Chapter III
Naipaul’s views on Trinidad

A House for Mr Biswas (1961), Naipaul’s first major novel, describes through the portrayal of an individual the complexities of a previously ignored culture. While it is an imaginative fictional recreation of the past, the main characters, places, and events are based on Naipaul’s father, Naipaul’s own youth and the larger family of which they were a part. His father Seepersad is the model for Mr. Biswas. When Seepersad’s father died, he was six years old. Seepersad and his mother became dependent on his mother’s sister (Tara of A House for Mr Biswas) and her wealthy husband (Ajodha) who had rum shops, taxies and other business. After some schooling, Seepersad became a sign painter; he painted a sign for the general store connected to Lion House (Hanuman House in A House for Mr Biswas) owned by the Capildeos (the Tulsis) of Chaguanas and married Dropatie Capildeo (Shama).

A House for Mr Biswas follows the outline of Seepersad Naipaul’s life. Biswas’s life resembles Seepersad’s in respect of the abortive apprenticeship as a pundit, the poverty of his origins and his marriage into a rich, engulfing and conservative family. Both have nervous breakdowns and work as journalists and civil servants. Both write stories and transfer their ambitions to a talented son who leaves the island on a scholarship. Both live in a succession of houses, moving from their wife’s family in the country and then in Port of Spain to an old estate house and back, before finally acquiring a house of their own.
There are two strands in *A House for Mr Biswas* : one describes various domestic atmosphere which Mr. Biswas had inhabited from childhood onwards, his experience in these environments and final escape from these into his own house, the second strand describes Mr. Biswas’s growth from being a sign-painter to becoming a journalist, and in his own wishful way, a man of letters and lover of books.

The first strands starts from his early childhood in the house of his father and mother, Raghu and Bipti; moves into the prosperous environment of his aunt Tara’s and her husband Ajodha’s establishment, and from there to brief sojourns in the houses of several of Ajodha’s dependants; then by marriage to Shama, his move to the Tulsi household in Hanuman House.

Mr. Biswas’s association with the Tulsi household, an extended family governed by Mrs Tulsi and her son-in law Seth, occupies the larger part of the book; in it Mr. Biswas gradually develops as a reasonably successful journalist, and he even has a brief spell in government service. But he fails to disembrace his own and his family’s life from the Tulsi household, and continues to find himself relocated in different Tulsi establishments – Hanuman House, the Tulsi House at Port of Spain, the Shorthills House. He finally makes his escape when he buys a rather tumbledown house on Sikkim Street in Port of Spain, where he settles down with his family, from where his son Anand leaves for England, and where he eventually dies.
The second strand is interwoven with the ups and downs of Mr. Biswas's search for domestic independence: Mr. Biswas's growth as a writer and lover of books. This strand deals with his first successful career as a sign-painter, which is also his first apprehension of the possibility of escape into an alternative reality of words.

Although, *A House for Mr Biswas* sets out to pay homage to Seepersad's memory and writing, it portrays in his fictional counterpart a man, who is incapable of his literary achievement, and tempers tenderness with mockery of its hero. Biswas's stories remain unfinished, unpublished and unread, except by Shama, and are confined to fantasies of romantic escape. They concern either a wish-fulfilment figure or a character akin to Biswas:

The hero, trapped into marriage, burdened with a family, his youth gone, meets a young girl. She is slim, almost thin, and dressed in white. She is fresh, tender, un kissed; and she is unable to bear children. Beyond the meeting, the stories never went.¹

Seepersad called "Gopi" bases this story. Biswas's relations with Shama were not satisfactory. He began to hate her. He kicked pregnant Shama in the belly, because he sees each new child as another Tulsi trap. Her pregnancy was grotesque; he hated it when she puffed and fanned and sweated in her pregnant way. When he dismissed Shama, he tells her to take her girl children and go. He wants a cessation of the entire process of birth and hopes for a sexless, sterile world in which he can be alone.
Biswas is living to an extreme degree the anxieties of the uprooted man. His elaborate poses, daydreams, assertion of self and evasion of responsibility, are a result of the cultural, social and psychological nowhereness produced by his position as an untalented second generation Hindu in poverty-stricken colonial Trinidad. He is appropriately an orphan.

As an Indian in the Trinidad of the 1930s Biswas is insecure and perhaps needs support of the family. Neither he nor any of the Tulsis is able to come to any meaningful compromise with the Creole world. When he marries into the Tulsi family, he is offered protection, the sort of job, which he could scarcely get anywhere, yet he rebels and makes the Tulsis the target of his revolt.

To understand Biswas rebellion, one must understand the social structure of Hanuman House. On the surface the Tulsis have affected an admirable reconstruction of the clan in a strong and sometimes hostile environment. It has its leaders, its scheme of prescribed duties and responsibilities, its own law and order, its religious ritual. It tries to provide the individual the sort of job for which his talents suit him. This is how it appears on the surface and Biswas’s rebellion seems meaningless when his prospects in colonial Trinidad are considered.

But when a closer examination is done, Hanuman House reveals itself not as a continuous reconstruction of the clan, but as a slave society, directed by Mrs. Tulsi and Seth who need workers to help rebuild their tottering empire. They, therefore, exploit the homelessness and poverty of
their fellows-Hindus and reconstruct a mockery of the clan which functions only because they have so completely grasped the psychology of a slave system. Like the West Indies, Hanuman House is constructed of a vast number of desperate families, brought together by the economic need of a high caste minority. Men are necessary here only as husbands for the Tulsi daughters and laborers on the Tulsi estates. To accept Hanuman House is to satisfy in one's slavery.

It is noticed that Mrs Tulsi and her daughters only mention the fact that Biswas came to them. They never speak of the original pressures, which they applied to get him to marry Shama. It is important for the smooth running of the system that the impression be maintained that everyman joins Hanuman House of his own free will. What Mrs Tulsi has established, is the fundamental idea that a slave system must be able to prove and contain all the apparent evidence of its own legitimacy. As Alfred Memmi observes in *The Colonizer and the Colonized*:

In order for the colonizer to be the complete master, it is not enough for him to be so in actual fact, but he must believe in its legitimacy. In order for that legitimacy to be complete, it is not enough for the colonized to be a slave; he must also accept this role.²

Therefore, Mrs. Tulsi as a good colonizer justifies her exploitation with the explanation that she is really doing her subjects well. Her argument is that one which ex-colonial peoples most bitterly resent, and also the one, which gives them pause. Biswas could not reply at once because he suspects that part of what Mrs Tulsi is true and he cannot
afford to admit that any good at all can proceed from so unjust a system. It is this irony of the colonial process, which paralyses Conrad’s Marlow in Heart of Darkness and humiliates Mr. Biswas.

*A House for Mr Biswas* presents Naipaul’s outlook towards society, politics and culture. The world is without purpose, violent, dangerous; in the natural world life is fearful, comfortless, irrational and brutal. Creatures organize societies for self-protection, they co-operate to assure essentials such as food and to build homes for comfort and refuge. While the effectiveness of societies to provide for their members differs, anyone outside society is likely to become a victim of the void. Well-organized societies are equipped with large resources and they have the ability to use their resources. Such societies are most likely to resist extinction and generally provide superior opportunities for their citizens. Achievement, whether through writing, building or empire is a way of avoiding of destruction and the void.

The novel starts with Mohun Biswas’s death, the first few paragraphs record the narrative’s sustained moments of satisfaction. They are Mr. Biswas’s appreciation of his wife’s loyalty to himself and their children and her independence from her mother and sisters. He is satisfied that he has his own house. He says:

> How terrible it would have been, at this time, to be without it: to have died among the Tulsis, amid the squalor of that large, disintegrating and indifferent family; to have left Shama and the children among them in one room; worse, to have lived without even attempting to lay claim to
one's portion of the earth; to have lived and died as one had been born, unnecessary and unaccommodated.³

At the time, Biswas is satisfied that he has his own house and he will not have to die amid the indifferent people. He has his portion of the earth, and no more he will lead as unaccommodated.

Biswas’s birth is problematic, for it does prophecies of doom for his parents, Bipti and Raghu. The family is depicted as mired in poverty and driven by superstition, so that Biswas starts life as a marked infant, differentiated from his brothers and sister, the carrier of an unlucky sneeze and pursued by prohibitions. To quote Naipaul:

‘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.’ He began to pack the long leaves of his almanac. ‘Much of the evil this boy will undoubtedly bring will be mitigated if his father is forbidden to see him for twenty-one days.’⁴

Naipaul’s deliberate reference to the Oedipus story comes to the fore when, as a child, Biswas unintentionally becomes the cause of his father’s death. His father’s funeral and mourning rituals are described elaborately:

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.⁵

Immediately after the funeral, the family is mentally tortured by Dhari, neighbour and owner of the calf that drowned under Biswas’s care, who with other neighbours, relentlessly digs around the house for Raghu’s reputed savings. Ultimately the family is forced to dispossess themselves of the house and land. To quote Naipaul:

In the end Bipti sold the hut and the land to Dhari, and she and Mr. Biswas moved to Pagotes. There they lived on Tara’s bounty, though not with Tara, but with some of Tara’s husband’s dependent relations in a back trace far from the Main Road. Pratap and Prasad were sent to a distant relation at Felicity, in the heart of the sugar-states; they were already broken into estate work and were too old to learn anything else.

And so Mr. Biswas came to leave the only house to which he had some right. For the next thirty-five years he was to be a wanderer with no place he could call his own, with no family except that which he was to attempt to create out of the engulfing world of the Tulsis. For with his mother’s parents dead, his father dead, his brothers on the estate at Felicity, Dehuti as a servant in Tara’s house and himself rapidly growing away from Bipti who, broken, became increasingly useless and impenetrable, it seemed to him that he was really quite alone.⁶

Without the father’s protection, the family can no longer survive together. The family was dispersed. Dehuti, the only daughter is sent as a poor relation servant to Tara, Biswas’s maternal aunt, while the brothers
Pratap and Prasad are sent to distant relatives to graduate into the cane labour system to which they have already been apprenticed. The family portrait that emerges has a sociological significance in its demonstration that the only resource the family has is in a system of extended kinship, and not in any of the island’s social institutions.

The novel describes in detail the course of Biswas’s life; the evolution of his marriage and immediate family, and the evolution of his self-reliance as a professional and individual within a newly forming social order. The resilience and resistance of East Indian familial custom emerges as the social web that both protects and inhibits the social mobility of its adherents.

The irony that the land his mother is forced to sell is later discovered to be rich in soil is the novel’s early indicator that the capital and its acquisition through inheritance or enterprise may be the only way to free oneself from reliance on a feudally structured kinship system.

For Mr. Biswas grew up in a more liberal and changing environment than that which obtained at Hanuman House, so, here, the definition of the role played by Hanuman House in the creation of that system Naipaul chooses to call “Tulsidom” is very important.

Hanuman House was founded by a pundit, a Hindu priest, a venerable man not only in Trinidad but also in India, an immigrant who had not come as an indentured labourer, one of the rare Indians in Trinidad who knew his relatives in India and was in constant touch with them. As head of the Tulsi clan in Trinidad, he provides, after the style of
the princely great houses of India, a sanctuary for succeeding generations of the family.

It is perhaps the fault of nature and of circumstances that a cultural anomaly arises out of this, for it is the Tulsi sons and their wives who should have populated the house, but Pundit Tulsi and his wife apparently had more daughters than sons. For the daughters were either older or less educated than the sons, they married earlier.

Nearly, all the Tulsi daughters marry men who were in need of Tulsi money and prestige and were glad to have a place at Hanuman House. Except this, Hanuman House was a virtual cloister for the Tulsi family as outsiders were rarely admitted.

On the other hand, Mr. Biswas belonged to hut-dwelling peasants. Bipti, although, depends on Tara, yet, stays with some of Tara’s husband’s dependent relations in a back trace far from Ajodha’s house. Pratap and Prasad are sent to a distant relation in another town, Dehuti lives as a maid with Tara, and Biswas, although lives with his mother, yet becomes emotionally estranged from her.

Naipaul depicts Hanuman House as a symbol of traditionalism, rigidity, cultural infallibility (to its inmates), ritual duty, hierarchy, and communal life. Mr. Biswas rebels because his society denies him personality and forces him to live with an inferiority complex and a sense of nonentity. As in the case of Mr. Biswas, underprivileged is struggling to build its symbolic house against overwhelming odds. Biswas can be seen as a second-generation Indian, who, although rebelling against his
own decaying Hindu world, cannot come to a meaningful compromise with the Creole world of Trinidad. Naipaul is aware of the development of the bilingualism, which is now imposed on the East Indian. Hindi remains the language intimacy but, by the end of the book, Mr. Biswas has four years been a journalist writing in English and the readers and learners all speak Creole.

It is worth pointing out that the traditional Hindu custom requires the bride to join her husband’s household and become almost a servant of her mother-in-law. The complete humiliation of Biswas’s position is that he has to assume the ritualistic role of the newly married Hindu girl. Thus, he is a rebellion against complete humiliation in the eyes of society, and against nonentity in an entire and, comprehensive sense. Naipaul had succeeded in presenting a hero in all his littleness, and still reserve a sense of the men’s inner dignity.

It is the combination of the extend force of westernization and urbanization supported by internal human impulses, which bring about the decay of that highly structured social organization housed at Hanuman. This influence impels Mrs Tulsi, the head herself, to suggest and execute the clan’s removal from Arwacas. It appears that she herself recognized the inadequacy of the ancestral home in the face of modern aspirations.

The formal education plays a main role in the decay of Hindu tradition. For Biswas is educated, his thinking differs from his illiterate brothers. His education has made him a rebel and a misfit in the midst of
acceptors and conservatives. Education had brought the Ovad and Shekhar into contact with ideas and a religion foreign to those of their ancestors. In other cultural aspects, western education differs from the traditions of the Trinidadian. The topics treated in western educational system are European. The disappearance of the values symbolized by Hanuman House is also associated with the exposure of what in Trinidad is very largely a rural way of life to an urban environment.

The reason for the cultural upheaval through which Tulsidom passes is the economic boom precipitated by the American presence in Trinidad during the Second World War. Naipaul’s vision of Trinidad Hindu society seems balanced. For while the hero of the novel vigorously hoists the flag of independence and individuality, it is an image of exposure that Naipaul uses to describe the present condition of Trinidad’s social life:

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 than 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. 7

Naipaul further observed that the virtue had gone out of the family and it is to his credit that he not only lets Mr. Biswas rile against a system which tends to destroy the individual personality, but also records Mr. Biswas’s appreciation of the positive benefits of that system - the sense of
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House, the village shops in which the owners live, the unfinished attempts to build simple houses in the country to the half-modern, partly owned house of Sikkim Street.

Therefore, Mr. Biswas portrays an impoverished, disorganized Trinidad and criticizes imperialism for having created such a mess in which those of African and Indian descent have been brought together without the resources to live or make better lives. Naipaul emerges here as one of many writers from the former colonies who have criticized colonialism and who see their lands and people as victims of the empire.

After writing *A House for Mr Biswas*, Naipaul was offered a grant to return to Trinidad where the head of the government, Eric Williams, suggested that he should write a book about the Caribbean. *The Middle Passage* (1962) is the first of his travel books. Naipaul’s view of Trinidad as the culture of mimicry and England as the mimicked culture is derived from his reading and assimilation of colonial experience and colonial history.

It describes the author’s passage to his home country amongst a motley crowd of tourists and his encounter with would-be West Indian emigres to Britain; his reflection on Trinidad; his explorations into the interior of British Guyana and his encounter with important political figures, particularly Dr. C.B. Jagan; his experiences thereafter in Surinam, Martinique, and Jamaica and his thoughts about miscellaneous subjects and concludes with an idyllic stay at a luxury hotel in Jamaica.
called Frenchman’s Cove where all the guests are given whatever they desire.

Naipaul’s books especially his early books, are based upon literary models and his model was that of a European traveller to the colonies. He adopts the manner of a Victorian travel writer to examine Trinidad, British Guiana, Surinam, Martinique and Jamaica. His specific model is James Anthony Froude, a writer intensely critical both of the crude philistinism of the British settlers and the culture of other peoples. The model has made the claim that the basic situation in the region has not changed since the last century; the Europeans created no worthwhile society culture, established no lasting economic foundations, had no vision, but imported as slaves and labourers large number of people from different cultures whom they discriminated against and then abandoned to their mutual antagonism without providing means of improving their situation. To quote Mustafa:

“The ideological base that Naipaul borrows from his Victorians is, then a belief that “order” is the prime directive that allows a society to “cohere” at its center. Put somewhat cruddy, this “order” stems from the practice of a shared enterprise of survival as a people. The unifying idea that evolves over time manifests itself in a peoples’ accomplishments - civil, political, economic, and cultural – that form a “tradition” from which subsequent “progress” can continue to happen, further enriching the group and the idea. Leadership, creativity, innovation and “knowledge” are the necessary ingredients. Hence, the methodology
that Naipaul’s Victorians—Froude, Trollope, Kingsley—employed in assessing West Indian societies of their time was to observe and then measure to what extent those societies had maintained the principles and values of the parent culture in an alien setting.8

Naipaul crafts fictional analyses of its Trinidad setting. Without heroes, the island is dismissed as a non-nation since it creates no sense of self-importance, ambition or value. Hence, Naipaul is able to justify his own antipathy by claiming that:

“Though we knew that something was wrong with our society, we made no attempts to assess it. Trinidad was too unimportant and we could never be convinced of the value of reading the history of a place, which was, as everyone said only a dot on the map of the world. Our interest was all in the worlds outside, the remoter the better………………

The threat of failure the need to escape: this was the prompting of the society I knew.” 9

In 1960 Naipaul revisited after an absence of ten years. Born in Trinidad in 1932, he had left at the age of eighteen for England, where he went to Oxford and has lived ever since. In The Middle Passage, a travel book written about his return to the West Indies, he attempts to assess his relation to the world, which he has been treating in his fiction. Naipaul shows in his direct examination of Trinidad a superficiality which he has outgrown in his novels.

It can be noticed that The Middle Passage is not written from the standpoint of a professional historian or sociologist and that Naipaul’s
reactions are those of imaginative sensibility. To this author's sensibility, Trinidad represents a nightmare, and one has constantly to differentiate between his sensitive examination of history and his honest expression of hysteria. Many of his attitudes are sophisticated, quasi-sociological rationalizations, but the intense gratitude he feels for having been allowed to escape is constant and vehement. He confesses a pathological dislike for Trinidad:

I had never wanted to stay in Trinidad. When I was in the fourth form I wrote a vow on the endpaper of my Kennedy's Revised Latin Primer to leave within five years. I left after six; and for many years afterwards in England, falling asleep in bed-sitters with the electric fire on, I had been awakened by the nightmare that I was back in Tropical Trinidad. I had never examined this fear of Trinidad. I had never wished to. In my novels I had only expressed this fear.¹⁰

It is a nightmare which, is nurtured through a decade of absence, and reinforced by the literature which Naipaul has read about the West Indies, has now become an obsession. To quote Naipaul:

As soon as the Francisco Bobadilla had touched the quay, ship's side against rubber bumpers, I began to feel all my old fear of Trinidad. I did not want to stay. I had left the security of the ship and had no assurance that I would ever leave the island again. I had forgotten nothing; the wooden houses, jalousied half-way down, with fretwork along gables and eaves, fashionable before the concrete era; the concrete houses with L-shaped Verandas and projecting front bedrooms, fashionable in the
thirties; the two storied Syrian houses in paternal concrete blocks- the top floor repeating the lower, fashionable in the forties. There were more neon lights. Ambition – a moving hand, drink being poured into a glass – was not matched with skill, and the effect was Trinidadian; vigorous, with a slightly flawed modernity......A good opening line for a novelist or a travel-writer; but the steel band used to be regarded as a high manifestation of West Indian Culture, and it was a sound I detested.  

Naipaul’s hatred of the steel band and all it indicates is no mere rejection of West Indian Culture, but a rejection of single common ground where Trinidadians of all races meet on a basis of equality. Carnival in Trinidad, dominated by steel band, calypso and costume, is more than a time of general merry-making.

There are several interesting points of analysis and evaluation, which emerge from The Middle Passage. First, all the different cultures are presented as mimicry cultures. These are shown to be subsumed by a sense of the colonizing cultures to which they have been exposed and the behest of which they have come to exist. The influence of the Dutch on Surinam, for instance, or, that of the French in Martinique, is shown to be all pervasive. Second, the mimicry is not merely of colonizers and excolonizers. The culture void of the West Indies is also susceptible to dominant cultures in the case of Trinidad, essentially the American. According to Naipaul:
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colonizer, racial resentment, envy political fantasy and violence are the result and can be expected to intensify with self-government unless the region can overcome ethnic differences in a positive nationalism and develop cultural pride. To quote Naipaul:

I had seen how deep in every West Indian, high and low, were the prejudices of race; how often these prejudices were rooted in self-contempt; and how much important action they prompted. Everyone spoke of nation and nationalism but no one was willing to surrender the privileges or even the separateness of his group. Nowhere...was there any binding philosophy; there were only competing sectional interests. With an absence of a feeling of community, there was an absence of pride and there was even cynicism... the race conflicts of every territory were growing sharper.¹⁴

Behind the several levels of mimicry, there is also the unavoidable fact of confrontations and clashes between the various racial and cultural groups in the West Indies. Naipaul does not notice a synthesized hybridized culture; instead, he encounters cultural and racial conservatism, which is matched by the absurdity of their displacement from their origins. Naipaul's feelings hurt in bringing attention to racial conflicts and prejudices, offering dismissive summaries of the region's history, and criticizing the existing culture. To quote such offensive remarks:

The Francisco Bobadilla would be only five days. It would go from St Kitts to Grenada to Trinidad to Barbados. One journey answering
another: the climax and futility of the West Indian adventure. For nothing was created in the British West Indies, no civilization as in Spanish America, no great revolution as in Haiti or the American colonies. There were only plantations, prosperity, decline, neglect; the size of the islands called for nothing else.15

It illustrates Naipaul’s anxieties in returning to the Caribbean, his place of origins, which he had fled and rejected, for there were no job prospects for a man like Naipaul. Naipaul as a schoolboy had made up his mind to leave Trinidad. To quote Naipaul:

I knew Trinidad to be unimportant, uncreative, and cynical. The only professions were those of law and medicine, because there was no need for any other, and the most successful people were commission agents, bank managers and members of the distributive trades. Power was recognized, but dignity was allowed to no one. Every person of eminence was held to be crooked and contemptible. We lived in a society, which denied itself heroes.

It was a place where the stories were never stories of success but of failure: brilliant men, scholarship winners, who had died young, gone mad or taken to drink; cricketers of promise whose careers had been ruined by disagreement with their authorities.16

Naipaul has raised many problems and many of these problems are still relevant. As they are expressed without the usual rhetoric of black-white conflict, victimization and cultural assertion, they became
uncomfortable. Sometimes it appears that Naipaul has not explained all pros and cons of the problems. To quote Naipaul:

Colonialism distorts the identity of the subject people, and the Negro in particular is bewildered and irritable. Racial equality and assimilation are attractive but only underline the loss, since to accept assimilation is in a way to accept a permanent inferiority.\(^{17}\)

Naipaul has illustrated the increasing racial conflict between blacks and Indians in British Guiana, and the insecure place of the Asian Indians in the West Indies:

The West Indian colonial situation is unique because the West Indies, in all their racial and social complexity, are so completely a creation of Empire that the withdrawal of Empire is almost without meaning. In such a situation nationalism is the only revitalizing force.\(^{18}\)

Naipaul has noticed that British Guiana instead of having 'an ordered and overdue social revolution' has split into its 'component parts', a dangerous situation brought about by 'racial rivalry' and fear. Naipaul has noticed Trinidadian preferences for American B-grade movies over more studies, British film as a sign of both bad taste and 'fraudulent' cosmopolitanism. Naipaul chooses to fault his compatriots for allegedly ignoring their folk culture, calypsos, and repressing their past in favour of European culture. Without acknowledging the class differentiation of the groups he chooses to compare. Without considering the agency of colonialism's programmatic subordination and denigration
of subject peoples, he engages in the practice of blaming slavery’s victims rather than its propagators.

Naipaul takes the questions of cultural authenticity, which are absolutely integral to questions of nationalist possibilities. With a growing confidence Naipaul concludes:

Nationalism was impossible in Trinidad. In the colonial society everyman had to grasp whatever dignity and power he was allowed; he owed no loyalty to the island and scarcely any of his group.19

He attributes this to the absence of a collective base from which the subject could unite behind an articulated purpose. To illustrate his contention, Naipaul adopts the metaphor of the picaroon to exemplify the individualistic and self-serving trickster-like characters that fought the first election in 1946. Dr. Voorhoeve, a Dutchman is a member of the Netherlands Bible Society. It is interesting to quote Voorhoeve’s intelligent, temperate talk for its analysis of the colonial society:

A colony is a strange sort of society, a society without an elite... The leaders came from the motherland, are people with another culture... The colonial cultural ideal has pronounced bad consequences for the individual. It is in fact an unattainable ideal.... A few exceptional people.... Come to great achievements, but thereby lose their nationality.... And what goes for them does not go for ten thousand others who must remain stuck in a soulless imitation, never achieving anything of their own. They learn to despise their own, but get nothing in its place. 20
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Nationalism was impossible in Trinidad. In the colonial society everyman had to grasp whatever dignity and power he was allowed; he owed no loyalty to the island and scarcely any of his group.¹⁹

He attributes this to the absence of a collective base from which the subject could unite behind an articulated purpose. To illustrate his contention, Naipaul adopts the metaphor of the picaroon to exemplify the individualistic and self-serving trickster-like characters that fought the first election in 1946. Dr. Voorhoeve, a Dutchman is a member of the Netherlands Bible Society. It is interesting to quote Voorhoeve’s intelligent, temperate talk for its analysis of the colonial society:

A colony is a strange sort of society, a society without an elite... The leaders came from the motherland, are people with another culture... The colonial cultural ideal has pronounced bad consequences for the individual. It is in fact an unattainable ideal.... A few exceptional people.... Come to great achievements, but thereby lose their nationality... And what goes for them does not go for ten thousand others who must remain stuck in a soulless imitation, never achieving anything of their own. They learn to despise their own, but get nothing in its place.²⁰
Naipaul’s belief that culture meets the requirements of authenticity only when a connected tradition with its original source is maintained through practice and its accompanying tradition not only underscores the rest of Naipaul’s assessment of the communities of the Caribbean, but also reveals the framework of his aesthetic investment: a monological view of culture that will not recognize the engendering capabilities of hybridity. The calypso is Trinidad’s real contribution to culture, but its commercialization, and the accompanying cultural commodification of steel drums within a nationalistic agenda, cancels the possibility of building upon its promise. To quote Naipaul:

It is only in the calypso that the Trinidadian touches reality. The calypso is a purely a local form. No song composed outside Trinidad is calypso. The calypso deals with local incidents, local attitudes, it does so in a local language. The pure calypso, the best calypso, is incomprehensible to the outsider. Wit and verbal conceits are fundamental; without them no song, however good the music, however well sung, can be judged a calypso.21

Despite the general pessimism, Naipaul has his moments of admiration for affirmative and progressive phenomena to these countries, though these are always under threat. Thus, he sees in the calypso something authentically Trinidadian and admires its spontaneous spirit. He is impressed by Dr Jagan’s political energy in British Guiana and he is favourably struck by the quality of Mr Eersel’s translation of Wyatt’s poem into Negro English in Surinam.
Finally, Naipaul paradoxically speaks of, and conducts his criticism of, all these contexts from an immense and unenunciated distance and yet with unmistakable rage. He is conscious of his past in Trinidad and is ready to face it, but he has the air of an informed outsider, though a cynical and bitter one. He meets all the people with a self-consciousness of his outside position. Later, in *The Enigma of Arrival*, he has described his approach to *The Middle Passage* in the following words:

I knew, and was glamoured by the idea of the metropolitan traveler, the man starting from Europe. It was the only kind of model I had; but as a colonial among colonials who were very close to me — I could not be that kind of traveler, even though I might share that traveller’s education and culture and have his feeling for adventure. Especially I was aware of not having a metropolitan audience to ‘report back’ to. The fight between my ideas of glamour of the traveler-writer and the rawness of my nerves as a colonial traveling among colonials made for difficult writing.22

Thus it is evident that in his early fiction and non-fictional writing about the Caribbean, Naipaul has successfully presented the counterpoint of mimic culture and mimicked culture and this counterpoint has presented a simplistic description of the relationship of colonizer and colonized. In this chapter, an attempt is being made to present an apprehension of the colonial process and ideology and make an examination of the state of affairs resulted out of it. It is also clear that
Naipaul has dealt with his colonial experiences because these preoccupy his thinking and aspirations as a writer. These colonial experiences are constituted in his own psyche and contained in his vision and his writings throw reflections on his colonized mind.
Notes


5. Ibid, p.32.


10. Ibid, p.34.

11. Ibid, p.34.


13. Ibid, p.64.


15. Ibid, p.15.

16. Ibid, p.35.


