself:

If you could write me letters about things and people – especially people – at Oxford, I could compile them in a book LETTERS BETWEEN A FATHER AND SON, or MY OXFORD LETTERS.⁴

Of all the writing that he has done, Naipaul has written more vividly of his Indian and West Indian identities than of the identity he has cultivated in England. The early works of fiction draw from Naipaul's own experiences. The Trinidad that he creates in Miguel Street, The Mystic Masseur, and The Suffrage of Elvira is of his childhood. In A House for Mr Biswas he has used autobiographical material, in the sense that it is essentially his father's story. The
reminiscences of his early life in Trinidad also appear in all of his non-fictional work, where he compares and contrasts his childhood life with the lives of others that he sees elsewhere. In his early non-fictional work these recollections were occasional, but with the coming of age of both the writer and his writing, these have substantially become frequent. Most of these are to be found in his travel books. While *The Middle Passage* is one that looks into his island life, the three on India are the ones that examine his development as a man and a writer most profoundly. As to his cultivated English identity, there are only *The Enigma of Arrival*, and two pieces; “London”, which appeared in 1958 and “What’s Wrong with Being a Snob?” that came out in 1967, that speak of it.

To talk of Naipaul’s development as a writer, it is imperative to talk about the circumstances that Naipaul comes from and how far they have contributed towards the building up of his psyche and persona.

The colonial Trinidad society to which Naipaul belongs was of ‘various races, religions, sects and cliques’ and, in it, the East Indian West Indian was ever confused of his placement. Says Naipaul,

> To be an Indian from Trinidad is to be unlikely. It is, in addition to everything else, to be the embodiment of an old verbal ambiguity. For this word ‘Indian’ has been abused as no other word in the language; almost every time it is used it has to be qualified.

Chaguanas, where Naipaul’s grandfather had built his house was a place which kept its Indianness to the core. Amidst the ‘Hindu rigours’ of religion and caste, life was symbolically peasant Indian: ‘the ritualized day, fields and huts, the mango tree in the yard, the simple flowers, the lightning of fires in the evening’ (*FC*, 50). People like Naipaul’s grandfather and others like him believed that life
in Trinidad was a transitory phase and would soon pass. They never made an attempt to move out of the India they had created for themselves in this alien land. Their life style, their houses with ‘balustraded roof terraces’ (EC, 35), were a representation of what peasant life in India was at that time.

Migration had not stopped people from adhering to rituals. People tried to stick to the orthodox values, so much so that any questioning of those values, minor or major, could lead to bitter rivalries and feuds. Their Indianess lay in their denial of Trinidad and adherence to beliefs and rituals they had brought with them from India. Some people like Gold Teeth, a friend of Naipaul’s mother’s family, refused to learn English and this was their way of denying an alien land. In Chaguanas, Naipaul’s mother’s family, a large joint family, was the centre of the Hindu community because of their affluent and respectable position. People around came to pay their reverences to them; and they had a set of retainers too; and this was a carry over ritual from their times in peasant India. Cow worship was another ritual that had been brought over from India; even Naipaul’s family kept cows as it served as a ‘link with the immemorial past’.

As time passed, the new generations could not deny Trinidad. They had to participate in the life around them; and adapt to new styles of housing, community behaviour, food, clothes and culture. With the passage of time belief in rituals declined but reverences were kept alive because people were unwilling to be severed from ‘the past, the sacred earth, the gods’ (EA, 284). And though the Indian clan system gave its incumbents ‘a caste certainty, a high sense of the self’ (FC, 57); with the growth of self-awareness it began to disintegrate and people began to move out and assert their individuality. Negro food and Portuguese dishes were inculcated into the Indian cuisine. Naipaul recalls that for a kattha to be held under a pipal tree, government permission was required, because the only pipal tree on the island was located in the Botanical Gardens. Though, years later,
he can appreciate this as complementary to rituals, yet, during his childhood, it was a strain because by this time the new generation was becoming 'self-conscious, self-assessing: [the] secret world was shrinking fast'.

Naipaul’s father, Seepersad Naipaul, was a journalist; this was considered an ‘unusual’ (FC, 33) occupation at that time because it wasn’t counted among serious occupations. In 1929, Seepersad started writing for the Trinidad Guardian under the patronage of Gault MacGowan, its managing editor from May 1929 to April 1934. Seepersad was attached to Naipaul’s mother’s family in much the same way as Mr Biswas was attached to the Tulsis. With no professional training except that of a pundit; married into a wealthy family of estate owners, given menial work by them, and dependent upon them for prolonged periods – such was the plight of Seepersad Naipaul. His reformist bend towards the Arya Samaj Movement ‘which sought to make of Hinduism a pure philosophical faith’ (FC, 79), his advocacy of the nuclear family and education for girls led him to be considered a rebel by his in-laws.

Along with his journalism Seepersad Naipaul took to writing short stories which ‘celebrated Indian village life, and the Hindu rituals that gave grace and completeness to that life’ (FC, 42). They were stories taken from the lives of relations, but he never found the courage to pen down his own story. ‘Certain things can never become material…. His last years, when he found his voice as a writer were years of especial distress and anxiety; he was part of the dereliction he wrote about’, writes Naipaul. In Seepersad’s stories criticism of village life and rituals was soft and a reconciliation to rites and customs was reached, no matter how rebellious the characters of the story may be.

A House for Mr Biswas which is essentially the story of Seepersad Naipaul’s life, owes itself greatly to his own story, “They Named Him Mohun”,
which V.S. Naipaul, claims to have ‘cannibalised’. In it, Naipaul created the same circumstances for his hero, Biswas, who too, died prematurely owing to heart attack leaving a family and a house which he could call his own.

Much of the education that Naipaul received as a child was very much abstract. It was difficult to adapt to any kind of foreign literature. It simply did not fit into the immediate surrounding because ‘education was imported in much the same way that flour and butter are imported from Canada’. The western authors that he read, particularly Dickens, made a great impact on Naipaul. But there was a growing distance between what he read and what he saw around him, for example, his discovery of the association of the word ‘jasmine’ with a common flower that he saw about him, as late as 1961, was one such thing. He records his study of literature:

To us, without a mythology, all literatures were foreign....To open a book was to make an instant adjustment....All Dickens’ descriptions of London I rejected....I gave them [characters] the faces and voices of people I knew and set them in buildings and streets I knew. The process of adaptation was automatic and continuous.

The culturally destitute environment of Trinidad made Naipaul seek other sources as well, to understand the outside world; movies being one among them:

Movies; Hollywood movies of the 30s and 40s like In Old Chicago. I would have died without them. Films that were about good and evil, right and wrong – Westerns.

Much of Naipaul’s education was, therefore, occidentally oriented, and encouraged him to believe that Trinidad was more remote than England and
Europe. And in more ways than one, his father, like Mr Biswas in *A House for Mr Biswas* prepared and urged his son to compete for a government scholarship so that he would have the opportunity to study abroad.

There were other factors involved that led Naipaul to leave Trinidad to pursue studies abroad. The narrowness of his Indian community life which he so often talks about in his writings every now and then are also almost equally responsible for his leaving the island. Being ‘an unbeliever’ (*AD*, 27) in a family of pundits, resisting participation in rituals which he could not understand, refusing to go through certain ceremonies such as the *janaywa*, Naipaul found that he could not adjust to the ritualized life of his Hindu community. Conceding to the various demands of the clan and extended family life was also difficult. In an interview with Tarun Tejpal in 1998, Naipaul says:

> I was oppressed by the pettiness of colonial life. I was also oppressed by something else about it which relates more particularly to one's Indian-Hindu family background. The intense family disputes...It was not a generous society – neither the colonial world nor the world in which I grew up, the Hindu world. The narrow Hindu world in which I grew up, I wished to get away from that. I had a vision that in the larger world outside people would be appreciated for what they were. People would be found interesting for what that were.¹⁵

Ambition came at an early age to Naipaul. But it was not to achieve the professional goals which drove the other aspirants that he wanted to go abroad. The desire to go to Oxford, Naipaul says, was not a ‘wish so much to go to Oxford as a wish to get out of Trinidad and see the great world and make myself a writer’
The desire to be a writer came from his father’s journalist career and the short stories which were from his collection. Moreover, in a place where law and medicine were considered the principal professional careers; and bookshops were scarce and people did not fancy the world of books, Naipaul concluded that Trinidad was ‘unimportant, uncreative, cynical’ (MP, 34), and that writing as a vocation could not be taken up in such a country.

The inability to adapt any further to such a society, the vision of a failed future on the island, and the will to stay ‘far from family and clan, city, colony, Trinidad Guardian, negroes’ (FC, 45) made Naipaul decide to leave for England.

Like the colonials he writes about, Naipaul perceived that England would hold magic for him. He felt that this outer world for which he had prepared so hard and for so long, would be as he had read in books. His stopover at New York on his way to England gave him a glimpse of the world he had so far only seen in movies; it made him anticipate that his experience of this outer world would ennoble him. On the contrary, he felt that it was his solitude that went on increasing the further away he moved from Trinidad. No sooner had he touched ground than he ‘passionately wanted, though hardly arrived in London, to be free of London’ (EA, 190). It was a moment when he wanted his stay in England to be temporary; he desired to feel like a tourist.

However, Naipaul, had come to a place which fitted the description of ‘the city that never slept’ (EA, 139), with its enchanting dusks, busy streets, the bustling city and its underground trains, and adjustments had to be made accordingly. Settling down in ‘wretched’ Oxford required him to make a lot of adaptations. He had to cope with English food which he considered ‘a calamity and a tragedy’ (LBFS, 298). He had to learn how to call people by their first
names instead of their last names, as was the custom in Trinidad. To get rid of his solitude he joined a number of societies in the University.

When Naipaul started out on the journey to become a writer, his role models were J.R. Ackereley, Somerset Maugham, Aldous Huxley and Evelyn Waugh. In England, he expected to find the ‘metropolitan material’ (EA, 147) that these writers had found. And at the same time, he was deeply influenced by the Dickensian technique of using ‘only simple words, simple concepts... creating thereby a city or fantasy which everyone could reconstruct out of his own materials, using the things he knew to re-create the described things he didn’t know’ (EA, 145).

To be the kind of metropolitan writer that Naipaul had aimed at, he began dabbling in writing, and tried to write pieces that would make for realistic reading. The separation of ‘the man from the writer’ (EA, 130) that had occurred on the passage to England made him search for material that would appeal to metropolitan readership, but this made his writing appear superficial. This brought out pieces like “Gala Night” which did not treat their subjects in depth. Several failed attempts to be a proper writer later, he realized that writing was not as easy a career as he had thought so far. It also made him acknowledge that his handicap lay in his incapability to use his reality as writing material.

The English or 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. And the restrictions could become attractive (FC, 32).
Man and writer were eventually to come together when inhibitions imposed by his island’s half-education were shed. The separation between the two had prevented him looking at his past, it had prevented him from treating issues such as that of race; but now with the acknowledgement of the island life came an acknowledgement of the self and vice versa. The earliest writings of Naipaul, of his childhood scenes, gave him the knowledge that he could use it as a canvas to work on; to make further acknowledgement of the self. So, the island past, which for his colonial instincts was ‘full of shame and mortifications’ (EA, 267) became his subject.

It is through The Enigma of Arrival that Naipaul traces the period of his stay in England. The title for the book comes from a title given by Apollinaire to an early painting of Giorgio de Chirico in a booklet from the series called “The Little Library of Art” that Naipaul discovered in his Wiltshire cottage. The painting was, Naipaul says, of:

A classical scene, Mediterranean, ancient-Roman-or so I saw it. A wharf; in the background, beyond walls and gateways (like cut-outs), there is the top of the mast of an antique vessel; on an otherwise deserted street in the foreground there are two figures, both muffled, one perhaps the person who has arrived, the other perhaps a native of the port. The scene is of desolation and mystery. It speaks of the mystery of arrival (EA, 106).

In addition to being a description of his life in England, The Enigma of Arrival is also an insight into Naipaul’s literary career up till the time of this book. Salman Rushdie has spoken of the book as an analysis and discussion of the ‘dark clouds that seemed to have gathered over Naipaul’s inner world’.17
There are two parallel themes that run throughout the five sections into which the novel has been divided. There is the landlord on his Wiltshire estate in Waldenshaw near the town of Salisbury where the protagonist, a writer, has gone to stay. The writer stays for ten years on the estate before moving to another house a little distance away. The second is Naipaul’s own passage from expatriation to exile. There are also other very evident, thinly-veiled themes such as the history of decay of modern England and the symbolic decay of English literature; juxtaposed against the emergence of new people; the people from former colonies who figuratively seem to have taken over England and English literature. The novel thus combines both fictional as well as non-fictional elements in it.

The first section, “Jack’s Garden” deals with a series of discoveries made about the land around, along with its people. Jack is central to the plot of the novel and his life and actions are constantly under the scrutiny of the protagonist. The eyes that observe the landscape and its peoples in this section are those which are trying to come to terms with the solitude and loneliness that has been thrust upon the narrator’s persona over the years.

The second section, “Journey” switches to the non-fictional mode and gives an account of Naipaul’s own passage, albeit through the writer narrator’s fictional experience, to England; his insecurities as an expatriate, the acceptance of his foreignness as a result of his different background and skin colour; his feeling of not being at home while yet wanting to stay.

The third section, “Ivy” begins with the description of a walk Naipaul took during his early years in Wiltshire and his discovery of a ‘dusty, ragged, half-rotted-away carcase of a hare’ (EA, 201) which symbolizes the state of the estate. This section of the novel discusses people of the estate and their relationship with
each other. The decay that appears to be setting slowly upon the estate is symbolic of the decay of England as an Imperial Power.

In “Rooks”, Naipaul discusses the birds that have come to settle on the tall beeches in the estate. They are birds of death and symbolize the final decay that has come to the estate. Here the writer-narrator talks of the death of the caretaker of the manor, Mr Phillips; he and Pitton, the gardener have been replaced by incompetent people. The chapter also brings onto the scene a number of new arrivals in and around the manor which also indirectly spells the loss of security, solitude and privacy that the writer has enjoyed on the manor estate so far.

“The Ceremony of Farewell” brings back Naipaul in the non-fictional mode and mourns the death of his sister, Sati and helps him investigate ‘this new awareness of death’ (EA, 376).

Using both the fictional and non-fictional techniques, Naipaul in The Enigma of Arrival, also discusses the books he has written so far, and the ups and downs of his career. He has allowed ample room in the book for self-criticism beginning with the critical analysis of his early writing and the hardship he had to face to initially establish himself as a writer.

Though Naipaul had come to London to establish himself as a writer and though, he agrees with Lamming that his career has been made by London; his acknowledgement of the same lacks passion:

I couldn't have become a writer without London – the whole physical apparatus of publishing, magazines, the BBC. This apparatus enables a man to make a living.

Like Nirad Chaudhari, whose prolonged stay in England has not deterred him from accepting his native Indian roots, Naipaul too acknowledges that his instinct
as a writer was developed in his native Trinidad, which served as a base, despite the fact that it did not hold much for him. While Nirad Babu says: ‘Kishorganj, Banagram, and Kalikutch are interwoven with my being; so is the England of my imagination; they formed and shaped me’, Naipaul too concedes:

It was odd: the place itself, the little island and its people, could no longer hold me. But...the island had given me the world as a writer; had given me the themes that in the second half of the twentieth century had become important; had made me metropolitan (EA, 166-167).

Having graduated, Naipaul moved from Oxford to London, to actively pursue writing as a vocation. The expatriate Naipaul who had come out to England in 1950, found, upon closer observation of London, that it was not at all as glamorous as it had appeared from far away Trinidad. Seeing the bombed sites in the middle of London, and the old-fashioned vending machines at the stations underground, he deduced that the city was not all about being an overwhelming capricious metropolitan as perceived from afar, inspite of the fact that it was one of those ‘cities which were to become cities visited for learning and elegant goods and manners and freedom by all the barbarian peoples of the globe’ (EA, 154). It did not leap out to possess him, and continued to remain strange and unknown for a long time.

As the expatriate returning in 1956 to his small island country, once again seeing and feeling the futility of the intellectually starved country, Naipaul decided that it was England alone that could support his writing career, though it was not a very likeable place for him. In a letter to his mother, dated May 3, 1954, Naipaul wrote:
Do not imagine that I am enjoying staying in this country. This country is hot with racial prejudices, and I certainly don’t wish to stay here. My antipathy to a prolonged stay in this country is as great as my fear of Trinidad (LBFS, 313-314).

In the same year, 1956, Naipaul returned to England to pick up his writing. It was not only his dislike for Trinidad that made him stay away, but also the bad financial condition of the family, especially after the death of his father. England was a country where he could make a living in a small way through radio scripts and journalism, while waiting for his books to get published. It was only in 1960, after having published three books that he returned to the island, his home, with celebration on his mind. However, he found that having achieved his ambition of being a writer, the relationship he had with the island ‘had come to an end’ (EA, 166) and that he was ready and ‘anxious to move on’ (EA, 166). This can be said to be the point where Naipaul chose to move from his expatriate status to that of an immigrant in London. But instead of acknowledging this shift in status openly, he shields it by saying that because everyone is adrift in a metropolis, therefore they are all ‘non-residents’20, and he is just another one among them.

Time and again, Naipaul insists that England is no more than a neutral territory; it is, for him, only a place which has given him the metropolitan as a vantage point for pursuing his career. While accepting the security provided by the metropolis, Naipaul has the vigour to disassociate himself from England:

As soon as I move out of that little enchanted area [London], I’m in a foreign country in which I’m not terribly interested.21
The shift from immigrant status to that of exile was quick. It complemented the psychological exile that he had developed as a result of the apparent difference between him and the people among whom he had come.

In all the years that Naipaul has lived in England, he has had several urges to leave it, to put an end to everything he has established and to move out; because despite the years, he has felt his aloofness grow from the very society that he had come to inhabit over fifty-five years ago. At a meeting with Dom Moraes after the publication of *An Area of Darkness*, he said:

I'm tired of England. Do you find that? I've felt my strangeness here more and more in the last ten years....I'd like to move, and live somewhere else for a while.\(^{22}\)

At the same time, exhibiting the exile's predicament of belonging and not belonging all at once, he admits that in Wiltshire, he found a place which gave him a feeling of rebirth, a place where he did some of his best work till date.

Though Naipaul does not particularly 'despair'\(^{23}\) for the debasement of English literature today, he has presented his vision of this degradation in *The Enigma of Arrival* by discussing it symbolically. The Wiltshire manor estate where he had gone to live, was once, in the colonial era, a part of English imperial grandeur of the nineteenth century. It had begun to rapidly disintegrate because of neglect, like imperial England, and had begun to be inhabited by people from former colonies; in the same manner as Naipaul, with his foreign presence, emanating from 'another hemisphere, another background' (EA, 13) had come to the estate. His foreignness in such a landscape was one of the reasons for his solitude. But upon mature reflection, in the novel, Naipaul concludes that though the estate owner was a privileged man because of the imperial power that he could exercise, this privilege worked against the him because satiation on the part of the
landlord had made him descend into 'non-doing and nullity' (EA, 209). This same circumstance can be applied to imperial England and the literature produced by it. At the same time, Naipaul says that the lack of this privilege or the perception of his difference had led to the sharpening of his own creative and survival instinct. Upon further retrospection, Naipaul realizes that this 'racial oddity' (EA, 208) gave him an edge over the landlord and this privilege had grown with time; it would not have come to him had he come to the Wiltshire estate immediately after his first arrival in England as a boy. It would have been 'burdensome' (EA, 208) and the realization of his own privilege would not have come to him at that point of time.

In 1960, Naipaul was commissioned to write a travel account on the Caribbean, his first foray into such a kind of writing. The book did not, according to him, come out successfully because it did not have a metropolitan audience to 'report back' (EA, 167) to. It made him conclude that travel writing required much more than just travelling and observation of landscapes and people; it needed him to acknowledge more of himself. To pursue this kind of a writing Naipaul says: 'I had first of all to define myself very clearly to myself' (EA, 168).

For this, Naipaul needed to study the other equally influential extension of his identity, beside the West Indian: the Indian identity; an identity which had been given him by his ancestors who had migrated to Trinidad and become a part of the ‘miniature’ Indias which overseas Indian groups like them created. These miniature Indias were distinguished by their endogamous approach to society, the isolation of language and culture, and their own rituals and rites. This identity needed to be explored before Naipaul understood his position as a traveller especially when he had two ideas of his identity itself – each sceptical of the other.
The first idea was that of an India which was symbolized by his little endogamous Indian community of Trinidad, a community of mostly peasant Indians, working on sugar estates. Migration from India had made these Indians want to improvise their conditions, had made them ambitious; but the Depression gave them few opportunities to rise financially. Encircled by their own rituals and institutions these Indians represented a trapped, transitory lot. They had no representation and many of them were destitutes. Given an opportunity to return to their native India, these people would not does. This gave Naipaul the presumption that the India which these people, and he, himself, for that matter, had come from was a fearful one. And despite a mere two generation old presence of his family in Trinidad, Naipaul found his ancestry dateless and difficult to trace beyond that; ‘an area of darkness’ (AD, 24) as he refers to it.

The second India was more realistic. It could be dated though it was far off. This was the India of nationalist movements, freedom fighters; the India of a great civilization and a great past; the “Incredible India” that the Indian Tourism Department uses as its slogan. For Naipaul this second idea of India balanced the first one. It was the presence of this India that made Indians, Naipaul included, hold on with pride, and on their own, in an alien land.

Naipaul says that the India they had in Trinidad was more of a representation than an actual presence. It was present more in attitudes and artefacts than in any other form of realistic presence.

More than in people, India lay about us in things: in a string bed or two, grimy, tattered, no longer serving any function…yet still permitted to take up room; in plaited straw mats; in innumerable brass vessels; in wooden printing blocks, never used because printed cotton was cheap and
because the secret of the dyes had been forgotten...in books, the sheets large, coarse and brittle, the ink thick and oily; in drums and one ruined harmonium; in brightly coloured pictures of deities on pink lotus or radiant against Himalayan snow; and in all the paraphernalia of the prayer-room; the brass bells and gongs and camphor–burners like Roman lamps, the slender–handled spoon for the doling out of the consecrated ‘nectar’...the images, the smooth pebbles, the stick of sandalwood (AD, 23-24).

Many of these things could not be used after having worn down because such craftsmanship as was required to repair them was not available; the people, therefore, had to switch over to items that were available locally. These unrepaired, useless symbols of India were, however, never thrown away. Rites and rituals, customs and traditions, were followed because they were ‘felt to be ancient’ (AD, 24). So, many Indians in Trinidad came to harbour a secondary kind of relationship with India; part acceptance, part denial. Of his own relationship with India, Naipaul says:

I had grown up with my own ideas of the distance that separated me from India. I was far enough away from it to cease to be of it. I knew the rituals but couldn’t participate in them; I heard the language, but followed only the simpler words. But I was near enough to understand the passions; and near enough to feel that my own fate was bound up with the fate of the people of the country (MM, 491).

To study this void in his identity; to discover what lay beyond the ‘area of darkness’ he knew, Naipaul set out on a journey to India in 1962. He carried with
him these two concepts of his motherland also. In addition to these, he had other presupposed ideas which were formed as early as 1950, as is evident from the letters he wrote home. In a letter dated, September 21, 1949 to his sister, Kamla, studying in Benares Hindu University, he wrote that Indians are a ‘thieving lot’ (LBFS, 5). In another letter to his sister again, dated, November 24, 1949 he put forward his opinion: ‘Indian painting and sculpture have ceased to exist. This is the picture I want you to look for—a dead country still running with the momentum of its heyday (LBFS, 9).

Beginning in 1962, Naipaul, by now, has made numerous trips to India, but the longer sojourns of nearly a year each have produced three books on the country: An Area of Darkness (1964), India: A Wounded Civilization (1977) and India: A Million Mutinies (1990). In addition to these, there are shorter pieces written over the years. Some pieces on India, such as “The Election in Ajmer” was written in 1971; it discusses the Third General Elections to the Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha, an event that actually occurred in 1962 during Naipaul’s first Indian trip. Each work on India gives an insight into the Indian strain present in Naipaul’s personality. At the same time, these books have citations of similarities and differences between Naipaul’s West Indian ‘Indian’ attitudes and the actual Indian attitudes that he sees in India.

Each one of the books mentioned above has received strong criticism from Indian critics. One of their principal accusations is that Naipaul has presented India from an occidental point of view: a gross mistake made by a man designated as a world writer. While a number of critics hold the view that he is at his snobbish best in these books, many believe that they are polemics rather than travel accounts. C.D. Narasimhaiah believes that Naipaul’s views on India are ‘obtrusively personal’;25 there are other critics also who hold the mature view that the books are more about Naipaul’s perception of his Indian sensibility than the
India that he has travelled to. George Woodcock, while discussing his first two Indian books, says that 'as one reads through these two very uncharacteristic books, it becomes evident that Naipaul is writing less about India than about himself'. Naipaul, however, has very specific views about the contents of his three Indian books:

They are all written in different modes. One is autobiographical, one is analytical and the last is an account of the experience of the people in the country.

Naipaul made his first trip to India with the idea that he would see there, the India that had so far been 'A Resting-Place for the Imagination' (AD, 21), a country never physically known, and therefore, 'never real... a country suspended in time' (AD, 21). The trip, however, was nothing short of a colossal disappointment for him. Preconceived notions and presumptions regarding Indian attitudes marred his vision and drew him into a state of hysteria, where he could comprehend nothing but the abjectness that the India of 1962 had to offer.

Naipaul begins An Area of Darkness by placing himself as merely an observer. He proceeds to examine the miniature India that was set up by his grandfather and other migrants like him in Trinidad, and the gradual dissolution of this India.

Naipaul came to India expecting to find 'metropolitan attitudes', as he says in a short piece, "In the Middle of the Journey", that he wrote in 1962, perhaps because he had assumed that the largeness of a land was directly related to the metropolitan culture it could harbour. Believing that he had observed all the minutiae linked to India, he concluded that the metropolitan culture had eluded India as it had Trinidad. He found that, instead of rootedness there existed colonial attitudes such as the ones that existed in Trinidad. These were the attitudes of self-
distrust and philistinism. Another remarkably noticeable attitude was the rejection of the idea of being associated with ‘poor, dirty India’ (\textit{Wr}, 6); and given an opportunity, a majority of the people would leave the country; an attitude found in Trinidad as well.

Naipaul believes that the dirt and evident poverty of India to be found even in elite places like five star hotels and first-class railway carriages and posh colonies do not just speak of the physical squalor of India, but of ‘a more general collapse of sensibility, of a people grown barbarous, indifferent and self-wounding, who, out of a shallow perception of the world, have no sense of tragedy’ (\textit{Wr}, 23-24).

Naipaul perceives India as an area of darkness, a land of mimics; and the mimicry he says, is present in every sphere of existence. However, the noticeable aspect is that in India the mimicry coexists with the reality and does not separate the outer and inner world of an individual, as it did in Trinidad, where the inner worlds of an individual was contained in a shell, shielded away from the impact of the outer world. This Indian mimicry, Naipaul says, is of a special kind:

The mimicry changes, the inner world remains constant; this is the secret of survival....Yesterday the mimicry was Mogul; tomorrow it might be Russian or American; today it is English (\textit{AD}, 55).

It is keeping this in mind that Naipaul speaks of the mimicry of Bunty, the stereotype ‘\textit{box-wallah}’ (\textit{Wr}, 13) of Calcutta; a \textit{box-wallah} being an executive who works in a firm with foreign connections. Bunty comes from a good family, has had an English education, maintains his adopted English accent, has a mixed marriage; his home is a mixture of east and west, and this harmony of the two cultures is to be found in his food, books, tastes in art, and so on. He plays golf
and follows social obligations religiously. All this is found in his adapted English style; but Bunty is an Indian at heart and has strong feelings for the Partition and nationalism; wherein he will occasionally curse the English; but Naipaul says that this is just a ‘passing mood’ (Wr, 14).

On this first trip, there are a very few things that actually appealed to Naipaul, but they too are tinged with his hysteria. The Himalayas, a fantasy of his childhood, is appreciated to a great extent by him. The sheer beauty of something that so far existed only in pictures for him, is appealing in reality as well, but he somehow manages to attach it to the ‘Indian symbol of loss’ (AD, 179). There are a number of times when he tries to understand the context of the rituals of his miniature India as a part of the real India that he has come out to.

It is not only the reminiscences of his Trinidad identity that are present in the book, but also the English presence that Naipaul can identify with. However, they are not as close to his heart as the likeness to the West Indian identity. Calcutta, for one, reminds him of the England he has known:

But nothing I had read or heard had prepared me for the red-brick city on the other side of Howrah Bridge which, if one could ignore the stalls and rickshaws and white-clad hurrying crowds, was at first like another Birmingham; and then, in the centre, at dusk, was like London, with the misty, tree-blobbed Maidan as Hyde Park, Chowringhee as a mixture of Oxford Street, Park Lane and Bayswater Road... and the Hooghly, a muddier, grander Thames, not far away (AD, 264).

The visit to the village of the Dubes is another such experience of mixed feelings, that Naipaul was unprepared for. Though he looks forward to discovering and accepting his roots, he is disappointed to find the dereliction of the other side
of his grandfather’s family. Unable to come to terms with their demand, the visit ends in flight. The darkness of India, that he feels, comes full circle with this visit to the village. He has failed to link, in any manner, the romantic vision he had harboured of India for so long with the India that he actually sees. In this context, the mildest critical remark handed to Naipaul for *An Area of Darkness* is:

> What he saw or chose to see – was not what he had expected to see, and he became sullen, he felt disillusioned....The things he saw and recorded with a tiresome peculiarity were certainly there, but there were other things too which his observant eye shouldn’t have missed.²⁹

The overall mood of the book is a critically analytical one. Naipaul begins the journey as a stranger despite feeling that he is ‘linked’ (*AD*, 178) to India in a special way. The one year that he has spent in India makes him realize acutely that he cannot and does not want to be ‘one of the crowd’ (*AD*, 39) of India. So, Naipaul retreats from India with unfulfilled expectations of finding his version of his ancestral homeland:

> India had not worked its magic on me. It remained the land of my childhood; an area of darkness...a land of myth; it seemed to exist in just the timelessness which I had imagined as a child, into which, for all that I walked on Indian earth, I knew I could not penetrate (*AD*, 274).

The second trip to India with a long stay began in August 1975, and produced the book *India: A Wounded Civilization*. By this time he has learnt to recognize the ‘absurdity’ (*Wr*, 19) of India which ‘takes the onlooker beyond anger and despair to neutrality’ (*Wr*, 19). Yet, he still believes that he is linked to India:
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; I cannot travel only for the sights. I am at once too close and too far.  

And here, he does not exhibit an anxiety bordering on hysteria as in 1962. Again, this book is a reflection of Naipaul's personal view of the land he had found drab on his previous trip. But a noticeable change here is the visibly lesser number of comparisons made.

As his first trip to India was a kind of soul searching trip, Naipaul had skimmed through his past too often to compare and contrast the India that he saw and the India that he knew; but not so in this book. Therefore, in the very beginning itself, he clearly outlines that whatever he will see and whatever he will write down will be put down from the point of view of his enquiring self, because this is what links his writing to the idea of the truth that he propagates:

And though in India I am a stranger, the starting point of this inquiry – more than might appear in these pages – has been myself. Because in myself, like the split-second images of infancy which some of us carry, there survive, from the family rituals that lasted into my childhood, phantasmal memories of old India which for me outline a whole vanished world. (IWC, xi)

**India : A Wounded Civilization** is more empathetic in context; something absent from Naipaul's first book on India. Much of the explorations, arguments, ideas applied in this book are anticipated in “A Second Visit” which came out in 1967. The subject of spiritualism, ideas, magic and rituals, dependence on borrowed ideas, and the absence of a working intellect is also present in this short
piece. For example, ‘The poverty of the land is reflected in the poverty of the mind’ (IWC, 159) is a statement very much similar to: ‘And the physical drabness itself, answering the drabness of mind: that also held the Indian deficiency’ (Wr, 23). But then, all of Naipaul’s work comes from a single continuous source.

This second book, coming after a decade of the first one discusses a number of changes that have occurred in the thirteen years they have in between them; this also includes a discussion of the changes in Indian attitudes that have taken place during this time. Naipaul discusses R.K. Narayan’s Mr Sampath and The Vendor of Sweets; there is a discussion on the various movements in India including the Naxalites in Bengal and the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra. There is also a lengthy discussion on Gandhi’s telescopic vision for India; and the India of the Congress imposed Emergency and its aftermath.

‘ “India will go on” ’ (IWC, 9), Naipaul quotes what Narayan, the great Indian writer, had said to him when the two had met in London in 1961. Naipaul believes that this is precisely the vision that drives all Indians; so despite all its failures and the rampant dereliction all around, India still manages to move on. He also strongly believes that Indians are not focused on to their problems; rather they heed to their karmic principles, ‘the successful prophecies of astrologers, of the wisdom of auspicious hours, of telepathic communications, and action taken in response to some inner voice’ (IWC, 100). Naipaul also believes that all proposals of industrialization and propagation of democratic values; the conscious efforts made to change the society and its values will be rendered as failed attempts until and unless Indians learn to let go of the past. Furthermore, the Indians do not apply their intellect to find realistic solutions because inquiry and analysis of historical and social development is ‘too far outside the Indian tradition’ (IWC, 82). The Indians, he feels, use borrowed skills which do not answer the needs of the Indian scenario; the Indians are also a laid back lot, accepting every thing and
anything without exercising the intellect. And all this while, Naipaul makes his personal history as a platform for presenting his views.

It is largely the Indian way of looking at and perceiving things and yet not looking, that makes Naipaul remark that the India Narayan has presented in his Malgudi, and in his fiction as such, is unacceptable to the wider human sensibility. It is far removed from the India that is real, it is inaccessible and hidden. Naipaul says that it is difficult for him to comprehend India through Narayan’s vision, because it required him ‘to ignore too much of what could be seen, to shed too much of myself: my sense of history, and even the simplest ideas of human possibility’ (IWC, 11).

In *India: A Wounded Civilization*, though India is still ‘a wounded old civilization’ (IWC, 8) for Naipaul, he is not as critical of it as he was earlier. He is eloquent about the India on the brink of change, slow however it may be. This makes him remark at the end of the book that the India of 1967, the year of a short visit, had seemed to him ‘a blacker time’ (IWC, 161).

The third book on India that Naipaul has written, *India: A Million Mutinies*, is one that is the least severe and the most empathetic picture of the Indian scenario as perceived by him. In addition to finding considerable changes in the perception of the man, who on his first trip had remarked, ‘It was a journey that ought not to have been made; it had broken my life in two’ (AD, 289); this book also exhibits the versatility in techniques used by the writer, something that has not been used in any of the earlier travelogues except *A Turn In the South*. In *India: A Million Mutinies*, Naipaul has let the people he meets, do the talking, as in *A Turn in the South*:

The idea of letting people talk in the book on the South was really quite new to me. And so in this book I thought it was
better to let India be defined by the experience of the people, rather than writing one’s personal reaction to one’s feeling about being an Indian and going back – as in the first book [An Area of Darkness] – or trying to be analytical, as in the second book [India: A Wounded Civilization].

Although it may appear that he is absent from the book; it is not so. His presence is very much there between the interviewee’s experiences. He has made his presence felt by putting in his personal experiences when he links one narrative to another; he is also ever present as an empathetic participant in the interviewee’s accounts. Also, in the book Naipaul does not satirize his interviewees and gives them an opportunity to speak their minds, as in A Turn in the South. And the spectrum he spans this time is wider than in the two previous books. Criticism is soft and does not deviate into tirade, so much so that the change in Naipaul’s vision is more visible than the change in the India that is the subject.

With each visit to India, there can be noticed in Naipaul a greater understanding of India. In India: A Million Mutinies, he presents India as a nation which is very much aware of its needs, and the requirements of the modern age. It is not as a decayed civilization that he refers to the country in this book. The empathy factor here is higher than in India: A Wounded Civilization. The Indians he meets and sees now are people who are slowly but surely asserting their individual identities, and releasing them from the bondage of self-distrust and karma. He can recognize an assertiveness in identity as much in the farmer in Karnataka, as in the box-wallah of Bombay who now appears more conscious of his individuality.

Keen observation also makes Naipaul see the various changes that he notes in a positive light. He has seen and remarked positively that though it was
prophesized as far back as 1962 that Calcutta was dying, ‘it had gone on’ (IMM, 347). When he sees the Karnataka landscape this time round, he can see enough prosperity to remark: ‘There was nothing like the destitution I had seen 26 years before’ (IMM, 149). And though he had appreciated the Senas civic activities in Maharashtra in *India: A Wounded Civilization*, this book sees him move from his appreciative stance to a move ambivalent one where he exhibits a slight disapproval of the Sena’s xenophobic vision.

Like in his first book on India, *An Area of Darkness*, Naipaul has, in this too, used personal experiences and thoughts to compare and contrast the visions and experiences of his interviewees. Visiting a Muslim family home in a ‘ghetto’ (IMM, 28) area in downtown Bombay, he can empathize and say that living in such a confined small area with a minority tag meant upholding of the minority issue much more than believing in individual existence, something that he had experienced when he was a part of the minority Indian community in Trinidad.

Furthermore, he says that being proud of an Indian identity and holding it as a sacred belief is something that is only possible in very small, isolated communities which have minority status in alien countries. Such an idea of a composite Indian identity as something sacred cannot exist in the vast land of India, because people here hold on to smaller identities of clan, caste and so on. Their curiosity does not go beyond that. Speaking of the changes he notes in the Indian society in India, he says that they are, in many respects different from the changes that the Indian community undergoes outside India. The slow loss of language, rituals, beliefs, supported by a namesake idea of family, clan, the larger India – these are changes that will not occur in India because here, no matter how much of ritualism is allowed to be lost, a few primordial principles would always remain and survive the rigours of time, because they are rooted to the land and have been associated for centuries with it.
In India: A Million Mutinies, Naipaul seems to advocate the right of the Indian man to secure for himself a material existence as well as an identity. Each Indian, Naipaul says, is involved in his own personal mutiny, and when comprehended on a large scale, each mutiny symbolizes the awakening of a nation, the remaking of India. In a way, the book can be said also to reflect the changes in Naipaul himself. In the years that lie between his first visit and the sojourn for this book, both Naipaul and India have changed; in that the frenzy and confusion of previous years have decreased.

Over the years Naipaul has accepted many of the changes around him with his newly formed idea that 'Change [is] constant' (EA, 32). The man who is a self-declared unbeliever was enraged to see electric bulbs being used instead of oil lamps for the festival of Diwali in Bombay when he had visited India before the writing of India: A Million Mutinies. This very man now benevolently observes the changes he sees in the performance of the rituals at a later date in Trinidad.

In 1984, when Naipaul went to Trinidad to participate in a religious ceremony complementary to the cremation of his sister, Sati, he noticed that rites and rituals still played a very important part in the lives of the Indian people there. Even though Sati, like Naipaul himself, had had no particular affinity for rituals, her family did not want any Hindu funeral rite to be left out. Amalgamation of traditionalism and modernism, along with tolerance and acceptance of other religions can be seen in the description of the rites as presented by him in the last chapter of The Engima of Arrival.

Sati’s son participated in the ceremony, wearing jeans in their suburban house in the city, although Naipaul associated such ceremonies with rural settings, as was the case in his childhood. The pundit, after performing the rites, delivered a lecture including in it, the topic of universal brotherhood ‘equating Hinduism –
speculative, many-sided with animistic roots – with the revealed faiths of Christianity and Mohammedanism’ (EA, 380). This was a particularity that had evolved over the years, and was not so much as a result of the evolution of this concept as it was of a fear of the loss of Hinduism in Trinidad. Reverence of a kind had gone out the ceremony, Naipaul noticed, when the feeding part of the ceremony came, especially the feeding of the pundit:

In the old days he would have eaten sitting cross-legged on blankets or flour-sacks or sugar-sacks spread on the top with cotton. He would have been carefully fed and constantly waited on. Now – sumptuously served, but all at once – he ate sitting at a table in the verandah. He ate by himself (EA, 381).

No matter how much religious tenets are altered to suit the needs of man, there are some things that can never be changed. Naipaul says that there were people within his community who did not believe whole-heartedly in rituals, nor did they understand their meaning, ‘yet were unwilling to dishonour because that would cut [them] off from the past, the sacred earth, the gods’ (EA, 384). With the passage of time people had become self-aware and this prevented them from accepting anything and everything with eyes shut.

There are aspects of his religion that Naipaul has learnt from his Indian trips. And each trip has led to the growth of knowledge of Indian culture as well. It is only upon his visit to India that Naipaul learnt that the vestiges of his brahminism which expressed themselves in the form of ‘a vaguer sense of caste, and a horror of the unclean’ (AD, 27) had their roots in the India that he was visiting. It is in India that he learnt that brahmins could use only well water for drinking because it had a direct connection with the earth. Moreover, the brahmins, who had to forever remain connected with the earth, had to use pots
made of brass or earthenware. All this, Naipaul learnt from Kakusthan, a man from a Brahmin colony in Madras, who strived to live a pure brahminical life.

Speaking of the adaptation to changes in religion, Naipaul recalls people using fresh, clean banana leaves, during his childhood, for eating on after religions ceremonies. This ritual was later done away with because it was wasteful extravagance. In India, in 1962, he noticed that food was served on banana leaves in a hotel in Madras; but this ritual was discontinued later for precisely the same reasons. Also, people like Kakusthan had to make do with some kind of round dried leaves from other plants, available in the market, thereby rendering the very act of eating on leaves ironical.

In addition to religious aspects certain customs became more comprehensible with his visits to India, the elusive reasoning behind the sacrifice of the pumpkin on certain occasions being one. The truth, Naipaul discovered was ‘more frightening’ (IWC, xii) for the pumpkin is a substitute for the goat; especially when he was able to recall the story of an actual version of this sacrifice made by his father, Seepersad, who had offended his orthodox in-laws by his reformist views. Penance would be accepted if he performed a ritual of sacrifice in honor of Kali, the goddess.

For a man who was against caste and such kinds of rituals, ‘going through priestly rites: a man in white, garlanded like the goat with hibiscus, offering sacrificial clove-scented fire to the image of the goddess, to the still living goat, to the onlookers, and then offering the severed goat’s head on a brass plate’ (FC, 51) must have been a horrifying experience; an ‘orgy’ to use Nirad Chaudhari’s word.

Much after he had written all these books; criticism, travel accounts, semi-autobiographical fiction; Naipaul has, in the recent years issued statements which
appear paradoxical and challenge the very stance he has been taking. Where he wrote on May 3, 1954 to his mother: ‘I think I shall die if I had to spend the rest of my life in Trinidad. The place is too small, the values are all wrong, and the people are petty. Besides, there is really very little for me to do there’ (LBS, 313); the same man, in 1984, says: ‘I’d like to buy some land in Trinidad, where I come from’ and repeatedly over the years he has called Trinidad as ‘his’ island.

For someone who writes this about England in 1954: ‘My antipathy to a prolonged stay in this country is as great as my fear of Trinidad’ (LBFS, 313-314), and then says that he would want to leave England to shed ‘the weariness of [his] insecurity, social, racial, financial’ (EA, 172); at a later time, partially accepts that England is nice in the way that it gives him security:

I’ve been living in England, but really I think it is truer to say that I’ve been attached to London, these few square miles which make an international city, a great metropolis.

And then does an about turn and says: ‘I must make the point that it’s not a place where I can flourish completely’.

The India that felt as ‘an assault on the senses’ (Wr, 3) in the beginning of 1962, does not appear so threatening towards the end of the year. Naipaul says: ‘I have learned to see beyond the dirt... and to look for the signs of improvement and hope, however faint...my eye has been adjusted’ (Wr, 4). The same man, in an interview in 1981 says that he would like to rediscover [his] identity by losing [himself] in the millions of India.

From the above made paradoxical statements, it becomes quite evident that Naipaul has followed the course of expatriation via immigrant status to the final situation of exile. His acceptance and denial of emotions associated with this kind
of a journey point towards the attainment of an altogether different incumbency; that of a rootless individual – the final definition of an exile. Affirming this, Theroux says:

[Naipaul ranks among the] former colonials, transplanted people who can claim no country as their own...Rootlessness is their condition; it is the opposite of those for whom being metropolitan is a condition. The homeless are not calm; their homelessness is a source of particular pain, for as with all travellers, they are asked, “Where are you from?” and no simple answer is possible: all landscapes are alien.\textsuperscript{37}
References:


2. Ibid.


11. Ibid., p. 19.


16. Ibid.


27. Tejpal, Tarun, “Interview with V.S. Naipaul”, op. cit.


33. Quoted, Bibu Padhi, Modern Fiction Studies, op. cit., p. 461.


35. Ibid., p. 367


Conclusion
The journey which led to the evolution of all other ventures that are characterized by the commitment ‘to deliver the truth’ was begun by V.S. Naipaul in 1950. The decision to become a writer, fed by the fantasy of nobility associated with the profession made the colonial Naipaul leave his small island country of Trinidad and make room for himself in England. For a colonial, to get to England was to move from the periphery of the world to the centre of it, since the periphery, or the margin did not have the institutions required to support the writing profession.

Expatriation, broadly speaking, is the germ of personal interests; the decision made by an individual to leave the existing order and cross the boundary to enter a new milieu; thereby changing the meaning of the word boundary altogether. The ‘boundary’ here defines that from which ‘something begins its presencing’, not where that something ends. Each individual has his own interest for choosing expatriation though patterns can be easily recognized.

Just as Naipaul’s expatriation emanated from his decision to become a writer, and at the same time get rid of his impoverished condition and the Indian clan system whose loyalty he found constricting; all of his characters have their own set reasons for choosing their expatriation. A study of the reasons responsible for expatriation in the different novels has brought out a definitive assessment of the patterns involved in expatriation.

As a writer who concerns himself with the representation of all that is contained in the world: half-made societies, half-and-half people, the centre, the margin, the self, Naipaul has written of expatriates from the perspective of the whites and the non-whites, highlighting their reason and perception of expatriation.
The white expatriates of Naipaul’s fiction, Bobby and Linda in “In a Free State”, Raymond and Yvette in *A Bend in the River*, Peter Roche and Jane in *Guerrillas* choose expatriation for the purpose of adventure, an easy life, an exploration of exotic cultures and to get rid of the social constraints of their English lives. These expatriates of Naipaul’s fiction closely resemble the white expatriates Naipaul has met on his trips to Africa and other such places.

As expatriates, the whites stay aloof and do not make genuine efforts to mingle with the natives. Even if they do so their mingling is characterized by superficial attitudes. When they are in the third world countries, particularly Africa, they tend to treat the natives as inferior; bushmen and barbarians. This is very much evident from Linda’s behaviour. Bobby takes an interest in the Africans for his own reasons, but then, beyond that, he too believes that they are not worth paying attention to. In *A Bend in the River*, Raymond, the President’s chronicler, puts up with the idiosyncrasies of the Big Man, all because he faces a life of financial distress if he goes back to England.

As long as there is something to extract, the expatriate wills himself to stay in the place which is the choice of his expatriation. When the whites in *A Bend in the River* find themselves surrounded by the rebel Africa, threatening their lives and interests with its violence, they contemplate an exodus to South Africa which is safe enough to sustain their interests. When interests begin to wane, and danger lurks around the corner, the whites on the Ridge in *Guerrillas* feel threatened and insecure; inspite of the fact that people like Jane had come because they believed that in the modern world, the centre had shifted to countries like Trinidad which were regarded as the periphery. People like Sandra of *The Mimic Men*, and Linda, believe that a move to an exotic land would provide a change and compensation from their insipid social lives in England. But the romance of the white adventure in the exotic ‘bush’ is short lived. The inadequacies of the land
catch up with the rootlessness of the mind; the result of which is the search for a new interest. Sandra wishes to go to America; and Harry in *Guerrillas* moves to Canada to safeguard his interests.

The interest of the third world individual in expatriation is basically founded upon the need to improve his economic condition. Naipaul, on his trip to Dallas, remarks that it is this interest that has drawn Indians to the United States. the third world expatriate who travels to England or Europe, or for that matter, the United States, takes with him the fantasy of a glamorous, bewitching life that he has so far seen only on television or in books, as opposed to the white expatriate who takes with him the concept of a fairy tale like idyllic life presented through travel brochures.

England, to where a number of third world and colonial Naipaulian characters travel, appeals to them as a fairy land, as it did their author. Willie Chandran of *Magic Seeds* is as awed by England as Ralph Singh of *The Mimic Men*. To Willie, England is a place which will let him be free of the caste seclusion that he has witnessed all his life; whereas Ralph Singh wanted to leave his island Isabella to lead a life that he had been fascinated by since childhood. It is for perhaps for the same reason that Dayo in “Tell me who to Kill” desperately wants to leave for England. Jimmy Ahmad of *Guerrillas* wants to leave his Caribbean island country because of his impoverished conditions and stigmatized presence.

Other kinds of expatriation that appear in Naipaul’s fiction appear to have arisen from whimsicality though there is a studied motive in them too. Santosh of “One out of Many” wants to leave for Washington with his employer, apparently because he cannot leave his employer; but his desire arises from the fear of facing drudgery if he goes back to his hill station town. Salim cf *A Bend in the River*
moves into the interior of Africa believing that he would strike it rich like his friend, Nazruddin, the successful entrepreneur. Dayo’s brother, the narrator of “Tell Me who to Kill” decides to go to England for the love of his brother, though it becomes evident that he was weary of his disappointing island life.

The individual study of all these kinds of expatriation prove that though expatriation is taken up largely for economic reasons, there are other reasons, lesser in magnitude, which are equally responsible; all arising from a difference in personal interests.

The salient difference in the expatriation of the whites and the non-whites, as evident from Naipaul’s fiction is that while the whites always consider their native countries as somewhere to go back to if their adventure fails or if their interests wane; the non-white expatriates are bent upon making their expatriate situation work out successfully. For them, memories of home are usually twined with the deprivations that had underlined their lives. It is this memory that keeps the narrator of “Tell Me Who to Kill” in England despite his failed life there. The only non-white expatriate to show a white expatriate attitude partially is Nazaruddin, who charts out his success path meticulously, giving up one land for another as soon as he begins to incur losses.

To think that it is just Naipaul’s characters, the white and the non-white expatriates who exhibit this kind of an expatriate behaviour is wrong. These characters can be identified with expatriates Naipaul has met at one point or the other in his journeys to different countries. Philips, the English expatriate Naipaul met in the Ivory Coast had come out solely for adventure but did not like the African attitudes linked to personality cults, even though he claimed to be ‘linked’ to Africa. Michele Gibbs, the American ‘internationalist’ Naipaul writes about in “Heavy Manners in Grenada” believed that she was serving a cause in Grenada,
whereas the natives liked to believe otherwise. These and many more white expatriates treat the expatriate country as an experiment ground for gauging their endurance and capabilities. On the other hand, Arlette and Andrée, two non-white expatriates, from the Caribbean background, Naipaul met in the Ivory Coast, did not wish to go back to their native lands.

All expatriates are in for a cultural shock as soon as they land in a new country. Even Naipaul was not spared the ungraciousness of cultural shock. The language, the people, their behaviour and customs, even small things such as responding to names, is something to be adjusted to. While some like Singh can cope with this situation to a great extent and can even develop a character of a kind; for others, such as Willie, the adaptation is tormenting.

Expatriation leaves the expatriate with two choices as studied from Naipaul’s fiction: one is a return to the homeland, the second is a further movement, which is again of two kinds: a second expatriation or immigration. While a number of white expatriates choose to return home, the non-white expatriates turn to take up the immigrant situation usually; this may be propelled by the vision of impending failure upon return to the native land. This is the very reason why Salim decides to leave for England following the steps of Nazruddin; and this is exactly the same reason why scores of destitute indentured labourers continued to stay on in Trinidad even after their indenture had come to an end. The India they had come from held a destitution far more than what befell them in Trinidad.

Ralph Singh is the exceptional non-white expatriate who chooses to return to his native land; but having adjusted to the life and people, facilities and situations of England; his own island fails to hold his interest, though he succeeds financially. Involvement in bad politics sees him take off from the Island after a
considerable amount of time. Willie Chandran, not knowing what to do, decides to go to Africa with his African wife, Ana. His expatriation turns into a failed attempt at achieving immigrant status there. Though he has a half-and-half society to move in, he remains forever the outsider and when he finds that he can take no more of his situation, he leaves; only to return to his native country, after a short stay in Europe. Like Ralph Singh, mistaken identities and mistaken attitudes of a political rebellion leave him a nowhere man.

It is upon immigrants or migrants, particularly the East Indian migrants of West Indies, that Naipaul focuses on. For this, he has received ample amount of criticism for not paying attention to non-Indian groups of the West Indies. But then, of course, a writer who believes that he is rooted to Indian culture, by reason of his parentage and upbringing, has the right to write about a community that has given him his identity, and has helped to commit him to the very profession that he pursues. But even while concentrating on the typical strains of the East Indian migration, Naipaul interweaves it into the large canvas of the West Indian society.

The East Indian West Indian community that Naipaul has written about are a highly endogamous lot; their sense of separateness from the larger part of the West Indian society goes far beyond their skin colour. Given a slightly better position than the slave descendents by an act in history, the Indian migrants do not leave a single stone unturned in exhibiting their difference from this larger group. They stick strictly to their rituals, food habits and particularly language.

But no section of society can remain unaffected by another. Cultural differences must be identified, accepted and then respected, both by the immigrants and the society that accepts them. The immigrants are 'in between' people, to use a term employed by Bhabha for them. Time helps these 'in between' people to forge a new identity based upon assimilation and faternisation.
As studied from the novels, The Suffrage of Elvira, The Mystic Masseur, The Mimic Men and A House for Mr Biswas, it can be said that assimilation of the east Indian community with the larger non-Asian community of the West Indies did not only lead to rapid deterioration of Indianness but an equally fast movement towards creolisation. It is as a result of this creolisation that they began eating Portuguese dishes, and plantains like the Negroes; it is the loss of their identity, both social and religious, which leads them to convert to Presbyterianism and go in for inter marriages.

Of all the work that Naipaul has done on the East Indian immigrants, it is A House for Mr Biswas, the greatest modern epic, which chronicles most aptly the stages of East Indian immigration in the Caribbean; from maintaining Indian building techniques and structures, to the much later migration of Indians to England and other countries, to getting rid of the West Indian futility that they were doomed to if they remained.

A House for Mr Biswas, being Naipaul’s own story, adopted from one of his father’s stories, is an insight into the making and shaping of Naipaul himself. It can therefore, be read as an autobiographical work depicting the struggle of one man, his father, Seepersad Naipaul, represented by Biswas, against the shackles of rituals and the crushing force of clan oppression. But rebellion, not acceptable in his time, sees Biswas suffer a breakdown and eventually premature death. But, despite this, Biswas emerges as a man of enormous courage, not only because he stands up for his individualism, but also for opposing ritualism while still being an ordinary man, rooted in his culture. He is a better East Indian migrant than the entire Tulsi clan, who despite their daily puja and togetherness, break up into smaller units and adopt customs and idiosyncracies of a religion they were forever sceptical of and a society they had stayed away from till then.
However, The Suffrage of Elvira written of a period later then A House for Mr Biswas shows that creolization has taken over in almost every sphere of life; the stronger non-Asian culture has seeped through into the weaker Asian culture, which, any way, had only memories to cling to, of a land which becomes distant with each passing day. The miniature Indias recede into the background and the Indias of the mind fade away.

It is when the immigrant fails to assimilate with the adapted society, does he slip into exile, or the ‘beyond’, as Bhabha says. This exile may be brought upon by political reasons, as in the case of Ralph Singh and Willie Chandran; it may be the result of acute depression as in the case of Santosh, the domestic in “One Out of Many”. According to Naipaul, just as the reason for seeking expatriation are varied, so also the reasons for adopting exile. However, the one crucial aspect of exile is that it is forced, even if the force results from psychological pressure.

Although, on the face of it, the predicament of Singh and Willie, and Santosh and the narrator of “Tell Me Who to Kill” may appear similar, they all vary from one another. And it would be just to say that Santosh’s exile is far worse than the exile of all these characters mentioned, because, while Ralph Singh and Willie can think of future prospects, Santosh, despite having gained what every other person coming to the United States desires, still feels lost. His is a condition of aggravated psychological exile. He has and can harbour no plans for his future, and his exile will only end on the day he dies, such is his agony.

The treatment of exile as a positive force is not a discovery of Naipaul, but still is rarely found in contemporary writes. Vacillating between the idea of being lost and the memory of a lost idea of self, makes both Ralph Singh and Willie Chandran think of options to pursue during their respective exiles, limited though
their opportunities an area of movement be. But it is Santosh, who despite creating a new homeground for himself feels homeless; who inspite of putting down roots feels rootless. This idea of homelessness and rootlessness are to be found in Naipaul also, but are nowhere near Santosh’s predicament.

Naipaul’s expatriation led to immigration, followed by a life full of adaptations and struggles which made him come to terms with the fact that London was not the centre that held his world, as he had been misled into believing. Migrant life, for him, did not lead him to amalgamate with English cultural environment. There was an acceptance and a denial followed by a distancing of himself from that culture. Whatever little adaptations that he did make seemed to him like the learning of a second language; a knowledge that was not instinctive, but cultivated.

To attempt to understand the other end of his identity given by his ancestors, Naipaul set upon a backward journey to cover that area of darkness that had so far eluded him. Coming to terms with India required three sojourns separated by nearly a decade each. According to Naipaul, these trips brought various truths to light: the truth of the existence of India of the minds, as much real as the existence of the miniature Indias found in expatriate and immigrant communities worldwide. Whereas Biswas lived in the miniature India in Trinidad, Santosh lived in the India of his mind in Washington. It is the India of his mind which tells Santosh that the hubshi is inferior; and it is this India again, which makes him pray to the bronze gods in the living room.

While the miniature India is the creation of the immigrant community, the India of the mind is a creation of the expatriate, and even some times, the exile, who looks back nostalgically at what he has left behind and redeems it through pictures in his minds and incantations; such as those chanted by the real Bogart.
invoking the names of his gods every morning, not knowing any other ritual of faith. It is this India of the mind which makes Ralph Singh calculate that he has entered the sanyasi period of his life.

It is after coming to terms with the largeness of the land and the lack of metropolitan attitudes that Naipaul remarks that India is at once too close and too far. Since he is unable to comprehend the Indian attitude, he has adjusted his eye to it, to focus on things removed from the immediate Indian psyches and onto the millions of mutinies that he sees on his third Indian stay, which lead him to conclude that the Indian attitudes appear to be changing, snail pace though it may be.

Naipaul’s fiction and non-fiction provides an indepth study of expatriation and all the concerns associated with it, alongwith the study of immigration as well as the varied forms of exile, which originate from expatriation.

To present the truth upon which he bases all his writing, Naipaul himself says that he remains an unattached observer, but unattached only in the sense that he lets his characters and his subjects speak their minds while he examines them for their attitudes and nuances with the ‘telescopic sight of an unattached observer’.

A writer who himself says that he writes from his experiences, whose fiction draws from his non-fiction which is in turn a combination of his self and his observation, is bound to write with a complexity that is unmatched by those who write from a distance; and yet he uses simple words and simple ideas to express his vision. Naipaul’s persistent search for truth, as he says, leads him to examine all aspects of reality. So, if he agrees to being made by London, he equally agrees that he is ‘an Indian writer writing in English’ from Trinidad; and
he has never denied being sentimentally attached to India, where perhaps he could settle down, among the teeming millions, to rediscover his Indian self.

All the realities that Naipaul has ever been associated with have never been denied by him. He is a colonial who lives in the postcolonial era; he is an Indian who is not from India and though he is an Oxonian, he is not an Englishman. He has a multitude of identities, like Salim in *A Bend in the River*, and yet, like Salim he is removed from each group he is associated with. He is a ‘remarkably free, untethered soul, an expatriate in his birthplace, an alien in his ancestral land, a disengaged observer of Britain and other countries’.

This identity gives Naipaul the privilege of associating himself with all his subjects, unlike other writers of his genre who exhibit tendencies of affiliations and loyalties to the coterie to which they belong.

Naipaul’s writing differs from the writing of other Caribbean writers in that it does not involve myth-making and does nothing to flatter the populations about which it speaks. Naipaul’s projection of the East Indian community in the West Indies is different from Samuel Selvon’s treatment of the same subject, which is more patronizing than investigating. Naipaul is different from the genre of committed writers who write for only one cause, such as, Derek Walcott who works for black awareness only; whereas he takes in the entire West Indian society into account when he writes. Even his two works on West Indian history, *The Loss of El Dorado* and *A Way in the World* present the history of the building of society in general. The loss of a writer committed to a view or to a particular subject is that he cannot see the incompleteness of the canvas or the vision, and produces his world as a result of that commitment. Naipaul, on the other hand, writes as he ‘sees’ the world.
Naipaul is also very much different from immigrant and diasporic writers such as Bharti Mukherjee and Salman Rushdie. He does not focus on immigrant writing with the zest of Bharti Mukherjee. Immigration as a theme is present in his work but not the only theme in his writings even in immigrant works such as The Mystic Masseur and The Suffrage of Elvira. And unlike Salman Rushdie who is fine with two identities to associate himself with, Naipaul rejects all notions of identity by declaring himself as a refugee and an exile; but his notion of these two terms flout the very meaning of them. His use of the term refugee is not to be mistaken for an identity constrained by various national affiliations; his exile is not a negative identity, marked by a descent into nullity; rather it is positive and is an assertion of his individuality.

Although Naipaul being an observer and an examiner, presents his final judgements with a imperturbable gravity, he makes room for self-criticism and improvements; the attribute of a truly dedicated writer. It is self-criticism that makes him acknowledge that he applied a defective technique to A Way in the World and Mr Stone and the Knights Companion and that An Area of Darkness was 'full of flaws'; and it is improvement which he has shown in the understanding of the Indian psyche over the years. Naipaul has modified his views and seems to have reconciled with the Indian attitude through his adjustable eye. This makes him different from Nirad Chaudhari, the other colonial, who is affirmatively British and appears disdainfully unIndian.

V.S. Naipaul does not answer the question as to where he belongs: Wiltshire, Trinidad, or even, if ancestry be counted, India. He believes, like A.D. Hope, that he belongs to literature; and is a writer first and foremost; a craftsman answering a nobel calling’ with the dedication it deserves.
The rootless and homeless conditions that he experiences are a result of his exile emanating from the expatriation of 1950. Using these conditions and himself as the starting point of his inquiry, he covers, on his canvas, the whole world, instead of a particular mission, commitment or vision. Surprising to him was the award of the Nobel Prize in 2004, because he felt that, as a writer, he doesn’t represent anyone but himself.

I have always moved by intuition alone. I have no system, literary or political. I have no guiding political idea.9

In the end it can be said that the gain V.S. Naipaul has had from his expatriate immigrant cum exile cum refugee situation is that he is acknowledged as ‘one of the few original voices of his time’;10 and his work, therefore, is ‘wholly original… [and Naipaul] may be the only writer today in whom there are no echoes of influences’. He is truly ‘the world’s writer’.12
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