CHAPTER IV

DIASPORIC SENSIBILITY IN V. S. NAIPAUL'S WRITINGS
Behind the realm of a diasporic writing or diasporic 'discourse' the core genesis of perception and understanding principally relates to the historical and socio-cultural junctures and dimensions through which the populace of a country has undergone alteration and transformation in the critical process of immigration, adaptation and adoption. This migration, global movement of so many sorts situates the individual, very often unenviably, torn among on the one hand the country of his origin (seen or nostalgically remembered as the country of his possible return even after many generations), the country of adoption (to which he or his ancestors had adopted), and on the other, for some the country of residence, the metropolis – London, Paris, New York – former colonial citadels, looked at with illusory promises of justice, betterment, racial tolerance, and so forth. This kind of inner conflict and tension germinating out of the critical process of immigration and the individual's attempts at adaptation and adoption, though it overlaps so much of the diasporic culture or expatriate literature, also accounts for striking new identities. In the observations of Edward Said: "Gone are the binary oppositions dear to the nationalist and imperialist enterprise. Instead, we begin to sense that old authority cannot simply be replaced by new authority, but that new alignments across borders, types, nations and essences are rapidly coming into view, and it is these new alignments that now provoke and challenge the fundamentally static notion of identity that has been the core of cultural thought during the era of imperialism" (Said 1993: xxviii).

As is mentioned, the immigration of a populace of a country and the consequent formation of diasporas have been propelled by many number of reasons like, economic, political, sociological, military and other pressures or compulsions, but the kind of literary, critical, or intellectual creation that has come as a ruse of immigration carries the most significant concern and interest. And that moves on to speak of the relationship between immigration, exile, and literary imagination. Exile, immigration and professional preference become synonymous and mutually indistinguishable. This 'preference' ultimately led to a shift in literary and intellectual activity to canonise them afresh. Africa was in possession of a rich heritage and the same applied to Latin America, Caribbean and Asian literary and historical documents. The descendant of the slave, the indentured
labour and the immigrant was enthused to recreate this kind of literary production, based on history, imagination and documentation, as a resource of memory and creative fulfillment. In the gradual process and with the passage of time these literary, cultural, social, political and other forms of expressions and writings of the various diasporas not only carried the feelings, sentiments, views and insights of these diasporic people but also became classed as the most authentic documents for studying diaspora. Diaspora has no longer remained as the domain of a particular branch of study; cultural critics, anthropologists, historians, sociologists and men of literature have studied diaspora in their varied ways. Again postmodernists, postcolonialists and poststructuralists have used their own approaches in interpreting varied diasporic literature and experiences, but to them this diasporic discourse is determined by the single factor – the colonial encounter. In case of Indian diaspora, along with this colonial encounter it has also been epitomised by many other kinds of preoccupations.

Since the diasporic experiences are varied, the diasporic literary works are differentiated in terms of tone and tenor, vision and values, and the complex combinations of experiences. Diverse countries and socio-cultural structures and stratifications have their distinct diasporic backgrounds and experiences through which the resonances of respective writers' works have to be understood and analysed. But at this point it should be remembered that colonialism was the prime pushing factor in diasporic movements and settlements, so many common experiences and pangs of colonialism are marked in near parallel patterns of diasporic creations. So, what is pertinent to note that racial, national and regional are the first features that foreground diasporic writing. The expatriate writing, which is very close or sometimes used as synonymous to the diasporic discourse, records and illustrates in certain ways the variety of interesting issues like, how the national consciousness resurfaces in changed geographical and socio-cultural climate of various nations with a diasporic socio-cultural setting or the metropolitan zones of the west. In *The Wretched of the Earth* Frantz Fanon has focused on this aspect: “National consciousness, which is not nationalism, is the only thing that will give us an international dimension. ...It is at the heart of national consciousness that international consciousness lives and grows. And this two-fold emerging is ultimately the source of all
In the case of the West Indian social setting, in the beginning it was very difficult to define that national consciousness, which was sometimes confused with nationalism. As has been discussed in the previous chapter of this study, in the beginning the Indian West Indians were not willing to assimilate or integrate to the so called West Indian society and they perceived ‘West Indianness’ or ‘West Indianism’ as nothing but Creolisation with the white standing at the apex with his branded supreme value and the blacks standing at the bottom with his ‘mimic’ of the master; Indians argued, where do they stand in this hierarchical structure? In order to be a true national or West Indian, Indians had to be Creolised or to mimic the white values, which the Indians thought as the degradation of their civilisational and cultural values and ethos, hence making the Indians un-nationals or anti-nationals without any kind of national consciousness in the eyes of the Creoles, whites and blacks. But with the gradual progression the West Indian society was led in the path of pluralism with the recognition of Indian values and ethos and Indians began to be perceived as having national consciousness if not nationalism. But for an individual or writer like, V.S. Naipaul, who is twice or thrice born, having an ancestry in India, born in the West Indies (Trinidad), a dwelling in the metropolis (England), courting a diasporic consciousness and possessing an exilic sensibility, it becomes very complex to bind him and analyse his works or writings. In this chapter, keeping the diasporic framework in mind an attempt has been made to examine some of the early writings of V.S. Naipaul, basically focusing on the struggles of Indians, their identity quest, occupational mobility, cultural confusion of the West Indians, especially, Indians, other socio-cultural dimensions of the West Indian society and Indians’ encounter with the other West Indians in the West Indian socio-cultural setting. At the same time the diasporic and exilic sensibility of V.S. Naipaul, as that of Indian West Indians have also been pointed out.

When Naipaul first ventured into his writing career his material was not “sufficiently hallowed by a tradition” (Naipaul 1976a: 27). Though Naipaul could stake a claim on the English language, yet he realised that the English literary tradition with its alien
mythology could never be his. And for Naipaul living in the closed boundary of the Indian community there was nothing which he could call a literary tradition and the West Indian or Trinidadian values were never liked by him. His father's stories found a way out of the problem for Naipaul and introduced him to a world of writing sensibility with the different nuances of writing, and this endowed him with a starting point. Naipaul's interest and aspiration of becoming a writer was, in the first place, something that had come to him from his father, who was a journalist, which occupation was unusual for a Trinidad Indian of his generation. Opening up an exciting world to Naipaul, his father's stories in a way compensated for Naipaul's lack of tradition. With finding a model for his work and discovering a literary tradition in his father, Naipaul set about establishing his identity by ordering his experiences through his writing.

Naipaul as a postcolonial novelist with a diasporic contemplation, recording and analysing various nuances of the colonial as well as diasporic people, situates his novels in colonial, ex-colonial and diasporic settings and provides a perceptive account of the complexities and intricacies inherent to such societies. The sense of alienation, identity crisis, paradox of freedom and the problem of neocolonialism in the ex-colonies are the major themes that emerge from a reading of his novels. The early novels of Naipaul deal exclusively with the colonial society of Trinidad, the island of his nativity, and are preoccupied with the themes of dispossession, homelessness, alienation, mimicry and the search for an authentic selfhood. Naipaul's personal experience of being a displaced member of a marginalised community in Trinidad provides him issues and essences for his writing and the characters in his novels are continually in search of an identity and home representing Naipaul's as well as the Indian diaspora's search for selfhood. Being an Indian by ancestry, Trinidadian by birth and English by intellectual training and residence, Naipaul is indeed a man with a broader perspective and this multiple heritage places him in a position that makes it possible for him to render a detached account of his subjective experiences.

Naipaul is unsparingly critical in his observation and interpretation of the ex-colonies and he exposes the inadequacies of such societies, which he believes to be the outcome of the
unconscious acceptance of the norms and values of the colonising culture. The colonialnature of the West Indian as well as the Trinidadian society marks Naipaul’s rejection ofhis birthplace, in his own words it was, “unimportant, uncreative and cynical” (Naipaul1969a: 43). As an immigrant society Trinidad consists of “various races, religion andcliques” (Naipaul 1969a: 45). The Trinidadian society is a fragmented one, comprising ofheterogeneous people, whose presence in the island was purely an accident of history.Commenting on the manufactured nature of West Indian societies Naipaul observes in*The Middle Passage*: “The West Indian colonial situation is unique because the WestIndies, in all their racial and social complexity, are so completely a creation of Empireset the withdrawal of Empire is almost without meaning” (Naipaul 1969a: 152-153).Nationalism or national consciousness was impossible in the West Indies due to the lackof a common West Indian identity. Moreover, there was not even any anti-imperialisticfeeling among the Trinidadians; on the contrary, it was rather their “Britishness”, their“belonging to the British Empire” that gave them a sense of identity (Naipaul 1969a: 45).

On his analysis of the diabolic impact of slavery on the West Indian Negroes, Naipaulobserves that the greatest damage done to the Negro by slavery was that it taught him“self-contempt” (Naipaul 1969a: 71). Naipaul further writes that slavery “set him theideals of white civilisation and made him despise every other” (Naipaul 1969a: 71).Colonialism not only dragged the Negro blood and flesh but also made the West IndianNegro to mimic and acquire the language, culture, religion and the attitudes of the whiteEuropean masters and ironically, they were taught and shaped to share the Europeans’contempt for the Africans. Naipaul’s quotation from Trollope in *The Middle Passage*makes this aspect evident: “The West Indian Negro knows nothing of Africa except thatit is a term of reproach. If African immigrants are put to work on the same estate withhim, he will not eat with them, or drink with them, or walk with them. He will hardlywork beside them, and regards himself as a creature immeasurably the superior of thenewcomer” (Naipaul 1969a: 71). The abolition of slavery brought about the emancipationof the slaves and the slaves were now free to sell their labour with a bargain price. But bythis time the Europeans had already inculcated their value system in the Negro mind andsoul. Whatever it may be, the Emancipation brought about a great transformation in the
lives of the Negroes: economically the Negro climbed the ladder of occupational mobility, from subservient peasant to different walks of professional life; politically the Negro was granted some of the privileges; culturally the Negro was Creolised with the white master sitting at the top guiding the Negro standing at the bottom about his value system; and emotionally and sentimentally the most important aspect for the Negro was that he was free and this made him the happiest creature of the world.

The abolition of slavery brought about another dimension to the socio-cultural set up of the West Indian society. In order to work in the plantation estates left vacant by the slaves, the Europeans colonial masters imported indentured labour from Asia, especially India and China, and others like, Javanese, Syrians, Portuguese and labour from other parts of the world provided the sufficient labour force required by the white colonial masters. But unlike the slaves, Indians had carried with them their rich cultural and civilisational heritage, which they considered dear than their lives. In the beginning with their secluded communal life and own set of beliefs and practices Indians were keeping themselves away from other segments of the West Indian society. And it was also a colonial ploy to make the different segments of the population secluded, may be due to the fear of rebellion in the West Indian society, which was ruled by the weak white minority. But gradually the western education, occupational mobility, rise in economic opportunities, growth of professional class, extension of political privileges and modernisation brought about an amalgamation of various people and ethnicities and their variant cultural elements in the West Indian social canvass. For the younger generation Indian West Indians India never remained as the same inspiring force as it used to be for the old generation and it never caught he imagination of the young generation. Then, followed the painful process of acculturation. However, unlike the Negroes who completely forgot Africa, the East Indians “never lost pride in their origins” (Naipaul 1969a: 88) and were never fallen prone to the self-contempt to which the Negroes had fallen victims. As Naipaul points out in Finding the Centre (1985: 49), it was the life of the clan that gave the East Indians, “a caste certainly, a high sense of the self.” In this process of acculturation or integration or the West Indians’ attempt at claiming their pluralism was involved many kinds of confusion, bewilderment and perplexity. With this
treasure in the background the segregation, alienation, acculturation, confusion and identity formation of the diasporic Indians and West Indians can be analysed in some of the early works of V.S. Naipaul.

The novel, *The Mystic Masseur* recounting a healer and guru's rise to power in colonial Trinidad, covers and analyses a historical period extending from the 1920s or 1930s into the 1950s, beginning before the changes alluded to in *The Suffrage of Elvira* and continuing beyond them. Naipaul has moved in his career by turning to the past for his subject matter: his own past, the past of his family, the past of the West Indies and the Caribbean. *The Mystic Masseur* revolves around the East Indian community and the narrator of the novel himself says that the "history of Ganesh is, in a way the history of our times" (Naipaul 1964: 18). So Ganesh the hero of the novel is a representative figure of the East Indians in Trinidad in their move towards city life, westernisation and their subsequent Creolisation. Ganesh represents the first generation of East Indians to come under the influence of western education, which acted as a potent force of cultural colonisation. The first generation Indians, in particular, faced an acute identity crisis because while their socialising process had been in the traditional culture, they were at the same time introduced to an entirely different value system in various spheres primarily in the school where they met students with different colour, religion, habits and custom. It is the need for education that brings Ganesh to the Creole world of Port of Spain.

The narrator sympathetically recounts young Ganesh's restlessness and aspirations; these, in conjunction with a very limiting social milieu, are some of the same elements that drive the boy of Miguel Street to leave Trinidad for England. The narrator creates sympathy by describing Ganesh's sense of inferiority, awkwardness, and frustration with his social limitations. Ganesh's first day in college turns out to be a humiliating experience, when the boys in the new college make fun of his awkward dress and country manners and for the first time in his life Ganesh is made aware of his marginal position as an Indian. He feels so ashamed that he even tries to hide his Indian identity: "He was so ashamed of his Indian name that for a while he spread story that he was really called
Feeling so humiliated and embarrassed he wears a Khaki toupee to class. This episode is only the prelude to Ganesh Ramsay Muir. The subtle process of cultural colonisation has already begun with the moment of Ganesh's coming into contact with the colonising culture.

The communal life of the Indians got disintegrated with potent forces of the economic boom precipitated by the American presence in Trinidad, together with rapid urbanisation acting as stimuli of disintegration. In The Overcrowded Barracocon, Naipaul writes that the East Indians in Trinidad could maintain their cultural insularity only because Trinidad was a “stagnant” society in the nineteenth century. The India that the East Indians had managed to recreate and preserve in Trinidad was an India in isolation. However, the insularity of the East Indians was broken during the Second World War: “At the first blast from the New World – the Second World War, the coming of Americans to the islands – India fell away, and a new people seemed all at once to have been created” (Naipaul 1964: 40). H.S. Mann, a critic discussing the effects of the Second World War on Trinidad, also notes: “Ill-prepared for the changes thrust on them by World War Two with its economic boom and by universal adult franchise in 1946, Trinidadians turned to trickery, and to the imitation of England and America” (Mann 1984: 171).

The inherent dichotomy in the lives of the East Indians in Trinidad is also brought to the fore by Naipaul. In The Middle Passage, Naipaul makes the observation that the religion of the East Indians has been reduced to “rites without philosophy” (Naipaul 1969a: 89). This becomes evident both during Ganesh's initiation ceremony as well as during his marriage. The Trinidad Indians also exhibit a tendency typical among people who are victims of what Sushanta Goonatilake calls “cultural schizophrenia” (Goonatilake 1982: 130) or the tendency among the colonised, to legitimise their actions in either cultural frames to suit the demands of the situation. In every sphere of the lives of the East Indians – their dress, language and food habits – their cultural confusion becomes apparent. When the boy narrator is taken to Ganesh to get his leg cured, Ganesh is still a struggling masseur and the first thing the narrator notices about Ganesh is his dress: “He was dressed in the ordinary way, trousers and vest, and I did not think he particularly
holy. He was not wearing the *dhoti* and *Koortah* and turban I had expected” (Naipaul 1964: 13). There is a contradiction in the fact that while Ganesh follows the traditional profession of a masseur he dons western clothes.

The lives of the East Indians are marked by duality, which is clearly evident in their use of a dialectal version of English, characterised by the use of misconjugated verbs. One observes that the East Indians hardly use Hindi, which is almost a forgotten language. The only person one hears using the language is Ganesh’s father, who dies even before the novel has really begun. So completely has English replaced Hindi that it has taken its place even in the rituals that the East Indians have managed to preserve. Dookhie uses English instead of Hindi when he performs his part in Ganesh’s initiation ceremony: “As arranged, Dookhie the shopkeeper ran after him (Ganesh) crying a little and begging in English, ‘No, boy. No. Don’t go away to Benares to study” (Naipaul 1964: 21). The East Indians themselves are unable to see the contradiction because the process of cultural colonisation has worked on them unconsciously. In the case of food habits, one finds that the staple is still rice or *roti* and *dal* and certain fastidiousness about food, which is typically Hindu still survives. Yet, the western alternatives have also been adopted.

Ganesh finds himself trapped in the conflict between the Eastern and Western worlds and this becomes the source of Ganesh’s cultural ambiguity and this cultural ambiguity sometimes drives Ganesh and sometimes Ganesh drives this cultural ambiguity to prosperity. Ganesh is successful as a masseur only after he has learnt to combine the merits of both worlds, Eastern spiritualism and Western learning, to effect the cure of Hector, the boy tormented by a cloud. This characteristic sets Ganesh apart from the hundreds in the same profession. Apart from his western learning, his attitude to religion, which is tolerance stance to other religions ensures his success: “He was no bigot. He took as much interest in Christianity and Islam as in Hinduism. In the Shrine, the old bedroom, he had pictures of Mary and Jesus next to Krishna and Vishnu; a crescent and star represented iconoclastic Islam. ‘All the same God,’ he said. Christians liked him, Muslims liked him, and Hindus willing as ever to risk prayers to new Gods, didn't object’” (Naipaul 1964: 139). The blend of the East and the West in Ganesh makes him “a sharp
character.” In The Middle Passage, writing about Trinidad, Naipaul observes: “Trinidad has always admired the 'Sharp character' who, like the sixteenth century picaroon of Spanish literature, survives and triumphs by his wits in a place where it is felt that all eminence is arrived at by crookedness” (Naipaul 1969a: 78).

After becoming the president of the Hindu Association, Ganesh contests the election and unlike, his rival, Indersingh, holds no election meetings, instead arranges a “Bhagwat” - seven day prayer meeting with free food. Ganesh understands people inside-out, and Indersingh even with the glamour of his Oxford degree stands no chance before Ganesh. After becoming a M.L.C. Ganesh attends a dinner party at the Government House. The dinner party serves as a commentary on the shortcomings of a society striving to mimic upper class respectability, which at once contradicts their social reality. Ganesh feels alien and uncomfortable in the party and this happens to be the last time Ganesh appears in traditional clothes. One is reminded that it is a typical colonial society where people are unsure of themselves and having no taste or style of their own are eager for instruction. In his autobiography Ganesh acknowledges the insignificance of the individual will when he writes: “We are never what we want to be...but what we must be (Naipaul 1964: 75).

With the recognition and adoption of the supreme colonial values and ethos, soon Ganesh is made the representative of the British Government and sent to Lake Success, where Ganesh speaks in defence of British colonial rule and this finally fetches him the title of M.B.E. By this time Ganesh has travelled far on the road to whiteness, but his final rejection of his society comes with his change of name to G. Ramsay Muir. Naipaul draws attention to the inadequacies of colonial societies which are often characterised by a lack of acumen for specialisation. Trinidad is portrayed as a society in upheaval, where the old order is giving way to new forces of modernity and the East Indian community of which Ganesh is a representative is particularly vulnerable. Ganesh's success story is really the story of the disintegration of the East Indian community, which under the conflicting pulls of the Eastern and Western worlds, makes the final choice in favour of the western civilisation. Naipaul has been severely criticised for his treatment of the
colonial people which is felt to be lacking in sympathy. But it should be remembered that Naipaul may seem cruel and unsympathetic but it is only because he is annoyed by the West Indians' appropriation of western cultural norms, which clearly cannot be their's.

While portraying the socio-cultural disintegration of the East Indian life, the narrator defines Gnaesh's biography – the story of a villager who becomes author, entrepreneur, politician, and statesman – as a "history" of the times, meaning, among other things, the story of a successful East Indian who sums up in his career the forces of change during a particular period of the colony and the Caribbean. Ganesh's story constitutes a history in that he shapes and is shaped by socio-economic forces that turn the villages of Trinidad from a communal to an individualist, commercialist order of society (Fromm 1941: 297-298). He represents a new entrepreneurship dressed in old customs and traditions, a marriage of marketing and mysticism. In the Fourways and Fuente Grove, where East Indian traditions are breaking down, he creates a spectacular image of himself as a man both of the past and of the future. Combining his education with the Hindu tradition of the masseur (following in his father's footsteps), he transforms that tradition into an enterprise.

Ganesh has a fervent desire to write a book and he feels that to be a reader, a collector of books confers a certain amount of power; to be an author, a hundred times more. That, at least, is partly the idea behind Ganesh's determination to write a book; he seeks the magical power of authorship for his self-image and for the impact that the word has on the villagers. The publication of his first book, 101 Questions and Answers on the Hindu Religion, represents a great moment in his life. Nevertheless, the book affirms what was uncertain and only imagined; his credentials as an intellectual and his identity as an author, a person with special powers. At the same time this new identity mystifies him; caught between the romance of authorship and the actuality of his book, Ganesh says with wonder to his wife Leela: "I write a book...look here at these words I write with my own hand. They print now, but you know I just sit down at the table in the front room and write them on ordinary paper with a ordinary pencil." Leela responds with equal amazement: "Oh, man Oh man Oh, man, you really write the book" (Naipaul 1964).
There is a warmth in these portraits of Ganesh and Leela as well as traces of Seepersad Naipaul's and his son's romance with books and the idea of becoming a writer. In the Foreward to *The Adventures of Gurudeva*, the son recalls his father's excitement at the publication of short stories: "The printing was done, slowly by the Guardian Commercial Printery; my father brought the proofs home bit by bit in his jacket pocket; and I shared his hysteria when the linotypists, falling into everyday ways, set – permanently, as it turned out – two of the stories in narrow newspaper style columns" (Naipaul 1976: 7).

The episodes in the life story of Ganesh are both biography and history, each with two sides, with a double meaning. As biography, it tells the story of a struggling East Indian who becomes successful in a limiting colonial society through his intelligence and his understanding of others; yet it also tells a story of a quack and con man, who succeeds by hook or crook and thus uses others for the gratification of his motifs. Through the account of his struggles, his wit, and style, Ganesh is depicted as an individual with a complex inner world; but in his manipulation of others and his transformation into a calculating, shifty politician and statesman, he is depicted instead as superficial, an abstraction, a final Anglicisation of the spirit of the West Indian colony.

Ganesh is being perceived and viewed as both the shaper of and someone being shaped by the forces of his day. His life is determined by historical attitudes and circumstances, such as the 1920s' and 1930s' East Indian attitude towards education, changes in the East Indian villages, the flow of new ideas from England and the United States, and the picaroon (every-man-for-himself) nature of colonial society at its worst. Had Ganesh been born “ten years earlier,” the narrator speculates, he might not have been educated; had he born “ten years later,” he might have been sent abroad for his education. Given the former circumstances, he would have remained a villager; given the latter, he might have become “an unsuccessful lawyer or a dangerous doctor,” the narrator says drolly. Similarly, had Ganesh taken work at a military base or become a taxi driver, “the mystic path would have been closed to him for ever” (Naipaul 1964). He becomes a “mystic masseur” because he is born at the right time; he achieves success because he is adept at interpreting the old in the context of the new in a period of cultural and socio-economic
transition in the colony. In the footsteps of his father and in keeping with his East Indian cultural heritage, Ganesh chooses to become a masseur; sensitive to the cultural and economic influences from England and the United States, he learns to get on in the world and to sell the mystic. He represents, then, the meeting of the old East Indian world and the new, Euro-American world, combining the spiritualism of the former and the materialism of the later. Above all, he molds and is being molded by his commodity oriented, client oriented colonial society.

The Trinidad of this 1950s novel combines an exile's distanced evaluation with a colonial's old uncertainties and fears. Through the novels' double voicedness and double perspectives, the author can write affectionately about the colony as well as satirise it. "To condemn the picaroon [colonial] society out of hand is to ignore its important quality," he writes in _The Middle Passage_. And this is not only its ability to beguile and enchant. For if such a society breeds cynicism, it also breeds tolerance...tolerance for every human activity and affection for every demonstration of wit and style" (Naipaul 1981: 77). Through the masks of double voicedness and double perspectives, he expresses both his affection for people and things of the colony and his sense of the colony's limitations and imprisonment.

Through caricaturing a campaign and election in the "smallest, most isolated...most neglected of the nine countries in Trinidad," _The Suffrage of Elvira_ focuses on the mixed-up equation of money-mindedness, profit, and enfranchisement in a predominantly East Indian community (Naipaul 1969: 9). Set during the second general election, the novel examines the East Indian community within the context of the newly emerging colonial-capitalist society during a period of growing social and political awareness. At the end of the novel, the East Indian community had come into contact with the Creole world of Port of Spain. Suffrage opens up into the broader social context of multiracial Elvira and includes the Negro and Spanish population as well. The thrust of the novel is to demonstrate how unsuitable the modern concept of democracy is for a corrupt and divided colonial society, in which democracy loses all meaning and becomes a means for promoting self-interest. Naipaul observes that universal adult suffrage came to Trinidad
in nineteen forty six without any popular agitation and that took people by surprise. Since people were not prepared for it only the enterprising made the most from it. Naipaul attributes the political “squalor” of Trinidad in the 1950s to the “picaroon” nature of the colony and to the public confusion that was brought about by the sudden granting of universal adult suffrage in 1946:

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. To understand this is to understand the squalor of the politics that came to Trinidad...when, after no popular agitation, universal adult suffrage was declared. The privilege took the population by surprise. Old attitudes persisted...The new politics were reserved for the enterprising, who had seen their prodigious commercial possibilities. There were no parties, only individuals. Corruption, not unexpected, aroused only amusement and even mild approval (Naipaul 1981: 72).

Political topsy-turvydom is not only Naipaul's target, but also the sub-world of predominantly East Indian villages with their narrow loyalties, jealousies, money-mindedness, and philistinism (Naipaul 1981: 82). Although multicultural in nature, Elvira is one such sub-world of the colony; a mélange of Hindus and Muslims, Catholics, Jehovah's Witnesses, and African animists, it is a village of ethnic diversity and defined group loyalties. Beliefs and traditions serve to differentiate and separate one group from another, although these differences are fewer obstacles than convenient tags of identity on the basis of which Elvirans vent their grievances with one another and politicians trump up issues on which to run for election. Although the ethnic groups in Elvira make a show of standing up for their traditions and beliefs, the differences between the groups are breaking down in the tiny, hybridising world of Elvira. The mixing of beliefs and traditions is one of its prominent characteristics: “Things were crazily mixed up in Elvira. Everybody, Hindus, Muslims and Christians, owned a Bible; the Hindus and Muslims looking on it, if anything, with greater awe. Hindus and Muslims celebrated Christmas and Easter. The Spaniards and some of the Negroes celebrated the Hindu festival of lights. Someone had told them that Lakshmi, the Goddess of prosperity, was being honoured; they placed small earthen lamps on their money boxes and waited, as they said, for the money to breed. Everybody celebrated the Muslim festival of Hosein. In fact, when Elvira was done with religious festivals, there were few straight days left” (Naipaul 1969: 66). In this context, partisanship based solely on ethnic differences would not seem
to make much sense, and part of the novel's satire of Harbans's and the Preacher's opposing campaigns derives from the fact that ethnic differences are less important in determining blocks of votes than bribery and deals. The beliefs are partly masks - for show and for concealment of underlying intentions.

Although Elvira is an area with larger Indian population and having the dominance of Indians in every sphere, yet for the Hindu candidate, Pat Harbans, this in itself is not assurance enough for victory. The Negro candidate Preacher may attract and get Indian votes, because one “owed no loyalty to the island, and scarcely any to his group” (Naipaul 1969a: 78). Only philistine values dominate and determine which candidate would win the elections. Harbans is prepared to give any bribe in exchange for votes. Traditions are even compromised for political gains. He even goes to the extent of trading a marriage alliance with Chittaranjan, who is not only the Hindu leader but also “the only man who carried weight with the Spaniards of Cordoba” (Naipaul 1969: 24). Baksh, the other power of Elvira, becomes the Muslim leader because he is a man of reputed wealth, even though he is not a good Muslim: “It was a puzzle: how Baksh came to be the Muslim leader. He wasn't a good Muslim. He didn't know all the injunction of the Prophet and those he did know he broke. For instance he was a great drinker” (Naipaul 1969: 13). Harbans arranges for Cuffy's funeral in a big way in order to win the Negro votes by generating their sympathy in his favour. There is utter confusion just before the elections with everybody selling out to somebody. In fact as Foam points out: “In Trinidad you can't say anybody win election till they draw their first pay” (Naipaul 1969: 185). Finally it is Harbans who wins the election and gradually becomes a typical politician.

The race for political ascendancy and crook campaign to win the election exhibit Elvira's aroused sense that any commodity, whether a vote or a daughter, can be turned to profit. Tradition, political dealing, and profit get united in the parentally arranged marriage of Chittaranjan's daughter and Harbans's son. The (broken) agreement between Chittaranjan and Harbans focusses the two forces of the campaign: the manipulation of the old ways by the new wiles of profit making, and complementarily, the contamination of the new
right to vote by the old patterns of petty feuds and ethnic prejudice.

“Democracy had come to Elvira four years before, in 1946,” the narrator recounts, “but it had taken nearly everybody by surprise and it was not until 1950, a few months before the second general election under universal adult franchise, that people began to see the possibilities” (Naipaul 1969: 13). “Possibilities” here should not be taken to mean the challenges of a newly emerged democratic society, but the opportunities for monetary gain. “The people' have learned their power,” Naipaul writes caustically in The Middle Passage, “and the sensation is still so new that every new voter regards himself as a pressure group. In this way the people...who wish to beg, bribe and bully because this is the way they got things done in the past...are a threat to responsible government and a threat, finally, to their own leaders. It is part of the colonial legacy” (Naipaul 1981: 120).

In Elvira everyone has a say, a voice, and almost everyone tries to profit from the election in one way or another. In the past, “People did just go and vote for the man they like,” Baksh remarks. “Now is different. People learning. You have to spend on them” (Naipaul 1969: 46). Viewed and understood from one perspective, a new money mindedness corrupts the community; and observed and analysed from another, the old survivalist principle of the colony (i.e. everyman for himself) corrupts the new democracy.

In Elvira no one seems particularly happy with the equation “democracy equals bribery,” and this breaks through in the wit and sly humour about the campaign and election. Even Harbans the winner, glumly totaling his campaign expenses, complains: “This democracy is a strange thing. It does make the great poor and the poor great. It makes me a beggar” (Naipaul 1969: 154). His sense that the equation of votes and money can lead to a topsy-turvy world is the narrator-author's attitude as well. Harbans's remark contains a suspicion that democracy may turn into a monster neither the candidates nor the voters can control. Democracy is being equated by other characters with an erosion of the community's values and with an ironic inequality: “Everybody want something for nothing,” Chittaranjan says. “I work for every penny I have, and now you have these people complaining that they is poor and behaving as though other people depriving them.” Ramlogan concurs, adding sarcastically: “Everybody equal. People who ain't got
brain to work and those who use their brain to work. Everybody equal” (Naipaul 1969: 141). Although lighthearted enough, these complaints also voice a deeper social dissatisfaction that foreshadows violence: the burning of Harbans’s new jaguar automobile.

Though this novel more prominently focusses on a political event, it does so only to expose the social tensions of a racially divided society like Trinidad. The insults that Chittaranjan and Baksh aim at each other over a false scandal involving their children expose the race relations in Elvira: “What is Muslim?” Chittaranjan asked, his smile frozen, his eyes unshining, his voice low and cutting. 'Muslim is everything and Muslim is nothing.' He paused, 'Even Negro is Muslim' (Naipaul 1969: 114). Baksh's retort is equally venomous: “All you is just a pack of Kaffir, if you ask me” (Naipaul 1969: 114). The cultural confusion of the East Indians portrayed in this novel is clearly evident in their clothing, which is more pronouncedly western. Mrs. Baksh wears skirts instead of the traditional Indian attire. Harbans and Chittaranjan wear trousers and shirt. Even Pundit Dhaniram, the best known pundit in Elvira, wears a dhoti only occasionally. It is interesting to note that pundit Dhaniram is educated at a Presbyterian school and sings hymns as well. He is even proud of his training in the Christian school because as he says, it makes him “see both sides” (Naipaul 1969: 48). As far as the use of language is concerned, no one speaks Hindi except Dhaniram’s invalid wife.

In this novel the counter-play between the narrator’s and character’s voices and attitudes, makes it an interesting reading. The narrator pokes fun at Elvirans, yet also shares with them a sense of malaise. He satirises their superstition, prejudice, and money-mindedness, yet also gives them a self-critical reflex. Like Miguel Street, The Suffrage of Elvira tells a double story. One story satirises a campaign that turns on bribery; the second depicts the social trauma of a people partly confused, partly critical of, the fusion of two new powers in their community: the power to vote and the power to buy and sell. In Elvira people have learned to live together, but in the confusion of political and socio-economic change, instead of becoming more democratic and open-minded, the village becomes less so, divided against itself.

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With a setting in which the East Indians form a small minority, the novel *Miguel Street* demonstrates the marginal position of the East Indians in the Creole dominated Port of Spain. Bhaku's is the only other Indian family living in the Miguel Street, apart from the narrator and his mother and Bogart. Bhaku, who belongs to an older generation of Indians, can sing verses from the Ramayana and Bhakhu's wife proudly claims that her husband can read and write Hindi as well as English. Bhakus maintain their distance from the Creole Negroes, who form the majority in the street. The tension that exists between the two races is made implicit. The narrator, however, being of a much younger generation and having grown up in the street feels no such inhibitions. However, when he falls into the typical vices of the street, and takes to drinking and visiting brothels, his mother rescues him from a life of total debauchery by sending him away to England to further his studies. The residents of Miguel Street are natural eccentrics. In *The Middle Passage* Naipaul defines eccentricity as "the expression of one's own personality, unhampered by fear of ridicule or the discipline of a class" (Naipaul 1969a: 83). It is through eccentric behaviour that the characters in this novel seek to break the tedium of their lives and get noticed. The narrator sees the street as a world where "everybody was quite different from everybody else" (Naipaul 1959: 79). Yet in order to become an accepted member of the street gang it is necessary to have something in common.

In this novel one can notice two characteristics about the social life of the Creole Negroes: firstly, their casual attitude to illegitimacy and secondly, the brutality towards women and children, both of which are the residual elements of their slave past. Though alongside legal marriage, the practice of having "keepers" was also quite prevalent among the Africans, it was due to slavery that the latter system became more common (Williams 1962). Denied of a family life during the days of slavery, the Negroes could only form casual relationships. On the other hand, physical brutality of the strong towards the weak being the basis of the slave system, it was also resorted to by the slaves as a means of psychological release and became a common feature of the West Indian life. Most of the man-woman relationships portrayed in the novel is of a casual nature. When Bogart suddenly disappears from the street, Hat and his friends begin to use Bogart's
room as their club house. They play cards, drink and even bring “the odd stray woman to the room” (Naipaul 1959: 12). When George’s wife dies, he simply brings another woman to stay with him and when she leaves him, he converts his house into a brothel and starts entertaining American soldiers. Hat voices the typical attitude to marriage when his brother, Edward says that he has to get married because his girlfriend is “making baby.” Hat remarks scornfully: “Is a damn funny thing to say. If everybody married because woman making baby for them it go be a hell of a thing. What happen that you want to be different now from everybody else in Trinidad? You come so American” (Naipaul 1959: 190). Even among married couples, loyalty is a rare thing. Popo’s wife elopes with the gardener of the big house where she works as a cook. Mrs. Hereira also leaves her husband for a man called Toni. However, it is not for money, but for love. When Toni begins to drink and abuse her and even threatens to kill her, she is forced to return to her husband and settle for the comforts without love. The stories of Laura, Mrs. Hereira, and Toni show the kind of profligacy and licentiousness in sexual relationships, as the boy recounts about Laura with an unsettling humour:

I suppose Laura holds a world record.  
Laura had eight children.  
There is nothing surprising in that.  
These eight children had seven fathers.  
Beat that (Naipaul 1971: 84).

Child beating and woman battering is a common everyday affair in this novel. It is a recreational activity for George, entertaining enough to keep him from joining the street gang. Beating his wife is a ritual for Bhaku. He finds a cricket bat best suited for this job and for his purpose and Mrs. Bhaku herself keeps the bat well oiled and ready for use. For the Indians also wife beating is accepted as the husband’s prerogative. The general attitude is summed up in the Calypso:

Every now and then just knock them down,  
Every now and then just throw them down,  
Black up their eye and bruise up their knee,  
And then they love you eternally (Naipaul 1959: 111).

In the Miguel Street children are treated no better and they also share the same fate as of
the women. When the narrator and Hat's nephews, Boyee and Errol, are together they compare notes about beatings and Boyee says: "The blows we get is nothing to what Big Foot used to get from his father" (Naipaul 1959: 68). Hat supplements the information: "Every day Big Foot father, the policeman, giving Big Foot blows. Like medicine. Three times a day after meals. And hear Big Foot talk afterwards. He used to say, when, I get big and have children, I go beat them, beat them" (Naipaul 1959: 68).

One of the prominent ideas that recur in the novel is the insufficiency and inadequacy of the colonial society that requires no efficiency. The carpenter Pop is never idle but when the narrator asks him what he is making, his reply is: "Ha, boy that's the question, I making the thing without a name" (Naipaul 1959: 17). When his signboard attracts customers, he panics and misdirects them: "The carpenter fellow?" "He didn't live here again" (Naipaul 1959: 18). This aspect is highlighted in the narrator's comment regarding Big Foot's casual change in profession from a carpenter to a mason: "There is no stupid pride among Trinidad craftsmen. No one is a specialist" (Naipaul 1959: 71). It is a fervent belief and acceptance of the residents of Miguel Street that England and America are the only places where anything of worth is possible and West Indies is a place where only worthless things happen. When somebody has the idea of organising a "Local Talent on Parade Show," Edward comments sarcastically: "Don't make me laugh. What sort of talent they think Trinidad have" (Naipaul 1959: 188). After disappearing for the second time, when Bogart returns, the narrator notices Bogart's deliberate imitation of American behavioural patterns. During the Second World War when the American soldiers flood Trinidad, Edward stops working in the cow pen and gets a job with the Americans in Chagu'anas and a complete change comes over Edward's dress habits and attitude: "He began wearing clothes in the American style, he began chewing gum, and tried to talk with an American accent. We didn't see much of him except on Sundays, and then he made us feel small and inferior" (Naipaul 1959: 185). A complete perceptible change can be marked even in the narrator's attitude to Trinidad towards the end of the novel. When his mother rebukes him for his wild dissolute ways, he blames Trinidad for it: "Is not my fault really. Is just Trinidad. What else anybody can do here except drink" (Naipaul 1959: 216). The only hope, it appears, lies in escape from Trinidad and
novel ends on the note of rejection with the narrator's departure to London.

The novel Miguel Street addresses to a split between the author's Trinidad and English cultural selves and attempts to resolve that split through double perspectives: firstly, by viewing Miguel Street from the perspective of a narrator who tells the story as if he were again a boy growing up in Port of Spain, the author can write from the base of his colonial Trinidad experiences, reentering, reconstructing, and revising that world and Secondly, by standing outside as well as within the narrator's viewpoint, the author can evaluate that world from the distanced perspective that he has acquired through his life in England. To speak in a nutshell, he can write from the double perspective of exile, viewing one culture through the lens of another. Through the counterpoint between the split perspective of the boy adult narrator and the comprehensive, evaluative attitude of the author, Miguel Street sets up a double discourse in which what is said may have two opposed meanings, and what is left unsaid may be as important or more important than what is said. Comprising seventeen chapters or sketches of inhabitants of a multicultural neighbourhood, the narrative's form would seem to emphasise the variety of life and richness of human difference in this one street of Port of Spain. The boy wants to impress this variety and difference on the reader: "A stranger could drive through Miguel Street and just say 'Slum' because he could see no more. But we, who lived there, saw our street as a world, where everybody was quite different from everybody else" (Naipaul 1971: 63). The boy is right. He can see what the outsider cannot; he sees details of human difference that the outsider might overlook or dismiss and he feels the neighbourhood's special pulse or spirit. But what the boy does not see, though his story shows it, is the essential similarity in the lives of Miguel Street. This is the world that the author in exile constructs – one not without affection, but chiefly a world to justify his and the boy's escape.

Although the boy intends to describe his world's uniqueness and to show its value to outsiders who might think of it as just another slum, the adult narrator's and author's evaluative attitude impart an ironic accent to his descriptions and thus intimate that Miguel Street may be quite different from what the boy initially perceives. The irony
suggests the other side of Miguel Street, its deterministic patterns. The boy's interpretation of Miguel Street often relates inversely to the adult narrator's, author's, and reader's interpretation of it. Thus, what the boy finds humorous, the author and reader often consider pathetic - or humorous and pathetic - and what the narrator says and describes often turns out to be less important than what he does not. Double voicedness and double perspectives create a dissonance in the boy's and other characters' humour, a dissonance that one hears in funny or unfunny stories about the failure of human relationships in the slum.

The adult narrator says that the people of Miguel Street are "romancers," by which he means that they live a "double life" of actuality and fantasy (Naipaul 1971: 72). Shaped by their culture and by imperial forces such as Anglo-American films and advertising, they live out a fantasy as a way of defending against or escaping from a milieu that does not satisfy their desires for meaningful work and identity. B. Wordsworth, who imagines himself the soul-brother of William, has ambitions of writing the "greatest poem" in the English language - at the breathless rate of one line per month. Does Wordsworth mimic the English poetic tradition, or rather, does he try to appropriate and transform it? Is he shaped by his milieu or is he also its shaper? On Miguel Street, hierarchy can be challenged and life raised out of its rut only momentarily. Wordsworth's life ends in erasure, not immortality, with poem unwritten, his death, the demolition of his house, and the cutting down of the mango, plum, and coconut trees around it. "It was just as though B. Wordsworth had never existed," he observes with sadness (Naipaul 1971: 52). Morgan, like Wordsworth, disappears, is erased - as if the "romancers" of Miguel Street are finally no more substantial than the stuff of their fantasies. In Miguel Street everyone is different and interesting, and everyone's life is shaped similarly by stultification and the threat of imprisonment. One can have play and gaiety in Miguel Street, but it also has a basic, ineluctable harshness against which "romancing" is only a feeble mask and no lasting protection.

The boy obtains a scholarship to study abroad, and at the end of his collection of portraits of Miguel Street describes himself striding across the runway to the plane that will carry
him away to a distant land: “I left them all...not looking back, looking only at my shadow before me, a dancing dwarf on the tarmac” (Naipaul 1971: 172). He leaves them behind, but he does not walk alone; he is accompanied by his shadow, the past extending into his future. He carries Miguel Street within him in that he has been formed by it and must, through the writing of this story, try to understand his reasons for leaving it. He celebrates it – and exorcises himself of it.

So, the novel Miguel Street carries a double stance and one needs to read its double story: the first portrays an inner city neighbourhood alive with a unique spirit and a folk symphony of voices; there is something in it of the street theatrically of the Trinidad carnival and the second conversely, portrays a pattern of frustration and imprisonment through cultural and social forces turning lives towards fantasy and away from accomplishment; this second story emphasises the futility beneath the gaiety, the uneasiness within the humour, the entrapment at the end of the imagined escape. The first story shows the author's affection for the personages and voices of his childhood in Port of Spain, while the second manifests an exile's fears and his need to justify leaving the West Indian colony.

One of the masterpieces of V.S. Naipaul's novels, A House For Mr. Biswas endorses a positive approach and predicament to the aspects of disintegration, displacement, identity quest and self-hood. The protagonist of the novel Mr. Biswas tries to overcome the limitations imposed on him by putting up a relentless struggle against the forces that try to suppress his individuality. His struggle is a long and traumatic one but he is successful in his negotiation for space and finally fulfills his dream of possessing a house of his own, which is a stupendous achievement for a man of his limited and mediocre circumstances. While cultural clash and the gradual disintegration of the East Indian community still forms the major preoccupation in the novel, Naipaul, at the same time focusses on the related problem of the East Indians' finding a foothold in the New World.

V.S. Naipaul in the first section of the novel brings into fore the Hindu way of life that finds its fullest expression in the customs, traditions, rituals and the social philosophy of
the people. This section of the novel represents Indians like Bipti's father, who came to Trinidad as indentured labourers and reproduces the India that they had created for themselves: “Fate had brought him from India to the sugar estate, aged him quickly and left him to die in a crumbling mud hut in the swamp lands” (Naipaul 1969b: 15). There is a vivid representation of the complete communal life, which is made evident through their superstitious beliefs, their faith in the pundit, the customs and rituals they still follow and above all in their belief in preordination. The insularity of the East Indians is evidenced even in the fact that they have retained the use of Hindi. In spite of the insularity of the East Indians, however, the intrusion of the alien environment is already making itself felt. These Trinidad Hindus are forced to change their traditional custom and bury instead of cremating their dead. Raghu has to be buried, and later Biswas's own cremation “one of the few permitted by the Health Department (Naipaul 1969b: 590),” is conducted on the banks of a muddy stream. It is Tara, who sends Biswas to the Canadian Mission School, and then suddenly decides that he should be made a pundit. So, he is sent to pundit Jairam for training. Pundit Jairam is a strange man who holds scandalous views and is full of contradictions: “He believed in God, fervently, but claimed it was not necessary for a Hindu to do so. He attacked the custom some families had of putting up a flag after a religious ceremony; but his own front garden was a veritable grove of bamboo poles with red and white pennants in varying stages of decay. He ate no meat but spoke against vegetarianism: when Lord Rama went hunting, did they think it was just for sport?” (Naipaul 1969b: 51).

 Mediocrity portrays the lives of colonial people and this idea finds its expression through the activities and behaviours of various characters of this novel. Biswas nevertheless tries to rise above this mediocrity by trying to invent things and he goes on to buy seven expensive volumes of *Hawkin’s Electrical Guide*, but cannot go beyond making rudimentary items like doorbells and buzzers, not because he is incapable but simply because Trinidad cannot furnish him with the equipment necessary to carry out more complex experiments. But Biswas does not break heart he remains firm in his resolve. When Bhandat accuses Biswas of stealing a dollar Biswas returns home and in his humiliation cries out pathetically to his mother: “why do you keep on sending me to stay
with other people?” (Naipaul 1969b: 65). It is then that Biswas, for the first time, declares his resolution to have his own house, which for him has become a symbol of liberation: “I am going to get a job of my own. And am going to get my own house too. I am finished with this” (Naipaul 1969b: 67). Referring to Biswas’s unquenchable hope, Kenneth Ramchand observes: “But if Mr. Biswas finds his world a deterrent to ambition, as well as engulfing and repulsive, the faith in life with which his author endows him...is greater than the fictional character’s impulse to escape” (Ramchand 1983).

The traditional Hindu social order that preponderates the beginning part of the novel gradually courts the process of disintegration that has already begun to set in due to forces operating both within as well as outside it. In the character of Lal, a low caste Hindu converted to Presbyterianism; there is an oblique reference to the threat posed by such conversions to other religions. The rigidity of the Hindu social order is threatened from within by inter-caste marriages like the one between Biswas’s sister Dehuti and Ramchand, a low caste Hindu. At this stage, such marriages are strongly disapproved and the couple, being ostracised by the society, have to shift to Port of Spain. Later, however, such marriages become socially sanctioned as is evident in the arranged marriage between Shekar, Mrs. Tulsi’s elder son and Dorothy, who belongs to a Presbyterian family. When a beautiful, educated and rich girl cannot be found in the same caste Mrs. Tulsi is ready to settle for any Hindu girl who satisfies the required qualifications. However, when no Hindu girl fitting the description can be found, they ultimately settle for a girl, who belongs to “a laxly Presbyterian family, with one filling station, two lorries, a cinema and some land” (Naipaul 1969b: 231). Caste, till then the prime consideration, has now been replaced by pecuniary factors. Shekar’s marriage takes place in a registry office after which instead of bringing the bride home, it is Shekar who leaves Hanuman House to stay with the bride’s family and look after their business. The disintegration is also visible in casual inter-racial liaisons like the one between Bhandat and a Chinese woman. Though these are peripheral cases, yet, they signify the beginning of the process of disintegration of the rigid norms which governed the East Indian society. We get further evidence of the disintegration of Traditional Hindu Indian practices in their celebration of Christmas. The assimilation into the Creole culture is
complete when Mrs. Tulsi starts sending Sushila to burn candles in the Roman Catholic Church, puts a Crucifix in her room and has Pundit Tulsi’s grave cleaned for All Saint’s Day.

The American presence brings about the sudden economic boom in Trinidad and this becomes evident in the way people like Govind and Tuttle become suddenly rich. As the narrator points out: “There was money in the island. It showed in the suits of Govind, who drove the Americans in his taxi; in the possession of W.C. Tuttle who hired out his lorry to them; in the new cars; the new buildings” (Naipaul 1969b: 438). The economic boom brings about an occupational mobility making so many East Indians leaving their traditional occupation to move to the cities for brighter monetary prosperity and this brings about an interaction of Indians with the other segments of the society, leading Indians to the process of syncretism.

The feeling of temporariness, as Naipaul finds out and analyses, is a typical condition among the displaced people. Even Hanuman House, for all its apparent solidity is actually built of clay bricks, the reason being that “the Tulsis had never considered themselves settled in Arwacas or even Trinidad. It was no more than a stage in the journey that had begun when Pundit Tulsi left India” (Naipaul 1969b: 390). The old men who assemble in the arcade of Hanuman House continually talk of returning to India. However, when the opportunity to go back to India does come, they are afraid to leave the “familiar temporariness” of Trinidad. What has happened in the meanwhile is that without realising it subconsciously these East Indians have developed ties with Trinidad.

Importantly, Biswas’s attitude to Hanuman House changes after coming to The Chaze. He realises that though Hanuman House had seemed chaotic to him, it was in reality ordered. At The Chaze he feels reduced to a non-entity. What Naipaul seeks to convey is that one’s sense of identity is rooted in relationships, the denial of which can only lead to alienation. When Biswas realises that Hanuman House is a sanctuary he needs, his relationship with the Tulsis undergoes a change. He visits Hanuman House more often and even tries to win their favour. Nevertheless, a vague sense of desolation and uncertainty still haunts
him and heightens the tensions between him and Shama. Biswas's fear and uncertainty have to be understood in psychic terms. His fears are the fears of a man who has yet to find his place in an environment that disowns him.

Here, one may refer to the trauma and tribulations faced by the returned migrants from the West Indies. After completion of their indentured contract, around thirty per cent of the indentured labour returned back to India in the hope of living in comfort and prosperity with the money in their bags. But to their utter surprise and dismay, the India for which they were feeling so proud of and the India which was so much ingrained in their mind, body and soul in that distant land was no longer going to accept them with the least respectability as the indentured labour thought of; India was still lingering in primitivism with its caste system and again these people were peeped through very drudging eyes for crossing the sea and mixing with the people of other race. The indentured migrants thought that at least in the West Indies they were enjoying certain kind of respectability for their work proficiency and they were not reminded of their caste and religious hierarchy. So, through their letters of communications to other indentured Indians in the West Indies, the returned Indian indentured labour urged and requested them not to come back to India as it carried no promise for them. Some of the returned indentured Indians also re-indentured themselves to the West Indies or other parts of the colonial plantation estates.

A fervent longing and yearning and many struggles for possessing a house of his own makes Mr. Biswas succeed in owning a house of his own but moving into the house, the Biswases discover its many flaws and realise that they have been cheated. However, the fact that it is their own house makes them accommodate themselves to the every awkwardness of the house. Shama's new found loyalties become evident in the way she prepares the house to receive the Tuttles, she even tells them “I do not want anything bigger. This is just right for me. Something small and nice” (Naipaul 1969b: 580). Biswas too learns to reciprocate the feeling of love. To quote Madhusudana Rao: “In his own house, which is incomplete like his own syncopated individuality, he has come to respect the feeling of love, - that state of consciousness which recognises the value of
gifting one's self away to meet another's human need. In a sense, Mr. Biswas has at last arrived" (Rao 1982: 99). Here Naipaul makes it clear that for displaced people like the Biswases, owning a house does not just mean having a shelter; it means the imposition of an order into their chaotic and patternless existence; it signifies stability and coherence, which are the pre-requisites for the carving of an authentic self-hood. Biswas finally dies as an accommodated man, who has been successful in claiming a portion of the earth as his own and in leaving behind a proof of his existence. It is in the dignity of his death, that Biswas's triumph lies. Landeg White notes the masterly handling of the comprehensive material: “Biswa is only forty six when he dies, but by the end of the novel a whole history has passed before our eyes” (White 1975: 88).

Biswa's struggle for existence and proof of his selfhood speaks many volumes of dynamics of individual self, out of which an interesting ambivalence emerges. The individual remains dependent on the society for his sense of being. Paradoxically however, it is necessary to rebel against the society in order to forge an authentic personality. Naipaul's quest for his identity has been brilliantly summed up in his words: “I didn't know who I was.” It was writing which imposed an order on his experience and lent it coherence. Through an imaginative recreation of the past, he was able to reconcile himself to his present. Just as the house imposed a sense of order on the lives of the Biswases, the process of recording his ancestry helped Naipaul to find himself.

In this novel Naipaul projects a poignant picture of the struggle of East Indians to preserve their identity in an alien environment, but ultimately succumbing to the influence of the dominating culture. The compromises that these Indians have to make in order to come to terms with the alien environment and forge an identity for themselves, form a long and painful process, which is touchingly retold by Naipaul. Naipaul, equally, exposes the inadequacies of his society, but his tone is sympathetic. He understands the unique predicament of immigrant colonial societies and in The Overcrowded Barracoon (Naipaul 1976a: 38), he accepts the fact that the Indians of Trinidad are no longer of Asia, but a part of the New World: “Immigrants are people on their own. They cannot be judged by the standards of their older culture. Culture is like language, ever developing.
There is no right and wrong; no purity from which there is decline. Usage sanctions everything" (Naipaul 1976a: 38).

The experience of “wholeness,” necessitates the fusion of the individual and the social consciousness. However, the paradox of the modern predicament lies in the fact that owing to the fragmentation of societies, the affinity that was once felt between the two has now been broken. In the case of artificially created colonial societies like the West Indies and that of Trinidad, this split becomes even more pronounced. The history of the West Indies or Trinidad has followed the abnormal course of conquest, colonisation and domination. The influx of foreign immigrants completely altered the social makeup of the West Indies and Trinidad. The indigenous population has been replaced by transplants, consisting of African slaves, indentured Indians, Chinese labour and imported Europeans. Amidst such heterogeneity therefore, a unitary and homogeneous cultural identity is simply not possible in the case of Trinidadians or West Indians. It is only natural that these displaced people, uprooted from their real homes, should find themselves out of place in an alien land. In Elbaki Hermassi’s words: “Displaced from their real homes and transported to distant lands, they experience a totally 'negative sense of place.' They are unable to possess in the spiritual sense the land they have in the physical sense” (Hermassi 1980: 157). So, it is pluralism, that is the celebration and respect of each other’s socio-cultural norms and ethos can provide them that sense of ‘belongingness.’

The process of colonial cultural subjugation not only brought about the subjection and degradation of Indian cultural norms but also imposed severe restrictions on their life patterns making them reduced to virtual non-entities. It is against such a context that one must try to view the process of their coming into consciousness. Deeply involved in the colonised people’s quest for order and identity, Naipaul makes these aspects central to his novels. He is particularly interested in the fate of the individuals in the colonial ethos, where the pressure exerted by the colonising culture suppresses and distorts their identity. During the initial stages of cultural colonisation, the colonised seem to react by showing a complete, surrender of the “self” to the “other,” in a bid to win recognition. In this struggle, the colonised often felt that complete self-realisation is not possible in a society
that keeps pulling them back continuously. In *The Middle Passage*, Naipaul observes that individuals are forced to conform to the mediocrity of a society like Trinidad, which neither recognises talent nor allows it to flourish. In such a society, people who possess unusual skills are often cut down to size or “made to boil down” (Naipaul 1969a: 44). Placed in such a situation the talented and the gifted ones among the colonised were faced with the dilemma of either escaping from the society or fighting against the social order. Paradoxically, however, the quest for identity of the colonised was often expressed not through open assertion, but by a complete surrender of the “self” to the “other.”

Hence one can mark that the early novels of V.S. Naipaul, on the one hand, celebrate the voices and richness of a plural society, while on the other hand, they exhibit alienation and fears of a carnivalesque swallowing of identity by the colony. The author as exile finds some of the keys to an understanding of colonial Trinidad by leaving it and distancing himself from it. Yet, his exile exacerbates fears that he has carried with him from the colony, especially a fear of being entrapped, of losing his special identity (as East Indian and as exile in the metropolis) by being lumped with Trinidadians or West Indians generally – by being rendered carnivalescantly one of the “folk.” The author's equivocal attitude towards the colony manifests itself in the interplay of voices, the “double voicelessness,” of the 1950s novels. Inherent in this double voicelessness and thus double perspective is the possibility of indirection and indeterminacy. In “London” (1958), Naipaul mentions a few such “misreadings”, reviews that concluded that his purpose in writing was “to show how funny Trinidad Indians are”, that he “looks down a long Oxford nose” at his own ethnic community, and that he does or does not (depending upon the particular reviewer’s assessment) write about Trinidad with “warm affection” (Naipaul 1976a). Naipaul cites the cultures portrayed in these novels as the source of the misreadings, explaining that “exotic writers” face obstacles in getting their work accepted on its literary merits and that only a reader who knows the West Indies will read the novels as they are meant to be read. On the one hand, these novels celebrate the voices and spirit of a people who, though facing harsh realities, manage to live together in a multicultural, multiracial society; on the other hand, the novels expose a malaise that is partly concealed by, partly expressed by, a people's humour and gaiety. They tell not only
stories with “local colour,” but disturbing stories as well about the trauma of a changing West Indian society.

V.S. Naipaul’s Exilic Self

Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul, a colonial West Indian with an Indian ancestry and writing about the West Indies highlights imagistically on the kinds of social, cultural, physical and psychological dislocations and displacement experienced by him and his fellow East Indians. Born and brought up in the West Indian domain, having an Indian lineage and being trained in English craftsmanship and encompassing an English attitude, V.S. Naipaul dwindles in an “in-between;” he is part of, yet not part of the English world, both included and excluded from it. To write about Trinidad and West Indian societies the colonial had to define a new relationship between self and metropolitan other; he had not only to make present what had been set on the margins, but also to show values in the colony in terms other than the values of another, very different world. Naipaul was marginalised, like other colonials, through the ideology and myths of Englishness, and through this and other experiences he began to learn to see as an exile.¹

Writers or intellectuals in exile are not a recent phenomenon, nor do all think of exile in the same terms, no matter what their nationality or place from which they originate. Some people wish to be a stranger among others, with their personal liberty by one foot in one country, the other foot in another. Some others like to be a foreigner everywhere to enjoy all places. This experience of liberty sometimes becomes prime appeal of exile. Some people are pushed or pulled towards the exilic. Exile in its general parlance can be perceived as a division between the self and others. In the most common usage it can be understood as the loss or the repudiation of ties and attachments with close and dear

¹ Keeping the novels of Naipaul and experiences of Indians in the West Indies, an attempt has been made in this section to discuss and analyse the exilic self of V.S. Naipaul. Some of the ideas of exile has been taken from Timothy Weiss, Todorov, Kristeva, Bakhtin and some others to analyse the exilic sensibility of V.S. Naipaul.
others, "family, community, society" among whom one lives or has lived. The exilic sensibility possesses dual dimensions: it can result in the self's fragmentation, yet it can also lead to a syncretism of old and new aspects of self-identity; the exile feels the pain of leaving home, yet goes forward into a world of new possibilities and experiences an opening up of self and world. Exile is a break with the centre and a manner of perception from the margins of other worlds. In the words of Tzvetan Todorov, the exile is one who interprets his or her life in a foreign country as an experience of not-belonging and cherishes it for that very reason. Exile is a process of becoming, in between origins and destinations, and because the exile is in-between, his journey can be two-directional movement (Quoted in Weiss 1992: 5). The exile, like Naipaul, may remain keenly interested in his former community and society, but to cultivate this interest and to probe its depths he needs to live in a foreign land. Todorov goes on to explain that one can be an exile even in one's own country, for it is the same sentiment of exile, though of lesser intensity, that motivates certain people to move from a town to a big city in order to be anonymous, to be a stranger among others of one's own nation, and thus, to resist integration within a community and to have one's private world (Quoted in Weiss 1992). This sense of exile can be marked in the lives of the Indian indentured immigrants in the early phase of their arrival into the West Indian land mass. As is understood from the writings of V.S. Naipaul, historical documents, sociological, cultural and anthropological studies, Indian indentured labour to the West Indies were ostracised from the mainstream 'West Indian society', if this existed at that time. And being ostracised they began to look themselves as exiles and equated their lives with that of Rama, the Hindu mythological figure from the Ramayana, who was banished from his empire for fourteen years and after the completion of their banishment or indentureship (for Indian indentured labour), like Rama, they had to come back to their motherland. Here the dual dimension of the exile needs to be understood: in this strange land the Indians were brooding of their loss of motherland and on the other end, their perception of themselves as exiles, hence returning back to the motherland gave them some sense of promise and hope. On the other sense, in the West Indies Indians were exiled due to their seclusion and no interaction with other segments of the West Indian society, which comprised of blacks, Creoles, whites and other indentured labour.
Of course it is true that a split marks the beginning of exile, yet at the same time it carries the prospect and possibility for new interactions and connectedness; it makes one understand one's self, culture, and society through the lens of others. What intrigues Naipaul is the potential plurality of the exile's perception, Naipaul in an interview with Ian Hamilton remarks on its opposite, a closure to foreignness: "Since I went to India [in the early 1960s] I've become interested in the way different cultures have different ways of seeing. Columbus, a medieval man, voyaging in a miraculous world, which causes him no surprise. Gandhi coming to England and leaving not a word of description, remembering only that when he arrived at Southampton, he was dressed in white" (Hamilton 1977: 45). Exile introduces and exposes one to an awakening and experience of diversity and heterogeneity and it also leads one to the basic connection between self and others. Paul Bowles writes in Their Heads Are Green and Their Hands Are Blue, "Each time I go to a place I have not seen before, I hope it will be as different as possible from the places I already know (Bowles 1957: vii). The exile has a heightened awareness of this, which can lead, variously, to wonder or estrangement, to a bond or a search for exotic others, to an embrace of the stranger within or a frightened depiction of monsters and a fear of the self's annihilation by alien others.

One's own preference for exile or one's compulsion for exile and one is being exiled against his or her will or one is exiled through force are not the same, but this distinction is less apparent in Naipaul's writings. Ralph Singh, in the Mimic Men, is exiled from Isabella, his West Indian island home, because of his political views and his party's failures, but Singh has an exile's mentality long before he is put on a plane for London. His departure fulfills a wish and continues a flight from the colony motivated by a long history of empire. For Singh, exile begins in his colonial inheritance and the many flights of exiles before him from colony to metropolis. But in the Miguel Street nothing happens worthwhile in that place and after obtaining a scholarship the boy leaves for the metropolis to continue his study. Here the boy may not have an inner will to leave that 'place' but the situation and time are the factors pushing and pulling him to be exilic; he leaves them behind, but he does not walk alone; he is accompanied by his shadow, the
past extending into his future. Here one may read Naipaul’s own leaving for England to continue his study. During the 1940s and 50s though this sense extends to much later, but especially during these periods in the West Indies it was a fervent aspiration for the parents as well as children to leave the West Indies for the metropolis especially, England, America, Canada and Europe to prolong their studies because West Indies did not provide that kind of worthwhile structure where one can learn something meaningful and sensible. When Naipaul himself got a scholarship to study in England his joy knew no bound and it was a celebration time for his family as well as his relatives. In *A House For Mr. Biswas*, Mr. Biswas has always a fervent wish to send his son abroad for study and when his son (Naipaul himself) obtains a scholarship to go to England to prolong his study it provides an immense inner satisfaction and solace to an unaccommodative and restless soul. Lo Julia Kristeva’s remarks that a wound (*une blessure*) pushes the exile to wander (Quoted in Weiss 1992). Here bringing some of the psychological ideas of consciousness of Freud, one can say that in the subconscious stage this wound in the West Indian boy gets created once the boy leaves the West Indian physical land mass to be encountered as the stranger in a new land, where he will be asked about his strange or savage habits or acts; here one may refer to Selvon, who in one of his writings says that when he landed in the metropolis he found people curious to know about him and his fellow beings staying in trees, moving without cloth or habits of hunting etc., however this may be due to the lack of much knowledge about the Caribbean at that time or simply a colonial stereotype. Coming back to the point, what is important here to remember is that the West Indies pushes the boy to leave and on the other, the metropolis is the only place where he can fulfill his aspirations. Subconsciously, this makes the boy ‘dwindle’; he fails to define his status. If he is an exile (here it should be remembered that this sense exists in the boy only in the subconscious stage), then he loses himself engrossed in the questions like, whether he has been pushed to that status, or it has been a compulsion, or it has been a will and aspiration. The boy grows up with these kinds of grappling and that makes him sometimes land in the dismissal of his homeland. As Patrick French says, “Naipaul’s dismissal became a part of his persona, a persona he invented in order to realise his early ambition to escape the periphery for the centre, to leave the powerless for the powerful, and to make himself a great writer” (French 2008: 192)
xv). For many exiles in the present day that wound begins as a force from without, a violation of human rights or a threat of extinction. For some, Edward Said notes, exile would seem without cause or rationale: "Think...of the uncountable masses for whom UN agencies have been created, or refugees without urbanity, with only ration cards and agency numbers" (Said 1984: 269).

A tradition of exile is also shared by Caribbean writers too, as Kenneth Ramchand notes, by the early 1950s the pattern was established of emigration to the Mother Country for West Indian writers seeking the stamp of approval and wishing to live by their pens; nearly every West Indian novel since then has been first published by London publishing houses for sale to members of the British public (Ramchand 1983: 12). It is not merely the fact that the prospect for a successful career lie beyond the Caribbean is the only deliberation for these writers, but there are other considerations as well for these writers. As Wilson Harris speculates, exile may be native to the Caribbean writer, who lives in 'exile' in his or her own country, an exile that takes place against the social background of what Harris calls a philistinism, a *persona* adopted by people in a dangerous world where they must play it safe and take no risks (Harris 1983: 120-122). Caribbean writers must constantly confront this philistinism, separating them from their community.

Among the amass of people with whom the exile lives, he is socio-culturally different from them and he possesses a different value system from that of others, which defines himself more sharply against that strangeness. In fact this may lead to a deepening understanding of self and others, as well as to an egocentric or ethnocentric disregard of others. At its extreme, this disregard that views others as objects can turn into the exploitation, even destruction, inherent in the many forms of racism. Here one may refer to the process of colonisation in the West Indies; the landing of Columbus and then the arrival of European colonial to plunder and exploit the West Indies. If one is interpreting and looking at the colonials as exiles in the sense of a will or monetary aspiration that 'wounded' (here the wound is positively used, that is to, inner will to create and gain monetary opportunities and benefits in the New World that pushed the colonials) them to land in the New World, one can say that the 'others' that are, the aborigines, Negro
slaves, Asian indentured labour and others became subject of exploitation and annihilation. So, the exile's experience of strangeness can result in non-seeing, or seeing only through the blinders of one's preconceptions; in this mode there is no dialogic interaction between self and others because the other is only an object in the self's path of plan and action. As has been discussed above in some of the novels of Naipaul, though some places carry the stamp of pluralism with multi-racial population inhabiting and crowding the place yet in very few instances they meet and interact except in occasions meant for 'gains.' And on the other end, each race and ethnicity is perceived as a block to other's prosperity. In a negative sense, then, the exile with it's 'strangeness' may see the other, or another culture or people, only as a variation (often flawed or degenerate) of his or her own.

Kristeva analyses the exilic self of the foreigner or stranger from a psychological perspective, scrutinising the process of estrangement and the response of the stranger within to the stranger without. As has been mentioned above, disturbance, or wound, pushes the exile into his wanderings; those who meet him respond with a mixture of fascination and fear, for he plays a double role in their community, on the one hand revealing the hidden meaning of the tribe, and on the other hand, undermining the consensus. The stranger cuts through other's feelings of security and shows them their dark place. The stranger, Kristeva explains, is within as well as without, for culture implants in us certain values and their opposites, sameness and otherness, identity and strangeness. Whether one flees or confronts the stranger, one struggles with one’s own shadows, one’s unconscious. A sizeable body of Naipaul criticism has highlighted his oppositional/critical tirade that flays him for his anti-West Indian stance, partially to hide his own inadequacies. This view, as is well-known, was made convincing by George Lamming who said: “...When such a writer is a colonial, ashamed of his own cultural background and striving like mad to prove himself through promotion to the peaks of a superior culture whose values are gravely in doubt, then satire, like the charge of philistinism, is for me more than a refuge...” (Lamming 1960). Lamming's famous remarks in *The Pleasures of Exile*, later echoed by Braithwaite and others, in fact reflect a body of opinion that represents, what Wilson Harris said “The collective West Indian
identity" that every West Indian must embrace. Much against this critical call, Naipaul's early satiric portrayal of the Trinidad waywardness and buffoonery in *Miguel Street*, *The Mystic Masseur* and *The Suffrage of Elvira* trigged this view that takes him to task for deliberately presenting himself as a detached, unconcerned spectator of the drama of illiterate, powerless hordes of trapped people. Naipaul — as the view reflects — is "a colonial in crisis," a man whose psychic centre is that of Europe, whose violent turmoil of having been born in an unknown, ghetto like corner of the world (and not in a metropolis) that characterises his psychic trauma, deep inferiority which results, as stated earlier, in a stasis, rather than a positive comprehension or analysis of socio-historical forces that have shaped the West Indian or Third World nations. But, in a world that is arguably growing more heterogeneous, more cosmopolitan, we are all becoming strangers, Kristeva states. Only by recognising the stranger in ourselves can we learn to live with others and achieve a multicultural, multiracial society; although this may sound like a utopian wish, it is also becoming a new world necessity (Quoted in Weiss 1992: 9).

Exile may provoke extreme responses: just as the stranger can fascinate or frighten, so too strangeness can channel the exile's energies creatively or destructively. Exile can fragment the self, reconstruct it syncretistically, or fragment and reconstruct in cycles. As the exile breaks ties with others, he lives within solitude, and the experience of exile can produce an intense *dechirement* or a splitting of self and world (Weiss 1992). As an outcast from the tribe, the exile may feel self-loathing and self-defilement, or he may despise others who rest secure within the tribe for their provincialism. The exile may withdraw into the self, as does Santosh in Naipaul's short story *One Out of Many* when, tired of the strange, bewildering world of America, he retreats into his cabinet/bed (Naipaul 1971b: 29). The exile may escape into fantasy as does Singh in his reveries of Old England and of a graceful, aesthetic life on an idealised West Indian cocoa plantation. Like the voyager in the Mediterranean fantasy "the enigma of arrival" in Naipaul's novel of that title - the exile may wander the world yet always end up in the same place, because he carries with him, in his mind, his past and the city from which he has escaped physically but can never escape psychologically.
The exile may always make attempts to return to the past, and, of course, always fail in his attempts and land in the same place like the Tulsi elders in *A House for Mr. Biswas*. Here the past is an idealised moment before the fissure of self and world and the expulsion from the “garden” of one’s native land; the exile, like Pundit Tulsi, may try to recreate the motherland from which he has been torn and end up living in a world of fantasy instead. In many of Naipaul’s writings one finds the experience of exile as dechirement or the splitting of self and world. The author alludes to the culturally induced inner turmoil felt by the Indian (and Trinidad Indian) who had left his community for abroad, in his essay “East Indian,”: “To leave India’s sacred soil, to cross the ‘black water’, was considered an act of self-defilement. So completely did these migrants recreate India in Trinidad that they imposed a similar restriction to those who wished to leave Trinidad” (Naipaul 1976a). In his initial years in England, Naipaul feels pangs of guilt, believing that he should be back home to help his ailing father and give moral support to his family (Naipaul 1985). In the story “One Out of Many” the author treats variations on these feelings through his exiled, Indian protagonist Santosh, who is stuck by pains of an imagined self-defilement after such taboo acts as intercourse with a “hubshi” (black woman) and the purchase of a western hat and suit. Traditional, religious (Hindu) minded Santosh with a caste prejudice is very much tormented by the sexual act, and takes a shower to purify himself after the sexual encounter. And after hastily buying the new clothes, he leaves them in the box, unable to wear them because he believes that to do so would be to overstep his caste boundaries and invite humiliation. The sex and the suit symbolise aspects of his new identity that he has yet to assimilate; though Santosh has been successful in enduring in the United States, but he has failed to attain a syncretism in which Indian and American values are embraced with the acceptance and celebration of their differences, where self and other exist in difference yet harmony. A sense of difference and harmony: this is perhaps the positive outcome of exile as an intercultural process. Coming back to the Indians’ encounter in the West Indies, Indian traditional religious values always stood in their ways of modernism, which they considered as an attempt of the other to ‘christen’ them. Like Santosh’s shower after the sexual encounter with the black woman and his suit, which he feared to wear due to the apprehension of loss of religious values, Indians always used their religious and
traditional values as protective shield to guard themselves from the ‘other,’ hence not allowing their ‘selves’ to mix with the ‘other.’ And looking from the other side, the ‘others,’ that are blacks, whites, Creoles and other ethnic segments of the West Indian population perceived the Indians as ‘new slaves’ (French 2008) with savage acts, hence looked at the Indians as the ‘other’ not to be respected and accommodated in the West Indian social structure. But the gradual progression of the West Indian society found the ‘self’ and ‘other’ existing in difference yet in harmony, leading it towards pluralism.

It may be remembered that the split between the exiled self and others can lead to dangerous repercussions and this split between the exiled self and other has been treated in its darkest aspects in his novels of the 1960s, Mr. Stone and the Knights Companion and The Mimic Men, but this split is inherent to the point of view, situations, and sensibility of many of Naipaul's essays and novels. The threat of breaking down, a deepening fissure within the self and between self and others, looms as a possibility in An Area of Darkness, The Mimic Men, In a Freee State, Guerrillas, A Bend in the River, Finding the Centre, and The Enigma of Arrival. In “One Out of Many,” that possibility is signified by Santosh's fascination with mirrors and their implicit questioning of his identity. (In the Foreword to Seepersad Naipaul's The Adventures of Gurudeva, V.S. Naipaul, recalling his father's breakdown, suggests the source of the mirror in Santosh's story: “My father looked in the mirror and thought he couldn't see himself. It was the beginning of a long mental illness that caused for a time to be unemployed, and as dependent as he had been in his childhood” (Naipaul 1976: 18). In Finding the Centre and The Enigma of Arrival the possibility of breakdown is symbolised by dreams of a crumbling bridge and an exploding head. But like the experience of exile, mirrors and dreams are ambiguous; the mirror of “One Out of Many” may also stand for a vehicle of reconstruction or syncretism of Santosh's Indian-American self. One can view the different, extreme responses to exile – breakdown, or burst of creativity and sense of focussed identity – as different aspects of a recursive process or cycle within the self.

Exile offers significant creative possibilities. It offers what Todorov terms the “epistemological privilege” of being a stranger: one is surprised by the new; one
examines things more closely because one looks at them in a new way. The exile exercises, potentially, what Bakhtin calls an "exotopy," a vision from the outside through which he or she can see what those "inside" (at anchor, at home) cannot. Todorov's epistemological privilege and Bakhtin's exotopy convey the basic idea that one can better know the centre from the margins, that is to as, in order to know one's self and one's own community and society, one must in a sense know all the world.² V.S. Naipaul's birthplace in Trinidad, with an Indian ancestry and an exile self residing in England makes him sit in an extremely detached and objective position to critically and objectively analyse the various dimensions of West Indian society. The concept or idea 'marginality' has been defined as the relationship between empire (the centre) and its colonies (the margins), here one may extend this metaphor to connote a mentality or map that the colonial exile carries with him to the metropolis and to other parts of the globe. Ling Mei Lim in V.S. Naipaul's Later Fiction: The Creative Constraints of Exile, argues that while Naipaul "cultivates an 'outsider's' perspective, the authenticity of his work comes from those experiences of living inside the Third World. By maintaining a hold on both the 'inner' and 'outer' perspectives, he transforms the 'fragmented consciousness' into an artistic advantage, rather than a crippling factor" (Lim 1984: 269). Dialogue between perspectives and syncretistic transformation holds the key idea here. To be on the margins is to be part of yet not part of; in the self's encounter with others, the exile can live a "double exteriority" for he or she belongs to two cultures without identifying wholly with either (Weiss 1992). The exile can engage in a cross-cultural dialogue and through that dialogue can affirm both his uniqueness and the interrelationship between himself and others.

Attitudes and modes of cross-cultural perception, encounter, and communication are entailed by the exile. The exile understands the self through the lens of strangers, and understands strangers through the lens of exiled self. So, exile provides a broader framework and dimension to study and analyse variant aspects and dynamics. Naipaul analyses and comprehends colonial Trinidadian (West Indian) society partly through the

² The ideas of Todrov and Bakhtin are taken from Weiss, Timothy F. (1992), On The Margins The Art of Exile in V.S. Naipaul, Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press.
lens of metropolitan English society, and colonial and postcolonial societies partly through the lens of Trinidadian (West Indian) society. For Naipaul exile turns into a journey to and testing of the limits of understanding and creativity. “Part of the problem...is that you use up your experience,” he explains about the challenge of writing. “The great triumph is to go on.” Throughout his career he has linked travel, writing, and the knowing of self through others: “I have to travel. Unless my imagination can be released from all these familiar deadening scenes, I will go stale. My travel is so different from that of Graham Greene and others. They are travellers in a world that's been made safe for them by empire. ... The primary difference between my travel and theirs is that while they travel for the picturesque, I'm desperately concerned about the countries I'm in” (Michener 1981: 105, 109). The most important idea delineated here is that travel can liberate, but it also by definition displaces. Naipaul embraces travel not only because it frees him, but also because it entangles him in the need to understand and respond—chiefly through his writings about himself and others. Unlike Greene, Naipaul the Trinidadian, Asian-Indian must enter into a relationship with the colonial or formerly colonial people he observes in India, Pakistan, and other countries; he cannot look only from the safe distance of his difference because he and they do share something in a tangled way. Naipaul writes that he is “desperately concerned about the countries” he travels in; he is, of course, but that does not mean that the relationship he enters into with their people is one that acknowledges their dignity and their meaningfulness in being different from him.

To conclude one can say that exile holds a two-dimensional canvass: the experience of exile holds new possibilities for seeing and understanding, but these can also be painful and paradoxical. In order to find the centre the exile believes that one must look from the margins; and that in order to know one’s self and society, one should venture to know the entire world, though sometimes what one sees and knows is a selection and construction. For Naipaul, exile is often a recurring, reinforcing division between self and others that separates him from his Hindu Indian community in Trinidad, from other Trinidadians, from the English in London, from Indians in India, and from the people in the developing countries to which he travels and lives as an observer. He is a person “on the margins” by
inheritance and choice: as a child shuffled from house to house (The Listener: 306), as the son of an iconoclastic journalist, as an East Indian in a primary black West Indian society, as a colonial in the English metropolis (where he has lived, in his own words, as a “a refugee,” as someone “peripheral” and in “limbo”) (Hamilton 1977: 41), as an East Indian-West Indian out of place in the “motherland” of India, as a writer from a developing country who writes acerbically about people in developing countries, as non believer among believers during his journey in India and Islamic countries, as the writer from a distant, former British colony, who by the “exercise of his talent...has set himself adrift” (Naipaul 1976). Exile, then as an experience of not belonging, as an epistemology, and as a manner of perception and encounter informs Naipaul's works, variously shaping their characters, themes, narration, and views of the world (Cudjoe 1988: 29). These works emerge from the “double exteriority” of Naipaul's belonging yet not belonging completely to either colony or metropolis, Third World or First World. They emerge through the tension between recursive voyages of exile and a sense of the past and home, and through the author's construction of a new syncretistic identity for himself and others.

**V.S. Naipaul's Diasporic Sensibility**

Almost all the diasporic writers have sought to record their experiences of adoption and adaptation in the new environment and the issues of loss, nostalgia, selfhood and identification provide them their diasporic canvass in which they paint the variant pictures of their new and old homelands. Culture, religion, ancestry, literature and history provide a strong sense of bonding in diasporic condition, but where this bonding moves or strives for new patterns of ethnic identity, it brings sometimes itself in a conflicting situation or even exclusion in the metropolitan zones of the west. The present day self-proclaimed, mobile and multiple identities may be seen “not as a market of contemporary social fluidity and dispossession but a new stability, self-assurance and quietism” (Young, 1995: 4). This “quietism” indicates one's coming to terms with unfixed modes of existence and professions; to opportunities the First World offers through attractive assignments, metropolitan consumerism, freedom to travel, petro dollars or illusory
promises of a heavenly life with utmost equality and justice. In this world of globalisation and trans-nationalism, not only the commodities move, but also the human beings cross borders in search for the promise and prosperity that the metropolis makes them dreamt of; hence begins the process of trauma and tribulations of dislocations, broodings, identity quest, nostalgia, loss of selfhood, issues of diasporic sensibility or notions of exilic self and so on.; thus marking the beginning of the germination of diasporic discourse making the sociologists, cultural critics, historians, cultural anthropologists, men of literature and policy planners to trace out the answers to these concerns. Here it should be remembered that diaspora is not a recent phenomenon, neither the diasporic discourse; as has been discussed in the previous chapters of this study, from the very ancient period human history is encountering this notion of diaspora and diaspora has occurred in many forms. Through the diasporic writings or discourses the diasporic writers not only exhibit their own and their fellow diasporic beings’ sensibilities but also open up new paradigms in which the lives of these people can be understood and revisited. V.S. Naipaul’s stance as a West Indian by birth with Indian ancestry, having a training in English craftsmanship with English attitudes, experience of meeting the globe with his traveling, exilic contemplation and diasporic self, makes him stand in an extremely superb position to analyse various dynamics and vitalities of these people.

Naipaul’s position and status as a diasporic writer needs to be understood and evaluated through the Caribbean literary, historical and cultural imponderables, which are fraught with all kinds of violent mixings. Recording the course of Caribbean history that has shaped his initial progressive development of his personality and traits, Naipaul claims in the first section of *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” (Naipaul 1994: 20). The Caribbean ‘synthetic’ society opens up the history of the Caribbean, which is bloody, violent with each racial group's memories adding new dimensions to its already difficult human
terrain. It speaks many volumes of the dark pages of cruelty exerted to the humanity; the discovery of these enchanted islands saw the flooding of many European colonial masters who in their first arrival in these islands massacred the aborigine Amerindians like, Arawaks and Caribs and annihilated their cultural notions and norms to prepare them to work for their mines and uncovering the hidden treasures, then was written one of the darkest episodes of human civilisation with the arrival of African slaves and then came the turn of the Asians and Indians to be crushed under the diabolic wheels of colonialism and other white European labour and labour of other ethnic segments also shared the same kind of history. So, from the time of their discovery in the fifteenth century the Caribbean islands were seen as objects to be exploited rather than colonies to be settled, which ultimately led to the intervention of European powers—France, Spain, England and the fierce rivalry among them in the ‘possession’ of the islands. The introduction of the plantation system at the end of the sixteenth century for sugar cultivation, based on African slave labour implicated the society in a cycle of deformed human relationships, miscegenation and racial prejudice. The other and the culturally significant event in the history of the Caribbean is the import of Indian and the Asian indentured labour around the 1830s; something seminal to Naipaul’s literary and individual development. Unlike the Africans, Indian indentured labour carried with them their civilisational values and ethos, their cultural and religious artifacts and texts, which they considered dearer than their lives any mixing with the other was perceived as proneness to christening. On the other, the colonial white masters found the Indians culturally rock like, unlike the clay like blacks whom they could stretch into any shape. The Indians’ dereliction, isolation, physical rootlessness in alien locales and poverty, imaginatively rendered by Naipaul is now part of his own inseparable destiny and place in the Caribbean literature. The essence of those historical experiences, unmarked or unimportant except in a communal, familial sense, has propelled Naipaul to look at the whole West Indian past and the Manichean history of colonialism with which the fate of all racial components of the islands are tied up.

In the beginning this was the nature of the West Indian society; separation and closed boundary that characterised the structure of the West Indian society, but gradually with
the all-round progression the West Indian socio-cultural canvass courted the ensemble of culture, races, communities, languages and the folk traditions which drove it towards plurality and multiculturalism which gradually placed the Caribbean literature and writers in a curiously privileged position. Along with this other developments in the social, cultural, economic and political domain affected the West Indian society, accumulating rich treasure of subject matters to be portrayed in the works of several West Indian writers like Wilson Harris, George Lamming, Sam Selvon, Roger Mais, V.S. Naipaul and Jean Rhys, among others. The West Indian society and economy had so many limitations in creating opportunities for the educational, professional and academic attainment both for the indentured Indian as much for the African ex-slave. This double struggle for financial security and intellectual advancement thus consisted the West Indian writers' struggles to move away to attain this coveted goal in European hibernation or exile. It was against this background that the literary experiments of the 1950s took shape. Derek Walcott, Braithwaite, Lamming, Selvon, Mittelholzer and Naipaul with their shift to London struggled to etch out new literary patterns of journey hardly easy in metropolitan London; each one had his own 'history' to describe. Most writers including Naipaul were concerned about the West Indian social condition, the culturally fragmented society, the question of literacy, the writer's role and of course, the question of cultural identity. The failure (or his ability) on the part of the exile to reconnect with his homeland is something which is itself a controversial area of discussion and debate, particularly in the case of writers like Naipaul who have reached a 'terminal' stage in their complicated umbilical relationship with Trinidad. As is clear, he has been moving closer to refocus through a mental prism the events of European intervention in the Caribbean by viewing monuments, buildings, roads, squares and the old plantation areas. The important aspect here is Naipaul's involvement with the issues of cultural and literary identity in multiple ways, and secondly, his intellectual and personal obsession with India as a country and metaphor that he evokes in a mood of anger and despair, at other times signifying a desperate need to approach the new reality of India with a dramatic shift in stance. Naipaul’s diasporic discourse needs to be understood in many complex perspectives: the initial West Indian society with multiple socio-cultural variants, then the evolution of the society to plurality, then Naipaul’s colonial self residing in the metropolis colony, his
Naipaul as an ex-colonial individual and writer quests for a viable tradition, carrying within him a whole burden of race, history, language and personal ambition. Naipaul not only inquires and examines the involuntary forces of history that shaped him and his ancestry, but also retraces phenomenon of a whole gamut of nationalities, cultures, races and people. This of course triggers from his views on indenture system and the helpless dereliction that it symbolised: the indentured man's existential plight, one such being his father's who was a second generation East Indian in Trinidad. Eventually, Naipaul's compulsive journeys through the leftover territories of the Empire, his dark peregrinations in search for parallels and literary correlatives – India, Caribbean, Africa, Latin America, the Islamic world multiplied and accentuated his creative burdens and harsh conclusions about things. Finding the Centre illustrates Naipaul's search for 'centre' of order, the process of the growth of knowledge, a centre which as one could see at the present time, Naipaul located from his beginnings which in turn light up the zones of darkness and the purgatorial spots of civilisations: “A writer after a time carries his world with him, his own burden of experience, human experience and literary experience (one deepening the other); and I do believe... that I would have found equivalent connections with my past wherever I went” (Naipaul 1985: 10). This carrying of 'burdens' for Naipaul, the displaced writer, goes back to his earlier attempts to rationalise and organise scattered bits of experience; colonial, political, cultural, autobiographical. It is this kind of unbroken correspondence between travel and fiction, between his autobiography and imaginary personages and events that has enabled Naipaul to clearly observe and critically absorb the apparently disconnected bits of history and social fact into the fine art of fiction, documentation and reportage.

Born in Chaguanas, primarily a rural belt in Trinidad and being grown up in Port of Spain after his family shifted to that place, Naipaul had the experience of the rural Trinidad as well as the large city, with the mixed black-mulatto society containing sprinklings of Asians, Syrians, Javanese, Christians, Muslims and Chinese. Seepersad Naipaul's, V.S. Naipaul's father, journalistic career in The Trinidad Guardian started here; it was indeed
quite struggling and fascinating for a man to go for a job like this, quite undreamt for an Indian at that time and then developing the ambition of and becoming a writer, coming from that kind of background – Hindu, rural, uprooted and extremely conservative, with the peripheral life in a small agricultural colony. In the Preface to *The Adventures of Gurudeva* Naipaul has pointed out that his literary ambition, his singular decision to be a writer was an inheritance he received from his father. And there is yet another and a significant 'point' which later became a point of departure for Naipaul himself in London; the crystallisation of the local East Indian life he saw and knew. Coming from the East Indian segment which after the turn of the century had enlarged, his father's marriage into distant relations brought that background to the fore. Seepersad chose to write about his own background and people; poor, unimportant, illiterate a life and a background he celebrated. To Naipaul the extended family, the relations, the rituals could hardly yield any rewarding meaning about the outside world in Trinidad with all its entanglements of race and history. Through his father's narrations and writings Naipaul was introduced to the aimlessness, the rootless isolation of the Indians in the West Indies. Naipaul's diasporic self has passed through complicated stages of scepticism, recollection and courage which accompanied his idea of not having a literary model, a tradition or a viable subject matter. Indeed the lack of a subject matter or tradition ironically turned out to be a positive one for Naipaul, for his insistence on writing out of an 'unknown' experience took him back to his own roots.

In the diasporic writings of the contemporary time one of the prime aspects to be marked is one's dialogue with history and the urge to define one's location in a given situation. As Manjit Inder Singh (1998: 75) claims, there could be two ways in which to spell out and rationalise one's historical place: either to see history as a tragic accident, a fateful coincidence and shape their response in terms of a committed protest that in turn promises to give birth to a new humanism. This is the role that most African writers (Francophone and Anglophone) have taken up. The second and the more problematic is the writer's malaise of history, his turning into a voice of derision, overwhelmed by the fact of privation and dispossession. The second category of writers is seen to “withdraw to a position of cynicism with regard to their people” (Quoted in Singh 1998: 75). Many
critics have found out Naipaul as typical of this attitude. An approach like this makes it difficult to see beyond the tragedy of circumstance or a fracture, to the complex survival which the transplanted cultures in the New World underwent. In this kind of criticism, typical of the anti-Naipaul stance of Afro-Caribbean writers, he is seen as indulging in paranoia and rhetoric through which he ironically exposes his own inadequacies and lack of empathy for his people and fictional protagonists. Some critics go on arguing that the total lack of a national consciousness on the part of Naipaul – Caribbean or Indian – alienates him from the dominant attitude of writers in Caribbean and Africa. Naipaul's outright attacks on post-independence politics and political opportunism are seen to mix with an overt nostalgia for the previous European statuesque in opposition to vigorous anti-colonial works by Achebe, Ngugi, Tayib Salih, and Lamming. Likewise, Naipaul's "longings", his permanent life in London and his dislike of its character, are seen as contradictions of migrant literary experiences in view of racist overtones in metropolitan zones. To hark back, Naipaul's writings mask a personality so radical in its scepticism, insight and yearnings that they will never be in tune with the political rhetoric of merging or developed nations. The recurring character in his later work is of a "deluded foreign liberal" who mediates and flies across the world through his own brand of East Indian/modernist stance.

Naipaul has courted severe criticism from the West Indian writers like, George Lamming, Wilson Harris, Braithwaite and several others for desisting the collective West Indian identity that every West Indian in their views, must embrace, and the criticism stems much for his anti-Third World stance and for deliberately presenting himself as a detached, unconcerned spectator of the drama of illiterate, powerless hordes of trapped people, partially to hide his own inadequacies. Though his father Seepersad Naipaul was never a happy man and was always feeling out of harmony in that 'starnge' land, yet he realised the bare necessity and adjusted himself to the (and much before Naipaul's expressed horror of it) unloved Trinidadian society. The provincial and staid preoccupations in the Hindu/Brahmin culture, the colonial Trinidad he has never emotionally embraced and the wretchedness and humiliations of his father in a family where he was an appendage sponsored Naipaul's escape. Never feeling a part to the
Trinidadian society Naipaul’s hope and dream was laid outside. And the East Indian community with its inner insulation and communal interests was itself a fading culture within a social structure whose principal native cultural influence was Creolisation. What is of interest is that Naipaul's alienation and malaise of a community had to do with factors quite beyond him. It is understandable, then, Naipaul’s confusion in having been born into an inauthentic Indo-Caribbean transitional setting, which further complicated things for him after living in the confused and encaged world of rituals in the East Indian subculture. In Naipaul's case, the craze, the dream to realise his western cringe can thus be located in factors which he as a child and adolescent grew into for a variety of reasons. The shaping of his aesthetic and personal responses is obviously tagged to his conception of the mixed, chaotic and disorderly Caribbean set up.

The West Indian writers’ criticism of V.S. Naipaul basically stems from the note of rejection that pervades the novels of V.S. Naipaul and they believe and claim that novels which expose the inadequacies of underprivileged societies like the West Indies should employ a sympathetic approach. Clarifying his position as a writer and at the same time lamenting the fact that West Indian writers have failed in their responsibility towards their society Naipaul claims in *The Middle Passage*: “Living in a borrowed culture, the West Indian, more than most, needs writers to tell him who he is and where he stands. Here the West Indian writers have failed. Most have so far only reflected and flattered the prejudices of their race or colour group. Many writers have displayed a concern, visible perhaps only to the West Indian, to show how removed his group is from blackness, how close to whiteness” (Naipaul 1981: 73). The other kind of criticism directed against Naipaul exposes his efforts right from the time of his migration from Trinidad to cross the regional barrier. In his writings Naipaul demonstrates his view about the impossibility of finding a literary ancestry, a suitable lineage to authenticate his kind of mixed and amorphous experience. Again Naipaul’s comment, “The English language was mine, the tradition was not,” conveys his persistent hammering of the same kind of split as migrant, diasporic writer living and dwindling in as uneasy relationship with two apparently related problems. And Naipaul called himself “exotic” writer whose work could not get easy recognition because of the break from the mainstream tradition of Europe. Although
Trinidad was a colony in the 1950s, the fictional works of Naipaul then were not seen as a regional expression of a geographical space of Empire; it was perceived as foreign, though stylistically Naipaul was writing out of a European, and a particularly British literary tradition. Naipaul's stationing himself in Britain, writing for the British (at that time) and his exclusion from the mainstream presents itself as a paradox. Naipaul's migration and exile, his life in England, his near static literary career at the present point of time indicate an exhaustion of his earlier regional, diasporic subject matter that creatively engaged him, albeit in negative aesthetics and colonial world view. Naipaul sees himself having “floated” from a conglomeration and accidents of history, of fate, or out of huge imperialistic phenomena of the confrontation of cultures. But it could be said that the imaginative apprehension of totality is always constructed on the basis of those bits and slices of concrete experiences which constitute any individual's life, migrant or not.

Hybridity constitutes one of the central strands in the discourse of diasporic writing, especially in regions like the West Indies, which is a home to multi-racial or plural societies. Racial and cultural hybridity constitutes of incongruous combinations of relationships, mentalities, genders, classes, nationalities and ethnicities, drawn up from the far off peripheries into the centre. Hybridity that has been 'politicised,' hybridity as division and separation, carries greater significance in diasporic discourse. In other words, hybridity (in racial as well as cultural models), involves an antagonism and coalescence, a doubleness that both brings together, fuses, but also maintains separation. Lambasting Naipaul for turning “his back on the hybrid half-made colonial world,” Bhabha sees in Naipaul's reading of the “English book his cringing for western attitudes towards colonialism.” Bhabha illustrates his assessment of Naipaul's negative, sterile attitude to the formerly colonised world: “The values that such a perspective generates for his own work, and for the one colonised world it chooses to represent and evaluate, are visible in the hideous panorama that some of his titles provide: The Loss of El Dorado, The Mimic Men, An Area of Darkness, A Wounded Civilisation, The Overcrowded Barracoon” (Bhabha 1993: 107).
In the diasporic discourse especially that of the West Indies, the question and the positioning of cultural identity has to be seen and understood against several diverse issues of race, nationality, colonialism, and the way it has become problematised. Cultural identity in the diasporic discourse has to be defined in terms of a shared culture, a sort of collective ‘true self’ hiding inside other, more superficial or artificially imposed selves, which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. The other most vital aspect is the experience of dispersal and fragmentation which is the history of all enforced diasporas. The history of transportation, slavery and indentured migration holds the prominent key in understanding and comprehending the forgotten connections, the rift of separation central to the West Indian experience. The ruptures and discontinuities which constitute West Indian uniqueness provides significant dimension in exploring and examining the notions of cultural identity in a diasporic framework. As Stuart Hall has argued, far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, cultural identities are “subject to the continuous play of history, culture and power” (Hall 2003). Here Hall tries to focus that identities in diasporas such as the Caribbean are far from being fossilised, fixed or mono-centric; indeed they are the names given to the different ways one is “positioned,” and positions oneself within, the narrative of the past. And the past is always constructed through memory, narrative, fantasy and myth. Moving with Hall, the Caribbean cultural identities, beyond *Presence Africaine, Presence Europeenne, and Presence Americaine* (which constitute the past and the present positioning) include other cultural ‘presences’: Indian, Chinese and others, the New World ‘collisions’ that made strangers break up a ‘home’, and peripheries in search of an eternal centre. Being partly ‘positioned’ by the ‘rupture’ and ‘rapture’ of the New World ‘collisions,’ with an exilic sensibility and diasporic self and sitting in a detached and objective place in the metropolis, Naipaul prepares a broad canvass in which the vast discourse of diaspora can be painted and encountered.