Chapter - II

THE MYSTIC MASSEUR

A Socio-Cultural Exposition
The Mystic Masseur is the story of Ganeesh, a failed school teacher turned mystic. The story illustrates Naipaul's stance on mimicry as a theme. The Mystic Masseur established the theme that was to recur in Naipaul's novels, the displacement of individuals in colonial and post colonial contexts and the struggle of the writer to create a sense of order from chaotic social situation. The Mystic Masseur was published in 1957. It was his first novel. In the words of the narrator Ganeesh is a quack masseur, a false mystic, a phoney author, and corrupt. It becomes an allegory of the history of our times. The names of the characters have also allegorical significance. Ganeesh is associated with success and prosperity. In this novel Ganeesh raises mimicry to an art form and establishes a new category of the mimic as an artist.

The novel spans the period from 1929 to 1954, the first generation of East Indians after the termination of indentureship. Distinguished by its alienation from the larger society, the community of The Mystic Masseur shares the socio cultural openness to other cultural influences typical of the African communities in the West Indies. The Mystic Masseur takes place entirely within an East Indian community in transition from Feudalism to capitalism. The novel concerns the problems of arranged marriages, the inevitability of one's karma or fate, tradition versus modernity, and the act of writing as a means of appropriating one's reality.

The text examines Ganeesh Ramsumair's rise to prominence from masseur to mystic to the position of an MBE (Member of the British Empire), one of the highest honors a colonial subject could hope to achieve. As in Miguel Street, the characters in The Mystic Masseur are not well developed. The Mystic Masseur presents the picture of the West Indian society, its crisis and challenges, in a more systematic way. As M.K. Naik points out, "Naipaul's main aim in The Mystic Masseur seems to be to exploit the comic absurdity in the
lives of the transplanted Indians in the West Indians." The novel charts the progress of Ganesh Ramsumair, the central character in the novel, and his relationships with others with clarity and irony. He is in the beginning an unknown schoolmaster but becomes later a masseur, a mystic and an MLC. Eventually he rises to such dizzy heights of eminence that the British rulers of the island make him an MBE.

Ganesh has all along been leading the life of sham and pretension. When he goes to join the town college, carefully dressed in a khaki suit and topee, he and his father "knew they looked important." At the college, Ganesh is so much ashamed of his Indian name that he circulates the story that he was actually called Ganesh. Ganesh's behaviour in the course of the story and social observances affecting him have been presented in such a way that the novelist is able to put his finger on the weak points of the society and its customs. At the time of his initiation into Brahminhood, Ganesh is given a saffron bundle and is called upon to go to Benaras as rituals demand. They shaved his head, gave him a saffron bundle and said "All right, off you go now. Go to Benaras and study." He took the staff and began walking away briskly from four ways. As arranged, Dookhie, the shopkeeper, ran after him, crying a little and begging in English, "No boy; don't go away to Benaras to study."*

This type of behaviour speaks voluminously about a degenerate society which clings to ceremonies and observances inherited from their ancestors but never bothers to know their deeper significance. Even marriage, a very personal affair, is treated in it as 'pre-ordained' (MM 46), eligible bachelors are ear-marked and trapped as prospective husbands for marriageable daughters, and then 'it was all right' (MM35). Wife-beating has a social sanction here, as would be evident from the following episode which took place on the day after Ganesh's marriage and may be taken to provide an apt prelude to his married
life. Leela continued to cry and Ganesh loosened his leather belt and beat her. She cried out "Oh God! Oh God! He go kill 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. The moment was precious."

This novel unravels the humorous history of Ganesh, a hero of the people. It is set in the West Indies on the eve of its independence. The Mystic Masseur is a success story laced with deep satirical touches. It traces the attempts of a displaced and mediocre individual to achieve recognition and success in pursuit of which he changes a variety of roles. The novel proves to be an example of the creolization of the various ethnic groups on the Islands.

The novel uses five parallel themes or Movements to reveal the social development of the East Indian in Trinidad. The first Movement presents the major problematic of most of Naipaul's work, the duality of the East Indian's experience in Trinidad, as exemplified in the description of Ganesh's hut:

Nothing had prepared me for what I was to see inside Ganesh's hut. As soon as we entered, my mother winked at me, and I could see that even the taxi-driver was fighting to control his astonishment. There were books, here, there and everywhere; books piled crazily on the table, books rising in mounds in the corners, books covering the floor. I had never before seen so many books in one place... I tried to forget Ganesh thumping my leg about and concentrated on the walls. They were covered with religious quotations, in Hindi and English, and with Hindu religious pictures. My gaze settled on a beautiful four-armed god standing in an open lotus.
At one pole is Ganesh's attempt to appropriate the Western world through books, at the other is the centrality of Visnu, the Hindu icon, representing the traditional Eastern dimension of his social reality. This theme is both emblematic and paradigmatic of Naipaul's early approach to the representation of the East Indian's dual position in Caribbean society. The five parallel themes of the text encompass Ganesh's working out of this dual position. The picture of Visnu standing in an open lotus on Ganesh's wall would suggest a number of meanings to the East Indian, thrust as he is into the wilderness of the Caribbean. Although Visnu symbolizes the eternal qualities of the East Indians' existence, man's common origin, the limitless powers of his mind the illusion of the world and its powers, and the sovereignty of man's individuality. He also represents man's transitory nature and existence in a changing universe. Yet Visnu also suggests the asramas that each Hindu must make in the wilderness to assume his being in this new world, the goal toward which all beings must tend, the symbolic compromise all must make to survive. Thus the icon of Visnu structures within the feudal communal world of Trinidad and Tabago. The life of Ganesh Ramsumair in The Mystic Masseur can thus be considered as a signification of the history of Trinidad's times.

The second Movement of the text depicts Ganesh's first encounter with the capitalist world as he departs from the countryside, emblematic of the feudal-communal world, for Queen's Royal College in Port of Spain, emblematic of the dawning of new capitalist relations. The safety and identity granted him by the country district and his Hinduism give away to insecurity and a threatened loss of identity in the city.

"The sense of alienation created by his confrontation with the urban center is contrasted with his people's attempts to revive the rituals of their former Indian world, that is, to be "good" Trinidadians yet to remain faithful to their Indian tradition." This point is clearly made when Ganesh is ridiculed by the college Principal for disturbing
a class on his return from being initiated into Brahminism. The contradiction of these two worlds exists not only at the level of mythology but also at the level of social practice.

The third Movement of the text begins when Ganesh, unable to cope with the urban world, returns to the countryside and meets Mr. Steward, an Englishman, who advises him to find the spiritual rhythm of his life. Steward reminds Ganesh how ordinary his life is and tells him about the beauty and wonder of foreign lands: "He can't help being involved there. Here there is no such need."10 Because this incident occurs at a time when Ganesh is particularly vulnerable psychologically, Steward's ideas have a significant influence on him.

The fourth Movement develops during Ganesh's marriage. Life for him and his wife, Leela, is bleak and arid:

"The villagers went to work in the cane-fields in the dawn darkness to avoid the heat of day. When they returned in the middle of the morning the dew had dried on the grass; and they set to work in their vegetable gardens as if they didn't know that sugar-cane was the only thing that could grow in Fuente Grove. They had few thrills. The population was small and there were not many births, marriages, or deaths to excite them. Two or three times a year the men made a noisy excursion to a cinema in distant, wicked San Fernando. Little happened otherwise."11

"Writing is the only means Ganesh has for imposing some sense into this world, though at this point in his development the act of writing is a curiosity whose implications Ganesh does not yet grasp."12 The tension between the spoken and the written duality exists until Ganesh becomes a pundit.

In this transitional phase of Ganesh's life, education begins to assume importance. When his wife, Leela, leaves him an action unheard of in Ganesh's traditional society, Suraj Mooma blames this trouble on the new tendency to educate East Indian women. According to Suraj Mooma "Leela spends too much of the time reading
and writing and not looking after she husband properly. I did talk to
she about it, mark you." Education was decisive in transforming the
society from feudalism to capitalism. World War II further eroded
feudal relations in the East Indian society and opened up new
possibilities for the East Indians. More important, it encouraged
Ganesh to undertake a deep examination of the Gita:

"It gave a new direction to his reading. Forgetting
the war, he became a great Indologist and bought
all the books on Hindu philosophy he could get in
San Fernando. He read them, marked them, and
on Sunday afternoons made notes. At the same
time he developed a taste for practical psychology
and read many books on The Art of Getting On.
But India was his great love. It became his habit,
on examining a new book, to look first at the
index to see whether there were any references to
India or Hinduism. If the references were
complimentary he bought the book. Soon he
owned a curious selection."14

The acts of writing and reading open up a new world of thought
for Ganesh and increase his understanding of his own world. It is
because he must know about the past before he can investigate and
explore the present that he develops an interest in practical
psychology and in Hindu Philosophy. An understanding of English
empiricism and Hindu metaphysics becomes indispensable for his
future undertakings.

The fifth Movement of the text brings together the two modes of
perception, the Eastern and the Western, the spoken and the written
word in a united act of cognition. This moment occurs when Ganesh,
having failed to achieve financial success by his writing, becomes a
pundit. As the Great Belcher warns Ganesh, "He must realise by now
that he has to use his learning to help out other people."15

Becoming a pundit enables Ganesh to investigate the past more
closely. In a significant gesture of solidarity, the Great Belcher gives
him his uncle’s great books, so he can use the legacy of the past to
guide himself and his people in an enlightened manner. As Ganesh
wrote “we never are what we want to be .... but what we must be” At this point the narrative enters more fully into the life of Ganesh. The mythology of the East is combined with that of the West as Ganesh attempts to save the life of Hector, an African boy who believes that a cloud is following him. In preparing to welcome Hector to his home, Ganesh converts his bedroom into a study in which he places a picture of Lakshmi, the goddess of fortune and the consort of Vishnu, in a prominent place. Below the goddess Ganesh places a candle. He burns the camphor and incense, and in his new persona, the tenets of Hinduism and Christianity, the theology of feudalism and capitalism, respectively, merge. “The ritual symbols of both worlds are placed at the service of Ganesh’s new enterprise in the wilderness, that of participating in a newly emerging social order and in the process, retreating from the narrow confines of the East Indian feudal order.”

V.S. Naipaul has no personal political commitment. It has been elucidated by some critics, namely Richard John Stone and Helen Pyne Timothy. As a travelling writer Naipaul’s first-hand experience of the nature of political twists and turns in the Third-World countries offered him a unique opportunity to model the characters of some of his major novels after such aspirations in politics. His first novel The Mystic Masseur falls in this line. Its charm also lies in its autobiographical elements in that its lead character Ganesh echoes V.S. Naipaul himself as a struggling writer dreaming of writing books. The novel is set in the Port of Spain and the rural area of Trinidad where the Indians lived and worked, and is a comic study of life in Trinidad in the face of the post-colonial rise of politics which smacks of mutual self-deception. The central concern of the narrative while emphasizing this aspect, centres round the meteoric rise and metamorphosis of Ganesh, the protagonist. Nineteen forty-six as Naipaul records was the turning point of Ganesh’s career:

“Nineteen forty-six was the turning-point of Ganesh’s career, and as if to underline the fact, in that year he published his autobiography The
Years of Guilt. The book, variously described as a spiritual thriller and a metaphysical whodunit, had a considerable success of esteem in Central America and the Caribbean. Ganesh, however, confessed that the autobiography was a mistake. So, in the very year of publication it was suppressed and the Ganesh publishing company itself wound up. The wider world has not learnt of Ganesh's early struggles, and Trinidad resents this. I myself believe that the history of Ganesh is, in a way, the history of our times; and there may be people who will welcome this imperfect account of the man Ganesh Ramsumair, masseur, mystic and since 1953, M.B.E. 18

In the beginning Ganesh felt awkward when he entered the Queen's Royal College. This awkwardness came to him, as the narrator points out, because of his Indian name. The messy character is greatly highlighted in the following passage:

"Ganesh never lost his awkwardness. He was so ashamed of his Indian name that for a while he spread a story that he was really called Gareth. This did him little good. He continued to dress badly, he didn't play games, and his accent remained too clearly that of the Indian from the country. He never stopped being a country boy. He still believed that reading by any light other than daylight was bad for the eyes, and as soon as his classes were over he ran home to Dundonald street and sat on the back steps reading. He went to sleep with the hens and woke before the cocks. That Ramsumair boy is a real crammer; boys laughed, but Ganesh never became more than a mediocre student. 19

Ganesh is trying to make his impact clear and distinct in the emergence of the new nationhood of Trinidad. He, along with Harbans and R.R.K. Singh, suffers from self deception. Inwardly he contrasts Trinidad with the larger consciousness of sophisticated London. There is obviously a physical and intellectual poverty in the midst of plenty. Ganesh and his ancestors lived a very circumscribed life as labourers in substandard work. Set in the West Indies on the eve of its independence The Mystic Masseur highlights displaced and mediocre individuals in pursuit of recognition and success. Various
ethnic groups are creolized. Ganesh is a representative of a community which has turned the Trinidad Indian into a complete colonial,

"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."\textsuperscript{20}

"Strangely enough all the qualities of Ganesh are not really virtuous, but the only working expediency which is most indispensible and suitable for any individual to succeed in the Caribbean society during the transitional period between the disappearance of the older values and the appearance of a new cultural loyalty and standard."\textsuperscript{21} The way Ganesh spreads a story that his name is really Gareth and not Ganesh shows how tenacious he is to employ crusade methods to realize his goal. All the time the narrator gives an impression of the confident awareness of his own potential greatness. His career is built on his own efforts. He is in the opinion of William Walsh "dutiful, devious, unscrupulous – each where it is necessary to give this greatness a chance to shine out."\textsuperscript{22} The way Ganesh tackles every situation with success shows that he has plenty of commonsense. The comments of N. Ramadevi are apt:

"He proves to be "smarter" than others, and his "smartness" is not condemned by the people of his society in which "smartness" and "intelligence" have come to be viewed as synonyms and with awe. It is a quality which beguiles and enchants with a "tolerance" for every kind of human activity and affection for every demonstration of wit and style."\textsuperscript{23}

The narrator of \textit{The Mystic Masseur} who is also the biographer of Ganesh writes about him with timely comment juxtaposition, and humorous deflation and is very careful in revealing the absurdity of a society that has pronounced him a hero. His aspiration to power and
prestige gravitates to politics as the supreme possibility of success. The narrator makes it clear that political power is ultimately, an embodiment of the colonised's dream of power, possession and self-realisation. The narrative identifies the destiny of the country with the personality of the gradually emerging political leaders like Ganesh. It only means that the individual conduct of Ganesh will ultimately put its impact on the goings-on of the country. As a colonial novel the novelist's sense of political pressure will determine the characters of the protagonist and that of the narrator also.

Fountain Grove, the place to which Ganesh goes is a misnomer, for as the name suggests instead of water flowing all the time and plants growing luxuriantly, the place is grim and drab. It reveals a kind of physical poverty and the concurrent intellectual poverty of the people who inhabit. The following paragraph will show how circumscribed is their life:

"Right from the start Fuente Grove looked unpromising. The Great Belcher had said it was a small, out of the way place. That was only half true. Fuente Grove was practically lost. It was so small, so Wretched, ..... The villagers went to work in the cane-fields in the dawn darkness to avoid the heat of day. When they returned in the middle of the morning the dew had dried on the grass. Two or three times a year the men made a noisy excursion to a cinema in distant, wicked San Fernando. Little happened besides"  

The arrival of Ganesh was perhaps the greatest happening. After an unsuccessful stint as a school teacher and after barely escaping starvation because of the inheritance he had after his father's death Ganesh begins anew at Fountain Grove. His first action was startling. He started there a Cultural Institute. His frequent itinerary in the place shaped his relationships through inspirations from different individuals. On the advice of his aunt and his father-in-law, Ganesh, apart from looking after the Cultural Institute, took up the job of a masseur. But soon he was disappointed with the
masseur’s trade. Thereafter he turned to writing a book. After producing it he said that the book was just a primer, because the people of Trinidad are just like children. The following conversation between Ganesh and Beharry will show that Ganesh had in his character all the trickery necessary for political success:

‘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. Start small and later on fling out your anthology at them. Is a good idea, mark you. But leave it for now. Something simple and easy first, eh? (Beharry placed his hands on his thighs). ‘yes, the people here just like children, you know, and you got to teach them like children. ‘A primer like?’ (Beharry slapped his thighs and nibbled furiously). “Yes, man. That self. Leave it to me, Beharry. I go give them this book, and I go make Trinidad hold it head and bawl.”

In the words of the narrator “the wider world has not learnt of Ganesh’s early struggles.” (MM 94) In fact, the life of Ganesh comes by extension to serve as an example of the con-manship and imitiveness which is so very characteristic of developing countries. As a whole, the novel is an account of the apotheosis of one man who represents the whole community. The narrator says that Ganesh’s career beginning from a quack masseur, a fake mystic, a phoney author through a corrupt politician records an allegory of “the history of our time” (MM 18).

The Mystic Masseur reminds one of R.K. Narayan’s The Financial Expert in more than one aspect says Ramadevi. But there is a difference in the endings of the two stories. Margayya, Ganesh’s counterpart in The Financial Expert, ends up where he starts after reaching similar heights as Ganesh, whereas Ganesh becomes G.Ramsay Muir, M.B.E and is sent abroad by the British Government to defend their colonial policy. As Ramadevi rightly points out “the ending of Naipaul’s novel suggests greater satirical intensity and
bitterness with which Naipaul repudiates the inadequacies of his society." This is the consequence of his failure to find fulfilment and roots in any society. This does not happen to be the case with R.K. Narayan since he tries to come to terms with the inadequacies of his legacy. While exploring the themes of isolation, absence of community, and things falling apart, Naipaul analyses the cultural upheaval in civilizations as they change from instinctive and ritualized existence to historical weakness and vulnerability. "Questions of identity and rootlessness, cultural differences and assimilation are so examined here that exile's dilemmas about self and home and the psychological and political effects of alienation are well brought out in The Mystic Masseur."27

Naipaul satirizes the Trinidadian society, the setting of Ganesh's success, rather intensely through such specific pictures as Ganesh's father cursing Port of Spain in eloquent Hindi, Mr. Stewart dressed as a mendicant, the Negro woman with white powder on her face, the American servicemen dispensing gum to the children of Fuente Grove, where they have come for spiritual advice, Leela's fridge packed with Coca cola and visible from the road. These dramatize the confusion of origins and loyalties, customs and aspirations. A sense of colonial dislocation is noticed here.

Naipaul strongly satirizes the inadequacies and absurdities inherent in his society through the ironic and mock-heroic tone of the narrator. One does not encounter an air of condemnation in the narrator's account or presentation of Ganesh's character. His neutral presentation of Ganesh's case and his leaving the conclusion to be drawn by the reader speak of Naipaul's capacity for detachment. "The neutral and detached tone with which he presents Ganesh before us probably suggests that Naipaul perhaps approves of what all Ganesh does in order to establish selfhood and achieve recognition in his society."28 As Landeg White observes, The Mystic Masseur is "written
primarily to illustrate a theses with the character chosen to support a comic but intellectual frame work."29

It is significant that Naipaul has given a symbolic name to the protagonist of the novel. The name of Ganesh is obviously after the Hindu elephant god, Ganesa or Ganapati, who is the Lord of categories and remover of obstacles. Ganesa, as the Hindu scriptures reveal, is always associated with success and prosperity through his wives, Siddhi and Ddhi. Whenever an enterprise is undertaken, Ganesa is invoked. In the beginning of the Mahabharat, Vyasadev, the wisest of the scribes has indicated that Ganesa, the elephant god is the patron of writers and of learning. So far as the novel is concerned it is found that like the Hindu god, the protagonist Ganesh has an insatiable appetite for food and a craving for fame and bigger things. These are two kinds of gluttony symbolized by the fat belly of Ganesa, the propitious deity in the Hindu pantheon. According to Mohit K. Ray "He is an opportunist whose central motif in life is to bring success to himself by defrauding others. His ultimate prosperity as a politician is unfortunately grounded in his early failures as a masseur and a mystic and as a writer whose works instead of being wise is meat for exploiting a credulous populace."30 Ironically his reputation as a writer is established by the publication of his book, Profitable Evacuation, an extended essay on constipation. The book should have been discarded for its scatological images which are almost like inspecting a drain.

The above sequence of the career of Ganesh offers an opportunity to the novel to express his views on politics, particularly the one that the hero in politics is also its villain. Ashamed of his Indian heritage, Ganesh calls himself G.Ramasumuir when he had an M.B.E. degree, a brick which he had adopted when he was in school. This was a trick of acceptance by the English community. His political rivals also anglicize their names as Beharry and Cyrus Stephen Narayan for similar acceptance.
The theme of political decadence is intensified by the choice of images and symbols. The setting of the novel, emphasizes the way Trinidadians have been alienated from their identities and have been disintegrated. For example, Beharry keeps his books, like the venerated \textit{Gita} in a run down shop. Ramlogan is trying to win Ganesh as a son-in-law by offering his daughter Leela in marriage by introducing things such as Chinese calendars in his dilapidated store. Collectively speaking these images as Landeg White has rightly asserted "dramatise the confusion of origins and loyalties, customs and aspirations, which is the setting of Ganesh's success."\textsuperscript{31} It is also seen that Naipaul is adopting a similar technique of incorporating images and symbols to highlight Ganesh's imitation and fraudulence. His portrayal gives an impression that even though he is victimized, he rises to be the master of all confusion. It is said that he has fifteen hundred books in his library, books published by Everyman, Penguin etc. But in actuality he has never seen or read them. It is interesting to note that to highlight his mysticism and to deceive people he wears Indian dhoti and koorta, but he prefers to wear European dresses on other occasions. His house has a Hindu exterior, but the interior has all the modern European scientific household gadgets. This is nothing but mimicry. Mohit K. Ray expresses, "as a politician and con-man he combines in himself Eastern spirituality with Western materialism and secularism, Indian orthodoxy with modern revolutionary ideas."\textsuperscript{32}

A complex Hindu consciousness is evident in \textbf{The Mystic Masseur} in the spiritual guidance of Mahatma Gandhi, in the teachings of the \textit{Gita}, and in the role of mysticism. Although Gandhi is the spiritual guide of the text, Ganesh derives his learning primarily from the \textit{Gita}, and mysticism provides a means to unify the characters with their social environment. The importance of Mahatma Gandhi in the text as well as in Ganesh's life is best comprehended by understanding the significance of the teachings of the \textit{Gita} for Gandhi. Louis Fischer's \textit{The Life of Mahatma Gandhi}, which
Naipaul cites in *The Mystic Masseur*, examines this influence. Drawing heavily on Mahadev Desai’s *The Gospel of Selfless Action* according to Gandhi, Fischer demonstrates how the *Gita* became Gandhi’s spiritual reference. For Gandhi the most important principle of the *Gita* is the idea of desirelessness, which culminates in the attainment of self-realization or freedom. But although the concept of self-realization or freedom involves complete indifference towards the rewards of one’s actions, it does not necessarily imply an indifference to the results of one’s actions. Indifference to rewards, then, does not mandate a disregard for material goods. Ganesh is seeking self-realization or freedom. He is not prevented from attempting to acquire material goods, even though he may choose to be indifferent to their power. Thus when Ganesh discovers the *Gita*, he develops “a fuller appreciation for the dialogue between Arjuna and Krishna on the field of battle ... gave a new direction to his reading.”

Soon after this conversion Ganesh becomes a mystic and is forced to carry the legacy of his people. “If he is a Hindu, he must realize by now that he has to use his learning to help out other people.” At this point, the Great Belcher gives him his uncle’s sold books, “some in Sanskrit, some in Hindi” (MM112). Ganesh devotes his life to desirelessness, and his teaching in the wilderness exemplifies renunciation in the service of his people.

“His main point was that desire was a source of misery and therefore desire ought to be suppressed. Occasionally he went off at a tangent to discuss whether the desire to suppress desire wasn’t itself a desire, but usually he tried to be as practical as possible .... At other times he said that happiness was only possible if you cleared your mind of desire and looked upon yourself as part of life, just a tiny link in the vast chain of creation.”

The teaching of desirelessness that is embodied in the *Gita* and that was the central message for Mahatma Gandhi becomes the central focus of Ganesh. Gandhi’s attempt to synthesize the
dichotomy between Western and Hindu culture, which lay at the heart of his greatness, is also Ganesh's central concern during Trinidad's transitional period. W.T. Stace has observed, in regard to Gandhi's capacity to synthesize the cultures of the East and West that:

"The secret of Gandhi is that, although his basic inspiration, like that of the Buddha, came from the spiritual plane and in this he remained characteristically Indian – yet he perceived that the alleviation, though not the destruction, of suffering is possible on the material plane and is to be achieved by social and political action. This has now been understood, not only by Gandhi but by India in general. And this fact, which found its most perfect expression in the life of Gandhi, must be regarded as one of the most hopeful examples of that synthesis of Eastern and Western philosophies and values of which we all ought to be in search. Gandhi's enormous stature is in part due to the fact that he combined in his personality all that is greatest and strongest and noblest in both East and West."

Hence emulating Gandhi's example, life reveals the achievement of self-realisation requires participation in a combination of religious, social and political activities. Ganesh discards his religious mantle when it is no longer appropriate to his social and political aspirations. Bruce King points out that Naipaul rejects Gandhian traditionalism because "it encourages Indian quietism and passivity, leaving the nation unable to cope with its contemporary problems." Still the theme of his *Mystic Masseur* is closely related to orthodox Hinduism. In the words of William Walsh "*The Mystic Masseur* is Naipaul's version of the India's theme in Narayan's *The Guide*.

The synthesis of the best of the East and the West is connected closely to the notion of mysticism, also an integral part of the text and its title. More than most religious beliefs, mysticism, pervades the minds of its Hindu adherents. Evelyn Underhill defines mysticism as "the art of union with reality and the mystic as a person who has attained that union in a greater or lesser degree, or who aims at and believes in such attainments." R.C. Zehner, in *Mysticism: Sacred
and Profane, argues that "the keynote of the mystical experience has always been one of reconciliation and of union with all things." But although the concept of mysticism involves both union and reconciliation, it also involves an appeal to a layer of one's consciousness that as Underhill points out, "has lain fallow in the past." Inherent in the text, and therefore in its title, are the concepts of union, reconciliation and the raising consciousness.

Naipaul’s concern with the specific form necessary to convey Ganesh’s new world experience remains paramount. Here again mysticism operates at both the levels of form and content. The mystical experience of the East, specifically of India, differs from that of the West, even in its mode of writing. According to Zaehner, "The Hindu mystical classics are not autobiographical and are not the record of actual experiences undergone by given individuals. They are either mystico-magical tracts like the earlier, Upanisads, or the exposition of mystical doctrines in verse like the later Upanisads and the Bhagavad Gita." The Mystic Masseur is not in keeping with the tradition of Hindu mystical classics because it is couched as an autobiographical statement and record’s the activities of Ganesh. The author is forced to use this autobiographical style precisely because he is in the wilderness. “The Mystic” in a new land is forced to compromise.

The Mystic Masseur examines the reconciliation Ganesh must make with his social environment and his linguistic legacy. He examines the mystical experiences of the East Indian in an alien land through an autobiographical mode, he is constrained to use the mystical doctrines of the Bhagavad Gita to explore his changing consciousness in his new land. Ganesh felt compelled to explain the reality of the East Indian condition at a particular moment in history. He “found himself a mystic when Trinidad was crying out for one” (MM200). He was able to offer his people “spiritual solace and comfort” because he was “the only true mystic in the island” (MM134).
Ganesh's life becomes a reflection of Trinidad's social evolution at that particular historical moment.

The life of Gandhi also embraced the union of two seemingly contradictory principles. As a mystic, he preferred to live among the masses of his people rather than achieve self-realization apart from them, as some Indian mystics did by returning to the caves of the Himalayas. Selwyn R.Cudjoe rightly says “he became the symbol of the Indian liberation movement, a representation of the attempt to synthesize the traditional world of Hinduism and mysticism and the contemporary world of Christianity and pragmatism.” Ganesh's life parallels that of Gandhi in many essential details. Most important, his participation as a mystic in social and political life becomes the point of departure in Naipaul's second book, The Suffrage of Elvira, in which the examination of the political is more important than that of the social or religious and in which the mysticism of feudalism gives way to the pragmatism of capitalism.

It is a common notion in the academia Naipaul's first three books are comedies of manners. James Wood finds his early novels “intensely Dickensian”, Amit Chaudhuri notes “the capacity for joy” in Naipaul's earlier work. But there has all along been an undercurrent of sadness beneath this mirth arising from the comic calculus of imperial condescension and colonial ambition. This is evident in The Mystic Masseur. This novel established the author as a humourist and a portrayer of street life. People who are no great admirers of Naipaul, are usually critical about his philosophical or journalistic excursions into Indian society and history. Rama Kundu remarks that “The Mystic Masseur is like other Trinidad stories, about a miniature India on the periphery of the British empire, far removed from the original land, the scene of the circumscribed life his immediate forefathers had experienced in their exile.” He describes Trinidad as a segment of India, though a very sickly, dwarfed, parodic version of a segment, it had been shipped across some thousands of
nautical miles, and still clung to its Indianess, comically, bathetically perhaps amidst alien corn.

The Street is Trinidad portrays the Creole world to which men like Ganesh or Biswas inevitably have to move from the security of the Indian settlements in rural Trinidad. There were few Indians in the cities and the East Indians who were compelled to move out of their isolation and merge with the Creole world. The narrator of Masseur is also a child. He meets Ganesh first when he is in school in 1939 and last when he is a university student in England in 1954. This is the growth of the narrator from childhood to youth implicitly following the story of Ganesh’s rise from a struggling masseur to M.B.E. The boy of the Street could well have been the narrator of Masseur. The story of Ganesh is presented as a kind of biography by this narrator who from time to time resorts to quotations from Ganesh’s autobiography. Masseur is placed firmly in the East Indian milieu of Trinidad. This character, who has been apparently taking shape in Naipaul’s mind almost since he was a child of eleven, seems to be a representative figure. In his life and career he symbolizes one aspect of the experience of the entire East Indian community in their move from isolated rural existence to city life and creolization which means ultimately a moving away from their East Indian identity. Naipaul makes the narrator say in The Mystic Masseur “I myself believe that the history of Ganesh is, in a way, the history of our times.”46 Alex Haley’s Roots has rightly been described as “an epic drama of one man’s search for his origins.”47 The narrator is an intelligent observer who understands very well what is happening. Landeg White expresses the greatness of the narrator as “if he frequently appears to be going along with the accepted view of Ganesh, this is not because he is taken in but because he is delighted and intrigued and because it is only by talking with his tongue in his cheek that he can explore the whole situation and at the same time convey the full flavour of his delight.”48
The Mystic Masseur is a tolerance, an affection for wit and style which, while it does not rule out assessment, definitely rejects contempt or indignation. Ganesh is perfectly attuned to his times. He is a hero because the contradictions of his society are expressed and heightened in himself. Indignation at his activities is tempered by recognition that he too is a victim of displacement, and gives way to relish that in such a limited society he should have been able to display so many and such attractive human qualities. Ganesh has become a respectable political leader. He was sent as a delegate to Lake Success where he defends British Colonial rule, and is awarded the M.B.E. There is nothing inappropriate about this. It is an axiom that the elite of a colonial society has a vested interest in colonialism, and Ganesh is only defending the system under which he has prospered.

Naipaul concerns himself with the political reality of Trinidad just before and after independence. His depiction of Trinidadian politics is amusing. His method is to invert and treat ironically what influences and concerns him. Naipaul’s reminiscences help to create a congenial atmosphere as he reaches out to people of divergent political, social and religious positions. Naipaul’s skill at touching the minute detail to extract the maximum desired effect is evidenced repeatedly in The Mystic Masseur. Kenneth Ramchand comments that, "Naipaul satirizes the fossilized Indian community as well as the larger static Trinidadian society in which Ganesh’s predominantly fortuitous drift to eminence takes place."49

Naipaul employs a rather simple device to eliminate the possibility of his lightly sketched figures losing their personal individualities. For each of the minor and even most of the major characters he designates a peculiarity and by reiterating this ‘tag’ in connection with the person at intervals throughout the story he effectively avoids confusion. After a series of failures in his early life, Ganesh becomes a mystic masseur. The successful healer in course
of time becomes an M.B.E. The knave railway Raju, the protagonist of *The Guide* also plays the role of a pseudo-religious fraud "preying on the credulous like Ganesh." In *The Mystic Masseur*, Bruce F. Macdonald perceives the beginning of the method of symbolic action which has made Naipaul's later novels such forceful works. In his article he observes "Here we find the death of the traditional ritual and the institution of the symbolic escape." He makes the right guess that the Trinidadians are not worried about the significance of his symbolic pretensions and actions. In their eagerness to preserve their cultural identity, they are ready to accept Ganesh's India as a substitute for the real thing. Though the occupation of masseur is traditional, Ganesh's "mystical power as a pundit, lies in his ability to recreate fantasy for others." He is a man who knows to deal with people and handle situations.

*The Mystic Masseur*, inspite of its claims to objectivity, is a subjective account of the island politician in the 1950s. The books is also a 'tongue in cheek' comment on the concept of biographical writing as a revelation of truth. For all his effort to assemble objective dada about Ganesh, the organizing sensibility touches it up with his own vision. Naipaul has underlined the conditions of world communication as being essentially political in nature. Trinidad's unpreparedness to do so at that level is its failure. Political anxiety has introduced the dialogue between the person and his nation but political awareness is necessary before it can communicate with the rest of the world.

Political reality structurally represents the multivalent poetic vision in these novels. The political situation in Trinidad reflects microcosmically the larger political disparities, highlighting the community of need disguised by ideologies. It speaks the universal language of corruption and the prostitution of politics. Politics control material existence and so political maneuvering becomes the minimum condition of world survival. Naipaul presents two antithetic
political situations, one objectively and the other subjectively. One is powerful, secure, superior and patronizing. The other is weak, insecure and obsessed by a sense of unimportance. Both egotistical and unscrupulous, meet under the mantle of democratically free nations. Trinidad's lack of historical perspective makes it absurd. It accepts unhesitatingly its newly imposed identity as it accepted its colonial and slave status in the past. It thinks seriously of jumping across time and place, of disregarding the facts of its historical reality, to reach out to possibilities which become escapist fantasies or mimic realities.

Ganesh is obviously seen by the novelist in his contradictory complexity. He does not dismiss him as a clever trickster only, but he gives him credit as being smart. He cultivates all the political qualities through which he can keep at bay the attributes of the Trinidadian society which tend to victimize the enslaved. As a novelist Naipaul is quite detached. He maintains a neutrality in presenting the character of Ganesh, leaving the conclusion to be drawn by the readers. The neutrality in which Ganesh is portrayed gives an impression that Naipaul is probably approving of whatever Ganesh does in order to establish his selfhood and achieve recognition as a political leader.

Finally, it is the opportunistic politics which Naipaul exposes in the political fight. Unfortunately, Trinidadian politics is conceptualized on imitating the Western model. Therefore, the observation of Eric Williams is in proper order as noted below:

"Political forms and social institutions were imitated rather than created, borrowed rather than relevant, reflecting the forms existing in the particular metropolitan country from which they were derived."\textsuperscript{53}

As a novelist Naipaul desires to affirm that "no one should accept any political ideology that comes from outside if one does not understand the thought, science, Philosophy and law that determine such an ideology."\textsuperscript{54}
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17. Selwyn R. Cudjoe, *V.S. Naipaul: A Materialist Reading*, p.41


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27. Ibid, p.33.


29. Ibid, p.66.


34. Ibid, p.110.


40. Ibid, p.44.

41. Ibid, p.44.

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