read in terms of the problems that the politics, society and the individual encounter in the postcolonial society. It also highlights the findings of the present study and scope for further research.
CHAPTER II
SOCIAL ISSUES: FRAGMENTATION AND DISINTEGRATION

The rise of colonialism in the 18th and 19th centuries in Africa, Asia and the South America has caused some changes in the themes of literature especially in the socio-economic and socio-political contexts. The literary writers raise their voice to the concerns about the natives who have been shaped by colonial suppression. Literature of the past ages has been concerned with the individual, his needs and woes. The writers of present ages have failed to appreciate the fact that, “Man is subordinated to his social order and his movements as well as his thoughts are restricted by the society” (B. D. Kumar 45). On the other hand, the 20th century pre-independence novels in English reflect the imperial mood, capture the temper of the times and describe the growth of colonial consciousness. They have universally inculcated in the people a sense of pride in their cultural heritage and strengthened them with a determination to fight against the British colonial rule. Modern Literature reveals the social, economical, religious, political and psychological crises in the society and the life of its people.

Of all the literary forms, the novel is considered to be the most socially oriented, because it depicts human society in its varied aspects – chaos, struggle and disorder. Diana Laurenson and Alan Swingewood in their work The Sociology of Literature aptly remark that, “The novel as the major literary genre of industrial society, can be seen as a faithful attempt to recreate the social world of man’s relation with his family, with politics, with the state: it delineates too his roles within the family and other institutions between groups and social classes” (13). It reflects the changes occurring in society and the manner in which individuals become accustomed to the social system. It should not be mere reproduction of things or events but interpretations. It is the “mirror of the age, but a very
special kind of mirror, a mirror that reflects not merely the external features of the age but also its inner face, its nervous system, coercing of its blood and the unconscious promptings and conflicts which sway it” (Allen 18-19).

Much more than other genres the novel has special links with the colonial discourse. Edward Said argues that, “The novel is worldlier than various other related forms. It is easier to inscribe social and cultural discourses in the novel than in realism and cultural politics right from the very beginning” (The World, the Text and the Critic 82). Further, he says, “The convergence between the patterns of narrative authority constitutes of the novel [and] a complex ideological configuration underlying the tendency to imperialism” (82). Another critic, Jonathan White considers novel “as an alternative way of doing history and politics” (209).

According to Naipaul, “Novel is a delight and a form of social inquiry” (India: A Million Mutinies Now 18). It is essentially a western literary form and comes with “assumptions about society [and] an idea of history” (qtd. in Cader 107). As a writer, Naipaul looks deeply into the life of the people to reproduce it in a novelistic structure, so as to make sure of a thorough understanding, thereby exposing the inner as well as the outer layers of the society. Therefore, his novels are being a telling testimony of the universal predicament of disorder of the Third World societies. They are predominantly realistic in their attention to vivid details and their candid presentation reflects the reality of the Third World societies and its inhabitants. Hence, Naipaul is rightly “a mandarin possessing a penetrating, analytic understanding of Third World societies” (Nixon, London Calling: V. S. Naipaul, Postcolonial Mandarin 4).

Society has different cultures, traditions, values and many age-old beliefs. The social issues bring a change in society and thereby provide sound values. McIver and
Charles Page in their *Society: An Introductory Analysis* comment that “Social change is a process responsive to many types of change, to changes in the attitudes and the beliefs of men, and to changes that go back beyond human control to the biological and the physical nature of things” (508). Social change is an ever-continuous development, changing the conditions of life, traditions, customs and behavioural norms of individuals or groups. It also implies the internal differentiation of roles and relationships within a social structure and “replacement of older structures by new structures” (Bisaria and Sharma 28).

The major questions on the social issues are: How did the experience of colonisation affect those who were colonised? How were colonial powers able to gain control over the non-Western world? To what extent has decolonisation been possible? How did colonial education and language influence the culture and identity of the colonised? Are Western formulations of postcolonialism overemphasising hybridity at the expense of material realities? How do gender, race, and class function in colonial and postcolonial discourse? This chapter answers the above questions with special reference to Naipaul’s discourse.

The European colonialism is responsible for the creation of a fragmented postcolonial world. The actions taken by the colonisers fragmented the spirit of the colonised people. They make the colonised feel that the white people are superior and every other races are inferior and to be dominated. Everything good belonged to the Westerners; everything else falls under the category of the ‘Other’. Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism* elucidates, “Independence was for whites and Europeans; the lesser or subject peoples were to be ruled; science, learning, history emanated from the West” (23). Therefore, the colonised people are made to believe that everything about them is bad and barbarous and they need to be ‘civilised’.
The colonisers not only capture their lands and properties, but also enslave them. The colonised people are made to serve the colonisers’ purpose and their benefits. Their culture, tradition, ritual and religion everything has been replaced by that of the colonisers. The colonised are forced to cut themselves off from everything that fabricated their existence and adapt to the life style of the colonisers. They are made to believe that they do not have culture of their own, because the colonisers have left the colonised people no choice but to embrace whatever is being offered. Ngugi wa Thiong’o in *The Language of African Literature* rightly points out, “The most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonized, the control, through culture of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world” (442). Even, the colonisers have made the colonised people perceive the world through their (colonisers’) eyes and therefore they seem to think that, “There is no use of looking for other, non-imperialist alternatives; the system has simply eliminated them and made them unthinkable. The circularity, the perfect closure of the whole thing is not only aesthetically but also mentally unassailable” (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 23).

Living a life of ambivalence, the colonised are trapped in ‘in-betweenness’ and ‘halfness’. Moreover, embracing borrowed culture, language and life-style ultimately throws them into the ever-tormenting wretchedness which has already been destined for them. Modernity and freedom remain just meaningless words to them and they live in a false idea of decolonising themselves. In relevance to this idea, Frantz Fanon aptly remarks, “Decolonization, which sets out to change the order of the world, is, obviously, a programme of complete disorder” (*The Wretched of the Earth* 27). The rise of new social movements around the issues like race, gender and ethnicity have revealed the limits of older conceptions of community, individual and nation. Profound changes such as decolonisation and new distribution of global power have led to instabilities.
Most decolonised societies go through two stages: in the first, the focus is on the
assertion of political power; in the second, with political power having become an
established fact. In this stage the erstwhile colonial people try to create a new self-image in
the fragmented society. Though the colonisers have left the land their ‘colonisation’ exists
even today in the form of education, culture and in the system of governments. In this way,
the formerly colonised people are left with a psychological ‘inheritance’ of a negative self-
image which alienates them from their own indigenous cultures. Postcolonial criticism,
therefore, addresses the problems of identity in cultural context since the colonisers saw
themselves culturally superior and the colonised as culturally inferior. Frantz Fanon in The
Wretched of the Earth comments about the colonial exploitation of the human beings
would help us in better understanding of the situation, “Native society is not simply
described as a society lacking in values. It is not enough for the colonialist to affirm that
those values have disappeared from, or still better, never existed in the colonial world. The
native is declared insensible to ethics; he represents not only the absence of values, but
also the negation of values” (32).

Theories proposed by critics like Homi K. Bhabha and writers like Wilson Harris
and Edward Brathwaite proceed from a consideration of the nature of postcolonial
societies. The West Indian poet and historian, Edward Brathwaite, stresses the
multicultural and syncretise nature of the West Indian society. Similarly, Robert Young in
Postcolonialism: A Historical Introduction elucidates, “Postcolonial theory is always
concerned with the positive and negative effects of the mixing of peoples and cultures,
whether it be through colonial domination of indigenous cultures, or the hybridization of
domestic metropolitan cultures as a result of immigration” (69).
Cultures are mixed up, which have the components of both the East and the West. There are many cultures present in a postcolonial society. Cultures associated with the political elite will be more powerful, as they control the culture producing organisations. Stuart Hall in *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader* takes a critical look at culture and tells us that culture is not singular and points out that “The concept of representation has come to occupy a new and important place in the study of culture. Representation connects meaning and language to culture . . .” (15). According to Ashcroft et al., “Post-colonial culture is inevitably a hybridized phenomenon involving a dialectical relationship between the ‘grafted’ European cultural systems and an indigenous ontology” (*Postcolonial Studies Reader*). The hybrid society has to face “innumerable challenges in finding out itself after a prolonged subjugation and cultural deprivation” (Pathak 129).

According to Bhabha, postcolonial culture is “standing on the borders of myth and modernity” (*The Location of Culture* 7). He also remarks that, “The issue of cultural difference emerges at points of social crises, and the questions of identity that it raises are agnostic; identity is claimed either from a position of marginality or in an attempt at gaining the center: in both senses, ex-centric” (“Postcolonial Criticism” 443). In *The Location of Cultur*, he comments upon Naipaul’s fascination with the English book, which is an embodiment of the Western sign, sustaining “a tradition of English ‘cultural’ authority” (105). However, the significant feature of postcolonial culture lies in its development of the cultural hybridity to translate the “social imaginary of both metropolis and modernity” (Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 6). Bhabha elucidates:

The borderline work of culture demands an encounter with ‘newness’ that is not part of the continuum of past and present. It creates a sense of the
new as an insurgent act of cultural translation . . . it renews the past, re-
figuring it as a contingent ‘in-between’ space, that innovates and interrupts
the performance of the present. The ‘past-present’ becomes part of the
necessity, not the nostalgia, of living. (The Location of Culuture 7)

In his two major works i.e., Orientalism and Culture and Imperialism, Said’s
commitment to a viable cultural analysis is prominent. In Culture and Imperialism, Said
makes a crucial point saying that “Imperialism is not only about conquering geographical
territories, but it is also about legitimising it through Western narratives appropriating the
‘right’ to conquest. The notion is that, in the imperialist’s concept, the European culture
emerges as superior against the non-European” (24). Nurtured by the idea of Edward Said,
Naipaul had the belief that the “true, pure world” lies elsewhere on the “snow slopes” (The
Middle Passage 157) and not on an island which is “an obscure New World
transplantation” (The Middle Passage 127). For him the true culture rests with the Western
world, especially in the metropolitan centre and not in the ‘unimportant’ and ‘barbarous’
world of the periphery. Hence, he has aligned himself with “the values and preoccupations
of the dominant Western culture” (Cudjoe 5). But, he has not been able to disconnect
himself entirely from his culture of origin.

The fictional world of Naipaul opens the historic vision of the Third World with its
pre-existing reality in which he challenges orthodox beliefs and tries to remove them from
the social set up. His novels truly reflect the mood of the West Indian society, especially
that of immigrants in the West Indies. His fiction and non-fiction seem significant to new
and developed nations because of the mixing of cultures, the collapse of older traditions
and rapid political changes that have left most people confused, sceptical and uncertain.
They have the widest scope of comprehending the manifold crises (disorder and decay) in
the society and the vast circle of people. Thus, his works throw light on the postcolonial and post-imperial realities that have shaped the contemporary societies and provide important insights relating to them.

Naipaul’s works are set in many places and explore many themes; he is best known for his portrayal of Trinidad, where he was born and brought up; for his explorations of India, his ancestral land; and for his bleak, unsparing portraits of postcolonial societies of Africa, Asia and South America. The history of Trinidad has followed the abnormal course of conquest, colonisation and domination, as we know that the indigenous population of Trinidad is virtually devastated during the initial stages of Spanish occupation of Trinidad. So far the Spanish has made little effort to develop the island because they are interested mainly in finding gold and silver. For them Trinidad is merely a stepping-stone in their search for the legendary city of gold. Then the influxes of foreign immigrants, following the liberation of official attitude towards immigration, completely alter the social make up of Trinidad. The indigenous population has been replaced by transplants, consisting of African slaves, indentured Indians, Chinese labourers and imported Europeans. Amidst such heterogeneity therefore, a unitary and homogenous cultural identity is simply not possible in the case of Trinidadians. The displaced people, who are uprooted from their real homes, should find themselves out of place in an alien land. “Displaced from their real homes and transported to distant lands, they experience a totally ‘negative sense of place’” (Hermassi 157). The degradation of their cultures together with the severe restrictions imposed on their life pattern in the colonies reduce them to virtual non-entities.

The social identity of people is rooted in their culture, while at the individual level it is determined by personal achievements. In order to experience a ‘wholeness’, it is necessary to fuse the individual and the social consciousness. However, the paradox of
modern predicament lies in the fact that owing to the fragmentation of societies, the
affinity that was once felt between the two has now been broken. In the case of artificially
created colonial societies like Trinidad, this split becomes even more prominent.

The themes of Naipaul’s novels observe and present the fragmentation and
alienation of the society which happen to be the universal predicament of man in the
contemporary world. Some eminent Third World critics concentrate mainly on Naipaul’s
development as a creative artist who picks up issues relating to the Third World. His works
throw light on the postcolonial and post-imperial realities that have shaped the
contemporary societies and provide important insights relating to them. They also lead to a
better understanding of the problems that are faced by the post-imperial generations.

The society in Naipaul’s novels is multicultural. Rather than assimilation of diverse
groups to a norm, multiculturalism indicates merely the existence in one place of a
plurality of distinct cultural practices and beliefs. The positive and negative effects of the
mixing of people and cultures as a result of colonial domination, is an obvious one that can
be found in all the works of Naipaul. This happens as a result of colonial politics, which
cruelly displaces people, leave them rootless and with no other reference point than the
British Empire. Today’s self-proclaimed and multiple identities can be seen “not as a
market of contemporary social fluidity and dispossession but a new stability, self-
assurance and quietism” (Young, Postcolonialism: A Historical Introduction 4).

Mimicry is yet another aspect which Naipaul integrates in his works. It is an effect
of colonisation that started from the colonising period and crept into the postcolonial era
which is “An increasingly important term in post-colonial theory, because it has come to
describe the ambivalent relationship between colonizer and colonized” (Griffith 124). The
concept of mimicry is heavily discussed by Homi K. Bhabha according to him, “Colonial
mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (*The Location of Culture* 122), he continues saying, “The menace of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority. And it is a double vision that is a result of what I’ve described as the partial representation/recognition of the colonial object” (*The Location of Culture* 126). He sees the coloniser as a snake in the grass who speaks in “a tongue that is forked” (*The Location of Culture* 122).

Colonial education and culture have presented the English world, with its rich culture, as a world of order, discipline, success and achievement. As a result, the natives consider their own culture, customs and traditions, religion, and race to be inferior to those of their master and try to identify themselves with the Empire. In his works, Naipaul enumerates how colonial education plays an effective tool in the hands of the colonisers to colonise and enslave the mind of the natives. The colonisers have set up educational institutions and forcefully convince the colonised people to send their children to the colonial school. They target the children mostly because the mind of a child is fragile and can be easily shaped. They want the colonial child to grow up with the ideologies of the colonisers and thus be their prisoner forever. In the colonial schools, children grow up with the English ideologies of the colonisers. They are taught the culture of the West and forced to follow them so that these children slowly move away and finally forget their own culture and traditions. Thus, a colonial child is “being made to stand outside himself to look at himself” (Thiong’o 443). The result of such educational practice is that school children are conditioned to be ashamed of the realities of their own surroundings.

Communication breaks down as well as the passing of culture from one generation to other since “language as communication and as culture is then products to each other.
Communication creates culture: culture is a means of communication” (Thiong’o 441). This way their entire existence crumbles. Children never get to know about their histories and grow up with English ideologies. The colonial child is made to feel inferior to oneself and one’s language.

The final blow on the colonised by the colonisers is the attack on the native language. The purpose of colonial education is to build an environment where English is the only medium of communication. According to the colonisers the natives do not have any language; all they have are dialects. If they have a voice it is of ‘silence’. Therefore, grabbing control over the language is like having ultimate power over the natives because the colonisers will be able to monitor everything the natives say and do, thus having access over their lives.

Naipaul deals sensitively with the East Indians’ struggle to find a foot hold in the New World (decolonised world). During the initial stages of cultural colonisation, the colonised people often feel that complete self-realisation is not possible in a society that keeps pulling them back continuously. Consequently, they are analysed within the framework of East-West encounter as both deal with the conflict arising through confrontation between the cultures. Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism* observes that since all cultures are hybrid and heterogeneous, the complete separation of the West from the East is impossible:

> No one today is purely one thing. Labels like Indian, or woman, or Muslim, or American are no more than starting-point which, if followed into actual experience for only a moment, are quickly left behind. Imperialism consolidated the mixture of cultures and identities on a global scale. But its worst and most paradoxical gift was to allow people to belief that they were
only, mainly, exclusively white, or black or Western or Oriental. No one can deny the persisting continuities of long traditions, sustained habitations, natural languages and cultural geographies, but there seems no reason except fear and prejudice to keep insisting on their separation and distinctiveness as if that was all human life was about. (408)

Naipaul expresses the socio-cultural issues of the urban world of colonial Trinidad and portrays the Trinidadian society as a typical picaroon society. The Trinidadian society is a multiracial, multicultural and fragmented society which “continually growing and changing, never settling into any pattern” (*The Middle Passage* 54). It has misplaced its roots and its religion is reduced to mere rituals and rites without spirit. Naipaul takes due care in presenting a striking picture of the Trinidadian society, because it is “the society he [Naipaul] grew up in and the society he rejected in unequivocal terms” (Iyer 126). For he says, “I knew Trinidad to be unimportant, uncreative, cynical . . . It was a place where the stories of failure grew” (*The Middle Passage* 43-44). He also acknowledges that he owes a lot to Trinidad, “I have grown out of Trinidad and in a way I am grateful to the Trinidad I knew as a boy for making me what I am” (*The Middle Passage* 27).

Naipaul explores the culture and social history of the Indian community in Trinidad and describes the Trinidadian Indians as people who are “living in a borrowed culture” (*The Middle Passage* 64) and they have to go back to their roots in Indian tradition and culture. He visualises the malpractices in the society in the name of religion and spiritual upliftment. He depicts the society’s pretention as:

The society only pretends to be colonial; and for this reason its absurdities are at once apparent and its mimicry of an old country, which has been without a native aristocracy for a thousand years and has learned to make
room for outsiders, but only at the top. The mimicry changes, the inner world remains constant. This is the secret of survival. And so it happens that, to the whole area of India, a late seventeenth century traveller like Ovington remains in many ways a reliable guide. Yesterday the mimicry was Mogul; tomorrow it might be Russian or American; today it is English.

(An Area of Darkness 56)

Leaving India as an indentured labourer in Trinidad, Naipaul’s grandfather and others left behind a certain way of life and culture. In Trinidad, they are exposed to cultural patterns which are imported from England. As a result, the next generation grows up in this foster culture. The Indians in Trinidad by and large, lack cultural ties with their heritage. In India: A Wounded Civilization, Naipaul clearly states, “These people are all helpless, disadvantage, easily unbalanced; the civilization they have inherited has long gone sour” (154). India exists in their imagination and knowledge as a ‘distant pole’. In The Middle Passage, Naipaul aptly describes them as:

A peasant-minded, money-minded community, spiritually static because cut off from its roots, its religion reduced to rites without philosophy, set in a materialist colonial society: a combination of historical accidents and national temperament has turned the Trinidadian Indian into the complete colonial, even more philistine than the white. (89)

The social observation of Naipaul is reflected in a way that he criticises the wrong doings and the evil customs which is widely spread in the society. People know only to retain their ancestral customs without considering its real value. The Hindu society in Trinidad is rotten by myths and rituals. It is exploited by the British on one hand, and religious gurus on the other. The ceremonies and rituals are carried out mechanically
without understanding the real essence of it. Naipaul remembers his grandmother’s family in Trinidad, when he was a child, “there had been so many pujas, so many ritual readings from the scriptures and the epics which had given them less the idea of what they were than the idea that in Trinidad they were apart” (India: A Million Mutinies Now 79). In his works, Naipaul draws the real picture of the Trinidadian Hindu society and tries to justify his stand. According to him “India survived in Trinidad in a diminished way, in the style of the house, in household objects, artefacts and in certain rituals, rather than in the attitudes of the immigrants themselves” (Theroux 94).

Naipaul’s society is made up of colonially uprooted and displaced people from many parts of the world. It is “a multiracial, immigrant and, slave, colonial society” (Kamra 14). Most of these people are displaced and dispossessed, living in societies, which lack any kind of cultural cohesion. He describes the disorder and disorganisation of the society, the corruption of the colonised and the coloniser. He is concerned with the happenings in the countries that have just freed themselves from colonial rule and are unable to attain the uncertain blessings of modernity. Hence, he has become a controversial figure for writing about “the half-made societies of the post-colonial world” (V. Singh, “Paradox of Freedom in A Bend in the River” 124). He describes the way these societies function in the postcolonial order. Though imperialism has passed and the colonies have attained an independent status, the Third World societies face a plethora of challenges like social, political and economic ferments which lead to dispossession, homelessness, displacement, loneliness, alienation and identity crisis. What Naipaul wants to focus in his novels is the ‘harshness’ of colonisation and the ‘barrenness’ of the colonised land and the colonised people.
This chapter focuses on the colonial and postcolonial societies portrayed by Naipaul in his novels *The Mystic Masseur, The Suffrage of Elvira, The Mimic Men, A Bend in the River* and *Half a Life*. These novels portray the life of a tradition-ridden society which is based on the corrupting and frightening facts of colonialism. Naipaul’s first published work *The Mystic Masseur* (1958) brings out the socio-cultural conflicts in the colonial set-up. Here, Naipaul attacks the distorted sense of values of the society, because it is barely aware of its important past; all it knows is a few ruins and rituals. It gives the analysis of the social clashes and crisis, and the challenges of the colonial Hindu society in Trinidad. It portrays how self-government and the veneer of self-rule have led to mimicry of European ways. This facet of an individual’s vision is well illustrated at the end of the novel where Ganesh, the protagonist of the novel, changes his name G. Ramsay Muir Esq. M. B. E. The life of Ganesh – a quack masseur, a false mystic, a phoney author and corrupt politician becomes an allegory of “the history of our time” (*TMM* 8).

Ganesh is a representative figure of the East Indians in Trinidad and their move towards city life. Being a man of rational and moral weakness, Ganesh could only use the ruins to acquire a small success for himself. Moreover, as a learned man, Ganesh does all the things in order to establish his knowledge and rise up to the highest position in the society. His anxiety for appropriation of the British culture through language is another aspect of his desire to achieve status in it, for which he practices better speech than his own dialect.

Ganesh takes some efforts to develop the Hindu Indian community in Trinidad. He establishes a Cultural Institute in Fuente Grove and the aim of the institute was to look after the Hindu Culture and Science of Thought in Trinidad. The President of the Institute of course is Ganesh, and the only patron for the institute is his father-in-law. When Ganesh
prospers, he decides to build a temple, “An Indian architect came over from British Guiana and built a temple for Ganesh in proper Hindu style” (TMM 143). Not only Ganesh, other Indians in Trinidad also adopt the Indian way of living. The taxi driver on the road to Fuente Grove sings a Hindi song in between his talking and driving, where other taxi drivers hang up their price list he says, “a framed picture, issued by the Gita Press of Gorakhpur in India, of the goddess Lakshmi standing, as usual, on her lotus” (TMM 135). Even though they follow Indian way of life, they always try to imitate the West. Ganesh has pictures of Mary and Jesus in his Shrine next to those of Krishna and Vishnu, and a crescent and star representing Islam which shows the multicultural and multi-religious world of Trinidad. He says, “All the same God”, because, “Christians liked him, Muslims liked him, and Hindus, willing as ever risk prayers to new Gods, didn’t object” (TMM 128).

Ganesh’s Dhoti and Leela’s sari, his morning pooja, the picture of the Goddess Lakshmi on her lotus in Ganesh’s room, their daily food, the cuisine and eating manners, including polishing the plate with one’s fingers and drinking water in the orthodox Hindu way are all signs of the Hindu life. Even during the political meeting Ganesh sits below a carving of Hanuman, the monkey god, and recites a long Hindi prayer before sprinkling supposedly Ganga water over the meeting, reminds the Hindu culture.

After achieving political power, Ganesh imitates the whites by getting a refrigerator and fills it with bottles of Coca-Cola. His house has Indian exterior, but the interior has all the modern European scientific household gadgets which is nothing but mimicry. He wears Indian dhoti and kurta, but he prefers to wear European dresses on other occasions. This is also nothing but imitation of Western culture. Even after he has achieved a measure of success and a reputation as a mystic, Ganesh “shrinks into themselves when venturing into the alien world of Port of Spain. He doesn’t have the
courage to go in his Indian attire and dons English clothes for a visit to the Register General’s office” (Ray, V. S. Naipaul: An Introduction 117).

The novel also exposes the Hindu rituals practiced by Indians in Trinidad. One of the rituals their children go through is the initiation ceremony in which a young boy is sent by his parents on make-believe journey to Benares to study. In this ceremony, two, members of the family are made to plead with him not to go, and the boy eventually listens to them. When it is time for Ganesh to go through this ceremony he had his head shaved and he is given ‘a little saffron bundle’ and told to go to Benares. When Ganesh starts walking away from home, Dookhie, the shopkeeper begs him to comeback while pretending to cry:

  Ganesh kept on walking.
  ‘But what happen to the boy?’ people asked. ‘He taking this thing really serious.’
  Dookhie caught Ganesh by the shoulder and said, ‘Cut out this nonsense, man. Stop behaving stupid. You think I have all day to run after you? You think you really going to Benares? That is in India, you know, and this is Trinidad.’ (TMM 11)

Thus, they perform all the rituals without knowing of its spiritual meaning. This type of social behaviour reminds us the pretensions of the society.

Another important Hindu wedding ritual they practice is ‘The kedgeree-eating ceremony’, a custom which East Indian immigrants have perpetuated but which has undergone some modifications because of the change in time and place. Ganesh, being no exception, didn’t eat the kedgeree until he extracted a considerable dowry from his father-in-law. Finally he gets “a cow and a heifer, fifteen hundred dollars in cash, and a house in
Fuente Grove” (TMM 45). Consequently, the colonial society recommends husbands’
beating of their wives as per the need of male domination. Though Ganesh differs from the
community in many aspects, he beats his wife on the very day after his marriage. His wife
cries out, “Oh God! Oh God!” (TMM 49).

The Hindu society in Trinidad and elsewhere in the West Indies is reduced to
comic and is confined to the externals of social life. Even in their carefully preserved
Indian village life existence, these men and women are quite aware that they are not in
India. Their way of life is altered from their lives in India by the pressures of the
environment. For instance, Ramlogan, the father-in-law of Ganesh, wants to make the best
of both worlds. When it can save his dowry money, Ramlogan has no objection in
embracing modernity. Ganesh too embracing modernity by changing the custom of Hindu
wedding, that is, instead of inviting relatives with saffron dyed rice, he invites them with
the “printed invitations on scalloped and gilt-edged cards” (TMM 38).

The working competence and simplicity in Ganesh proves that his character is most
appropriate and essential for any individual to succeed in the Trinidadian society. Thus,
Santhosh Chakrabarti in “Naipaul’s Discourse of Aspirations: A Study of The Mystic
Masseur and A House for Mr. Biswas” elucidates, “The biographical account of Ganesh . .
. is a double-edged discourse of the social reality and an individual’s attempt at rising
above that reality and the author’s satire on the Trinidadian society” (33).

While The Mystic Masseur exposes the distortions of personality and corruption of
an individual under the pressures of reality, The Suffrage of Elvira does it at the societal
level by “exposing the distortion of such concepts as democracy and independence and the
large-scale corruption of the society, itself by looking at the microcosm through the
macrocasm” (Mannarsamy 13). It throws light on how democracy and its ideals are
distorted in the Third World countries and visualises the chaos of the present which suggests a very disordered past.

The concept of democracy, due to constant misuse and misinterpretation leads to greater destabilisation of the society that was held together by its basic needs and wants. Every individual in Elvira knows that democracy is a damn business, but still they want to participate in the vain environment of the Election. To Mrs. Baksh, democracy stands as a warning sign of bad times. Hence, she keeps on warning her husband and son many times that “Nobody ain’t listening to me . . . ‘Everybody just washing their foot and jumping in this democracy business. But I promising you, for all the sweet it begin sweet, it going to end damn sour’” (SE 43). The people are anti-democratic in spirit, for them, election is a festival, and democracy is absurd rather than a passion. Hence, Democracy and independence may be said to be out of date and irrelevant in a society like Elvira.

The society of Elvira comprises a community of Hindus, Muslims, Africans and Spaniards and is undergoing its second General Election. It is a popular society, witnessing a number of successful campaigns by various candidates in the election. Just coming out of colonial rule, the society is unable to free itself from the colonial power in which it exposes the mixed up socio-cultural situation:

Things were crazily mixed up in Elvira. Everybody, Hindus, Muslims and Christians, owned a Bible; the Hindus and Muslims looking on it, if anything, with greater awe. Hindus and Muslims celebrated Christmas and Easter. The Spaniards and some of the Negroes celebrated the Hindu festival of lights. . . . Everybody celebrated the Muslim festival of Hosein. (SE 74)
Elvira is a destitute society without history, without achievement and exposes its middle class manners and morals, but it is “a good friendly place before this universal suffrage nonsense” (SE 96). To the people of Elvira, suffrage means a selfish opportunity for personal gain. In this society, religion is no longer a subject of spirit, but becomes something that could be oppressed in a variety of ways to meet the ends of the selfish people. The names of Baksh’s children are suggestive of the mixed-up nature of religion in Elvira. The Bakshes preferred Christian and Muslim names alternately for their children. The boys are named as Foam, Iqbal, Herbert, Rafiq and Charles, and the girls as Carol and Zilla. This shows that there is a ‘unity in diversity’.

The supernatural element, a major thread in the society, shows the nature and manners of the people of Elvira, and also their tradition-ridden faith in the supernatural. They have a great belief in obeah, jharay, black-magic and spiritual fumigation. Not only that, “Nearly everybody else in Elvira had some experience of the supernatural” (SE 81). Mrs. Baksh, like others in Elvira, has a greater belief in the supernatural. When the small dog, named as ‘Tiger’, is considered as a bad omen, walks down in the streets, “Schoolchildren and labourers stood silently at the verge to let him pass. Faces appeared behind raised curtains” (SE 115). While praying, people of various religions “Christians, Hindus, and Muslims crossed themselves. To make sure, some Hindus muttered Rama, Rama as well” (SE 117).

Apart from superstition, corruption is seen as a livelihood of the people in Elvira. Money is the main value of the society and those who posses it are highly praised, irrespective of the means by which they earned it. Here, end justifies the means; success justifies everything. No one has any honesty, truthfulness or sincerity.
Moreover, the people of Elvira have the tendency to mimic the foreign things. Ramlogan, the rum-seller “was lavish with the Canadian Healing Oil” (SE 119). Nelly, Chittaranjan’s daughter, has her greatest wish fulfilled, when “she went to London and joined the Regent Street Polytechnic” (SE 240). Harichand, the printer, “liked sporting the American raincoat” (SE 125). Chittaranjan’s brightly painted house with tiled floors, his five-valve radio and chromium-plated ash tray; Baksh’s dream of building a house in Californian style; Mrs. Baksh wearing knee length skirt, instead of the traditional salwar kameez; and an Indian doctor wearing a Harris-tweed jacket despite the heat, are some examples of these mimic men’s passion.

The primary aim of Naipaul is to drive out the evils from the society. The society of Elvira is totally religious and taboo ridden, in which the characters like Harbans are merely fragments. Naipaul attacks the electoral process practiced in the society and intends to create a unique society that finds pleasure in creating unity. On the surface it seems to have a state of unity, but in reality, the racial and religious groups are as divided as ever. The unity of the people proves to be unstable, not grounded on a genuine historical or social awareness. This kind of society is, of course, common to the Third World countries and it proves to be a universal description of the most demoralised society. Though it is small its issues are more complex than in any normally civilised society.

The novel, *The Mimic Men*, presents the life of formerly colonised people of the island who are unable to establish order and govern their country. It deals with the irretrievable disorder of a Caribbean island and its true sufferers and examines the notions of decolonisation, freedom, achievement and the fact that individuals are limited by the history of a fragmented society. It presents a detached understanding of a violated, colonial society of Isabella which resembles the Trinidadian society in all aspects. Isabella is an
“unstable, shallow, mixed and chaotic society” (Theroux 73). Moreover, the title of the novel signifies the condition of colonised people who imitate and reflect colonisers lifestyle and views.

Though, Isabella is a small world, the issues that emerge from it are ‘more complex’ than those existed in any civilised society. Ralph, the protagonist, describes the society of Isabella as “haphazard, disordered and mixed” (MM 57). He further observes that the society is fragmented, inorganic, no link between man and the landscape, a society not held together by common interests . . .” (MM 224).

Naipaul has revealed much about “Ralph’s generation and about his island society” (MacDonald 249). While Ralph’s generation is trapped in colonial mythology, his mother’s generation looks back to the Indian culture. An illustration of this is found when Ralph and his wife Sandra arrived at Isabella, his mother performs Hindu religious rites for them as Indians do for a newly married couple. But Hindu rituals have lost their meaning in Isabella as the people have lost their connection with India, its culture, customs and tradition. By leaving India and going to the Caribbean islands, the Indians are doomed to isolation and dislocation: “The process of losing one’s Indianness started with leaving India. That was the original sin, the fall. After that Indian traditions could only either decay into deadening ritual or become diluted, degraded and eventually lost through outside influences and intermarriage with others” (King 68).

Ralph is completely shocked when his father sacrifices Tamango, the race horse, even though he is aware of the symbolic significance of the sacrifice in Hindu tradition. The aim of the sacrifice is to “secure prosperity and fertility” (Mackenzie 90-91). The sacrifice causes him to see an Indian world that is in contrast with the noble and ideal
realm of imagination. Although, Ralph idealises his Hindu past and culture, he is in fact unable to understand Hinduism.

The novel outlines the theme of mimicking authenticity of an older order and the theme of resultant chaos that does not lead to freedom. The people of Isabella have been oppressed by a foreign rule and condensed to ‘mimic men’, mimicking the colonial rulers. Although they have achieved independence, they are nomadic all the time. They are demoralised and degenerated and imitate their grand rulers and live borrowed lives. They hide their real names and live with false identities. They have nothing of their own and feel totally empty. The contact with the big world and industrialisation offers no solution to their problems. Under these circumstances, the people lose all sense of belongingness with their world. In fact, the cultural disorder of the island of Isabella is the agent of the cultural chaos upsetting the whole people.

Naipaul seems to believe that mimicry, imposture and fraud are historically inevitable as the outgrowth of a picaroon society evolving out of slavery and colonialism. He is aware of the harmful effects of mimicry but he thinks that the characters who endure and indulge in mimicry have no other choice. He describes West Indian writing as a species of mimicry for in it “the characters keep slipping into a mid-Atlantic whiteness” (The Middle Passage 69). A statement of Eric Williams may underline the very idea of mimicry as conceptualised by Naipaul, “Political forms and social institutions were imitated rather than created, borrowed rather than relevant, reflecting the forms in the particular metropolitan country from which they were derived” (501).

The novel visualises the tendency of the children to mimic and live fictitious lives to an extent where they conceal their real names and identities. As a school boy, Ralph is uneasy about his Indian name ‘Ranjith Kripal Singh’. He splits Kripal Singh into two and
adds Ralph and used to sign his name as R. R. K. Singh. This attempt of self-baptism sounds comic, but at a deeper level it shows the child’s struggling for a new personality and his attempts to find his identity. Throughout his life, Ralph struggles to find order in his life. In the process, his activities are shaped by the factor of mimicry. As a result, this sort of mimicry causes damage to one’s sense of belonging.

The way the colonial educational system functions to erode the social, communal and national identity of the Trinidadian is clearly portrayed by Naipaul, because he himself has faced such harassment in his educational life when the degree results are published, he got a ‘second grade’. Naipaul has satirised the educational institutions in the West Indies that have distanced their students from the reality of their societies. His anguish on colonial educational system is also reflected in the character of Ralph in The Mimic Men.

Much of the social criticism in The Mimic Men centers on the colonial educational structure in Isabella. For the students in Isabella, school remains “a private hemisphere” (MM 102), separate from their family life, the landscape, the people and the island existence noticeable through the open doors and windows. Occasional confrontations with the reality of their society always result in shame and disgust for a “betrayal into ordinariness” (MM 104).

As a victim of colonial education system Ralph says, “We pretended to be real, to be learning, to be preparing ourselves for life, we ‘mimic men’ of the New World, one unknown corner of it, with all its reminders of the corruption that came so quickly to the new” (MM 157). They try to reject their own world and never try to identify themselves with such lands that lacked power where they think that “the first requisite for happiness was to be born in a famous city” (MM 127) and that, “To be born on an island like
Isabella, an obscure New World transplantation, secondhand and barbarous, was to be born to disorder” (MM 127).

Eric Williams in *From Columbus to Castro* aptly remarks that the colonial education system is not only “inadequate in quantity [but] woefully deficient in quality” (458). The work schedule is based almost entirely on foreign materials that are totally irrelevant to the daily lives of the pupils and to their surroundings. The schools disregarded essential instruction on hygiene, nutrition, national history, economics and political scene. Instead they blindly copy outdated British models and fit pupils only for white-collar careers, while they are still members of a community predominantly engage in agriculture.

The colonial school system of Isabella, however, inculcates, into its youth, values which produce unrealisable aspirations within the society. It is because with his colonial education Ralph could not manage to become successful, neither in London nor in his own Island. He remains a miserably failed politician to whom the idea of power is “vague and unreliable” (MM 37).

Naipaul’s works echoes the thought that colonial education cannot help the colonial child to find a way of emancipation rather they are “being taught the lucrative value of being a traitor to one’s immediate community” (Thion’o 438). This education cannot erase the tag of being a ‘colonial’ subject in the English society; they never become English, they are always the ‘colonial’. Colonial children, no matter how good their English are, are always considered secondary to the English children. Ngugi wa Thion’o in *The Language of African Literature* aptly remarks, “All the papers were written in English. Nobody could pass the exam who failed the English language paper no matter how brilliantly he had done in the other subjects” (439). Priorities are always given to the English children, while the colonial children suffer.
Ralph has always been encouraged to imitate the empire and to become a ‘mimic man’; however, he explains, “My first memory of school is of taking an apple to the teacher. This puzzles me. We had no apples on Isabella. It must have been an orange; yet my memory insists on the apple. The editing is clearly at fault, but the edited version is all I have” (MM 97). Moreover, Ralph’s colonial education has taught him that the mother country, England, is the symbol of order. When he studies English culture and history, he feels that his own culture, if there is any, is inferior to that of the coloniser. Hence, his colonial education has caused him to become a homeless man with no self-image. He both recognises and criticises colonial mimicry, but he also knows that he cannot help being a mimic man as he is “a specific product of a particular socioeconomic formation called colonialism” (Cudjoe 100). His references to the collusion between empire and education, illustrate to what extent he is moved within an English cultural and literary milieu.

Ralph’s inability to locate himself in London is marked by feelings of ambivalence and psychic unease. Returning to Isabella after his study in London Ralph becomes part of the ‘cosmopolitan’ middle class on the island. Frantz Fanon in Black Skin, White Masks addresses this colonial dilemma that “to speak a language is to take on a world, a culture” (18). He further argues that the colonial people are only able to speak and therefore, represent themselves, through an imperial discourse. Even though Ralph speaks the imperial discourse he does not, as he finds out, belong to its esteemed culture. He remains on the periphery living among an immigrant community.

Like Ralph, the people of Isabella are also rootless and directionless. Their world is insecure, temporary and exits on the outside loyalties and creates a sense of fear. Ralph’s experiences become the microcosm of the dilemma of his people in which he observes, “They had lost their sense of their place in the scheme of things” (MM 39). So long as they
remain in the island, their life is the life of everlasting self-deception and hypocrisy in which Ralph realises that, “the island was like a place still awaiting Columbus and discovery” (MM 120). Naipaul, like other West Indian writers, thinks this cultural loss as a threat to society. Thus, the cultural chaos existing on the island is representative of the cultural chaos affecting people in general. This can happen with any society that has faced a prolonged sense of displacement or rootlessness.

The novel *A Bend in the River* brings out the socio-cultural conflicts in the colonial society of Africa. Mohit K. Ray compares the novel *A Bend in the River* to Eliot’s poem *The Waste Land*. Eliot portrays a dreadful picture of post-war England, whereas Naipaul portrays the dreadful picture of postcolonial Africa. Considered as a ‘post modern epic’ *A Bend in the River* reveals the ravages of postcolonial world. It offers a representation of a culture struggling with diverse values and with a breakdown of established traditions in the attempt at modernity. It portrays Africa as a timeless, homogeneous entity whose social characteristic are to be explained and interpreted in terms of its geographical features. But neither the landscape nor the society apparently gives rise to be conceived in a historical light Mahesh in *A Bend in the River* observes that “. . . stable relationships were not possible here, that there could only be day-to-day contacts between men” (246). Therefore, the postcolonial scenario in Africa, as it is in Trinidad is a chaotic one.

Africa is a place of aimless violence and rites. The officers in the town are little better than their European counterparts. Naipaul’s description of them reveals the past, “With their guns and jeeps, these men were poachers of ivory and thieves of gold. Ivory, gold – add slaves, and it would have been like being back in oldest Africa” (BR 106). The town was once an Arab settlement and then built by the Europeans which is now without Arabs or Europeans. The natives of Africa want to return to their essential past which is
untouched by the outsiders. They have a mixed culture, as they look to distant India for their religion and to their white neighbours for their manners and for a civilised living.

The groups of people, who occupy a small town at the bend in the river, are a few Belgians, some Greeks, Italians, and Indians living a “stripped, Robinson Crusoe kind of existence” (BR 28). They look back to their glorious contributions to human civilisation with a great deal of nostalgia and pride, but they are trapped in Africa on the basis of the cultural roots they have sunk on the east coast and the economic power base they have developed over the years. When they are examined within the context of the prevailing neo-colonial framework, they are viewed as inferior to Africa’s former colonisers in terms of their racial attributes and their economic power, but they are considered superior to the indigenous communities in both respects. Furthermore, they are non-native natives because, due to their numerical inferiority to the local peoples, they cannot contribute significantly to the political destiny of the region despite their economic power. The result is that they exist in the region more or less as enclaves of Asian and Middle Eastern cultures in an overwhelmingly African cultural context.

The novel offers a representation of a culture struggling with diverse values and with a breakdown of established tradition in its attempt at modernity. The unnamed African country modelled on Mobutu’s Zaire is bloody, lawless and threatening, “The bush muffled the sound of murder, and the muddy rivers and lakes washed the blood away” (BR 60). The domain is the place of modernity and of prestige and status for the young African students who attend the only education centre that is similar to the one in central Africa. The institution seems to be a way for the African leader to instill a sense of self worth and pride in the African people. However, the institution is foreign-funded and many of its teachers come from Europe or have been educated there. Europe represents a
lost ideal of peace and order, but has also given rise to a junk civilisation. It has given way to the pull of disorder, and it exports naïve ideologies to the rest of the world.

Salim, the protagonist of the novel, is a Muslim and an adventurous son of a business and slave-owning family. His family settle in the East coast of Africa, the coast is not truly African, “It was an Arab-Indian-Persian-Portuguese place, and we who lived there were really people of the Indian Ocean” (BR 12). Salim’s people have come to feel themselves as people of Africa:

My family was Muslim. But we were a special group. We were distinct from the Arabs and other Muslims of the coast; in our customs and attitudes we were closer to the Hindus of North-Western India, from which we had originally come. We simply lived; we did what was expected of us, what we had seen the previous generation do. We never asked why; we never recorded. We felt in our bones that we were a very old people. (BR 12)

Salim expresses his fondness for colonial mimicry when he wishes to desert his roots, “I wanted to break away. To break away from my family and community also meant breaking away from my unspoken commitment . . .” (BR 27). He notices the society in a perplexing assortment of mimicry and destruction. In the bars, foreign builders and artisans drank and made jokes about the country which was painful and sad. He feels and says, “I saw a disordered future for the country. No one was going to be secure here” (BR 118). He reflects his knowledge of the past and realises that all of it comes from European sources: “All that I know of our history and the history of the Indian Ocean I have got from books written by Europeans . . . . Without Europeans, I feel, all our past would have
been washed away, like the scuff-marks of fishermen on the beach outside our town” *(BR 13)*.

Through Salim’s recollections, we acquire access to much of the history of his people as he understands it. We learn that Arabs, Persians, and Indians were once ‘masters’ of East Africa, but that they have now lost their power to Europeans who have subsequently taken control of the region. In the distant past, they were among the most ‘civilized’ communities in the world. Before the coming of the Europeans to East Africa, they ruled over much of the region: “They had pushed far into the interior and had built towns and planted orchards in the forest” *(BR 16)*. In addition, they play a crucial role in the development of the slave trade during that era. Unlike the slaves of the west coast, the slaves of the east coast are not “shipped off to plantations” but are either retained by local Arabs, Persians, and Indians or sent “to Arabian homes as domestic servants” *(BR 14)*.

In fact, as recently as the turn of the nineteenth century, many among the Arabs and Indians on the east coast are still practicing the trade. As a trader, Salim states:

> Europe no longer ruled us. But it still fed us in a hundred ways with its language and sent us its increasingly wonderful goods, things which, in the bush of Africa, added year by year to our idea of who we were, gave us that idea of our modernity and development, and made us aware of another Europe – the Europe of great cities, great stores, great buildings, great universities. . . . But the Europe I had come to – and knew from the outset I was coming to – was neither the old Europe nor the new. *(BR 268-69)*

After independence, the town soon sees itself westernised and modernised beyond its need, but the Africans show little enthusiasm for the newness brought into the society with the mimicking ideology of the Big Man (the new President), Africans are kept away
The Big Man models on “Henry J. Taylor’s protagonist” (Bachchan 166), is a “symbol of all postcolonial regimes” (Said, “The Mind of Winter: Reflections of Life in Exile” 37), is enthusiastic about turning the country into something similar to modern European society. The town soon sees itself westernised and modernised beyond its need. The city, while decaying in the centre, with dirt roads and rubbish heaps near the river has been turned into presidential reserves – palaces with great walls, gardens, state-houses of various sorts. “All kinds of projects were started. Various government departments came to life again; and the town at last became a place that could be made to work” (BR 100). But the arrival of modern technology serves only to multiply the incidents of violence.

The motto, which the Big Man gives, is painted everywhere: “DISCIPLINE AVANT TOUT, Discipline Above All” (BR 245) which means ‘Discipline above everything’ is absolutely ironical as discipline is the thing which is completely lacking among the people. The motto is as false as the independence which the Africans enjoy is also false. They feel perpetually trapped and shipwrecked in their native land for the destined wretchedness and ever-prevailing ambivalence which destabilises their lives entirely.

Naipaul stretches particular words, phrases, sentences and images to describe the chaotic nature of the society. The plant water-hyacinth symbolises disorder and horror of the society. The horror becomes evident when the water-hyacinths arrest the dugout with Father Huismans’ damaged body. Even the flowers of water-hyacinth stand for death and destruction. Not only that, the description of the site surrounded by water-hyacinth is suggestive of the days of rebellion and serves as a metaphor for the new society:
Always, sailing up from the south, from beyond the bend in the river, were clumps of water hyacinths, dark floating islands on the dark river, bobbing over the rapids . . . . The people still called it ‘the new thing’ or ‘the new thing in the river’, and to them it was another enemy. Its rubbery vines and leaves formed thick tangles of vegetation that adhered to the river banks and clogged up waterways. It grew fast, faster than men could destroy it with the tools they had. *(BR 52)*

Naipaul’s portrayal of Africa implicates him as a “witness for the western prosecution” (Said, “The Mind of Winter: The Reflections of Life in Exile” 56) where he depicts the close links between the individual and his social environment. He gives his real assessment of the postcolonial scene in Africa, and his vision of postcolonial Africa is pessimistic which reveals the emptiness and the violence related to a fantastical return to a ‘true’, unsullied past that roots the nation within a fixed historical and cultural tradition. Therefore, the town at the bend in the river is decayed; the modern enclave that is the domain is outwardly beautiful but full of cracks and flaws.

Thus, in *A Bend in the River* Naipaul demonstrates a keen consciousness of African history by documenting the historical backgrounds of his characters. This is due to the dilemma that Naipaul has had to endure as a person whose cultural background is not secure and therefore his desire to reconstruct a more appropriate historical background for himself. As Peter Prescott puts it, “Naipaul’s personal sense of rootlessness, derived from the experience of growing up in an immigrant community in Trinidad and then living in a rather restless exile in England, gives a sharp edge to his emphasis on the social necessity of history” (549-50). It is that determination to rewrite history to suit his own ideological
orientation that generally informs Naipaul’s problematic perception of relations between Europe and Africa.

The social disparity in India is aptly described by writers such as Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Bhabani Battacharya, Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Arun Joshi, Amitav Ghosh, Nayantara Sahgal and others. These writers break new grounds for the contemporary social issues. Like them, Naipaul writes the factual realities of his ancestral land (India) in *Half a Life*. The main social issue of India is its wretched caste system, which is classified by “descent and occupation . . . has been India’s own variety of racism” (Bhaskar and Shukla 257).

In this novel, Naipaul painfully observes the wounded civilisation in India. He is obsessed with India’s poverty and shocked by the dirt and meanness of India, and condemning the society for the cruelties of its caste system which is deeply rooted in every part of the multidimensional nature of Indian civilisation. He uses irony and satire to reflect the “follies and weaknesses of the society” (Devi, “Satire and Structure in Naipaul and Narayan” 110). There is no excuse whatsoever to accept the cruelties of the caste system. However, abolition of social inequities is not achieved in any continent through the enforcement of law. Industrialisation and the emergence of capitalism, which is coupled with revolutionary ideas, have helped western societies to a large extent in this process.

Willie Somerset Chandran, the protagonist, is the representative of the modern hypocritical and self-centered society that does not hesitate to sacrifice its human values. He is the victim of displacement who faces cultural dilemma and tends to retain cultural identity and cultural practices. Through Willie, Naipaul projects the cultural confusion and confrontation of Indian, London and African society. Willie’s experience of halfness in life
is reflected in his trans-continental migration and multidimensional socio-cultural environment.

In India, the Brahmins (priestly caste) are considered to be the highest, and the lower castes are the untouchables. The lower class people in India are not included in the mainstream. Even, “They didn’t know about the religion of the people of caste or the Muslims or the Christians. They didn’t know what was happening in the country or the world. They had lived in ignorance, cut off from the world, for centuries” (HL 39). They are prohibited to cross the temple road while the priests in the temple are doing some religious ceremonies. Naipaul clearly exhibits the meanness of the priest in those times: “When people like that went to the temple they would have been kept out of the sanctum, the inner cell with the image of the deity. The officiating priest would never have wanted to touch those people. He would have thrown the sacred ash at them, the way food is thrown to a dog” (HL 12).

Similarly, Naipaul has exposed the oppression of the abused people in colonial India through Willie’s mother’s school experience. In that school, Willie’s mother finds that a rough and half-starved school servant gives out water from a barrel using a long handled bamboo dipper and when a student appears before him, he pours water into a brass vessel or an aluminium one. Willie’s mother wonders in a childish way whether she would get brass or aluminium. When she comes to the servant no choice is offered to her. The servant becomes angry and “made the kind of noise he would have made before he beat a stray dog” (HL 38). He finds a rusty and dirty tin into which he pours water for the low caste people. From that she learns that in the world outside, aluminium is for Muslims and Christians, brass is for people of high caste and a rusty old tin was for her. She spits on the tin and to avoid beating of the servant, she runs out of the school. After this incident, “...
the teachers and the school servants didn’t want Willie Chandran’s mother there. The school servants were even more fierce than the teachers. They said they would starve rather than serve in a school which took in backwards” (*HL* 38).

Apart from caste system, corruption is the main evil of the society. There is corruption among the tax-collectors and surveyors. In the Maharaja’s state, the Land Tax Department was very rich, everybody who owned any little piece of land has to pay an annual tax for it: “Officers would take the land tax from poor people who couldn’t read, and not give receipts, and the poor peasant with his three or four acres would have to pay the tax again. Or he would have to pay a bribe to get his receipt. It was endless, the petty cheating that went on among the poor” (*HL* 22).

In the second part of the novel, Naipaul portrays the pretension of the London society. After finishing his schooling in India, Willie goes to London for higher studies. His struggle in London helps him to come close to reality. He finds that the college is full of various kinds of tradition where he comes in contact with a lot of people belonging to different races who has come to London to try their luck. He learns that people in London wants West Indian chaps to drive the buses, and nobody in London liked to rent rooms for the black people. This reveals the double standard of London society and how the people in London see the ‘other’. Hence, some black people like Percy are encouraged to buy properties and rent them to West Indian drivers.

In the third part, Naipaul visualises the African society and its difficult racial and social ideas: “There were quite a few Indian traders. They ran cheap shops and socially never stepped outside their families. There was an old large Goan community, people originally of India . . . who had come to this place in Africa to work as clerks and accountants in the civil service” (*HL* 145). They speak Portuguese with a special accent
and they are called as second-rank Portuguese. They follow a pattern in colonial days, that is, the wife in the capital or one of the coastal towns looking after the education of the children and the husband is looking after the estate. Usually, because of this repeated separation, husband begins to live with African woman and has African family.

Willie says that the African Government is authorised but the people have no idea about it. The village people have contact with the government only during the sisal cutting session. Only the convicts can be compelled to do such a work. The estate holders make their requisitions to the prisons and the convicts, properly guarded, are sent for the dangerous work of sisal cutting. The long black point at the end of the sisal blade is needle sharp and poisonous and the area remains full of venomous snakes. “A sisal plantation is a terrible place, and it was a rule (or just our practice) that a medical nurse should be standing by with medicines and snake-bite serum when sisal was being cut” (HL 169). It describes the inhuman ways supported by the government and the cruelty of the wealthy people. There is a kind of rough logic and effectiveness in this principle of government.

While travelling to Ana’s African country, Willie’s mind is occupied by the confusion that such frequent changes in the setting lead to, “He thought about the new language he would have to learn. He wondered whether he would be able to hold on to his own language. He wondered whether he would forget his English, the language of his stories” (HL 132). This loss of proper language becomes even more ironical in view of the fact that Willie is an emerging writer and a writer’s very existence is dependent on his language. In her effort to overcome the sense of alienation, Ana too enrolls herself at a language school in England. The explanation she gives to her family shows the significance of the language issue in the study of diaspora:
‘I wanted to break out of the Portuguese language. I feel it was that that had made my grandfather such a limited man. He had no true idea of the world. All he could think of was Portugal and Portuguese Africa and Goa and Brazil. In his mind, because of the Portuguese language, all the rest of the world had been strained away. And I didn’t want to learn South African English, which is what people learn here. I wanted to learn English English.’ (HL 154-55)

Fanon, of course, is referring to the dilemma of the colonised, and their acculturation, through language, in relation to the coloniser’s values and ways of being. In his view, the colonial people inherit an inferiority complex when forced to surrender their local culture and accept an imperial discourse. He succinctly identifies that language cannot be isolated from the ‘world’ or ‘culture’ in which it is embedded. It is this embeddedness in an imperial language and culture that Naipaul seeks to address in his novels. In Black Skin, White Masks Fanon reflects upon the role of language in the colonial relationship between imperial possession of language and the colonial people’s mimicry of that language:

To speak means to be in a position to use certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization. . . . A man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language. What we are getting at is plain: Mastery of language affords remarkable power. (17-18)

Thus, seeking to become a part of the country one has migrated to is, in Bhabha’s words, only a reminder that one is “almost the same but not quite . . . almost the same but
not white” (The Location of Culture 86, 89). Naipaul could understand the agony of losing one’s language. Therefore, in his Nobel lecture he revealed candidly the trauma of migration and consequent loss in these words:

The world outside existed in a kind of darkness; and we inquired about nothing. I was just old enough to have some idea of the Indian epics, the Ramayana in particular. The children who came five years or so after me in our extended family didn’t have this luck. No one taught us Hindi. Sometimes someone wrote out the alphabet for us to learn, and that was that; we were expected to do the rest ourselves. So, as English penetrated, we began to lose our language. (Ray, “Two Worlds: Nobel Lecture December 7, 2001” 8)

Naipaul has taken the notion of ‘half-made’ society from his predecessor, Joseph Conrad and to whom he is greatly indebted to especially for his (Conrad’s) dark vision of human life and existence. Conrad’s Nostromo (1904) provides for Naipaul the vision of the world’s ‘half-made’ societies, which are said to be ‘borrowed,’ ‘mimic’ and without any goal, where, achievement cannot but be small. The Western bias that works in his mind makes him to consider those societies as ‘half-made’ because they fall short of the standards and values of the West. What Naipaul considers to be Western or ‘universal civilization,’ is, in reality, the culmination of the ‘plundering’ of the rest of the world which are now labeled as ‘half-made’ societies.

The social conflict that Willie undergoes in London and then in Africa takes it roots in cultural alienation. Asha Choubey in “Naipaul’s Half a Life: Coming to Terms with King Cophetua” rightly states, “Cultural alienation seems to be in Willie’s blood” (168). Thus, the novel, Half a Life, is really an invention about the country’s periods and
situations; it is a social satire with the struggle of an individual who is victimised by the society.

Termed as a minute observer of societies, Naipaul has committed himself to exploring and representing the objective reality and psychological authenticity of the social class. He is one of those writers who protests and displays the inequalities and exploitation prevalent in the multicultural societies. His works contribute to the awareness of social problems including prejudice against immigrants, discrimination against racial minorities, unsafe and chaotic social conditions, exploitative labour conditions, etc.

Through his works, Naipaul “diagnoses the problems besetting colonial and former colonial societies” (Hamner 23). Especially, his novels expose the inadequacies of a society whose history is one of slavery and exploitation. The harsh conditions of colonialism have left the West Indian cripple under the burden of poverty and ignorance. Therefore, Naipaul vividly portrays the complexities inherent to colonial and postcolonial societies.

By analysing and interpreting his own experiences, Naipaul hopes to find some order within the chaos of the present, and the uncertainty of the future in the contemporary society. The social analysis which he attempts in his work is not confined to the West Indians but extend to the entire Third World. He exposes the inadequacies of the societies, which he believes to be the outcome of the unconscious acceptance of the norms and values of the colonising culture. He himself accepts the fact in an interview: “Even my funniest novels were all begun in the blackest of moods, out of a sense of personal anguish and despair” (Newsweek 38). Hence, his novels portray the social issues in all its variety, colour and complexity. They have the widest scope of comprehending the manifold crises in the society and the vast circle of people.
Naipaul’s ties to India, Trinidad and England are contradictory and ambivalent. He sees Trinidad as inferior society populated by uncivilised people, and heads for England, from which civilisation derives. But the difficulties in assimilating himself to the metropolis frustrate Naipaul, causing him to miss his family in Trinidad. Caught in this ‘in-betweenness’, Naipaul does not totally disown his homeland. He has depicted the sufferings of disposed people because of cultural clashes and social conflicts. His contradictory and ambivalent feelings about postcolonial societies can be perceived through his characters. Most of his heroes want to flee from his hometown to establish himself in a culture of high traditions and customs. It shows the emptiness of the society in terms of values and tradition.

Naipaul has taken special concern to define the colonial world of West Indians and their hybrid culture. His assessment of complex postcolonial societies relies on a cultural difference. He portrays West Indian societies as half-finished, fractured, and unproductive thereby atleast acknowledging the colonial legacy; but he represents Africa as belonging to the sphere of a historical nature. Also, he demonstrates the hybridity nature of Trinidad which is the “sign of the productivity of colonial power . . . it displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination” (Bhabha, The Location of Culture 159).

In Trinidadian society, Britishers have the most highly regarded culture; Blacks are politically dominant during Naipaul’s lifetime in Trinidad. And Indians who are in the Caribbean have a different colour, speak a different language and have a different religion, and for many years they had no opportunity for education in English. Until recently, Indians were “at the bottom of the Trinidadian, social, economic and political ladder,
mostly rural farmers and labourers; even Hindu marriages were not recognised by law” (Rajan et al. 7). Thus, the Indians remain separate in Trinidadian society.

Multiculturalism is what we encounter not only in Naipaul’s novel but in daily life insofar as we are able to detect different cultural patterns distinguishing people into groups. But a society is not significantly multicultural of its distinct parts that relate mainly through assimilation. It is also, of course, an indication of rapid social change bringing a decline to multicultural tolerance and cultural-esteem, as opposed people seek assimilation into mainstream culture. Evidently, both historical and synchronic ethnographic studies can still encourage and support contemporary multiculturalism. Bijay Kumar Das in *Aspects of Commonwealth Literature* aptly describes that, “A good writer is one who assimilates both the cultures – of his native land and the land of his present living – and makes a multicultural commitment to transcend the individual consciousness and thereby achieves universality” (48). Naipaul is one such writer who achieves universality for his multicultural commitment.

Though Naipaul’s work is a product of multidimensional exposure to different cultures, races and nations and societies in transition, his literary imagination transcends all limits. He propagates the need for a society which provides a means of establishing identity through shared heritage. His novels demonstrate Naipaul’s remarkable ability to understand and analyse the idiosyncrasies of the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural world of Trinidad. “No social prejudices, no social sanction really matters in Trinidad: standards are too diverse and society is split into too many cliques” (*The Middle Passage* 197). The narratives of these novels are broken, discontinuous and fragmented. This fragmentation may manifest itself in different ways, but in each case, it demolishes the concept both of purity of origins and teleological progress. In Naipaul, this sense of fragmentation comes
across not so much through the narrative style as though the consciousness of the narrator, his deep and unshakable sense of loss, of being the perpetual outsider, the mimic man.

The emptiness and hollowness of the colonial set up show the people as mimic men. These mimic men are stuck in the conflict between order and destruction, corruption and truth and the old and the new in which they try to achieve the glory of the colonial culture. Naipaul explains this dilemma in an interview with Israel Shenkar, “The people I saw were little people who were mimicking upper-class. We were trapped in our situation. Each attempt at the establishing of a personal security prepared the way for further disorder . . . that in a society like ours, fragmented, inorganic, no link between man and the landscape, a society not held together by common interests” (“V. S. Naipaul, Man without a Society” 256), which conveys nothing new about what is already quite well-known Naipaul’s scathing and unchanging mediations on the fate of men and societies.

The values relating to love, sex and marriage in a society are vividly depicted in his novels. They also give glimpses of both rural and urban scenes of West Indies and portray the social scene in all its variety, colour and complexity. Although, these novels show an affinity with the novels of Dickens, Thackeray and Wells, Naipaul’s distinctive feature consists in his heterogeneous theme of mimicry, “The society represented in the novels of Scott, Dickens, and Thackeray was very different from the society Indians knew and lived in. This society was already different from the traditional agrarian life of the previous generations with a subtle cultural background which the British rule had partially disrupted” (Thakur 12).

The positive and negative effects of the mixing of peoples and cultures as a result of colonial domination, is an obvious one that can be found in all the works of Naipaul. Examining the cultural clashes Naipaul effectively uses satire, caricature and irony and
recreates a fictionalised history of Trinidad. He describes the disillusionment and failure, treachery and brutality. He holds the view of the possibility of a viable cultural identity emerging in future which will be based on intellectual honesty and conviction.

Similarly, Naipaul resorts to savage mockery and bitter irony in describing the degradation and demoralisation of the colonial and postcolonial societies. He criticises the state of affairs of a society from which the older East Indian values have long since died. He succeeds in presenting the serious issues that affect individuals and communities in the complex cultural reality of colonial societies. His unbiased and unfriendly diagnosis of the various ills of his society just coming out of colonial rule enables one to have a glance of the trickery, corruption and mimicry common in such a society.

The creative spectrum of Naipaul’s works repeatedly brings out Naipaul’s inability to leave India behind him. At the same time his works simultaneously suffer and prosper from his painful yet fructifying tension which arises out of his inability to integrate his ancestral past with his diasporic present. In these novels one can see both “society and individual alienated from the larger social reality whose presence, as stated earlier, is experienced as fantasy and the urge for a personal vision of life, because of a static relationship to the past” (Kamra 113).

A close analysis of these novels reveal that the contradictions that make up the mimic men lend themselves to a greater understanding of the kind of post colonialism that is not governed by the celebration of interconnections, discontinuities and hybridity. Rather, they foresee the loss inherent in such fragmented societies. The novels come to gain a universal importance by virtue of the observation that Naipaul makes about his society which in fact, turns out to be a remarkable observation of the postcolonial society in general and represent the fragmented cultures and displaced populations.