Thus, the novels *The Mystic Masseur, The Suffrage of Elvira, The Mimic Men, A Bend in the River* and *Half a Life* illustrate the disordered, rootless Third World societies which generate insecure, fragmented personalities such as Ganesh, Harbans, Ralph, Salim and Willie. Moreover, these novels dramatise and reflect the chaos and disorder in the fragmented and disintegrated societies.
CHAPTER III

POLITICAL ISSUES: DISORDER AND CHAOS

The history of literature, right from the ancient epics to the modern fictions, shows that all literary works are fundamentally ideological, social and political. Even the greatest epics such as *Ramayana*, *Mahabharatha*, *Iliad*, *Odyssey* and *Paradise Lost* have depicted the politics of their times. Hence, “Politics is part of man’s history and it is men who make history. It, therefore, remains to be the privilege of the writer as man to decide upon the extent to which he may participate or stay away from the political goings on around him” (O. P. Bhatnagar 8). Politics has played in the developing countries during the struggle for “national independence and the postcolonial era, ignoring it would be an ideological distortion or luxurious entertainment on the part of the reader” (Eid 165). The second half of the 19th century witnessed “the flowering of national political consciousness and the foundation and growth of an organized national movement” (Chandra et al. 51).

Political issue primarily becomes a serious concern with political questions like who governs? What is the governance like? and, how does it affect the individual in his day-to-day life? It also reveals the growing alienation between the individual and the society. The dialogue with the political issues must be included within the creative process which integrates the “hell and paradise of human life into the symbols of the whole” (Salomon 24).

Politics has played a critical and crucial role in the Third World countries during the colonial and postcolonial epoch. The colonisation in the previous centuries has been more brutal and inhuman. The plantation economy that calls for a larger labour force from Asia to the Caribbean is in any case concerned with European imperialism. This transportation in the 19th century has been a mere matter of forced migration from one
country to the other. The idea of discipline and control even in this indenture contract has been very important, till a time after which the British left the islands. The migrants of the Third World have emerged from a history of oppression and suffering. They have been from their homeland and have worked like machines to satisfy the colonisers’ lust for gold and material gains. The brutality and degradation of slavery deny their humanity and destroy their self-respect. In Fanon’s works they are ‘the wretched of the earth’.

During the colonial era, the migrants struggle to avoid political conflict with Africa’s European colonisers on the one hand, and the native on the other. They concentrate their energies on the economic and cultural aspects of their lives and for the most part interacting with indigenous people only within the context of the workplace. Colonial powers inhibit the possibility of a continuous culture on the part of the colonised by forbidding a family life, a native language and religion. In effect, they become rootless people, set adrift socio-culturally “on an irreversible course of mediocrity and nothingness” (Maes-Jelinek 114). In the course of the transition from colonial rule to independence, their middle class social status is disturbed by the departure of the former colonisers and the increasing political power of the indigenous people.

The colonial power over the colonised is done at two levels: first, at the level of administration through military power and second at the social level through education in schools and institutions like church and other social organisations. The colonial power has exploited the colonised both politically and culturally and wants to establish the superiority of the west over the east. Political power embodies the colonised’s dream of power, possession and self-realisation. In fact, “personal identity might be determined by the politics of imperialism” (Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* 250). In so far as colonialism or postcolonialism is concerned, the Empire or the former Empire on the one
hand, and the colony or the post-independent state on the other, can be said to be two
distinct discourse communities. The program of colonialism or postcolonialism revolves
around the production of forms of knowledge designed to advance the interests of the
Empire beyond its borders within the context of international capitalism.

Postcolonial era is more modern and progressive than the earlier historical period
of European colonialism in the 19th century. It also has helped the native people to take
their place by gaining independence and overcoming political and cultural imperialism.
Therefore, ‘Postcoloniality’ is a condition of mind which looks into the past from a
historical perspective and links it with the present from the standpoint of political as well
as cultural imperialism. It is not that the colonisers only shaped and influenced the political
institutions and cultural life of the colonised, they also to some extent, were influenced by
the colonial culture and institutions. Spivak corroborates this view in *Outside in the
Teaching Machine* that, “Post-coloniality – the heritage of imperialism in the rest of the
globe – is a deconstructive case” (60).

The ruling class considers themselves as superior and enjoys the political power at
the expense of deprivation of basic facilities to the poor and needy. Politics is not aimed to
create the bonds of unity in the masses belonging to different sections of society; rather
they make all efforts to create divisions in the society. The politicians hardly make efforts
to save and spread the native language and culture; rather they have become promoters of
English education and Western culture. It is really painful that even after years of
independence, the colonised do not have an independent thinking of their own and the
political system still runs on the borrowed institutions. Instead of making efforts to frame
the policies for the betterment of the society, the politicians are indulged in the game of
making money through corrupt practices. The colonisers exploited the colonised, no doubt, the present day rulers also do the same.

The social, political and economic structures have been established during colonial rule and that continue to inflect the cultural, political and economic life of postcolonial nations ranging from Ireland to Algeria, from India to Pakistan and from Jamaica to Mexico. Critics like Frantz Fanon, Homi Bhabha and Spivak emphasise how anti-colonial nationalism assumed a distinctively bourgeois character and is perceived by many to reproduce the social and political inequalities that has been predominant under colonial rule.

Contemporary critical thought supports the effective reworking of western theoretical concepts and ideas to address contemporary political concerns in the postcolonial world. It is a continuous attempt to make western critical theory account for contemporary forms of political, and social inequality and oppression in the contemporary world that makes Spivak’s thought particularly engaging and valuable. One of the postcolonial literary critics, Bart Moore-Gilbert, argues that, “Spivak, along with Edward Said and Homi Bhabha, has been one of the foremost figures to accommodate ideas and concepts from western critical theory within the field of postcolonial studies” (49).

Spivak is best known for her explicit political use of contemporary cultural and critical theories to challenge the legacy of colonialism and on the way we read and think about literature and culture. Her critical interventions include a range of theoretical interests including Marxism, feminism, deconstruction, postcolonial theory and work on globalisation. She has touched upon a rather sensitive issue that has affected the structure of societies like the British today where diasporas of different ethnicities participate in the political debates and military exercises, but their role is indeed, limited. In her own
powerful reading of the *Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography*, Spivak has argued in its defence that the contributors make “a strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest” (14).

Edward Said’s *Orientalism* seeks to study the postcolonial texts in the former colonies in the context of European imperialism, in which he views that, “The humanistic study can responsibly address itself to politics and culture” without establishing a “hard-and-fast rule about the relationship between knowledge and politics” (15). To him, imperialism is “the practice, the theory and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory, colonialism is almost always a consequence of imperialism, of the implanting of settlements on distant territories” (*Orientalism* 260). Third World societies become so locked into the habit of blaming imperialism that they prevent any strategies for change. Said points out a “more interesting politics of secular interpretation” (*Orientalism* 46) which suggest a way of avoiding what Frantz Fanon called the “pitfalls of national consciousness” (*The Wretched of the Earth* 116). One of these pitfalls is the ‘rhetoric of blame’ that Said sees as undermining the potential for social change:

The country dwellers are slow to take up the structural reforms proposed by the government; and equally slow in following their social reforms, even though they may be very progressive if viewed objectively, precisely because the people now at the head of affairs did not explain to the people as a whole during the colonial period what were the aims of the party, the national trends, or the problems of international politics. (*The Wretched of the Earth* 117)

The fact of imperialism – the economic, political and military involvement of Europeans and later, Americans in the Orient necessarily shapes how seemingly apolitical
institutions and individuals viewed the Orient. Like any discursive practice, *Orientalism* must be understood in relation to the imbalance of power which has existed between Europe and the rest of the world for the last few centuries. Undoubtedly all discourse on the Orient has been politically motivated, but “it was the culture that created that interest, that acted dynamically along with brute political, economic and military rationales” (*Orientalism* 12). It is in this light that Said views *Orientalism* as a “dynamic exchange between individual authors and the large political concerns shaped by the three great empires – British, French, American” (*Orientalism* 14-15).

According to Bhabha, *Orientalism* “inaugurated the postcolonial field” (“Postcolonial Criticism” 465). For him, the relationship between coloniser and colonised is more complex and politically ambiguous. He has infused thinking about “nationality, ethnicity, and politics with poststructuralist theories of identity and indeterminacy” (“Postcolonial Criticism” 437). Consequently, Bhabha distinguishes the emergence of a radically variable political body at the moment of anti-colonial uprising. It is in this indeterminate zone where anti-colonial politics first begins to articulate its agenda and “the construction of a political object that is new, neither the one nor the other, properly alienates our political expectations, and changes, as it must, the very forms of our recognition of the moment of politics” (Gandhi 130-31).

Most theorists consider Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* as the pre-eminent work on Third World liberation. Somewhat paradoxically, European-centered schools of Western thought are put forward to the colonial people’s liberated consciousness as the typical site of existential foundation for collective revolutionary action. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon comments that, “The art of politics is simply transformed into the art of war; the political militant is the rebel. To fight the war and to take part in politics: the two things become one and the same” (132).
Fanon is impatient with the insulting, oppressive and dehumanising effects of European colonialism which justifies his call for a general native revolt. Further, he advocates that “the future of the national culture and its riches are equally also part and parcel of the values which have ordained the struggle for freedom” (*The Wretched of the Earth* 198). Fanon’s revolutionary idea to counter Europe is a way to start a new history: “It is a question of the Third World starting a new history of Man, a history which will have regard to the sometimes prodigious theses which Europe has put forward, but which will not forget Europe’s crimes . . .” (*The Wretched of the Earth* 254).

The creation of a liberated humanity through the revolutionary overthrow of European imperialism in *Black Skin, White Masks* reaches another crescendo in *The Wretched of the Earth*. According to Fanon, decolonisation is “a historical process” and also “a veritable creation of new men” (*The Wretched of the Earth* 36). For him, “Independence is not a word which can be used as an exorcism, but an indispensable condition for the existence of men and women who are truly liberated, in other words who are truly masters of all the material means which make possible the radical transformation of society” (310). Similarly, Homi K. Bhabha in his introduction to Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* writes:

The struggle against colonial oppression changes not only the direction of Western history, but challenges its historicist ‘idea’ of time as a progressive, ordered whole. The analysis of colonial depersonalisation alienates not only the Enlightenment idea of ‘Man’, but challenges the transparency of social reality, as a pre-given image of human knowledge.

(xi)
In his works, Naipaul comes to grip with the political reality between the colonial West and the colonised Third World. There is always a booming voice that is of “an area of darkness” (Nixon, *London Calling: V. S. Naipaul, Postcolonial Mandarin* 67). In most of his writings, colonists come and conquer, empires rise and fall, new societies emerge, but darkness always remains an integral part of colonial and postcolonial lives possessing the false hopes of assimilation. His views are all about the global political situation, especially the clash between belief and disbelief in postcolonial societies and he constantly portrays them as “politics of plunder” (Pantin 18). His, “political analysis draws attention to the underlying layers of damage suffered by the colonial society which makes postcolonial empowerment more difficult to achieve” (Nandan 130).

Naipaul considers literature as a “political weapon” (qtd. in Jacob 54). His politics is its reliance on a Marxist model, which as Robert Young remarks is merely a “negative form of the history of European imperialism” (2). Yet, the mobility of Naipaul’s narratives does not function within a historical location alone but also within a literary location “crucial to the writer’s anxious embodiment of the politics of postcolonial arrival” (Suleri 157).

Naipaul’s works have been praised for their scrupulous political perspective and their interrogation of the political ideologies underpinning society and culture. His works particularly the novels are concerned with “personal and political freedom” (Patil 1400). They independently examine different aspects of reaction to political independence of the individual and the group. Each one of his novels dramatises a particular feature of Trinidad’s inability to go back to colonial identity and project the political effects in the lives of the Trinidadian people.
When he notices the people are still mentally handicapped and in dilemma, Naipaul has doubt on the independence of Trinidad and Tobago even after the declaration of their independence. Hence, he calls Trinidad and Tobago as “‘a materialist immigrant society’ with no political or cultural orientation and doubts whether the inhabitants can ever become truly independent” (*The Middle Passage* 49). Since Trinidadian politics is more an imitation of Western politics in which the people are unable to impress their existence on the sophisticated political consciousness of the West, “Nationalism was impossible in Trinidad. In the colonial society every man had to be for himself; every man had to grasp whatever dignity and power he was allowed; he owed no loyalty to the island and scarcely any to his group” (*The Middle Passage* 78).

In the unethical atmosphere of Trinidad and Tobago, the quest for politics is devoid of any political commitment and the politicians are no more than tricksters, who are willing to deal with anything, regardless of its moral standing. No judgment is passed concerning any character or action; the only concern is the correlation of the individual and the action to the outcome of the votes.

The novels *The Mystic Masseur*, *The Suffrage of Elvira* and *The Mimic Men* visualise the real political situation in Trinidad before and after independence. In *The Mystic Masseur*, Naipaul exposes an opportunistic politics and identifies the fate of the country with the personality of the gradually emerging political leader, Ganesh, whose rise is “a constant remaking and renaming of the world and of individual lives through simultaneous processes of displacement and accumulation” (Gourevitch 29). The introduction of politics at the end of the novel affords Naipaul an excellent dramatic situation for exploring the goals of individuals. The neutrality in which Ganesh is
portrayed gives an impression that Naipaul is probably unbiased of whatever Ganesh does in order to establish his selfhood and achieve recognition as a political leader.

Being clever and cunning enough, Ganesh manipulates his failed situations into opportunities. In politics, he is the hero as well as the villain. He emerges as “a champion con-man in a world of small-time tricksters” (Thieme 34). His transformation to the ‘politician’ is an act of opportunism. His victory in politics can be attributed to certain appropriate strategy that he took by applying his knowledge of practical psychology and his close observation of the people. He makes a pledge to fight against communism in Trinidad and also the rest of the free world. He works out a new political theory with Indarsingh, “Socialinduism. Socialism-cum-Hinduism” (TMM 200), but it does not receive the necessary public support. Moreover, his authentic speech gives him a clear win in the election. He becomes very famous and is constantly photographed by the local dailies.

As a cunning man, Ganesh cleverly plans his political campaign by organising a seven-day recitation of Bhagwat. During the recitation he also organises free distribution of food. Intelligently, he turns the religious followers into votes, but he did not make any serious campaign like Harbans in The Suffrage of Elvira:

He held no election meetings, but Swami and Partap arranged many prayer-meetings for him. He worked hard to expand his Road to Happiness lectures; three or even four taxis had to take the books he required. Quite casually, in the middle of a lecture, he would say in Hindi, ‘It may interest one or two of you in this gathering tonight to hear that I am a candidate for the elections next month. I can promise nothing. In everything I shall consult God and my conscience, even at the risk of displeasing you . . . .’ (TMM 187)
Moreover, he uses posters, propaganda and slogans to incite the masses. Ganesh’s
electioneering posters emphasise his ability, energy and sincerity as a politician. His
campaign slogans are considered as heart-to-heart contact: “GANESH WILL DO WHAT
HE CAN, A VOTE FOR GANESH IS A VOTE FOR GOD . . . GANESH WILL WIN and
GANESH IS A MAN OF GOOD AND GOD” (TMM 187). The most attractive poster is:

GANESH is
Able
Nice
Energetic
Sincere
Holy. (TMM 188)

Therefore, making posters, writing catchy slogans in the public places, arranging
dpublic meeting and canvassing for votes through loudspeaker are nothing but the election
Gimmick of contemporary political ‘drama’. Ganesh’s sound judgment and his way of
dealing with the things on the rational level is a surprising one. His goodness, energy,
sincerity and holiness help him to make a sound decision even in critical moments. Politics
is not part of the social consciousness of Trinidad, hence, the public vote for personalities
and not for issues. Hence, the people would vote for him without bothering about issues
raised by other politicians.

Ganesh’s ambition to power and reputation gravitates to politics as the supreme
possibility of success, whereas his spiritual aspect makes him rule over the minds of the
Trinidadian. He says to Beharry, “I go make Trinidad hold it head and bawl” (TMM 83).
After achieving political power, he feels, “Now, if I was in India, I woulda have people
coming from all over the place, some bringing me food, some bringing me clothes. But in
Trinidad – bah!” (TMM 76-77). This shows the greedy and corrupt nature of the politicians in Trinidad.

As an intelligent man, Ganesh is not in favour of violence, but he could be very tough when necessary. He deals with Narayan confidently when he was out to create trouble. All the time he feels that there is some power hidden in his personality by which he can handle every difficult situation in the world. However, he does not forget to take the benefit of every opportunity but elevates himself from M.L.C. (Member of Legislative Council) to M.B.E. (Member of British Empire). His motives and methods are praiseworthy but he fails utterly, when he is unable to control the mob of frustrated and angry workers. “He talked instead as though they were the easy-going crowd in Woodford Square” (TMM 204), but the workers continue their riot. This situation explains the real politics in the West Indies, and the very chaotic nature of Ganesh’s background deprives him of the ability to deal with the actual chaos. After his failure to control the mob, he never walked out again. Unable to come to terms with Trinidad and its colonial people he opts for the ultimate colonial bondage that is, mimicking the masters.

Ganesh’s career begins from a quack masseur to a corrupt politician records an allegory of “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.” (TMM 8). This description declares “the mock-heroic dimension of the novel’s political fable” (Mustafa 45). Thus, politics makes Ganesh rich and he no longer has to work as a pundit. It, however, makes Ganesh a different man, quite corrupted by money and status.

The colonial politics is steeped in corruption and bribery. The politics of Trinidad becomes, “the politics of self-aggrandisement and corruption” (Ray, V. S. Naipaul: An
Politics controls material existence and so political strategy becomes the minimum condition of world survival. Naipaul’s novels depict political confusion and corruption which lie beneath the surface of the society. His novels are about the postcolonial situation in Trinidad, however, they are only a revelation, revealing the betrayal of independence. Shashi Kamra in *The Novels of V. S. Naipaul* enunciates:

> 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 controls material existence and so political maneuvering becomes the minimum condition of world survival. (79)

The novel, *The Suffrage of Elvira*, offers a more elaborate view of politics in Trinidad and shows how it is inextricably mixed with racism, religion, superstition and greed. Critics consider this novel as a metaphor for Naipaul’s mockery of the political transformation of Trinidad and Tobago. Exploitation, corruption, bribery, tricks and cunningness are well defined in this novel. It narrates an account of political awakening in Elvira, a remote, unconnected and dingy village, at the time of the second general election for Trinidad in 1950. It is “a place small enough for people to know each other and where the potential numbers [votes] in the thousands” (Buma 164). The politicians are tricksters who trick the voters into voting for them while the voters also try to exploit the politicians by extracting bribes for votes. Mohit K. Ray in *V. S. Naipaul: An Introduction* rightly states that “In the postcolonial world, people start with new hopes and ambitions, but inevitably, they all succumb to the corruption” (96).

The apparent chaos surrounding and engulfing the second general election in Elvira is viewed comically. Naipaul is fully aware of the pitfalls of an emerging democracy.
Democracy does not establish an ideal society; the deficiencies are already in view of the people. The electoral candidate Harbans says that, “Democracy is a strange thing. It does make the great poor and the poor great” (SE 179). Through the characterisation of Harbans, Naipaul brings out the lives of unprofessional and amateur politicians in the Third World countries.

Naipaul exposes the tricks of the politicians to win in the election. His mode of portrayal suggests, how little the candidate features in Elviran politics and shows the development of democracy in a vacuum. The candidates do not have a policy for the platform. Harbans’ strategy is to get the Hindus to vote for him and to persuade the Muslims to do so through Baksh. Though people talk about unity, religious and racial chauvinism always take preference over ideology. Hence, the politicians make the people more and more racially conscious.

The people are anti-democratic in spirit and pay only lip service to democracy. To them, election is a festival, and democracy a farce rather than a passion. Mrs. Baksh considers democracy and the election stand as symptom of bad omen. Hence, she keeps on warning her husband and son many times: “Is this election sweetness that sweeten you up so. And now you seeing how sour it turning” (SE 72).

Harbans selfish nature is revealed when he wants the people to be united only on the occasion of the elections. To him the promises given to the people during the elections are casual and not to be taken seriously. But he realises to his constant disappointment that he is expected to spend money at every step. He comes to know that no one in Elvira is really working for his winning in the election; instead they work to get money from him. “The Elvirans’ propensity for money is revealed in their priorities. Money is placed topmost even above religion” (Ramajeyalakshmi 604).
The ordinary people also look for a chance for bribery in the electioneering process. Mazurus Baksh, a Muslim tailor and the leader of the Muslims in Elvira, fits naturally into the role of the colonial trickster who is cunning and realistic. Though he has no dignity as a leader, he is popular among the Muslims, probably because he is a big talker. Years before the election, he contrives fraudulent practices such as the shirt-making scheme in which he sold cheap, one-size shirts as exclusively tailored, depending upon the size of the offer made to him. He has controlled not more than thousand votes in Elvira. Three times he has been bribed: first to support Harbans; then to stand for election by himself; and, finally, to withdraw in favour of Harbans. Moreover, he uses his energies to extract the largest possible bribe from Harbans in return for the promise of the Muslim vote. It is rightly so, Chittaranjan, the goldsmith, calls him “Bribe number three” (SE 183).

Not only Baksh, everybody else would like to make a profit in the electioneering process. Thus, taking bribes is an accepted and approved norm in Trinidad.

Chittaranjan, the leader of the Hindus, is a man “aloof and stiff” (SE 12), who becomes an important figure in the local politics in which he has control over three thousand Hindu votes and one thousand Spanish votes. He has much influence among the Hindus of Elvira. Even Blacks, Muslims and other community people show their respect to him. He is a popular man in Elvira, because he is rich and owns the biggest house in Elvira. In the elections, he is a staunch supporter of Harbans, and of course, he has his own selfish reason for it. He wants his daughter Nelly to marry Harbans’ son, though Harbans is not interested in this alliance. In spite of this, Chittranjan works out all the election schedules and helps in devising certain strategies to win the votes, such as taking care of the sick people of Elvira and providing monetary help to the poor and the needy.
The other two supporters of Harbans are Dhaniram and Mahadeo who consider the election as a chance for bribery and personal gain. They are included in the committee, only to avoid them from making mischief. Dhaniram is a Hindu pundit who lives in a wooden bungalow with his paralysed wife and his daughter-in-law, who has been deserted by Dhaniram’s son just two months after the marriage. As a devout Hindu, whenever he makes a Hindu ceremony he urges his listeners to vote for Harbans. Thus, the involvement of the Hindus in the activity of politics is a good process through which they get assimilated with the local ethos.

Mahadeo, who works as a sub-overseer, a driver of free labourers on the Elvira Estate, is “an out and out fool” (SE 46). At the election, he is entrusted with the work of preparing a list of all those who are sick or dying. He is deeply concerned about old Sebastian, and expects him to survive at least up to the polling day to secure the other Black people’s votes. Ironically, he himself is fully drunk even before the polling begins and forgets to vote.

Foam, the eldest son of Baksh who is appointed as the campaign manager by Harbans at seventy five dollars a month, because, he knows each and every one in Elvira is an important figure in the election drama. He is accepted even by Harbans as the best campaign manager for the elections. In fact, he works not so much for the victory of Harbans but for the humiliation of his enemy, Lorkhoor. Later, he is sincere in his work and persuades the people to vote for Harbans over the loudspeaker: “People of Elvira, vote for the only honourable man fit to become an Honourable Member of the Legislative Council of Trinidad and Tobago. Vote for Mr Surujpat Harbans, popularly known to all and sundry as Pat Harbans. Mr Harbans is your popular candidate. Mr Harbans will leave no stones unturned to work on your behalf” (SE 106). Like Ganesh in The Mystic Masseur,
Foam makes enthusiastic slogans: “VOTE HARBANS OR DIE!” (SE 43) and “HITCH YOUR WAGON TO THE STAR VOTE SURUPAT (‘PAT’) HARBANS CHOOSE THE BEST AND LEAVE THE REST” (SE 59).

Similarly, Lorkhoor, the Campaign Manager of Preacher, begs every man and woman to vote for Preacher and urges them to unite at the time of election:

‘People of Elvira, the fair constituency of Elvira’ . . . ‘Unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains. Unite and cohere. Vote for the man who has lived among you, toiled among you, prayed among you, worked among you. This is the voice of the renowned and ever popular Lorkhoor begging you and urging you and imploring you and entreated you and beseeching you to vote for Preacher, the renowned and ever popular Preacher. Use your democratic rights on election day and vote one, vote all.’ (SE 74)

Mohit K. Ray in V. S. Naipaul: An Introduction aptly comments that, “The election campaigning, is professional and Lorkhoor’s speech is a post-colonial imitation both of the colonial speeches and literary allusions and the voice of Karl Marx’s manifesto” (72). Obviously, Lorkhoor betrays Preacher at the end by selling his eight hundred votes to Harbans, in which he bargains a dollar for a vote. He becomes “a damn traitor!” (SE 20). Not only Lorkhoor, Elvira is also “full of traitors” (SE 39). At last, Lorkhoor gets five hundred dollars from Harbans and leaves Elvira with the daughter-in-law of Dhaniram.

To discuss election matters, Chittaranjan, Ramlogan, Mahadeo, Dhaniram, Baksh and Foam form a ‘committee’. The first meeting of the committee is held at Chittranjan’s big house. This is a meeting to map out strategies on how to counter the effectiveness of Lorkhoor. During the second meeting, the committee members calculate the number of votes in Elvira. It has “eight thousand votes in Naparoni. Four thousand Hindu, two
thousand negro, one thousand Spanish, and a thousand Muslim” (SE 52) and they discuss the possibility of Harbans to get more votes. They also contribute some ideas for attracting the people:

‘And every one of we could buy just one sweet drink for some negro child every day until elections. Different child every day. And the parents. We musn’t only help them if they fall sick or if they dead. If they can’t get a work or something. If they going to have a wedding or something. Take the goldsmith here. He could make a little present for negroes getting married.’

(SE 57)

Personal favours are claimed as a matter of right even if that meant violation of certain crucial democratic principles. The unpredictable appearance and all the more sudden disappearance of political parties just on the eve of the Election Day is another feature of Third World countries. In 1946 election, a party called as PPU (Party for Progress and Unity) was formed and it conducted a motor-car parade, for which it hired five hundred cars and toured the island. Here, Naipaul takes a chance to criticise the instability of the political parties, “The party had been founded two months before the parade; it died two days after it. It won one seat out of twelve; ten of the candidates lost their deposits; the President and the funds disappeared” (SE 185). Such practices do not predict well for a country and its political system.

When the election campaign grows hot in Elvira, photographs of Baksh and Harbans spring everywhere – on houses, telegraph-poles, trees and culverts in which they are promptly invested with moustaches, whiskers, spectacles and pipes. Naipaul portrays the Election Day with full vividness. Polling begins at seven in the morning, but the fun began before that: the Elvira estate has given its workers a day off, Chittaranjan gives his
two workmen a day off and Baksh gives himself a day off. “At seven, or thereabouts, the polling stations opened. Presently there were queues. Agents sat on the roots of trees still cool with dew, ticking off names on duplicated electoral lists, giving cards to voters, instructing the forgetful in the art of making an X” (SE 212-13). Harbans’ men have to take care of the agents and clerks at the polling booths, who would otherwise stagger the polling process.

In the final count, it is money alone that decides the election. Harbans wins with five thousand, three hundred and thirty-six votes and becomes an honourable Member of the Legislative Council. Like the contemporary politicians, he thanks the people over the loudspeaker: “I want to thank everybody . . . the police and the Warden and the clerks . . . everybody who vote for me and even people who ain’t vote for me” (SE 223). He spends more money on petrol, rum, posters, banners, loudspeaker van, medical welfare and free drinks. In addition to the above, he has to give bonuses to the agents. All these make him so desperate that he looks sad and absent minded even in the moment of triumph. On the other hand, Preacher faces bankruptcy due to the loss in the elections. Only Baksh, the third candidate of the election, is most benefited in the election.

When Harbans comes to Elvira for the first time after becoming a Member of the Legislative Council to give away the crate of whisky, which Ramlogan has promised the committee of the winning candidate, his brand new car (Jaguar) is set on fire. Leaving Elvira, Harbans stops his vehicle and curses the people of Elvira “‘Elvira, you is a bitch’” (SE 238) and says good bye to Elvira. Therefore, Elvira has not changed significantly as a consequence of the election: “So, Harbans won the election and the insurance company lost a Jaguar, Chittranjan lost a son-in-law and Dhaniram lost a daughter-in-law. Elvira lost Lorkhoor and Lorkhoor won a reputation. Elvira lost Mr Cuffy. And Preacher lost his deposit” (SE 240).
The machinery of election is educative and it brings out not only the dormant differences but also establishes a temporarily forged unity created by a common involvement in the election. The temporarily united world is described humorously and ironically by Naipaul where he illustrates the evil nature of the individuals in a democratic world, who actually in their real life, live for personal gains and corruption, and they have nothing to do with democracy. Thus, the shoddiness of the political system in Trinidad is vividly depicted in *The Suffrage of Elvira*.

Like *The Suffrage of Elvira, The Mimic Men* is a novel on “corruption of the body politic and corruption of the individual human soul” (Lall 11). It is not only about the island’s corrupt politicians, but also about the predicament of a sincere politician in the newly independent countries, who is condemned to play a role which can only carry on the unpleasant status of his little world. It describes the Third World politics and tells the reminiscences of an exiled politician, who is “playing the game of politics on a large scale” (Kamra 70).

Before independence, Isabella had been suffering from the consequences of class and race differences. After independence there is a great change in Isabella’s politics, but the colonial rule has exploited and influenced the natives. As a result, even after independence they continue to suffer from mental slavery and lose their independent ethos. To attain cultural and political identity, they have lost their sense of direction because they are unable to adjust with the new forms. As a result, they find themselves culturally displaced.

National independence in places like Isabella is founded upon “rhetoric masking continued dependence, continued exploitation” (Calder 274). Politics in the colony of Isabella is consistently treated with indifference and neglect in the metropolitan country.
Perhaps Landeg White assumes that, “Isabella has a coherent political life of its own, something distinct from the personal neuroses of its inhabitants . . .” (168). The emergence of various political and religious movements offer a sense of drama and hollow excitement finally ending up in disorder.

The island politicians suffer from non-existence as politics does not have any real meaning on the island that has been controlled, ruled, and exploited by the coloniser. Therefore, without a real political history of their own, colonial politicians are used as political puppets by the super-powers. They are left bewildered and filled with “emptiness, exhaustion, even distaste” (MM 217). Their radicalism and symbolic action have increased the restlessness and colonial disorder in Isabella. Lacking the conviction and competence, they are unable to come to grip with their situation in a mature, responsible way. For this Ralph observes, “We lack order. Above all, we lack power, and we do not understand that we lack power . . . Our transitional or makeshift societies do not cushion us” (MM 6).

The political situation is defined through Ralph’s ironic vision. At first, he presents it as the idealised golden landscape of opportunity and then contrasts it with his own awareness of its chaos and disorder, “. . . there was no true internal source of power, and that no power was real which did not come from the outside. Such was the controlled chaos we had, with such enthusiasm, brought upon ourselves” (MM 224). He illustrates the distrust of postcolonial politics, saying, “What did we talk about? We were, of course, of the left. We were socialist. We stood for the dignity of the working man. We stood for the dignity of distress. We stood for the dignity of our island, the dignity of our indignity” (MM 215). His account of his political failure relies on the belief that his society is irremediably sterile. Ralph recognises the insignificance of their victory, “I cannot see our predicament as unique. The newspapers . . . talk of the pace of postwar political change. It
is not the pace of creation. Nor is it the pace of destruction . . . The pace of events . . . is no more than the pace of a chaos on which strict limits have been imposed . . . The chaos lies all within” (MM 209). Moreover, he can only make sense that they were doomed to fail because of the nature of postcolonial societies and by contending that the only way to avoid such failure is to abandon politics altogether.

Ralph enters into politics as a remedy to his broken marriage. Unlike his friends, he cannot share any pleasure from the Island which he thinks to be infertile. Where his friends “memoirs were individual and romantic, his were historic and sublime” (Cooke 35). Browne is among those people who could live contended by blending what has been provided by the colonisers and incorporating them into their native ways, that the “native and Western are linked” (Cooke 37). Browne wants Ralph to see that they have a history, though ‘contrived’ and ‘manufactured, but the Island of Isabella does have some sort of history after all, if one wants to search for it. He demonstrates emphatically, “Our landscape was manufactured as that of any great French or English park. But we walked in a garden of hell, among trees, some still without popular names, whose seeds had sometimes been brought to our island in the intestines of slaves” (MM 158).

Ralph’s access to political power is not achieved by competing with the established politicians, but by putting an end to the old order. His political career is very much like his father’s, who is “a popular leader and political renegade” (Theroux 26). His father’s movement offers enough excitement to the people to win popular respect for his family, which Ralph is later to exploit in building up a political career for himself. Therefore, his father’s movement and the resultant popularity are preludes to his political career.

It is not a real life experience for him and he is aware that his role as a ‘colonial’ politician was meaningless, it is more of a mockery. He is very well aware of the fact that
politics has not brought order and peace to the island but only created a dramatic illusion of order and peace. He understands that politics is the challenge as well as the trap for the colonial politician. He learns from his own experience that, he is doomed to forego the freedom of disorder in his own life.

Deprived of all social standards – wife, home, money, friend, status and leadership he is labelled as ‘traitor’, all his other acts are misjudged. He is branded as “a racialist and a radical, a dangerous man, a trouble maker” \((MM\ 6)\) and forced to leave the country. Hence, the career of the colonial politician ends cruelly, “For those who lose, and nearly everyone in the end loses, there is only one course: flight. Flight to the greater disorder, the final emptiness: London and the home countries” \((MM\ 6-7)\).

Being completely alienated in the island of Isabella and devoid of any coherent past to hold on to, Ralph tries to become politician to gratify his psychological need of identity and fulfillment. “Only with The Mimic Men does the recognition of a national history in the landscape become necessary condition for establishing a stable identity” \((Cooke\ 32)\). He also takes up politics because he wants to get a real view of himself, to rid himself of the “panic of ceasing to feel myself as a whole person” \((MM\ 27)\). His reasons behind joining politics are not to help his fellow Islanders but to satisfy his own ego and his thirst for power.

In his attempt to define himself through his political activities, Ralph realises that he has become separated from his people and has to play a role to preserve his position. He feels incomplete because he is aware of the meaninglessness of his role as a colonial politician. To him, politicians in Isabella seek power and order without knowing the real meaning of those concepts: “The politician is more than a man with a cause, even when this cause is no more than self-advancement. He is driven by some little hurt, some little
incompleteness. He is seeking to exercise some skill which even to him is never as concrete as the skill of the engineer; of the true nature of this skill he is not aware until he begins to exercise it” (MM 37).

Slowly he realises the emptiness of his island’s freedom in which he finds himself at the center of events that he cannot control. He gets exhausted on seeing the world fully corrupted and does not want to get attached to those corrupted land (Isabella). Aware of the exploitation and pretension of the political leaders, he states:

They promised to abolish poverty in twelve months. They promised to abolish bicycle licences. They promised to discipline the police. They promised intermarriage. They promised farmers higher prices for sugar and copra and cocoa. They promised to renegotiate the bauxite royalties and to nationalize every foreign-owned estate. They promised to kick the whites into the sea and send the Asiatics back to Asia. (MM 216)

In the process of political change, racial violence is unleashed in Isabella, radicalism turns into race riots and race murders. While talking about the riots, Ralph says, “Do not give me names. Do not tell me how many people died. Say instead, ‘Race riots occurred’. Say, ‘there was loss of life’” (MM 263). The affected people come to him, which make him realise the failure of the politicians in handling the situation. Knowing his failure in politics, Ralph ruefully comments, “My sense of drama failed. This to me was the true loss. For four years drama had supported me; now, abruptly drama failed. It was a private loss; thoughts of irresponsibility or duty dwindled, became absurd” (MM 241). The tension which Ralph undergoes is “a special political problem that arise[s] from the fatal junction of nationality with concepts of culture and the affinities and affiliations which
links blacks of the west to one of their adoptive, parental cultures . . .” (Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic* 2).

After four years of political life, Ralph realises that he is a scapegoat in various affairs of the government. This is illuminated when he remarks, “So long as our dependence remained unquestioned our politics were a joke” (*MM* 206). He realises the helplessness of the politicians, hence, his failure leads his role as, “Leader and liberator, to find virtue in the poverty of the people, and to reduce them again to the level of slaves – status possibly more dangerous than their original slavery, since they remain unconscious of it” (Boxill 54). He finds everybody seeking a retreat into fugitive world of aspiration where freedom is conveniently declined from responsibility.

His political failure relies on the belief that his society is irremediably sterile. His party’s inability to hold on to power and to push through any lasting political changes can be explained by the fact that in a society like Isabella, fragmented, no link between man and the landscape, a society not held together by common interests, there is no true internal source of power. Therefore, “His failure as politician signifies the failure of Trinidad to be a nation” in his eyes (Kamra 70).

The colonial politicians become prisoners of their roles. They live in an illusion of power which brings no real sense of identity or control. They are mesmerised by instant power, but, at the same time, they are fearful and anxious for their new insecure position. Ralph playing the game of politics on a larger scale, unable to compromise or withdraw, is forced to leave the country in disgrace. Deprived of all social standards of success he experiences a loss of aspiration. He analyses the causes for his political failure through writing of his memoir. Frantz Fanon’s observation help into understand Ralph better,
“Those leaders who have fled from the useless political activity of the towns rediscover politics” (The Wretched of the Earth 135).

Politics does not have any real meaning on the island that has been controlled, ruled, and exploited by the empire. Naipaul brings out the irony of the situation which involves the arrival of democracy in the islands for which the people are not prepared for. He articulates the basic deficiency of the society and underlines the illusions, conflicts and vague objectives of the politicians:

Politicians are people who truly make something out of nothing. They have few concrete gifts to offer. They are not engineers or artists or makers. They are manipulators; they offer themselves as manipulators. Having no gifts to offer, they seldom know what they seek. They might say they seek power. But their definition of power is vague and unreliable. (MM 37)

The idea of power remains vague and meaningless to the politicians. They do not worry or work for the betterment of the people. They are more obsessed to assert their control and domination over them. They do not understand that with power comes responsibility; they used power to fulfill their own purpose. Moreover, without a real political history of their own, colonial politicians are used as political stooges by the superpowers. The fundamental deficiency of the Third World society which Naipaul articulates here underlines the illusions, conflicts and confused objectives of the politicians in the contemporary world and it is these deficiencies which make all the Third World politicians as ‘Mimic Men’. Thus, the novel The Mimic Men is a political tract born out of a specific historic-political milieu and questions the authenticity of a Caribbean society’s psychological, cultural, economic and political independence from its erstwhile colonial rulers.
Like *The Mimic Men*, several other Third World novels echo the political upheavals in the Third World countries. Naipaul like the other Third World writers offers no solutions to these problems. The impact of the political upheaval shapes the life of Third World people. Naipaul’s novels portray the political upheavals of Trinidad just before and after independence. In fact, Trinidadians have retained a confused racial and cultural memory but not political memory whatsoever. Trinidadian society is not politically conscious though it is alert and aggressive when it feels threatened, in which neither the leaders nor the people are aware of the outside world.

In Naipaul’s novels the Third World politics abounds in chaos and its resultant disorder. The chaos of this period is the consequence of the loss of the colonial order with nothing to replace it, except borrowed forms and concepts which are manipulated by personalities motivated by the historical fear of non-existence. His distant, detached observation of the modern nation sharpens his ironic attitude in satirising the futile attempts at controlling disorder through borrowed power and resources.

The novel *A Bend in the River*, shows the contemporary postcolonial Africa after the disintegration of colonial order. Africa has long been a part of the literature of imperialism beginning in the late 18th century and flourishing in the 19th century. The ideology of nationalism seeds out of imperialism and formulates its aspirations in the soil of foreign conquest. Joseph Conrad points out in the opening of *Heart of Darkness* that, “The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look at it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea” (10). Europe’s sense of nationhood is linked with its former colonial margins. The notion of modernity as a European invention becomes an
essential trope in discourses which Europe locates itself and constructs the difference of its racial and cultural ethos. Europe symbolises civilisation while Africa mirrors barbarism.

Conrad would like us to read *Heart of Darkness* as an allegory of civilisation as defined by colonialist ideology. “The new politics, the curious reliance of men on institutions they were yet working to undermine, the simplicity of beliefs and the hideous simplicity of actions, the corruption of causes . . . where always ‘something inherent in the necessities of successful action . . . carried with it the moral degradation of the idea’” (*Heart of Darkness* 170-71). However, Conrad’s primary argument is that the Africans are trapped at the beginning of time on the basis of their primitivism. Naipaul’s argument is basically that this primitivism consists of nihilism that renders the Africans unable to cope with modernity as manifested in the colonial rule imposed on Africa by Europe. In “A New King for the Congo: Mobutu and the Nihilism of Africa” Naipaul argues that the basis of the brutality that Mobutu Sese Seko exhibited during his rule in the Congo (1965 to 1997) is the momentary nature of the African’s exposure to civilisation through the brief period of European colonial rule in Africa. Thus, the problem with post-independence Africa is primarily about “African nihilism, the rage of primitive men coming to themselves and finding that they have been fooled and affronted” and “Mobutu embodied the values of the primitive man who is transformed into a nihilist by his contact with a civilization which he is incapable of utilizing properly” (Prescott 548-49).

Africa play out in the interstices of nation and cultures, theories and texts, the past and the present in which the meanings of cultural and political authority are negotiated to evoke “the ambivalent margins of the nation-space” (Bhabha, *Nation and Narration* 4). In order to create a ‘national consciousness’, governments must invent traditions to give permanence and solidity to a political and cultural form. As Timothy Brennan aptly
comments, “Nations are imaginary constructs that depend for their existence on an apparatus of cultural fictions in which imaginative literature plays a decisive role” (“The National Longing for Form” 49). That the category of the African race is taken at face value and the need to create a “nationalist pedagogy” (Bhabha, The Location of Culture 214) is dependent on a coherent definition of the people who can be acculturated, becomes a signifier of national unity.

Writers like Chinua Achebe and James Ngugi project their dark self on to the dark people. Ngugi in The River Between and Chinua Achebe in Things Fall Apart show that before the coming of the White men, the people in the ‘bush’ lived with their own culture and they could define themselves in relation to their primitive world. In A Bend in the River, the bush symbolises theft, corruption and racist incitement. Also, “Sun and rain and bush had made the site look old, like the site of a dead civilization. The ruins, spreading over so many acres, seemed to speak of a final catastrophe” (BR 30).

The political set-up of A Bend in the River reminds us one of the African countries described by Naipaul in an earlier novel, In a Free State. The landscape of the novel is veiled in mysterious darkness; it extends into the heart of Africa which has been dominated first by Europeans and then by Arabs. It is filled with lust and corruption at every level, hopeless and inefficient. The citizens of Africa are puppets in the hands of an erratic ruler and the individuals struggle on the path to self-realisation. Naipaul focuses on how the memory of the past contributes towards the destruction of postcolonial societies grappling with western paradigms of modernity. His depiction of postcolonial Africa shows a society devastated by dictatorship, civil war and ethnic and ideological purification. By locating his protagonist as a minority figure, Naipaul is able to articulate some questions around culture and identity within an emerging national consciousness.
The unnamed town at the bend in the river abounds with chaos and disorder. Naipaul feels skeptical about the freedom and the modernisation of Africa. Even, the natives have to pay the price for their freedom, “Exploitation was part of African realism and they did not yet have an idea of nationhood. They do not experience the racial resentment of the American Negro. Their despair is more immediate: how to save their skins against inevitable oppression” (Kamra 135-36). The town has seen the rise and fall of many civilisations and the people of the town seem to be its leftovers:

Ruins had been left as ruins; no attempt had been made to tidy up. The names of all the main streets had been changed. Rough boards carried the new, roughly lettered names. No one used the new names, because no one particularly cared about them. The wish had only been to get rid of the old, to wipe out the memory of the intruder. It was unnerving, the depth of that African rage, the wish to destroy, regardless of the consequences. (BR 29-30)

The river is a silent witness to the developments in the town. Veena Singh in “Paradox of Freedom in A Bend in the River” rightly states, “The timeless river, like the river in Mark Twain’s Huckleberry Finn, shares the woes and troubles of the people who occupy its coasts, and the making and unmaking of the civilisation” (126). It is the symbol of corrupt nature in contrast to the corruption of civilisation, its dirt, heat, ugliness, the colonial relics and the political corruptions. It is part of Africa’s past and history. Naipaul presents a complex reality of modern Zaire in contrast with the straightforward imperialist view of the Congo. In “A New King for the Congo: Mobutu and the Nihilism of Africa” Naipaul writes, “The Congo, which used to be a Belgian colony, is now an African
kingdom and is called Zaire. It appears a nonsense name, a sixteenth-century Portuguese corruption” (173).

Political and social disorder is for Naipaul the unavoidable product of contemporary liberation movements. From the very beginning of the novel *A Bend in the River*, Naipaul says, “The country, like others in Africa, had had its troubles after independence” (*BR* 3) which shows the chaotic and ambiguous Third World. The namelessness of the places enables one to understand not just Africa but the modern world in general. The novel places great emphasis on “slavery and slave trade, the relationship of master to slave as an example of the dependency relationship that inevitably erodes individual identity” (Nightingale 247). It also highlights the rising of the black-power, killing of a black leader, eruption of violence and the crumbling of the government.

Lives of people in Africa have been dependent on the fanciful decision of the President and he does what is beneficial to him and would not bother less about the betterment of his people. The President’s decisions are very contradictory. On one hand he has his ‘European’ posters hung up at every corner of the country, on the other hand he asks the people to stop “running like children after things in imported tins and bottles . . .” (*BR* 241). The President’s ‘New Domain’ is flourished and adopted the ‘modern’ lifestyle, but the people in the villages and in the town are completely unaware and deprived from all of it. Therefore, the President’s flawed effort to the process of ‘Africanisation’ is all in vain and there is no such thing as ‘true’ Africa.

The real political tyranny in the town is focussed through the experiences of the Muslim trader Salim, who explains, “I had heard dreadful stories of that time, of casual killings over many months by soldiers and rebels and mercenaries, of people trussed up in disgusting ways and being made to sing certain songs while they were beaten to death in
the streets” (BR 75). Another kind of wilderness that Salim encounters is embodied in the blind fury of the tribal and the deliberate and unreasoned violence – resulting in a complete reversal of civilisation and modernity into primitivity and chaos.

The colonial society lacks order and Salim is a detached observer. He finds it hard to see history in a country that he primarily interprets through its landscape. He criticises the corruption and unpleasant behaviour of Africans. Breaking away from family, community and the ritual life, he travels to the heart of the African continent, accompanied by Metty, a son of one of the family’s slaves and becomes a trader in a town at the bend in the river. Salim makes the same journey as the slaves have made from the East Coast to Central Africa. He feels unprotected because one can live happily only if one is safe in this world, but the river appeases to him and brings him back to something outside time, something eternal, for which he elucidates:

At independence the people of our region had gone mad with anger and fear – all the accumulated anger of the colonial period, and every kind of reawakened tribal fear. The people of our region had been much abused, not only by Europeans and Arabs, but also by other Africans; and at independence they had refused to be ruled by the new government in the capital. . . . the people of our region might have seen that the town at the bend in the river was theirs, the capital of any state they might set up. But they had hated the town for the intruders who had ruled in it and from it; and they had preferred to destroy the town rather than take it over. (BR 75-76)

Therefore, it is not surprising that Salim becomes increasingly disillusioned with his African circumstances on the East Coast. He expresses his fear that the region’s non-
native natives could have no future because of the growing power of the Africans of ‘the interior’. From within his pseudo-European world, he feels somewhat secure, but he is physically alienated from Europeans and his identification with them is an illusion.

The country has its troubles after independence; there has been a “semi-tribal war that had broken out at independence and shattered and emptied the town” (BR 75). Salim feels that he is an ‘outsider’ and observes the violence around him objectively: “. . . I was neutral. I was frightened of both sides. I didn’t want to see the army on the loose. And though I felt sympathy for the people of our region, I didn’t want to see the town destroyed again. I didn’t want anybody to win; I wanted the old balance to be maintained” (BR 77).

The Liberation Army opposes the Big Man and declares in a badly written leaflet: “We have decided to face the enemy with armed confrontation” (BR 248). The competing nationalist movements, those of the Big Man and the Liberation Army create “traps that prevent economic and culture growth” (Eid 183). Hence, both are worse than the colonial rulers. There is nothing in the town at the bend in the river, except disease, disgust, ignorance and corruption. A person like Father Huismans attempt to educate the Africans, but his cruel death confirms that it is a corrupt, degenerated and irredeemable country and reminds the others to remember where they are.

At the end of rebellions and uprisings, the Big Man takes the reins of power into his hands, in which he reorganises the army and brings some order in the town by placing the army there. After independence, yet under the new President, the country is more enslaved than it has been under the Arabs or the Europeans. Frantz Fanon aptly remarks:

We know that it is not a homogeneous world; we know too that enslaved peoples are still to be found there, together with some who have achieved a simulacrum of phony independence, others who are still fighting to attain
sovereignty and others again who have obtained complete freedom but who live under the constant menace of imperialist aggression. These differences are born of colonial history, in other words of oppression. (*The Wretched of the Earth* 10)

The town sees itself modernised and westernised beyond its need which confirms how young nations ape the West. All kinds of projects and services get started there. The Big Man tries to create modern Africa, “He was creating a miracle that would astound the rest of the world. He was by-passing real Africa, the difficult Africa of bush and villages, and creating something that would match anything that existed in other countries” (*BR* 116). Modernity is therefore symbolised as shallow and superficial.

The Big Man maintains his power by means of European airplanes and by posting gigantic photographs of himself which is printed in Europe. The Euro centric power is reflected here. His speeches are usually superficial; especially his radio speech which conveys all the contradictions and hypocrisy of his principles. Like Abraham Lincoln, he dreams of the future of African people:

> The speech, so far, was like many others the President had made. The themes were not new: sacrifice and the bright future; the dignity of the woman of Africa; the need to strengthen the revolution, unpopular though it was with those black men in the towns who dreamed of waking up one day as white men; the need for Africans to be African, to go back without shame to their democratic and socialist ways, to rediscover the virtues of the diet and medicines of their grandfathers . . . the need for vigilance, work and, above all, discipline. (*BR* 241)
The relationship between the Big Man and the people is unrealistic which would never lead to prosperity. His policies are effective, people believe that he is the guardian of tradition and the brave innovator, but the results of his policies are corruption and bribery.

Disorder and destruction create continuous rebellion and repression. The helplessness of the situation is also evident in the following statement of Ferdinand, “An execution is to take place at seven in the morning. That is what we are meeting for. We are going to witness the execution. It is one of us who is going to be executed; but the man doesn’t know. He thinks he is going to watch” (BR 320). He also explains the impending chaos, “They’re going to kill everybody who can read and write, everybody who ever put on a jacket and tie, everybody who put on a jacket de boy. They’re going to kill all the masters and all the servants. When they’re finished nobody will know there was a place like this here. They’re going to kill and kill” (BR 322). This in fact clearly shows the chaotic situation of a postcolonial Africa.

In the postcolonial world, violence and bloodshed abound. Natives are not recognised as human beings worthy of exercising their right to sovereignty; therefore, they are forced by the nature of this dialectic, to demand recognition from their oppressors and court death to obtain it. For Fanon, violence and the risk of death mean that the native’s life is transformed into the corporeal manifestation of the ‘universal objective truth’ of freedom:

In relating themselves to freedom through the readiness to die, the colonized clearly indicate what is at stake . . . What comes first is not the recognition of particularity but the humanity of the colonized, the struggle for recognition as human being . . . Violence expresses this disincarnate, ethereal freedom. It is how freedom exists less as an attribute than as the
very subject exacting recognition through the risking of life. The rehabilitative value of violence lies in the equation that the colonized are ready to risk the only and most precious thing they have, namely, their life, for their dignity and equality. (Kebede 549-50)

Power is misused by the politicians. In their act of helping the people, they do them more harm than good. Robin Kelley writes to Césaire review on colonialism in his introduction to *A Poetics of Anticolonialism*:

Césaire reveals, over and over again, that the colonizers’ sense of superiority, their sense of mission as the world’s civilizers, depends on turning the Other into a barbarian. The Africans, the Indians, the Asians cannot possess civilization or a culture equal to that of the imperialists, or the latter have no purpose, no justification for the exploitation and the domination of the rest of the world. The colonial encounter, in other words, requires a reinvention of the colonized, the deliberate destruction of the past-what Césaire calls ‘thingification’. (qtd. in Noor 62)

The river represents the call of timelessness and embodies the flow of history which takes away with itself Salim and the Africans. It would be the observer of the historical tragedy along with the victims of political violence. The violence arises from a universalising narrative that attempts to inscribe the people into a nation.

Thus, the novel *A Bend in the River* depicts the suppressed rebellion, violence, bloodshed, tyranny, injustice, corruption, exploitation and political power and pathetically views the survival of ancestral Africans in the modern state. People are unable to adjust to the new ways of lifestyle. They are left behind with a lot of modern equipment from the Europeans but they do not know what to do with them. The villagers still want to go back
to their ancestral ways of life. No one is safe under the present rule, neither the natives nor the foreigners.

In *Half a Life*, Naipaul portrays the political issues of pre-independent India and postcolonial Africa. Naipaul has great connection with India, “Whenever he wrote about India, he tried his best to be realistic, rejecting the popular western concept that India was solely a spiritual country” (Haldar 88). He has written extensively on India and many of his views on this country have evoked controversies. This is because he has given expression to several negative remarks on India. His travel books *An Area of Darkness* and *India: A Wounded Civilization* abound in criticism of the lives of Indians after independence. He believes that “India is dark, its civilization is wounded and the country is quite known for its unclean atmosphere. People dirty the places all over, they will not bother about any shelter; civic sense is less compared to other countries and so on” (M. S. Kumar 91).

Whereas, in his travelogues, *India: A Wounded Civilization*, Naipaul criticises the political set up of India: “Formal politics answered less and less, became more and more formal towards the end, it had the demeanour of a parlour game, and became an affair of head-counting and floor-crossing” (167). He reinforces his conviction that India, wounded by a thousand years of foreign rule, has not yet found an ideology of regeneration. Yet, he expresses his hope of possibility for a true new beginning in India at the end of the travelogues, *India: A Million Mutinies Now*. The book records those voices from all sides of India which tell him that India has changed.

In *Half a Life*, Naipaul visualises the political situation and the evils of caste system in India. He records confessional life history of Willie’s father, who is almost universally accepted as a Gandhian saint. Willie’s great grandfather belongs to a
respectable priestly community (Brahmin), which has been once very rich and prosperous. The community becomes poor after the Muslim invasion in India, and the situation gets worse after the arrival of the British. Forced by the pangs of hunger, Willie’s great grandfather comes to a big town, where the Maharaja lives. He somehow manages to get the job of a letter writer and is able to make a fair living. Even though the country is struggling for its freedom, the state of the Maharaja is struggling with caste war. Willie’s father ironically says, “Elsewhere in the country they were talking of Gandhi and Nehru and the British. Here in the Maharaja’s state they were shut off from those politics. They were half-nationalists or quarter-nationalists or less. Their big cause was the caste war” (HL 28).

Sometime later, Willie’s father came to understand that the days of the Maharaja have gone, and so he thought of a different career for himself. It is the time of the national movement and the impact of Gandhi is in the air and sacrifice is the ideal presented before the youth by Gandhi. Willie’s father decides to follow Gandhi’s ideals and keeps looking for a suitable opportunity for the same. He states, “I suppose I was ripe for political action. India was full of politics” (HL 8). Also, he adds, “I adored the great names of the independence movement” (HL 9). He has heard about Gandhi’s teachings and his idea of crossing the whole of India on foot in order to harvest salt in the ocean. People all over world have come to know about Gandhi’s movement and join him.

Naipaul critically views the Gandhian philosophy and the non-co-operation movement of Gandhi in the freedom struggle of India. The advent of Gandhi brought a sea-change in the Indian political scenario by making the people not only politically conscious but also politically active. During 1931 and 1932 Gandhi has called the students to boycott their universities. Knowing Gandhi’s movement, Willie’s father decides to
sacrifice his career and join Gandhi’s call and hence make a little bonfire of the novel *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and the professor’s notes in the front yard of the college, but it affects his education. He expresses his grief, “I foolishly gave up English education in response to the Mahatma’s call, and unfitted myself for life, while watching my friends and enemies growing in prosperity and regard” (*HL 2*).

Gandhi’s call is for the upliftment of the neglected part of society which consists of untouchables and low-caste. Hence, Willie’s father decides to marry a low-caste girl who is studying in the college. His sacrifice initially looks like a trend, but it turns out to be a real sacrifice for he enters into a relationship which spoils the prospects of a bright and secure career. He even takes the vow of sexual abstinence, following Gandhi he also takes the vow of *bramacharya*, but in reality, he has a son and a daughter in quick succession.

The final part of the novel, ‘The Second Translation’ describes the political disorder in Africa, where the establishment of the local government brought new problems for the non-Africans. Through Willie, Naipaul expresses the horror of race-riot in South Africa: “There had been an uprising in one region, and a mass killing of Portuguese in the countryside. Two hundred, three hundred, perhaps even four hundred, had died, and they had been done to death with machetes” (*HL 166*). Naipaul also mentions this cruelty in *A Way in the World*:

> . . . I had grown up thinking of cruelty as something always in the background. There was an ancient, and not-so-ancient, cruelty in the language of the streets; casual threats, man and parents to children, of punishments and degradations that took you back to plantation times. There was the cruelty of extended-family life. The cruelty of the Indian
countryside and the African town. The simplest things around us held memories of cruelty. (20)

The anti-Portuguese guerrillas have the support of the black government over the border. Willie points out that, “The guerrillas are in camps just over the border. The government there is on their side. They are real guerrillas now, and they aren’t playing. When they decide to move I don’t see what’s going to stop them” (HL 194). He also states:

The colonial government in the capital closed down just like that; the guerrillas took over. The Portuguese population began to leave. The army withdrew from our town. The barracks were empty; it seemed unnatural, after the activity and the daily military rituals, like church rituals, of the past twelve years. And then after some weeks of this blankness a much smaller force of guerrillas moved in, occupying just a part of the barracks that had been extended many times during the war. People had died, but the army hadn’t really wished to fight the African war, and the life in the towns remained normal right up to the end. (HL 223-24)

With the break out of the Civil War, the Portuguese colony is about to explode into a bloody revolution and Ana, Willie’s wife tells him: “Africans may not be afraid of you and me, but they are afraid of one another. Every man has access to the fetish-man, and this means that even the humblest man has power. In that way they are better off than the rest of us” (HL 159). People like doctors leave the country every day. Certain shops become empty and they are closed forever; their owners have gone away to Portugal or South Africa and houses in the central square are also abandoned. In the end, unable to survive in the chaotic political situation, Willie also decides to leave the country.
The postcolonial society turns amok without a strong political head at the helm. Political upheavals serve as a backdrop to the drama of sensibility of Naipaul’s characters. Most of his protagonists realise themselves through political failure. For Ganesh in *The Mystic Masseur*, Harbans in *The Suffrage of Elvira* and Ralph in *The Mimic Men*, politics means success of a kind which has absorbed their sense of failure.

By integrating his protagonists with the political process rather than isolating them from political platitudes and developments to a thorough scrutiny from a human point of view, Naipaul reflects a perceptive reality in his novels where he successfully depicts the “dynamics of political change in the ‘third world’ as though these dynamics are responsible to particular laws and rhymes because past is never quite past” (P. K. Singh 146). His worldwide visions and narratives of political affiliation, do intimate the possibility of associations beyond national, ethnic and cultural margins of the Third World countries. Brent Staples in “Con Man and Conquerors” comments, “Few writers of V.S. Naipaul’s stature have been so consistently and aggressively misread on account of ethnic and racial literary politics . . .” (1).

Naipaul’s novels offer a sense of drama and empty excitement which finally ends up in chaos and disorder. His political novels appear to be too cruel and tragic, the fact remains that they have not darkened or soured the author’s compassion or his belief in the future of mankind. He simply demonstrates that such things have happened before and will happen again. Even if the future holds no promise of security, there is no room for nostalgia. His firsthand experience of the nature of political twists and turns in the Third World countries has offered him a unique opportunity to model the characters of some of his major novels after some aspirations in politics.
The political background in the novel does not become a metaphor for psychological and social elaboration of life. Electioneering is viewed in a social context – a form of participation in public life which creates the opportunity for success. It is the area of widest scope for self-fulfilment with the least demands on talent and qualification. It is the first area of power which the colonisers have to submit to the colonised unequivocally.

Lack of sophistication and power makes the Third World countries political stooges in the larger game of the big power. Naipaul makes it clear that political independence has changed nothing and the imperialist states continue to retain their hold on the former colonies through the newer, more secret methods of postcolonialism. He portrays the imperfect and corrupt nature of the politicians, their tricks to win the election and their cunning nature, disorder and hopelessness. Hence, exploitation and bribery of politicians ruin the society in general and as a whole the world in wide sense.

Political upheavals serve as a backdrop to the drama of sensibility of Naipaul’s characters. Most of his protagonists realise themselves through political failure. For Ganesh in *The Mystic Masseur*, Harbans in *The Suffrage of Elvira* and Ralph in *The Mimic Men*, politics has meant success of a kind which has absorbed their sense of failure. The political uncertainty in the characters’ notion makes it impossible for them to develop a sense of belonging. As a result of disorder and decay, they decided to seek order and security in a new place. For instance, Ralph in *The Mimic Men* and Salim in *A Bend in the River* went to London to seek order and security. Like them, Willie in *Half a Life* seeks refuge both in London and Africa, but he also finds the same chaos and disorder there. Ralph’s realisation of the unreality of political power brings a moment of total