Chapter 1

Introduction

Literature is political. Power is the issue in the politics of literature as in the case of any politics. The drama of power may be disguised in a literary piece, but its presence can never be forgotten. The mainstream literature has a veil upon it that gives it an apolitical and ahistorical surveillance but it is to be noted that the issue of power is thoroughly obscured by the mythology, language, and the structure of romantic love. Scrutiny will proclaim the presence in the mainstream literature, of an abstract, though spiteful, ‘they’ whose goal is portrayed as to break the good, the beautiful and the brave. Here the subject of power is explicit in the character of the colonised, the marginalized ‘other.’ These marginal, inhumane, depersonalized figures often warm the pages of history, history which is the only terrain of White elite. Since there were none to uphold the cause of these downtrodden people, ‘they’ always appeared in the second slot of the binary oppositions like good/evil, civilised/uncivilised, light/darkness, heaven/hell, and so on. Mainstream literature penned by the European patriarchal metropolitan always portrays the ‘other’ as a debased existence. It is at this juncture lies the importance of ‘other’ literatures, be it postcolonial, feminist, lesbian or gay literature.

To explore the merit of literature, history plays a decisive role. Given the context of West Indian history, it is difficult to offer a date as such as a point of origin, the genesis of West Indian writing. In fact it is painful that the Caribbean possesses ‘no indigenous tradition’ in literature. History of the nation acts as the
backdrop of any literary creation. Since the Caribbean islands are a historical and cultural microcosm of Empire, and a prey to its ‘divide and rule’ policy, the nation itself has a dislocated history.

The radical historylessness, or in other words, the fragmented history of the Caribbean islands has to be enunciated before the study of Caribbean literature. The history of the Caribbean reveals the significant role the region played in the colonial struggles of the European powers since the fifteenth century. Genocide, slavery, immigration and rivalry between world powers have given Caribbean history an impact disproportionate to the size of this small region. The history of the Caribbean is marked by a series of invasions and dominations by different people and the consequent subjugation and semi annihilation of native people, namely the Arawak and the Caribs. To begin with, Christopher Columbus, who discovered the Caribbean, opened up the saga of exploitation in 1492. At the time of the European discovery of most of the islands of the Caribbean, three major Amerindian indigenous peoples lived on the islands: the Taino in the Greater Antilles, the Bahamas and the Leeward Islands; the Caribs and Galibi in the Windward Islands; and the Ciboney in western Cuba.

The first voyage of the explorer Christopher Columbus, designed by the Spanish crown to conquer, was made with an eye on the rich resources of the nation. The Spanish, who came seeking wealth, enslaved the native population and rapidly drove them to near-extinction. The exploitation of the Caribbean landscape dates back to the Spanish conquerors around 1600 who mined the islands for gold which they brought back to Spain. The more significant
development came when Christopher Columbus wrote back to Spain that the islands were useful for sugar development. The history of Caribbean agricultural dependency is closely linked with European colonialism which altered the financial potential of the region by introducing a plantation system. The ‘New World’ plantations were established in order to fulfill the growing needs of the ‘Old World.’ The true natives of the islands, the Arawak and the Caribs were forcefully held in slavery to work in the plantations. But these people were unsuited for and unaccustomed to such labour. The twin demons of forced labour and European diseases squeezed these poor lots into near extinction. It was a virtual extermination of not only an entire people but also of an entire culture.

The Caribbean region was war-torn throughout much of colonial history. Soon after the voyages of Christopher Columbus and the Spanish invasion of the West Indies, other European powers, most specifically England, the Netherlands, and France, hoped to establish profitable colonies of their own on the golden soil of West Indies. The resultant colonial rivalries made the Caribbean a cockpit for European wars for centuries. The manner in which the diverse colonial powers administered their respective territories shattered the sense of unity in the Caribbean islands. The European powers truncated the Caribbean region into different sublinguistic subsets asserting their authority over these regions. Hence, Spain declared Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico to be the Spanish area and the language of these invaders became the language of the people of this region. The French portion included Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French Guiana, which are currently departments of France, and Haiti, which began to
enjoy independence since 1804. A French-based Creole was spoken in Dominica and St. Lucia. The Dutch parts included Suriname, which became independent in 1975 and Aruba. The islands of Curacao, Bonaire, Saba, St. Maarten, and St. Eustatius, were part of the Dutch state. The English-speaking areas included an assortment of independent and dependent islands linked to Britain, collectively called the Commonwealth Caribbean (the independent ones include Jamaica, Barbados, Guyana, Belize, the Bahamas, Antigua, St. Kitts-Nevis, Grenada, Dominica, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent; the dependent ones include the British Virgin Islands, Monseratt, Anguilla, Barbuda, the Cayman Islands, and the Turks and Caicos islands), and those linked to the United States namely the American Virgin islands. The island of St. Maarten was jointly run by the Netherlands and France. So taken as a whole, it is difficult to call the Caribbean a society in any meaningful sense of the word. Rather it would be more suitable to call it a place that is deeply divided culturally, racially, ethnically and linguistically. An observer, noting the bewildering diversity in the region, went so far as to argue that each island in its peculiar evolution has become a museum in which archaic distinctions were carefully preserved.

The history of the Caribbean is interlinked with the history of slave trade. Since the plantations had to be taken forward even after the holocaust of indigenous people, white peasant and criminal labour was bought in. The tobacco plantation, which was the first crop of the islands, was deposed by the more demanding King Cane. Since sugar cane needed more hardy human machinery, Africans were brought forcefully from their continent. These people were rooted
out from a place where they had a sense of home and self, a sense of their rightful place in a continent rich in history, culture and tradition. They were forced to leave their communities for the sake of their would-be white masters. They were brought to experience the horrors of Trans Atlantic passages, ‘the middle passage’ which very few were able to survive. The harrowing story of the debased and dehumanised plight of the slaves on their way to the islands is beyond description:

They were shackled and placed in the bellies of ships, with no more space to breathe in or move in than the Europeans gave to their dead. Slave ships were spiritual coffins; human beings were packed spoon fashion, and it was in this tiny space that they ate, defecated, urinated, sweat and bled. (O’Callaghan 5)

The pain and the fear they underwent were so excruciating that even the gods fled. After this horror ended, there arose the miseries of plantation life. Each dawn broke like a whip on the back of the slaves. The West Indian intellectual C.L.R James, one of the most distinguished thinkers of the modern Caribbean, describes the inhumanity and savage brutality as follows:

Whipping was interrupted in order to pass a piece of hot wood on the buttocks of the victim; salt, pepper, citron, cinders, aloes and hot ashes were poured on the bleeding wounds. Mutilations were common—limbs, ears and sometimes the private part, to deprive them of the pleasures which they could indulge in without expense. Their masters poured burning wax over their
heads, burned them alive, roasted them on slow fires, filled them with gun powder and blew them up to the neck and smeared their heads with sugar that the flies might devour them; fastened them to nests of ants or wasps; made them eat their excrement, drink their urine, and lick the saliva of other slaves . . . Were these tortures, so well authenticated, habitual or were they merely isolated incidents, the extravagances of a few half-crazed colonists? Impossible as it is to substantiate hundreds of cases, yet all the evidence show that these bestial practices were normal features of slave life. (334)

The brutalities above mentioned were common practices and a subhuman nature was taken for granted in black slaves. Slavery was seen a necessary component of plantation economy, and the question of slave trade was defended by the binary opposition which traditionally saw the white man as the positive and the black man as the negative side of human nature. This relationship was set from the beginning as unequal, by setting the black man as the bestial counter part of the rational white man. The Eurocentred western hierarchical structure subdued and degraded ‘the other,’ belittling them culturally and socially by establishing a biased vision of cultural worth and moral value. But the Caribbean dared a strong tradition of resistance from the very beginning. They resorted to political strategies: active resistance included riots and revolts, while passive resistance operated on an individual basis which involved suicide, voluntary abortion, poisoning masters and sabotaging crops.
The colonies which were in the hands of the French and Spanish were brought under British control in 1802. Since the British society was rigidly class structured, they indoctrinated the sense of class divisions and its resultant corrosion in the slave society as well. This resulted in social tension and discrimination between the blacks themselves and also between the blacks and the whites. The friction was mainly based on the question of superiority. Thus the obnoxious triad—white, coloured and black—who populated the West Indies, began to indulge in cold wars between each other.

After a few hundred years, Europeans, however, awoke to the idea that slave labour was no longer profitable. In 1787, the Abolition society was constituted by Quakers opposing slavery and slave trade. This led to the official abolition of slavery in 1834 which emancipated slaves into economic liberation. Since cheap labour was needed in the plantation, a policy to encourage immigration was established. Afterwards it was the age of indentured labourers. The immigrants included the Indians, Chinese, North Africans, Portuguese, Jews, Japanese, Syrians and so on who were literally pulled towards different cultural imperatives against their will. They formed the ‘diaspora.’ The term ‘diaspora’ denotes the movement or migration of a group of people, such as those sharing a national and/or ethnic identity, away from an established or ancestral homeland. It carries a sense of displacement as the population of the diasporic communities would find itself separated from its national territory. It is quite usual that its people have a hope, or at least a desire, to return to their homeland at some point, if the ‘homeland’ still exists in any meaningful sense. Some writers have noted
that diaspora may result in a loss of nostalgia for a single home as people are ‘re-rooted’ in a series of meaningful displacements. Naturally, individuals may have multiple homes throughout their diaspora, with different reasons for maintaining some form of attachment to each. Since multiethnic communities co-exist in a diaspora, the people tend to vary in culture, traditions, language, and other factors. However, even in the midst of diversity the diaspora well exhibited a shared identity which helped to bind the co-ethnic communities together.

West Indies was the diaspora of a whole lot of diverse communities with their own distinct language, religion or cultural practices, and they had no desire to shed their homeland or to cultivate English ways and manners. They never felt at home in their new cultural surroundings. Each group, unwilling to be where they were placed and longing for other lands, remained antagonistic to each other. What they shared like an unvoiced pain was the consistent erasure of their humanity, the very depletion of the human person. The forced alienation of these people from their own ‘home,’ the only place which could give a sense of belonging, pulled them to the unfathomable pits of apprehension. The denial of the basic needs and its related difficulties are evident in the words of very robust Afrocentrists, Ian Smart and Kimani Nehusi who articulate about the idea of home and belonging as follows. Nehusi sees home as:

\[...\] a nurturing place, a space of spiritual, psychological, social, and physical comfort, freedom, security and satisfaction, and ultimately confidence, because we know that we will be understood there \[...\] humans feel at home only when they can be themselves in culturally
familiar ways. Home is therefore . . . a space that not merely permits but encourages us to be our own selves and in which we are ‘easy’—not merely familiar, but comfortable too. (1-2)

It is to be noted that the master-slave opposition, the theoretical rift between black and white did actually cover up the subversive role of cross-cultural contamination as expressed by Homi K. Bhabha’s theory of ‘hybridity.’ The varied ethnic groups with different social, political, religious and cultural backgrounds were forcefully put to melt down in the West Indian hotchpotch. This cultural fragmentation and ambivalence inspired the descendents of the ‘diasporic’ movements to develop their own distinctive cultures which both preserve and develop their original cultures. The development of such diasporic cultures questioned essentialist models, interrogating the ideology of unified, ‘natural’ cultural norm, one that underpins the centre/margin model of colonialist discourse.

The study of European history is also relevant for a justified understanding of the Caribbean literary realm. The breaking up of the feudal system in Europe and the decline of old empires brought about changes in economic structure. The lowest strata of population was forcefully separated from the land they cultivated, giving rise to poverty and discontent all around Europe. This, however, altered their colonial enterprise which assumed a triple function: firstly, colonies in the New and Old world were seen as the main accelerating forces to initiate a rapid process of economic evolution and to foster the financial expansion leading to the industrial revolution in Britain; secondly colonials succeeded in gaining
psychological power and self-confidence, indulging in auto-glorification and unleashing unlimited brutality on their slaves. Thirdly, European colonials ventured to change relations of power for the first time at a global level. New relationships were bred which heralded the modern age.

The migratory wave to West Indies soon stopped by 1930s. Social unrest grew and throughout the Caribbean Islands the working class began to strike calling for better labour conditions, in terms of higher wages, working hours, and so on. The foundation of trade union paved the way for nationalist aspirations and ambitions for independence. Until the beginning of the World War I, the trade union activities were more or less checked by the British central government, adopting the policy of compromise. Token concessions were given to the Colonists restricting simultaneously internal self-decisions in the Colonies. However, the World War I had the crucial effect of spreading the sense of dissatisfaction toward the alleged mother country. As social discontentment gained momentum, the British government found it difficult to maintain order, and a special commission, called the West Indian Royal Commission, was created in 1938 in order to examine the situation and to adopt possible solution. Its hidden purpose, however, was to give the impression of a genuine interest, on the British government’s part, in solving problems which were strongly felt in the British West Indian colonies. Gradually the British mother country was forced to concede constitutional reforms which were to change the nature of the relationship between the colonies and Great Britain. With the rise of labour rebellion in Jamaica in 1938 which forced Britain to legalize trade unions, a
steady process of enfranchisement from British rule began. As a consequence, resistance, riots and strikes began to spread from one island to other, thus enabling an increasing development of national consciousness. By the 1960s, majority of Caribbean Anglophone islands attained freedom in the right sense of the word.

Literature being a mirror of the cultural context in which it is written, the literary works produced in colonial and postcolonial contexts deal with issues of race, identity and tradition, and Caribbean literature is no exception. Along with political struggles to gain independence from Britain the Caribbeans were empirically thinking about the questions of identity and racial relations. Ethnicity and its related cultural practices thus form an unavoidable issue in Caribbean literature.

Ethnicity, as a term, is derived from the Greek word ‘ethnos’ which is normally translated as ‘nation.’ It is a group of people whose members identify with each other, through a common heritage, consisting of a common language and a common culture which often included a shared religion and a tradition of common ancestry. The ‘ethnics’ are the descendents of relatively recent immigrants from non-English-speaking countries. In general terms, it denotes all human groups that explicitly regard themselves and are regarded by others as culturally distinctive. It was Max Weber, the German sociologist who introduced the term “ethnic group” into social studies. Weber defined it as:

[T]hose human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of
customs or both, or because of memories of colonisation and
migration; this belief must be important for group formation;
furthermore it does not matter whether an objective blood
relationship exists. (15)
The ‘ethnic’ thus came to stand in opposition to ‘national,’ to refer to people with
distinct cultural identities who, through migration or conquest, had become
subject to a state or ‘nation’ with a different cultural mainstream.

In Caribbean, the people from different ethnic groups were oscillating
between the lost home and the new ditch, and consequently an uneasy tension did
build up between them. The typical Colonial strategy of ‘divide and rule’
aggravated this tension by strictly establishing social borderlines that could never
be crossed.

The Caribbean intellectuals and politicians who gained reign from the
British hands perpetuated ethnic divisiveness, instead of promoting national
unity. Blacks, East Indians and Chinese people, who populated the islands, were
encouraged to form distinct and separate groups. The existing gap between them
was enforced through the rhetoric of racial and religious backgrounds. By
fostering racial hatred among classes and by generating internal alienation within
the society, the ruling elite followed ‘the divide and rule’ policy of the
imperialists. In fact, the elite were formed according to Eurocentred values,
discarding local history and tradition. They did not encourage interracial
communication between the ex-colonised ethnic groups which would have
rendered them political power and solidarity. Rather they submerged all sorts of
mobility in the rigidly class structured ethnic society at the expense of subjugated people’s self-esteem and self-respect.

The structuring and socialising process was done by instilling superiority and inferiority complex in the minds of each ethnic group. Tsenay Serequeberhan writes, regarding the progressive pretensions of the dominant tradition:

In the name of the universality of values, European colonialism violently universalized its own singular particularity and annihilated the historicity of the colonised. In this context, Western philosophy—in the guise of a disinterested universalistic, transcendental, speculative discourse—served the indispensable function of being the ultimate *veracious buttress* of European conquest. This service, furthermore, was rendered in the name of Man and the emancipation of Man. (4-5)

The division of labour was thoroughly race-determined. East Indians, who were the largest ethnic group, were employed in manual, non-skilled jobs while the Chinese in independent non manual jobs. The blacks were employed in jobs that required skilled workers. This social structure was rigidly hierarchical not only in terms of class, economic status and language prestige but also in terms of ethnicity.

However, the alleged superiority of the English master and his intolerable cruelties and inhumanity pulled the ethnic groups together to stand united against the European imperialism. As a people with history, the ethnic groups have their own distinctive cultures. The values, beliefs, institutions, style of life and general
design for living vary in each group. Yet despite these variations in cultural
distinctiveness, they began to share certain interests which imparted in them a
sense of unison. Hybridity of the multicultural Caribbean came to be equated with
unity. The white society treated the ethnic groups under the categorical ‘they,’
unmindful of the internal differences of the group, which pushed them to a life of
unceasing difficulties. They became targets of discrimination, prejudice,
exploitation and ill-treatment. The definition of ‘they-ness’ that the European
imposed on these subjugated racial groups literally stripped them of basic human
qualities. Winthrop Jordan has observed the inhumanity of the white Europeans in
the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries who compared black Africans to
animals. They addressed them as libidinous savages, transmuting them into the
ultimate form of dehumanization. Yet, Jordan believes that in some perverse
manner, their ‘they-ness’ acted as a shield of protection for them.

The historical designation, ‘they,’ imparted to the ethnic groups by the
European society was instrumental in the development of a sense of ‘we-ness’ in
the group. Thus the multicultural society, with an aggregate of people who lack
common culture and tradition, began to create within themselves a sense of
shared fate and identity. They passively accepted their role of second class
citizens, developing a social separateness which led, in Stuart Hall’s terms, to the
‘birth of colony society’ (Hall et. al. 344). The ‘undesirable’ citizens clubbed
together to fight against the cultural fragmentation imposed upon them by the
whites. The Caribbean identity based on links between the black communities
and their inherent unity is often reflected in the Caribbean literature. Writers like
Aime Cesaire of Martinique, Luis Pales Matos of Puerto Rico, Jacques Roumain of Haiti and Leon Damas of French Guiana attempted to portray this distinctive Caribbean literary identity in the 1920s.

Homi K. Bhabha’s coinage ‘hybridity’ is also relevant in the context of Caribbean identity. Before an analysis of the term an understanding of ‘identity’ is essential. Irvin Cemil Schick gives the comprehensive idea about identity:

Identity is the socially constructed, socially sanctioned complex of self significations deriving from an individual’s membership in such collectivities as class, race, gender, sexuality, generation, region, ethnicity, religion and nation. It plays a decisive role in human behaviour: one acts from a certain positionality and in accordance with a certain world view or set of values, interpreting data with help of certain parameter—all these deeply rooted in identity. At the same time, identity is never ‘complete’; rather, it is always under construction. To put it more explicitly identity is not an object but a process. Furthermore, this process is not even: times of crises or transition are often periods of particularly intensive identity construction . . . identity is (a) representation, and the representation of identity, whether to one self or to others, is in fact its very construction. (19)

Ethnic identity emerges from collective group consciousness that imparts a sense of belonging derived from membership in a community bound putatively by common descent and culture. As a subjective phenomenon, it imparts to the
individual a sense of belonging and to the community a sense of solidarity.

Isaiah Berlin has pointed to the pivotal part that belonging plays in human life:

. . . just as people need to eat and drink, to have security and freedom of movement, so too they need to belong to a group. Deprived of this dimension in life, they feel cut off, lonely, diminished, unhappy. To be human means to be able to feel at home somewhere, with one’s own kind. (23)

Identity as belonging can be acquired through membership in various communities bound by one or more social attributes such as race, language, religion, culture, region, etc. In each case, the individual has to perceive that his or her relation to a linguistic, religious, or cultural community is a unique link that confers a special sense of personal value, importance and collective meaning. Often, this identity is formed in contradistinction to the claims of other groups to a similar sense of uniqueness, so that in a real sense, identity formation is a relational and comparative phenomenon locked into ‘we-they’ antipathies which seem to be hostile in an overt sense. In the introduction to *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* Barth has stated that the notion of belongingness can denote inclusion and exclusion simultaneously; it establishes a boundary, even though the line of demarcation may be fluid and situational social constructs that are ascribed subjectively by the individuals themselves.

Caribbean identity, however, has to be discovered and constructed anew in the altered scenario. Caribbean people are forced to reconstruct their identities for they have lost most of what they had in the transmigration from the Old World.
While residents at home the natives of Caribbean islands became virtual strangers searching for familiar persons and places. Often without family, they were entrusted in an alien land, forcing them to cling to each other like suddenly rediscovered lost brothers and sisters. The words of Walcott echo the Caribbean experience as a whole:

That is the basis of the Antillean experience, this shipwreck of fragments, these echoes, these shards of a huge tribal vocabulary, these partially remembered customs. They survived the Middle Passage and the Fatel Razack, the ship that carried the first indentured Indians from the port of Madras to the cane fields, that carried the chained Cromwellian convict and the Sephardic Jew, the Chinese grocer and the Lebanese merchants selling clothes samples on his bicycle. This medley of memory applies to the polyglot descendants of the new Caribbean natives, separated from their Old World roots even though cultural residues persist in one form or the other. (qtd. in J. Puri 23)

The rootlessness, displacement and alienation that the Caribbean people had to undergo left them bereft of any shade of identity.

The values and beliefs one holds are also the markers of identity. But the Caribbeans, since they constitute a diverse whole, lack the notion of value system or the belief patterns of their own which would have helped them determine their subjectivity and relation to others around them. Identity, being a process of construction in terms of gender, class, race, gender, sexuality, generation, region,
ethnicity, religion and nation, Caribbeans stand on a debit side when speaking of
sexual identity, national identity, cultural identity, historical identity or even
personal identity. Since it is as an area populated by a diverse polyglot of peoples,
it is difficult in the Caribbean islands to locate its boundaries. There are whites,
blacks, browns, yellows, reds, and an assortment of shades in between with
different nationalities like Europeans, Africans, Asian Indians, Indonesian
Javanese, Chinese, Aboriginal Indians, and many mixes. They also belong to
varied religious sects like Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, etc. They speak
in a multitude of tongues–Spanish, English, Dutch, French, English, and a diverse
number of Creoles such as Hindustani, Bhojpuri, Urdu, etc. They coexisted in
different combinations of race, religion, language, and culture; and they dwelled
on small islands and large, some poorly endowed with natural resources, others
abundantly. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, a Caribbean scholar remarked:

Perhaps, no other region of the world is so richly varied . . .

Caribbean societies are inescapably heterogeneous . . . the
Caribbean has long been an area where some people live next to
others who are remarkably distinct. The region–and indeed
particular territories within it–has long been multi-racial,
multi-lingual, stratified, and some would say, multi-cultural. (21)

Amidst this diversity, the concept of a Caribbean people and the construction of a
Caribbean identity would seem challenging. The shifting sense of Caribbean
identity can thus be defined as the outcome of the ‘hybridity’ of its culture, which
is its hallmark.
The term ‘hybridity’ originates from the Latin *hybrida*, a term used to classify the offspring of a tame sow and a wild boar. A hybrid is something that is mixed, and hybridity means mixture. The rhetoric of hybridity, sometimes referred to as ‘hybrid talk’ is fundamentally associated with the emergence of postcolonial discourse and its critiques of cultural imperialism. Key theorists in this realm are Homi K. Bhabha, Stuart Hall, Gayatri Spivak, and Paul Gilroy, who often responded to the increasing multicultural awareness in the literature of postcolonial and magical realist authors such as Salman Rushdie, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Milan Kundera and J. M. Coetzee. A key text in the development of hybridity theory is Homi K. Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture* which analyses the liminality of hybridity as a paradigm of colonial anxiety. His key argument is that colonial hybridity, as a cultural form, has produced ambivalence in the colonial masters and has altered the authority of power. Bhabha’s arguments have become seminal in the discussion of hybridity. Another key figure in hybridity theory is Mikhail Bakhtin, whose concept of polyphony is employed by many analysts of hybrid discourses in folklore and anthropology.

Studies show that by the end of the 18th century, an argument rose in the circles of anatomy that Africans and Asians were racially inferior to Europeans. This notion cultivated a fear of miscegenation in connection with the thought that the offspring of racial interbreeding would result in the dilution of the European race. Hybrids came to be seen as an aberration, worse than the inferior races, a weak and diseased mutation. However, the social transformations in the nineteenth century resulted in the ending of colonial mandates, followed by rising
immigration, and economic liberalisation which profoundly altered the use and understanding of the term hybridity. In the postcolonial context, hybridity gave the immigrants, in Homi K. Bhabha’s view, the opportunity to cross the imaginary borderlines. In the West Indies, hybridity gave the ethnic varieties, an impetus to stand united against all odds.

In Caribbean societies, cultural and national identity had always been a threat to their very existence. Stuart Hall, one of the leading experts on Caribbean culture, states that identity and a sense of belongingness have always presented themselves as challenges for Caribbean people. They were often disturbed by the central questions—‘Who are we?’ and ‘Who were we?’ The key to the issue is denotation of the word ‘we,’ something which is always complicated and controversial. To quote Anton Allahar:

The Caribbean can be many things to many people: a geographic region somewhere in American backyard, an English-speaking outpost of the British Empire, an exciting holiday destination for North Americans and Europeans, a place where dirty money is easily laundered, and even an undefined, exotic area that contains the dreaded Bermuda Triangle, the mythical lost city of El Dorado, the fabled Fountain of Youth and the island home of Robinson Crusoe . . . As a concept or notion the Caribbean can also be seen to have a marvellous elasticity that defies the imposition of clear geographic boundaries, has no distinct religious tradition, no agreed-upon set of political values, and no single cultural
orientation. What, then, is the Caribbean? Who can justifiably claim
to belong to it? Of the various peoples who have come to comprise
the region, whose identity markers will be most central in defining
the whole? For not all citizens of a nation or a region will be
equally privileged and not all will have equal input in the definition
of national or regional identity. (125)

West Indies, being a culturally and ethnically diverse society, people of
different cultural backgrounds were placed together in a hierarchical social order
which constituted slave masters, forcefully migrated enslaved persons and voluntary immigrants. It is quite complex to define the cultural dynamics evolved from these social relationships. The populace of West Indies clearly mirrored a whole plethora of social types based upon ‘race’ and ‘colour.’ The categorization of the West Indian society shows the intensity of the question of race and ethnicity:

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<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negro</td>
<td>child of Negro and Negro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sambo</td>
<td>child of mulatto and Negro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mulatto</td>
<td>child of white man and negress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quadroon</td>
<td>child of Mulatto women and white man</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mustee</td>
<td>child of quadroon and white man</td>
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<td>Mustiphini</td>
<td>child of mustee and white man</td>
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<td>Quintroon</td>
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<td>Octoroon</td>
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This complicated social structure intensified the racist dogmas, significantly striking a strong impact on the superior/inferior question. For centuries racist ideologies justified the oppression of one group by the other, and the subjugated group internalised the dominant norms. These structural features have continuously influenced the ways in which people experienced citizenship. The ethnic identity for West Indies thus stemmed from different historical and social tensions.

The literature of the Caribbean can be analysed in this backdrop. The corridors of Caribbean literary history reveal the oral literal tradition of the islands which faded away into the pages of oblivion even without retaining the mark of its existence. But with the newly-won spirit of liberation, writers like Sam Selvon, Derek Walcott, etc. began to hark back the lost literary tradition of orality which was literally annihilated by the master’s language. These writers understood the power of written language which Jacques Derrida coined as ‘logocentrism.’ Heretofore, history of the colonies was written by the white masters whose alleged superiority gave them the possession of the power of writing. With the advent of decolonisation, writers of the colonies began to tread on the arena of writing their ‘history.’ This resulted in the rise of postcolonial writing.

Postcolonial literature can be viewed as the offspring of multiculturalism and decolonisation. The colonial rule was established and consolidated, as V.Y Mudimbe notes in *The Invention of Africa*, on the basis of the domination of physical space, the reformation of natives’ minds, and the integration of local
economic histories into the western perspective (2). These complementary projects constitute what might be called the colonizing structure, which completely embraces the physical, human and spiritual aspects of the colonizing experience. The writers from the former British colonies took an active effort to decolonize their literature by releasing it from the bondage and boundaries imposed by the constraints of the English language. They radically endeavoured to recreate, reinvent and reassemble a literature of their own.

It was this literature which posed a direct retaliation to the colonial ideology that denigrated the ‘native’ culture and silenced the ‘native’ voices. The postcolonial literature commissioned a thorough subversion of the subalternising and silencing propensities of the colonialist representation. It advocated a profound decentering of the dominant tradition of the literary world. Eurocentrism, diffused with its binary opposition ‘Europe and its Others,’ was thwarted of its alleged power and superiority. The Shakespearean Prospero vs. Caliban metaphor has been used in many different postcolonial contexts to represent and to reverse the colonial relationship between the master and the servant.

Language is one of the first and most effective weapons used by postcolonial writers to struggle against the dominant Western discourse. As has been surmised:

. . . language consists of much more than words on paper; the spirit of what is communicated is more significant than what is printed as text. The use of written language requires an understanding of its
construction, the ability to apply language, and a cultural context. Cultural context comes about as a result of writing as a member of a particular society or culture, enabling the writer with techniques, clichés, and phrases particular to the given society. It is only when the writer intends to write from a non-native perspective that the cultural context is minimized, and even then few aspects are still evident in the produced literature. (Jefferson)

Third World postcolonial writers demonstrated a sense of urgency to recreate social and cultural selfhood through their language. They all questioned the centrality of the dominant discourses, which claimed to be universal. They challenged the norms of the centre and, in Linda Hutcheon’s words, “challenge[d] their transparency” (53) by taking hold of the language of the centre and, as Cixous advocates, transforming it from within.

The socio-economic distinction is clearly marked in the language, English. One of the main features of imperial oppression was control over language. The imperial education system installed a ‘standard’ version of the metropolitan language as the norm, and marginalized all ‘variants’ as impurities. Language becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of ‘truth,’ ‘order,’ and ‘reality’ becomes established. The power that English enjoyed is rejected with the emergence of an effective postcolonial voice. The postcolonial writers forcefully took over the power of language from the dominant European culture along with its power of writing.
“The English language is a tool of power, domination and elitist identity, and of communication across continents” (291), opines Braj. B. Kachru in his work, *The Alchemy of English*. Postcolonial writings respond to English’s pervasiveness through two major responses which include rejection and subversion. Fearing English’s encroachment on indigenous culture and traditions, some of the writers like Ngugi Wa Thiong’o demanded a complete rejection of the imperial language. According to him “The bullet was the means of the physical subjugation. Language was the means of the spiritual subjugation” (287). He believed that the retention of the colonisers’ language will prevent the nation from gaining independence. In the chapter entitled “The Language of African Literature” in *Decolonising the Mind*, Wa Thiong’o wrote: “Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world” (290). However a great number of postcolonial writers chose to write in English, the very language of the colonisers.

Subversion involves the use of English as a means of retaliation; hence the concept of ‘the Empire writes back’ is relevant in this context. The postcolonial writers’ adoption of the colonial language by constructing it into a “very different linguistic vehicle” (Ashcroft et.al. 283) epitomises their wise utilisation of the imperial language. The ‘standard’ British English inherited from the empire should be distinguished from the english of postcolonial countries in order to focus on the complex ways in which the English language has been used by these writers, and to indicate their own sense of difference. Though British imperialism
resulted in the spread of English across the globe, the english of Jamaicans is not the english of Canadians, Maoris, or Kenyans. A differentiation should be made between what is proposed as a standard code, English (the language of the erstwhile imperial centre), and the linguistic code, english, which has been transformed and subverted into several distinctive varieties throughout the world. In practice, the history of this distinction between English and english has been between the claims of a powerful ‘centre’ and a multitude of intersecting usages designated as ‘peripheries.’ The language of these ‘peripheries’ was shaped by an oppressive discourse of power. Yet they have been the site of some of the most exciting and innovative literatures of the modern period in which is included the Caribbean literature.

The postcolonial writers, who do use English, however, have not only just used language; they have also modified it, in the process of generating alternative literary possibilities. Taking hold of English language they undertook a whole new process to represent a whole new identity, the diasporic identity of West Indies. As Helen Cixous advocates, by transforming it from within they forced the adopted language to truly articulate the real islander and his related issues. They refused to be confined by its meanings and creatively transformed it so that it no longer conforms to the logic either/or. The postcolonial writers moulded the language in such a fashion that the postcolonial writers need not feel compelled to adhere either to extreme forms of traditionalism or to those of Westernisation. Such liberation enabled the colonised to signify and to conceive them differently from the other to which they have been reduced within the colonial discourse.
They were against the notion of conforming to a predefined category whether it is that of gender, race, or nation. Rather they took the process of construction into their own hands in an effort to go beyond those categories dictated upon them by the white elite. By dismantling the logic either/or and adhering to a different logic, the postcolonial writers creatively constructed a new identity that transgresses the boundaries set by those in the centre.

By ‘writing back’ to the metropolitan centre in the language of the metropolis itself, they desired to speak on behalf of their own culture independent from European standards. The literary strategies created and employed by these writers laid the foundation towards the decolonisation of their literary field.

A survey of the different angles of Caribbean literature is necessary at this juncture. Being one of the new literatures that began under colonialism, the development of postcolonial literature has paralleled the rise of national movements and its themes and subject-matter have often been the problems resulting from colonialism and independence. Sharing with other developing new literatures, its characteristics included the creation of myths of the past, the use of local scenery, the study of local, especially peasant lives, an emphasis on the community, race or nation, the treatment of individual as representative or typical, and the modification of Standard English as a literary language by the use of local forms and rhythms of speech.

The origin of the Caribbean literature can be traced in the literary tradition, though namesake, of American Indians such as the Caribs or the Arawaks, the true natives of the islands. According to Britannica Online, the American Indians
who existed before Columbus’ discovery of the islands left very few carving or petroglyph. Their oral culture faded away and died out when the natives were exterminated during the Spanish colonisation in the sixteenth century, leaving behind scarcely anything which was uniquely native to the Caribbean islands. The West African people who were brought as slaves to replace the Amerindians did not possess a written tradition of their own. Anyhow, even in the bondage of slavery they succeeded in passing on a culture of orality, of storytelling and song that declares itself as the evidence of an African heritage in the Caribbean.

The early stages of the Caribbean literature was, however, imitative. Along with other new literatures, the Caribbean writers tried to imitate the English models. The education that the colonised received instilled in them the notion that White values and European civilization remain paramount. Contiguously, they disparaged all that was Black or local. As a result the actual landscape of the writer was at odds with the landscape that inhabited the creative imagination. Self was at odds with self. Reflecting the condition of the society as a whole, the writers of those days of colonialism turned out to be psychically fragmented and culturally schizophrenic. They felt that the landscape they inhabited itself was a mirror to this sense of futility since the West Indies was a fractured archipelago, a broken backbone. In their search for a language to speak their wholeness into creation, they found nothing but that which was borrowed from or imposed by Europe. In place of a landscape, they found only jungle, volcano, plantation, beaches and sea, a landscape barren of a ‘civilized’ society. They could find only half-buried, half-excavated fragments, when they groped for tradition. Even their
hunt for history was in vain as they found only indignity. This led them to mould their mindset in such a fashion that they could see dignity only in European. As a result there was a great deal of imitative stuff written during the thirties and forties. Daizal R. Samad records:

It would sound foolish yet all the writers wanted to be Keats or Shelley, Tennyson or Coleridge, Wordsworth or Arnold. They wrote blissfully of autumn, winter, snow, and daffodils—elements quite foreign to their actual landscape, but which belonged to the landscape of their imaginations. They wrote in a language that was contrived, wooden, alien to what they felt, to their hopes, and to their mission, a mission not imposed by some political, policing body, but by the necessity of history itself. And this task, above all else, was the re-assembly of the individual into a thing of dignity, wholeness and worth. (4)

However, with the fifties and sixties, writers began to contemplate on the worth of writing in a style different from the metropolitan centre. They endeavoured to speak about their own racial heritage. To achieve this they had to break away from the racial garrisons within which they were imprisoned. For this they began to distance themselves from the islands for a short span and migrated to Europe or England. This movement was triggered by Edgar Mittelholzer and Jean Rhys who were followed by C.L.R. James, George Lamming, V.S. Naipaul, Edward Kamau Brathwaite, Wilson Harris, Samuel Selvon, John Hearne, Martin Carter, Roger Maise, Michael Anthony and Austin Clark. Derek Walcott
was among the few to remain at home, writing out of Trinidad and St. Lucia. The distancing from the West Indies and proximity to the centre helped them to open their eyes. Each writer tried to blend the shattered pieces of the society and his own self by writing a unified whole into being. This new enlightenment about the worth of their own culture compelled them to write catering to the native taste. But this compulsion to write for one’s kin was disturbing to them since they were confused about the apt strategy to be adopted. In “What the Twilight Says”, Derek Walcott writes:

The future of West Indian militancy lies in art. All revolutions begin amateurishly, with forged or stolen weapons, but the West Indian artist knew the need for revolt without knowing what weapons to use, and just as a comfortable self-hugging pathos hid in the most polemical of West Indian novels, so there was in the sullen ambition of the West Indian actor a fear that he lacked proper weapons, that his voice, colour and body were no match for the civilised concepts of theatre . . . The West Indian mind, historically hung-over, exhausted, prefers to take its revenge in nostalgia, to narrow its eyelids in a schizophrenic daydream of an Eden that existed before its exile. Its fixation is for the breasts of a nourishing mother, and this is true not only of the generations of slaves’ children, but of those brought here through indigence or necessity . . . (18)

To take revenge was the aim of these writers. But to accomplish this, the West Indian artists were necessitated to remove their lips from the breasts of
cultural mothers who were theirs and not theirs. They needed to have:

. . . descended from the laps of luxuries, as it were, and to crawl on their hands and their knees, searching the land, listening to its tremors which were as the rumble of their own thoughts; feeling its pulse which was but the beat of their own hearts; harkening to the rush of surf, the torrent of their own blood. (Samad)

This necessitated the artists to embark on an arduous journey to a world where their own innate sensations resonate. They had to forgo the racist dogmas and racial roles that history had conferred upon them. But what awaited them in their world was the disparate islands with all the disparate peoples. Like the landscape, society was also fragmented, shattered into pieces. The broken islands were a real replica of the people that they populated. The writers were to take up this challenge of blending the literal archipelago, picking up each shard that drew blood. Though the journey was painstaking the writers portrayed in true colours the unique West Indies with its multicultural ethnic societies, hybrid identities and overlapping languages.

The emancipation of the Caribbean colonies from the cruel clutches of the British Empire unleashed on them the joy of freedom, liberation and enlightenment. The first literary breakthroughs, departing from mere imitation of the conventions of the European colonisers, came outside the Anglophone Caribbean, in the French and Spanish islands. Studies prove that the writers like Aime Cesaire of Martinique, Luis Pales Matos of Puerto Rico, Jacques Roumain of Haiti, etc. were the first to have carved out a distinctive Caribbean literary
identity. The identity that they moulded was not based on European ideals but on links between black communities in the Caribbean. After World War II, the British West Indies also picked up this challenge. With the growth of newly independent states like Barbados, Trinidad and Jamaica, the Anglophone literary personalities of the islands began to develop a writing tradition focusing on the Caribbean consciousness. Pioneers of this movement include Vic Reid who published *New Day* in 1949, George Lamming with *In the Castle of My Skin* in 1953 and V.S. Naipaul who penned *Mystic Masseur* in 1957 and the canonised *A House for Mr. Biswas* in 1961. The prominent writers began to be fascinated and absorbed with the collective history of Caribbean islands.

In an age when many authors turned away from the past to contemplate the present and its technological bridge to the future, the Caribbean writers like George Lamming, Caryl Phillips and V.S. Naipaul engaged themselves with the history of their islands and the processes by which that history was created. They endeavoured to unveil through their writings ‘the falsification of history’ by the white hands. This was accomplished by exploring the annals of Caribbean literary tradition. They also gave an emphasis on the themes like local colour and landscape, social realism which was felt to be more nationalistic, a protest tradition, the exploration of a divided cultural heritage, the discovery of how to treat regional subject-matter more poetically and artistically, and a contemporary literature which is both local in its particularities and in tune with modern writing elsewhere.
A deeper and more penetrating exploration of West Indian history was triggered with the rise of Caribbean Renaissance. The Great Depression in the United States in 1929 resulted in evoking social and political consciousness in Caribbean people. For the first time, the Caribbean people felt a greater sense of being at home and the necessity to examine what this sense of home implied. The writers began to rely on a mixture of naturalist and realist tendencies, depicting social conditions rather than psychological issues thereby delineating the issues that confronted the society. The people of the period, more significantly, the writers began to involve more actively in their national and political affairs. They attempted to align creative writing to local radical politics under the influence of Russian Revolution and Indian Nationalist Movement. Nadi Edwards observes:

Trinidad popular culture was appropriated by the writers of the 1930s in order to initiate a decolonised literary and cultural practice. The barrack-yard culture of Port of Spain, with its expressive vehicles of picong, calypso and Carnival, provided local aesthetic models that enabled C. L. R. James, Alfred Mendes and others to produce a self-consciously local literature. Necessarily, this period of more intense political activity (the societies achieved adult suffrage in the 1940s) ushered in a writing that bore all the marks of the political aspirations of the people. (qtd. in Cudjoe, “Identity”)

The literature of this period has been concerned with such contrasts as the poor and middle class; the history and the present; the desire for and suspicion of education; dispossession and freedom; racial difference and creolisation;
metropolitan and regional culture; local pride and embarrassment. The writers of the period dealt with the common themes which included the search for ‘roots’ and for identity, social and historical injustices, feelings of imprisonment, the desire for order, the discovery of traditions or a folk culture, and the creation of a new society.

The post-war years marked a new wave of West Indian literature which reflected a growing nationalism, hopes of a regional federation, feelings of anti-colonialism, and interest in local culture. The writers were not only prepared to examine issues of personhood, they also examined the impact of colonialism on their lives. It is within this period that the literary names such as Edgar Mittleholzer, Seepersad and V. S. Naipaul, Vic Reid, Roger Mais, Sam Selvon, Martin Carter, George Lamming, Wilson Harris and Derek Walcott began to appear. Many of these writers received their first start in several new magazines like Trinidad, The Beacon, Bim, Focus and Kyk-Over-Al which were published in this period. The usefulness of such publications to the development of West Indian literature can be seen in the comments of V.S. Naipaul. He details the problems faced by the writers before 1950. His father Seepersad Naipaul wrote a collection of short stories, Gurudeva and other Indian Tales, which he had to publish at his own expense, which he sold locally in Trinidad. He expresses the dilemma thus:

. . . reading to a small group, publication in a magazine soon lost to view: writing in Trinidad was an amateur activity, and this was all the encouragement a writer could expect. There were no magazines
that paid; there were no established magazines; there was only the 
Guardian . . . My father was a poorly local writer, and writers like 
that run the risk of ridicule . . . (qtd. in King 21)

The writers of the period also explored areas of experience that were not subjected to literary expression. Seepersad Naipaul and Samuel Selvon examined the Asian aspect of Caribbean identity; Mittleholzer, the mixed nature of their identity; while Harris looked within the heart of the South American landscape to understand how that aspect had shaped the present Caribbean condition. The works of these writers reflected the social and cultural presence that had developed among the middle class of the period and the increasing awareness that their values were not necessarily those of the populace.

The 1950s is perhaps the most important decade of West Indian writing in the sense of their having established an identity, an awareness of common themes and a canon of significant writers and texts. The Trinidadian writer Sam Selvon; the St. Lucian poet, Derek Walcott; George Lamming from Barbados are some of the prominent figures whose literary outputs have rendered a timeless, universal and classical dignity to the West Indian experience. They endeavoured to capture in their own unique ways the picaresque quality which characterises the West Indian lives. Literary production proceeded apace even after 1960s. Apart from the prominent writers, most of the Anglophone writers began to take their place in the literary firmament. They began to examine the social and cultural problems of newly independent nations in the postcolonial world. By the early 1970s many writers came to be involved in the debates concerning ideology,
neocolonialism, black consciousness, folk traditions and an African heritage which resulted from the failure of independence to bring into being social justice and authentic national culture.

A Prospero/Caliban relation prefigures in the postcolonial Anglophone writings. They have strived to envision the rift between the European ruler and the native slave, the civilized and the savage. The new language that the postcolonial writers adopted from the colonisers gave them the advantage to express how they feel towards the colonised. Caliban’s attitude in *The Tempest* is highly visible in the vocabulary of colonial writers who used the imposed European tongue to represent their condition.

Each society has its prevalent tradition to be proud of, whether it is oral or written. But the status of tradition depends upon the status of the language being used. It was always a complex issue to deal with the questions about orality and literature and their reciprocal relationship. Though orality has its own power and prestige in literature, it is often misinterpreted. The body of rituals, traditional ballads, heroic poems and many other contemporary genres such as pop songs, folk and protest songs represent the culture and tradition of the societies in which they originated. Yet, as they belong to the category of oral literature, they often had to undergo different problems of interpretation which make them suffer serious prejudices in the academic world.

The oral literature involves a highly complex aesthetics, yet it has been assessed only as the product of ‘inferior societies’ which does not deserve the attention of scholars of ‘high’ literature. A set of binary oppositions was created
and accepted, declaring orality and literature to be opposites. Literature was considered to be superior over the ‘other’ because ‘writing’ or written literature was considered to be associated with higher refinement. Since a written text is the output of a single individual, its paternity is immediately, univocally identified. Moreover the personality of the author lingers as an everlasting signature giving it a fixed and immobile permanence. On the other hand, oral literature was conceived to be performed with a scope of many different versions of the same ballad, song or tale. In it, the collective, natural and spontaneous element was given priority at the expense of the artistic and individual.

A new interest seeped up in oral culture at the turn of the twentieth century which was directly related to the experience of decolonisation. Postcolonial studies gave great importance to the study of the ‘other’ as a text. The postcolonial writers questioned the mainstream literature which thrived on a superior position at the expense of ‘other’ marginalized cultures. They devised new paradigms in the literary panorama in order to locate the oral tradition on par with the written tradition. In the postcolonial context, the biased approach towards oral tradition is brushed aside, and it is no longer seen as the product of a ‘primitive’ or ‘preliterate’ society. Instead its presence is being detected even in highly developed societies, in the form of protest songs or street ballads. The power conferred on the written word by the imperialist forces under the guise of law, administration, education and bureaucracy is being thoroughly questioned by the postcolonial writers. Saba Saakana, a postcolonial critic, writes about the ‘destruction of mind’ of the colonised in a highly political vein. He argues that the
falsification of history, the denial of reality and the penalisation of those who dared to reveal the secrets of European past, all characterise the charade of civilisation as propounded by the dominant European view. He claims that Europe’s claim to civilisation is based upon its destruction of another nation’s civilisation. The cultural theft operated by Europeans has to be tackled properly in order to unveil the truth behind ‘the falsification of history,’ as Saakana calls it (21).

The postcolonial writers reconsider the traditional opposition between ‘oral-primitive’ and ‘written-modern’ cultures. The validity of the presumed European superiority is questioned by identifying empirical overlaps between orality and writing often shaded by ‘historical falsification.’ Postcolonial writers demonstrated the misguided preliminary assumptions by proving it to the world that orality and writing are interconnected and it is difficult and pointless to distinguish and separate them. Tannen points out:

\[
\ldots \text{literate tradition does not replace oral. Rather when literacy was introduced, the two are superimposed upon and intertwined with each other. Similarly, no individual is either ‘oral or ‘literate.’} \]

Rather, people use devices associated with both traditions in various settings. (3)

She illustrates how orality and literature merge:

\[
\ldots \text{creative writing is a genre which is necessarily written but which makes use of features associated with oral language because it depends for its effect on interpersonal involvement or the sense of} \]
identification between the writer or the characters and the reader. (14)

The postcolonial writers, redefining the status of orality, thus put into question the monolithic structure of Western ‘logos.’ By adopting new paradigms and values, they retrieved the oral cultural practices and techniques and gave it a new shade of novelisation. They attempted a demythologisation of Western culture by subverting the western classics. In the postcolonial rewriting of the classics, these writers undertake a conscious exploitation of the potentialities of oral/written interplay. The metamorphosis of the European sacred/scribal canon thus led to, in Louis Bennet’s terms, colonisation in reverse.

Caribbean literature also adopted the politics of language as a token of its revenge against Eurocentred logocentrism. The Caribbean novelists, poets and playwrights fully exploited the potentialities of subversive resistance of the Creole language. Mixing different cultural influences, extensively drawing from the oral/written and standard/Creole continua, and playing with the blending of several languages are thus some of the strategies used by West Indian artists. They succeeded in corroding the English canon by undermining the supposed purity of English language and of English culture.

West Indies, being populated with multilingual people, was a hotpot blending different but great languages like English, French, Dutch, Spanish, Hindi, Arabic and Chinese. Though it was difficult to integrate these different languages, the Caribbean writers painstakingly reassembled the shards, the fragments of language in their own fashion. Multilingualism becomes the mark of
Caribbean writing where each writer sat with an individual vocabulary to capture the story of broken humanity of West Indies. There was no uniform use of language in Caribbean literature, for uniform tradition is alien to the Caribbean. The language—like the Caribbean person, like the Caribbean society—was composed of shards on the ground. The typical plight of Caribbean writers is echoed in the words of Raja Rao, a postcolonial writer of India, who defines the problem of his language in the Foreword to *Kanthapura* thus:

One has to convey in a language that is not one’s own the spirit that is one’s own. One has to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought–movement that looks maltreated in an alien language. I use the word ‘alien,’ yet English is not really an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual make-up—like Sanskrit or Persian was before—but not of our emotional make-up. We are all instinctively bilingual, many of us writing in our own language and in English. We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians. We have grown to look at the large world as part of us. Our method of expression therefore has to be a dialect which will someday prove to be as distinctive and colourful as the Irish or the American. Time alone will justify it. (v)

Caribbean writers, as a whole, do not have their ‘own’ language. It is worthwhile to quote M.G. Smith, a Caribbean scholar who commented on
the uncertainty of the Caribbean language:

Within the Caribbean taken as a whole, no other differentiator is as obvious and salient in separating Caribbean peoples into large interactive groupings than language. The Caribbean geographical area was truncated in the process of colonisation into linguistic spheres of imperial control with higher levels of interaction among residents of a particular region than among islanders who may be geographically contiguous but belong to a different linguistic area. The English-speaking Commonwealth Caribbean has little interaction with the Spanish, Dutch, and French spheres which tend to maintain greater contact with their colinguistic metropoles and other ex-colonies of their metropoles. (28)

The fragmentation and division of the different linguistic states due to imperial confrontation left a cleavage in their language acquisition. The multiethnic groups which included Blacks, Coloureds and Whites who inhabited the islands were devoid of a single language which they could cling to as ‘nation language.’ Hence they evolved a new language out of the old ones to cope up with the new situations and surroundings. As Grace Nichols, a West Indian poet speaks out in her poem *i is a long memorized woman*:

I have crossed an ocean
I have lost my tongue
from the root of the old one
a new one has sprung. (87)
These new languages are the offspring of English itself, the tongue of the masters. They came to be known as pidgin and creole. Colonisation is the typical contact situation which gave rise to pidgin and creole. A pidgin language is formed when an immediate means of communication is needed by at least two different communities. It is a language acquired by communities involved in a contact situation and consists of a basic vocabulary and simplified grammar. Thus, pidgin is a contact language of two or more communities whose native languages are not mutually intelligible. The result is a simplified restricted language that is capable to express basic needs in elementary exchange situations, like in trading or sailing contexts.

As D. Bickerton puts it, pidgin is not a native language and it implies reduction of linguistic resources and restrictions of use, while the process of creolisation involves an expansion of its basic structures and vocabulary. Creolisation is an evolution of pidgin towards more established forms, and it arises when a second generation of speakers adopts the pidgin as their first language. In other words, when pidgin becomes mother tongue of a community, a process of creolisation has started. As a consequence, vocabulary is expanded to fit the larger needs of a community. While creolisation involves the acquisition of a first language, pidginisation concerns second language learning. However, there is much debate as to whether pidgin is a necessary step in the creation of creole. L. Todd argues that a Creole can emerge from a pidgin in two ways: “Speakers of the pidgin may be put in a position where they can no longer communicate by using their mother tongues. This happened on a large scale in the Caribbean
during the slave trade” (2). The only language common to these slaves was the variety of the European tongue they had acquired on the African coast, or on board ship or while working on plantations. Children born into this situation necessarily acquired the pidgin as first language and thus a Creole came into being.

This modality of evolution, however, is not unique because a Creole can evolve out of different contact situations. For instance, people can deliberately choose to adopt a pidgin as their community language, due to its usefulness and convenience. As L. Todd suggests, it gradually becomes a natural means of expression for larger strata of population: “In this way children can acquire it as one of the first languages. This second type of creolisation can probably occur only in multilingual areas where an auxiliary language is essential to progress” (2).

Creole, thus, became the medium of most of the Caribbean writers. Even the Anglophone Caribbean writers made a vast use of the local variants in order to express their unique thoughts and emotions in their literary outputs in true colours. As V.S. Naipaul, one of the famous figures in Caribbean literature has said: “English language was mine, the tradition was not” (Cudjoe, Naipaul 31). What he conveys is that the narrative voice in his fiction and non-fiction is always Standard English, although his characters speak in local varieties.

Caribbean Creole was looked down upon by the colonisers derogatorily calling it as broken English. Creole was always given a low prestige in contrast with the high prestige language, English. However, Caribbean writers chose to
contaminate Western influence by voluntarily using ‘other’ narratives. By means of linguistic and literary contamination, the Caribbean writers sought to subvert the European intelligentsia. Writers such as V.S. Naipaul, George Lamming and Samuel Selvon heralded a Caribbean literary movement, with its own peculiar nuances, tones and hues. As Kenneth Ramchand, a literary critic, points out:

West Indian literature would seem to be the only substantial literature in which the dialect-speaking character is the central character . . . This characteristic feature of West Indian writing reflects the more obviously new event—the centrality of the Black or Coloured character and the articulation of this hitherto obscure and stereotyped person. (96)

West Indian authors, writing in the twentieth century, are the educated products of the dialect-speaking group, so they have a familiarity with the dialect and a competence in the Standard English.

Caribbean Creole, as a language, is very complex and even more is the complexity in understanding Creole community. Creole, as they are connotatively addressed, form a group of people who are white skinned, but emotionally an islander. They are the white settlers in the black islands. In the West Indian history, the predicament of the White Creole community is rather a pathetic one. They form the displaced group who live in no man’s land. The creolised whites in the Caribbean are a minority group comprising the plantation owners who preferred to remain in Caribbean islands unlike others who went back to settle in England. In reality they have no other place to go back to other than the
West Indian plantations which is their only home. As Dash has rightly said: “. . . for the creolised white, England can never be real, never be as alive and as vibrant as the West Indies which has formed their psyche” (qtd. in Nasta 229). However, after Emancipation, this community became the butt of black hatred. Rejected by both Blacks and Whites, they became a much despicable group. Hence, it is surmised that a study about the Creole dilemma has to be undertaken.

The thesis explores the identity politics inherent in the narratives of postcolonial period. The texts under study are the representative discourses of white Creole literature wherein the authors utilise counter discursive strategies to dig out the latent politics in literature. They explore the white hegemony of the West and their hidden agenda of stereotyping the people of the East in the colonial discourses. Through their texts they attempt a radical dismantling of European codes and a postcolonial subversion and appropriation of the dominant European discourses. The narrative power of the West conceals the truth; and depicts and canvasses a reverse picture of reality. Consequently an entirely new or wholly recovered ‘reality,’ free of all colonial taint has to be dug out.

The motive of the thesis is to investigate, through the texts of Allfrey and Rhys, the means by which Europe imposed and maintained its imperial codes in the colonial domination. It is an attempt to unveil the challenges posed by postcolonial literature to the Universalist and hegemonic pretensions that dominate the world literature.

The thesis poses the postcolonial questions and reinvents the modes of cultural perception—the ways of viewing and of being viewed. Being born as
postcolonial subjects themselves, Allfrey and Rhys explain, analyse, and transcend the personal and societal experiences of imperial subjugation. They portray the pains of having endured the imposed identity of a colonial subject. The cultural, social, political and economic dilemma that these authors faced in the European colonies are under research and an attempt has been made to excavate their counter hegemonic strategies.

The chapter two of the thesis titled “Cultural Relations and Intertextual Identities” attempts an intertextual analysis of Allfrey’s *The Orchid House* and Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Intertextuality is the multiple ways in which any one literary text echoes, or is linked to, other texts, whether by open or covert citations and allusions. It can include an author’s borrowing and transformation of a prior text or to a reader’s referencing of one text in reading another. The works under consideration here are the two novels which form a part of Caribbean fiction: Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Phyllis Shand Allfrey’s *The Orchid House*. Both the texts are seminal in the realm of Creole Caribbean literature. *Wide Sargasso Sea* had been looked at as a prequel to the canonical Victorian novel, *Jane Eyre*. The novel, though written in a Caribbean context, is read as having intertextual relations with *Jane Eyre*, its parent text. Yet attempts have seldom been made to unravel the intricate relations the work holds with *The Orchid House*. Hence, this project attempts to study the intertextual nuances of *Wide Sargasso Sea* in relation to *The Orchid House*.

The third chapter “Creole Discourse as Counter Discourse” studies the acute manifestation of the might and power of imperial discourse in the
mainstream literature. The postcolonial attempts to subvert the western literary hegemony through counter discourses are appraised. It endeavours to penetrate into the counter discursive strategies of the Creole discourse to challenge, question and problematise the colonial discourse which had a pervading influence on the Caribbean identity.

The three different phases that characterise the evolution of Caribbean writers are also studied to illumine the socio-cultural-political influence on the creative faculty of the writers to be openly defiant and overtly counter discursive. Creole community is the prime area of study in both the texts, charting the genesis of the Creole identity crisis. An attempt has been made to examine how the novels reflect the issues like othering, Eurocentrism, canonical counter discourse, hybridity and unhomeliness. The colonial notion of cultural purity widely dispersed through imperial discourses is challenged and interrogated by firmly affixing the new discourse of hybridity named creolisation. The chapter also probes into the assertion of black identity in the texts of Allfrey and Rhys who dismantle the colonial centrality and canonicity. The politics of language is also brought under investigation which is used in great appropriation to reject Standard English, to resort to the new ‘english’ and to demolish the cultural privileges of the surrogate English.

The fourth chapter titled “Reading the Cultural Miasma: Exploring the Identity Politics” is an effort to depict the influence of culture in conferring a meaning to the literary texts and an identity to its subjects. The concept of culture has to be researched in detail along with the demarcations of high and low
culture. Since culture is about the political ideologies and national identities, the theoretical presumptions of the recently emerged field of study, Cultural Studies is applied in order to substantiate and explore the production and inculcation of culture or maps of meaning. Cultural Studies believes that the ‘culture’ of a community includes various aspects: economic, spatial, ideological, erotic and political. Aiming to evaluate all these cultural elements in the Caribbean islands, the chapter employs cultural studies to probe into the texts so as to understand how particular objects acquire meaning and value in a society or community.

Through the trajectory of cultural studies the matters of power and politics in the Caribbean cultural scenario can be traced and the oppressive or hegemonic structures of Caribbean society can be revealed. The study is an attempt to look at how the Caribbean history dismantles the pervasive notion of might of the white; and how the Caribbean history proves that no community, be it black or white, will be spared from the demonic clutches of its diasporic tensions. The inhabitants of the islands are the migrants from different nationalities and communities who constitute Asians, Africans, Chinese, and so on along with the white migrants from the European nations. But, quite often, the plight of the white settler community is overlooked or ignored while talking about the trauma of the diasporic experience. The thesis, however, endeavours to sense the trauma of alienation that inexhaustibly haunts the white migrants and its strangling effects on their identity.

Through the protagonists of The Orchid House and Wide Sargasso Sea, the thesis tries to destroy the kind of recognition attributed to the stereotypes. It
demolishes the oft welcomed concept of colour as the cultural and political sign of superiority or inferiority, and skin as its natural identity. Fiction, theoretical texts and critical essays have been written in plenitude in order to analyse the issue of colonialism and the ‘black’ trauma, often questioning the divine superiority bestowed on the white elite. But only a few fictive pieces exist to elucidate the ‘white’ trauma, and rarer still are the theoretical texts and analytical essays to detail the pathos of the white migrants. Venturing to take up the cause of the white emigrants, Phyllis Shand Allfrey and Jean Rhys bravely assert the voice of the less heard in the realm of mainstream literature. Thus the thesis efforts to defend the cause of the less privileged and has taken up the issues of the white Creole communities in the Caribbean islands.

Chapter five “Ritualising Resistance” studies resistance as an inevitable expression of the postcolonial literature. Resistance is viewed as an expression of defense against the inequality of power relations in the society, be it gender relations, racial or ethnic. As in the case of any discourse, mainstream narratives are political as they endorse the hierarchy of power relations and impel the readers to conform to conventions of language and other forms of hegemony. To resist the onslaught of the political narratives of the European literature, postcolonial writers attempt counter hegemonic and alternative forms of discourses. Through their narratives they seek to decelerate the oppressive strategies perpetuated by the colonialist discourses, manifested in the narrative forms of Eurocentric genres. Therefore, in the postcolonial context, narrative’s relationship with resistance is vital.
In the chapter, the ritualised resistance of the postcolonial writers to fight the dominant European structures is analysed. These writers use defying narratives with experimented styles and appropriated language to foil the racialist interpretation of the imperial discourses. The new narrative forms are achieved by negotiating between indigenous narrative modes and imported imperial culture. The ‘contamination’ of Standard English and the ‘hybridization’ of western forms which they explore are part of a programmatic strategy used by the postcolonial novelists to subvert the hierarchies of power. Rather than adhering blindly to the tradition, the new writers endeavour to attempt a fusion of native and western conventions which reflect their desire to express true postcolonial identity and heritage. Allfrey and Rhys used these new variants of language in their seminal works which are brought under the domain of the present study. Their linguistic resistance is hoped to be explored in detail so as to dig out novel paradigms to read the colonial discourses anew.

The thesis thus is an investigation into the myriad dimensions of *The Orchid House* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* and unveils the latent politics in their discursive patterns. It addresses the ways by which Allfrey and Rhys challenge the occidental and patriarchal hegemonic ideologies to win back the lost identity of the Caribbean natives. The different concerns of the thesis are also hoped to provide a deeper understanding of the cultural nuances of the Caribbean Creole community and a better cognition of the endurance of counter discursive practices. The thesis will thus serve constructively in opening new reading practices and in articulating broader ideological interests.