

# Cultural Squabble in V.S Naipauls *The Mimic Men*

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V.S. Naipaul's novels are exemplary for the ages of post-colonialism and post-modernity by the diversity of the intercultural images, discourses and dialogues that they move toward. Naipaul embarks upon is the detection of an ideal space for anchoring the identity of the postcolonial, postmodern spirit. This perpetual and never-ending search is like hallucination whose purpose is never completely reached and whose direction is permanently changed in an eternal search. The article aims to identify the ways of constructing comparison of migrant identities within the postcolonial context .In the fragmented and chaotic postcolonial world the characters feel estranged from the world around them and experience of a crisis of identity which leaves them hollowed and unable to reinvent themselves. His novels *Magic Seeds* and *The Mimic Men* highlights the experiences of non -western protagonists and their cultural rootlessness.

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

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

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Post-colonialism pursues post national reading of the colonial encounter by focusing on the global amalgam of cultures and identities consolidated by 'imperialism' (Gandhi 1998:129). It is a challenge for the postcolonial writer to construct an identity for the postcolonial people which is often suppressed by the colonial encounter. The question of identity is the most controversial issue in postcolonial time and literature and it can be regarded the most important because of its crisis exist in all postcolonial communities. Due to the circumstances of post-colonial era and the problematic conditions that faced newly freed nations and countries in their search and formation of self-identity the crisis floated on the surface. The issue of identity is not a clear and fixed concept as it may imagined, that led to the crisis and became a phenomena as Mercer argues identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis, when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty"( 43) In the following of World War II, the act of decolonization and liberation of nations under colonial rule provoked a noteworthy move in the direction of recreating social and individual identities.

The period also marked by the struggle of decolonization in all the levels of life, culture, economy, arts etc., that demanded to regain their identity which was lost by the powers of colonization. The opposing view, however, involves the idea that cultures do not assume any precise and easily distinguishable attributes which attest to their authentic and unmixed peculiarity with regard to the notion that identities and cultures never take up any rudimentary and distinctive center which sets up their frontiers, it is asserted that "identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions" (Hall & Gay 4).

Then, cultural identities cannot be considered as separate from the process of renewing and remolding themselves owing to their interactive bonds with other cultures and dynamics, but this renewal and floating appear to be neither entirely independent of their previous structural elements nor entirely dependent upon them.

Although there can be some dissimilarities in the In *The Mimic Men*, the main character Singh as a West Indian politician who attempts to obtain a steadfast and well-structured identity throughout the novel embodies Naipaul's theoretical views on wavering and fragmented identities and cultures which have come into view after the cultural clash between the European colonizers and the colonized nations. His Caribbean land, Isabella, poses a setting in which independence cannot reconstruct his purely native culture and identity because the Western civilization has already pervaded their indigenous cultural elements and given rise to an ambivalent intermingling

of the cultural distinctiveness of the two totally dissimilar worlds. Intending to search for ease and comfort by means of writing his memoirs and psychological impasse as a sort of healing for his individual dilemma.

Singh makes a statement as follows: “It was my hope to give expression to the restlessness, the deep disorder, which the great explorations, the overthrow in three continents of established social organizations, the unnatural bringing together of peoples ...” (Naipaul 32).

not feeling any static emotion of belonging to anywhere including his own ancestors’ society, Singh attributes to his anxiety springing from the state of being originally a West Indian in a different and extraneous land like Caribbean Isabella which was once immensely under the British colonialism in the previous times, and this anxiety culminates in certainly distorted and vague cultural identities. Consequently, what Naipaul lays emphasis on in the novel is that cultures and identities cannot be claimed to exist as fixed and established entities whose consistency has to be questioned especially after the Western civilization has filtered through the native cultures of the ex-colonized nations.

In *The Mimic Men*, Naipaul also falls back on some images as a marker of fluidity and alterability of identities that arise as a result of interactive association between discrete nations; for instance, the image of “shipwreck” is used several times in the novel so as to stand for Singh’s fragmentation and anxiety becoming visible due to the fleeting and ephemeral trait of his identity, especially during his journeys between London and Isabella.

The shipwreck can be evidently identified with the mental state of Singh since the wreck is not utterly owned by the ship, and also it partly belongs to the ship because it is an inseparable part of the ship before the ship tears apart. Then, the shipwreck has to endure this ambiguity in an irretrievable manner just like the ones that are often exposed to wholly disparate cultures or nations and inevitably feel dislocated, confused and isolated throughout their lives.

In the novel, the author makes references to the loss and fluctuation of Singh’s identity in his first stay in London like this: “Those of us who came to it lost some of our solidity; we were trapped into fixed, flat postures ... everyone reduced, reciprocally, to a succession of such meetings, so that first experience and then the personality divided bewilderingly into compartments” (27). Aiming to elude his huge unrest in Isabella and get a university education, he moves to London with great hopes in order to explore his purely primary self; nevertheless, he gets frustrated by an obscure territory in which his disintegrated self deepens rather than vanishing. Singh emphasizes his frustration and bewilderment by mentioning that “So quickly had

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London gone sour on me. The great city, centre of the world, in which, fleeting disorder, I had hoped to find the beginning of order” (18).

As an appealing and prosperous metropolis which Singh thinks can offer a new promising route to his identity predicament, London holds his interest since the colonialist nations have succeeded in imposing the supremacy of each aspect of the Western world on the colonized societies. This presentation of the Western civilization and culture firstly promises new and fulfilling prospects on the surface for the citizens of the once colonized countries, but its allure conversely hauls those citizens into the depths of a so-called superior and different world, locating them in a sort of disorder and uncertainty and thus nullifying the standing barriers between the Western and Oriental nations. By displaying the ambiguity of Singh’s first stay, particularly his educational period, in England regarding where and how he can adjust himself to the unknown setting, Naipaul brings up the principal predicament of this main character (Mustafa 101). After leaving London with frustration and impasse in order to return back to his supposed native roots in Isabella, Singh articulates his first impressions he gets as soon as he arrives there in the following way.

Implying Singh’s incoherent and blurred identity whose fluidity is intensified during his stay in London, Naipaul draws attention to Singh’s feelings right after his arrival in Isabella: “We celebrated our unexpected freedom; we celebrated the island and our knowledge, already growing ambiguous, of the world beyond; we celebrated our cosmopolitanism, which had more meaning here than it ever had in the halls of the British Council” (56). In spite of feeling dislocated and confused in London, Singh now thinks that his cosmopolitan side becomes meaningful and effectual while being in Isabella for he has abandoned half of his identity in London.

Not embodying any heterogeneous society, cultural and traditional instruments and orderliness which can bring about consistency, Isabella’s past experiences of enslavement and the European hegemony have given rise to the severe opposition and the figurative avenging of the previous torments instead of the calm, logical assessment of what has to be performed within the existing and politician, he is compelled to depart from Isabella as an exile to again London due to the fact that, as Mustafa mentions it, “The party of which he is co-founder is a nationalist, multi-ethnic, populist, and quasi-socialist organization which soon ousts him as its base becomes increasingly factionalized” (100).

In returning to London again, but as an exile this time with his shifting cultural identity, Singh cannot find any resolution and static mood even though he strives to reach relief and permanence through his activity of writing memoirs as is stated by the author: “I no longer dream

of ideal landscapes or seek to attach myself to them ... I no longer seek to find beauty in the lives of the mean and oppressed. Hate oppression; fear the oppressed” (10, 11). Singh’s feelings disclose his recognition of his vain attempts to locate himself in an ultimate territory which might smooth out his dilemma of dislocation resulting from the European nations’ oppressive acts on the colonized population in the past in that these policies and acts have paved the way for the quandary of the oppressed nations.

*The Mimic Men*, as a student firstly and then as a politician, comes to London several times, leaving his nominal Caribbean island of Isabella as originally an Indian person. He finds neither solidity nor any permanent identity in any landscape and remains as a character with disintegration and spiritual ruins. He exemplifies a typical ex-colonized citizen that frequently immigrates to other territories with the hope of searching for an unshakable mood for the reason that these once colonized people occupy an in-between position, always being unable to associate themselves with any static nation ultimately. Through their mentioned novels, both writers imply the fact that cultures and nations cannot preserve their essential elements and characteristics because they possess not any motionless and steady nature, but constantly changing and floating whenever their citizens or members have intimate connections with others, ending up with borderless and placeless discrete worlds.

### Works Cited

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