CHAPTER – III

A FLAG ON THE ISLAND
A Flag on the Island (1967) consists of eleven stories which range from portraits of Trinidad street life to early attempts at recording English social behaviour. The main interest, of course, is the title story which dramatizes the Island life from an extra insular perspective. The remaining stories reflect a minute observation of the Island life offering glimpses of the complex social process in the mixed milieu of the West Indian life. The stories gathered in A Flag on the Island employ the island – world as a unifying metaphor in the same manner as Miguel Street does the street world. The story, "A Flag on the Island" is specially written for a film company. All but two of the shorter pieces in this collection have appeared in periodicals in England or the United States. 'The Enemy' is written as part of Miguel Street and this story was published in the American Vogue. But, 'The Enemy' is not used in the Miguel Street and some of the episodes are developed later into books. 'The Raffle' is written for the London Evening Standard Series. "The inhabitants of the island in the title story are keyed to moods rather than personalities, capturing the flavor of a character through an element of surprise with which the island life is continually coloured." Each of the eleven stories feels the flutter of the flag on the island. The 'flag' is used as a metaphor for historical change which imposes its own models on social reality.
and so creates the need to modify the behavior. Some stories in *A Flag on the Island* are episodically related to *A House for Mr. Biswas*, although the stories - "My Aunt Gold Teeth", "The Raffle", "The Enemy", and "The Heart" - lack comic richness and existential depth. "A Flag on the Island" is different in content, capturing slices of life. There is a similarity between the stories of *Miguel Street* and *A Flag on the Island*. In both the works, the narrator narrates the stories in first person.

"My Aunt Gold Teeth" deals with an orthodox Hindu woman who changes from one faith to another, and whose private religious virtuosity brings her a comforting illusion with which to assuage the anxieties of her barrenness. Gold Teeth's physical appearance and mental imbalance are witty. Gold Teeth is the rich but childless wife of Pundit Ramprasad. The narrator does not seem to know her name. She is short, scarcely five feet tall and very fat. She exchanges her sound teeth for gold teeth to announce that her husband is wealthy. She frequently changes her faith. She opines that the Hindus are the best people in the world and that Hinduism is the best religion. But, at the same time she believes in Christianity. She wears a crucifix. She brings the pictures of the Virgin Mary and
crucifixion to the house. The acts of wearing the crucifix and preserving the pictures of Virgin Mary and crucifixion clearly reveal that Gold Teeth has changed her faith to Christianity. But, she changes her faith to Ganesh Pandit when her husband falls ill. The District Medical Officer calls it diabetes but Gold Teeth knows his illness has been caused by the Christian prayers she has been offering in secret seeking a release from the curse of childlessness. Ganesh reassures her and prescribes something which hastens Ramprasad's death.

To be on the safe side, though, she used the insulin he prescribed and, to be even safer, she consulted Ganesh Pandit, the masseur with mystic learnings, celebrated as a faith – healer.¹

The words that Ganesh speaks to her, 'it doesn't matter how you pray, but God is pleased if you pray at all,' (p. 17) are unable to keep her faith firmly. She keeps the images of Krishna, Shiva, Mary, and Christ side by side. No relegations save the husband of Gold Teeth. Her frequent change of faith in Gods leads her to her own doom, "It is all my fault," she cried. 'My own fault, Ma. I feel in a
moment of weakness. Then I just couldn’t stop.” (p.21) The night before her husband’s death, she becomes possessed, and is deeply respected by her family for the quality of her double religious commitment. Landeg White accuses Naipual of being an Oxford snob with his style surrendering completely to the artificial of mock – heroic prose in lines:

> She was living at the time in a country village called Cunupia, in Country Caroni. Here the Canadian Mission had long waged war against the Indian heathen, and saved many .... At no time was Gold Teeth persuaded even to think about being converted.... She was willing to select, modify, and incorporate alien eccentricities into her worship; but to abjure her own faith – never! 

A sense of uncertainty of faith haunts the character of Gold Teeth. Religious practices drawn both from Hinduism and Christianity make for a delectable medley of comic manners, which Naipaul exploits with engaging humour and wit. But, at a deeper level he reveals an important sociological insight by dramatizing how
individual psychology meets the social situation by making the routines of reality assume the predictability of ritual. The room of Gold Teeth on whose walls hang the images of Shiva, Krishna, Mary, and Christ, typify the eclectic social situation. Ritual resolves the cultural contradictions and enables these people to collaborate with one another in the reflexes of the individual human personality. The orthodox and puritanical Aunt acquires the ability to improvise and achieve a pragmatic stability in an unstable society. As K.I. Madhusudhana Rao feels, "She provides an example of the process of decolonialization, which implies an accommodation of the inherited with the acquired identity." Thus, beneath the surface of a grotesque comedy, the merry 'My Aunt Gold Teeth' affords a glimpse of social transformation.

The story 'The Raffle' is a story about Mr. Hind, a petulant pedagogue, who proceeds from one comic calamity to another. Education system in the Trinidad society is a much neglected one and 'The Raffle' clearly depicts it. The first two lines of the story, read as "They don't pay primary school teachers a lot in Trinidad, but, they allow them to beat their pupils as much as they want."
Mr. Hind never pays attention to teaching and is ever busy in keeping the poultry and a few animals, and private tuitions. He raffles a goat, which is not his for a shilling. The narrator wins the goat, which looks sullen and bored. The narrator’s passion is to get milk from the goat, but all in vain. A man takes the goat away by giving money to the narrator’s mother. Later the goat is killed and eaten. Mr. Hind becomes furious and beats the narrator, and that was the last day the narrator attended the school. Mr. Hind’s perversion of the education system suggests how the best values may turn sour in the colonial context with ineffectual but annoying madness. As the story is narrated by one of the victims of Mr. Hind’s eccentricities the point of view richly embellishes the comedy of the tale. The ubiquitous return of the goat and its final disposal contributes to the story the flavour of a folk tale.

"A Christmas Story" is the story of a teacher whose lonely idealism is threatened and subverted by the ways of his family and the world. What happens to Randolph is again typical rather than individual. Much of what happens to him is representative of the life around. When the school building goes up in fire, the irony is set into
action reversing all the earlier reversals of fortune experienced by 
Randolph in the pursuit of self-fulfilment.

'A Christmas Story' describes the career of Randolph, 
formerly Choonilal, a Presbyterian convert, who, having at eighteen 
chosen Christianity for its promise of higher standard of living ('to me 
the superficial has always symbolized the profound'), finds himself left 
far behind by his Hindu businessmen relatives. He consoles himself 
by taking pride in his threadbare jacket and his plain wooden house - 
symbols of the 'sacrifice' he has made for his faith. Then, after a 
lifetime as teacher and headmaster in Presbyterian schools, he is 
given the responsibility of supervising the construction of a new 
school. It is the climax of his career, the final concrete expression of 
the decision he made at eighteen. But the building is a disgrace, a 
cheap gim-crack construction, the result of a corrupted vision 
dermined by his own embezzlement of the funds:

I felt myself caught in curious inefficiency that 
seemed entirely beyond my control, something 
malignant, powered by forces hostile to myself. 
Until at length it seemed that failure was staring me
in the face, and that my entire career would be forgotten in this crowning failure. The building went up, it is true. It had a respectable appearance. It looked like a building. But it was far from what I had visualized. I had miscalculated badly, and it was too late to remedy the errors. (p.p. 49-50)

He is rescued when his wife (chosen for qualities that 'wear well') and his son (free from any symptom of Hindu 'backwardness') set fire to the school three days before it is due to be inspected by the ministry. Randolph is, in a sense, a Presbyterian Ganesh, an opportunist who has the knack of convincing himself that every act however dishonest, every triumph and set-back, confirmed his special piety. In a sense, he provides a fascinatingly sinister contrast to Mr. Biswas who also ends his life with a building which is the image of his panicky career – like Mr. Stone and the Knight's Companion, also begun in reaction to A House for Mr Biswas. (the story was written in 1962.) Just as The Mimic Men, 'A Christmas Story' is another first person narrative, an attempt at exorcism through frankness. In something of Kripalsingh's style, though with strong evangelical overtones, Randolph describes how he seems to have been caught
in a web of ironies. Yet there is never any doubt about Naipaul's detachment, never the slightest difficulty in seeing through Randolph's account to what is really happening:

How agreeable, for instance, to rise early on a Sunday morning, to bathe and breakfast and then, in the most spotless of garments, to walk along the still quiet and cool roads to our place of worship, and there to see the most respectable and respected, all dressed with a similar purity, addressing themselves to the devotions in which I myself could participate, after for long being an outsider, someone to whom the words *Christ* and *Father* meant no more than *winter* or *autumn* or *daffodil*... On these Sundays of which I speak the men wore trousers and jackets of white drill, quite unlike the leg-revealing dhoti which it still pleases those others to wear, a garment which I have always felt makes the wearer ridiculous. I even sported a white solar topee. The girls and ladies wore the short frocks which the others held in abhorrence; they wore hats; in every respect, I am
pleased to say, they resembled their sisters who had come all the way from Canada and other countries to work among our people. (p.35)

The irrelevance of the new religion (Christ and Father along with winter and daffodil), the sheer absurdity of such mimicry (the new religion conceals men's legs but reveals women's), is beautifully established here.

As the story proceeds, the irony bites deeper. At a relative's wedding, Randolph is contemptuous of the groom's Hindu regalia, concealing 'the truck driver that he was', and of the bride's beauty, which is only 'skin deep' – though missionary dress seemed to him earlier to symbolize the profound. He complains bitterly of the 'outward shows of respectability and efficiency and piety' by which his rivals try to cheat him of promotion to headmaster. Yet in the next paragraph he speaks of his 'renewed dedication', the prayer meetings and Sunday school classes which led to 'my later elevation'. As headmaster, he administers ritual floggings for 'the backward' on Friday afternoons – the sadism involved in his contempt for his background is a convincing touch. Finally, after he has married the
daughter of a schools' inspector and has gained through the connection the managership of three schools, the maximum number permitted, he relinquishes responsibility for the most derelict to dispel rumours that he is pocketing funds intended for renovation. The action, taken on his father-in-law's advice, proves 'to have its own reward'. For he is given charge of the construction of a new school – the one which eventually has to be burned to conceal evidence of his dishonesty. Sympathy for Randolph is not entirely forfeited. He is a man whose life has been corrupted by fantasy, and there are moments when, like Ganesh, he is almost tragic - when he all but envies Kedar for his marriage to a genuinely beautiful girl, or when after his retirement he takes pleasure in still being addressed as 'headmaster' by villagers whose backwardness he momentarily forgets. But there is never the slightest doubt about Naipaul's intentions. At every stage of the story, evidence is provided which undermines Randolph's version of events. As the gap widens between his pious phrases and the actions they gloss over, the irony becomes as sharp as anywhere in Naipaul's work.

Naipaul, then, is perfectly capable of demolishing his narrator's pretensions should that suit his purpose. But this kind of
distancing follows judgment and the question which arises with Kripalsingh in *The Mimic Men* is what such distancing would necessarily imply. *A House for Mr Biswas* concludes with Anand in Britain and with Mr Biswas in his own house. It was in the possibility of such solutions that the ironies of the whole novel finally made sense. Despite all that was said about colonial disorder, it remained possible to lay claim to one's portion of the earth or to escape to a place where things were different. The ironies pointed, in other words, to the availability of alternatives.

"A Christmas Story", one of Naipaul's finest short stories, contrasts the progressive tendencies of Christianity with the backwardness of Hinduism, which, as the narrator contends, is a "religion that deadens its devotees" and is "little fitted for the modern world." The story is a continuation of *A House for Mr. Biswas*, in which these two worldviews struggle for dominance.

There is a strong under-current of pathos and futility in the story which is finally elucidated in the end when the headmaster learns that the reason why he destroys his dream is after all unreal. Even though the story takes place on a Christmas Eve, one's mind is
not on Christmas as it is benighted and overtaken by the insidious drives in the island life. The expected illumination of the pious event is lost in the area of darkness within the human consciousness. 'A Christmas Story' at the end turns out to be any thing but a Christmas Story.

The 'Mourners' is a sympathetic story of a mother, Sheila, who loses her lovely son and how she comes to terms with the loss by living with her son's memory. Her husband, a doctor, tries his best to bring her back to normalcy and reality, but fails. The narrator, Romesh, a poor relation of the family arrives. When he enters the hot dark room for the first time, he meets Sheila, who has lost her son. Romesh finds Sheila in a loose lemon housecoat and walks slowly across the polished floor towards Sheila. She breaks the silence looking at Romesh and enquires after his mother's whereabouts. She tries to manage a little laugh on her face. She looks him toe to head and says, 'My, you are getting to be a handsome young man.' Then she begins to cry remembering the death of her son and wipes her eyes with a handkerchief. After a few moments, she smiles and asks the narrator to forgive her for breaking down. Romesh tries to console her. But she grieves a lot about the demise of her son.
Romesh lies just to console her partly and later regrets the lie: “I only saw him once,’ I lied; and instantly regretted the lie. Suppose she asked me where I had seen him or when I had seen him. In fact, I never knew that Sheila’s baby was a boy until he died and news spread.” (p. 58)

Sheila calls the servant girl Soomintra to bring the photographs of Ravi, her dearest son. As soon as she hears the name of Ravi, she bursts into tears and finally manages to bring a smile on her face. The snapshots of Ravi in the album stand out as a symbol for her need to return to her sorrow, to forget which is, for her, a gross violation of her personal integrity. Soomintra brings the photograph album of Ravi, which looks expensive and is covered with leather. The album contained pictures of Ravi photographed until a month before his death:

There were pictures of him in bathing costume, digging sand on the east coast, the north coast and the south coast, pictures of Ravi dressed up for Carnival, dressed up for tea parties; Ravi on tricycles. Ravi in motor – cars, real ones and toy
ones; Ravi in the company of scores of people I didn’t know. (p.p 59-60)

The narrator observes the pages with not much interest. But, Sheila never for once stops commenting on the photographs because of her endless love for her son.

Finally, Sheila grows silent. Constant gazing at the photographs exhausts her. She has been through the album several times before. Meanwhile, the narrator prepares himself for a sad farewell and greets the Doctor, Sheila’s husband, who had been unsuccessful in assuaging Sheila’s sorrow, which is so deeply implanted in her consciousness. The Doctor also asserts that Ravi is a good child, “When he was four he used to sing, you know, all sorts of songs. In English and Hindi. You know that songs – I’ll be seeing you?” (p. 61) Finally the Doctor talks to the narrator in a philosophical way that “Here to day. Gone tomorrow. It makes you think about life and death, doesn’t it?” (p. 61)
The narrator, after his brief visit understands the mute tension between the wife and husband with profound sympathy. The narrator presents, with utter objectivity, a Hindu husband's ingrained view of life as a passing interlude in a wider cosmic process, and a man's place on earth as but a temporary bivouac. The husband thinks of his son's death in a philosophical way, but it is not possible for his wife, she can not escape the fragile portals of personality. As a mother and as a woman, she can make no compromise with reality. For once the narrator uses irony not to abolish either side of the contrast, but to evoke sympathy and understanding for both points of view. The story reaches a crucial point when the servant girl brings the album. The story illustrates how well Naipaul uses the technique of withholding judgment on events, as a way of letting them dramatize their own meaning. William Walsh seems to oversimplify the real meaning of the story when he traces it to "The superficiality of self-regarding suffering." 4

"The Night Watchman's Occurrence Book" is cast as a diary of events in the hotel universe, which is characterized by human dereliction. The tourists and the transients who come to the place are rootless. They try to forget their predicament in a frenzy of self-
indulgence and pointless passion. Theirs is essentially a Prufrockian world where men and women come and go measuring out their life with drink and soda water, trying to ward off their responsibilities in the temporary ecstasies of group orgy. This world of hollow, mimic men is presented through a double, contrapuntal perspective offered by the record of the night watchman, Hillyard, and the sardonic footnotes made by the manager, Inskip.

As the story progresses, an adverse awareness of human relationships emerges, which continually modifies the point of view. The dismissal of the previous watchman, with which the story begins, hints at the only conclusion that is possible for the new watchman in his impossible task of rendering factually the fictitious happenings in the hotel every night. The manager insists upon strict and unabashed objectivity on the part of the watchman—narrator who, in his turn, clings to a certain personal slant in everything he records in the occurrence book. For Hillyard ‘nothing unusual means everything usual’, whereas for the manager it is the reverse. The collision of the quotidian and exceptional views of the happenings in the hotel traces out a pattern of narration in which the real significance of events lies embedded. Where the night watchman
conforms meticulously to his superior's instructions, he produces a record of facts which is devoid of any connection or meaning. A shadow comes between the events recorded and its communicated image. The event is not embodied in the word, and the word distorts the event. The occurrences as they happen indicate no relationship to one another and provide an experience without syntax. All is chaotic, unformed, pointless, and meaningless. As for instance, in the terrifying hollowness of the last entry in the 'Night Watchman's Occurrence Book,' Naipaul seems to imply that the narrative art is a search for connection and relevancy through form and, where the latter is eliminated, the actual holds out little sense of reality. The Night Watchman's occasional garrulity, which is promptly shouted down by the manager, is what would have made his record a truer representation of the occurrences. Once the manager preempts this pattern and the rhythm of the narrative breaks down, what remains is only a collection of narrative bones without the marrow of form. The manager himself seems to experience a great tension in sorting out the truth of the happenings in his hotel, and finally becomes a victim of his demands for precocity. The Night watchman's frustration becomes his own, and he has to beat a temporary retreat from his own Frankenstein monster of actuality without perspective. The story
is thus developed on three levels – in the hotel rooms with the strange and weird activities of its guests; in the consciousness of the watchman on one hand and the manager on the other, and in their evolving hostile relationship. The interaction of these planes of narrative action results in the creation of a sense of Kafkaesque nightmare which is characteristic of Naipaul’s description of landscapes and places, especially of the crowded landings and labyrinthine stairways of the Tulsi House in *A House for Mr Biswas*. 

The nightmarish world of the hotel is distanced by the two points of view, which, despite their contradictory postures, finally merge to produce a single impression. “The Night Watchman's Occurrence Book has both the technical virtuosity and an authenticity of atmosphere both directed towards the image of a people menaced by reality or foiled by fantasy.”

“The Enemy” was written with the intention of including it in the *Miguel Street* and it also strengthens our understanding of one of the intense scenes in *A House for Mr. Biswas*. Landeg White finds in it the reason as well for its deletion from *Miguel Street* “He (Naipaul) would scarcely have wished to anticipate some of his best scenes.”
The story is about the contest between a father and mother for domination over their son and the son's shifting of loyalties towards his father and mother one after the other. The narrator feels that his mother is her own enemy and she hates her husband too. There is a rivalry between his mother and father. The hatred of his mother for his father continues even after the father's death. His father lives in Cunupia as an overseer on a sugar estate where the people are not tough, but wait for years together to murder someone whom they hate. Because of the insistence of his father, they shift their house to a little wooden house where the real calamities begin to occur and where terror haunts them. Whenever the narrator is terrified, he used to chant 'Rama! Rama! Sita Ram! to overcome the terror. This seemed to have been passed on to him by his father. The unexpected arrival of unknown people terrifies them and his mother who is brave all the time begins to scream. From then on she kept a sharpened cutlass in her hand and his father always kept a gun with him. At nights, they hear the fearful voices from bushes behind their house. His father brings a dog which is more of a playful dog than a watchdog to embolden the family.
The rivalry between his mother and father takes roots over a small matter. Because of his father's hate his mother goes to her mother's house.

My mother has decided to leave my father, and she wanted to take me to her mother. I refused to go. My father was ill, and in bed. Besides he had promised that if I stayed with him I was to have a whole box of crayons. I chose the crayons and my father. (p. 77)

During these days, his father teaches him three things, they are 1. God is the real father 2. The Law of gravity 3. Blending of colors. The narrator remains with his father for a long time.

When the father dies of fright, the boy rejoins his mother and the rest of the story concerns his relationship with his mother. The family later shifts to Port-of-Spain where the narrator's mother beats him for all the nonsense his father had taught him. She beats him for not tying his shoe properly. Every boy, she knows, is better and more intelligent, but her son is just idling and living off her blood.
Though the narrator worries about his mother's health she never worries about him. His teacher is pleased to see the poem, 'A Day at the seaside', written by the narrator which narrates an incident of his drowning at the Dockside. But the mother instead of encouraging, belts him. The mother is seen as an enemy.

So she remained the enemy. She was someone from whom I was going to escape as soon as I grew big enough. That was, in fact, the main lure of adulthood. (p. 86)

Though the mother is identified as 'the Enemy', the real enemy is the paranoiac terror, which hurts both the parents and the son. The story is of the disloyalty of the wife and husband and their competing for dominance over their child and the child's shifting of loyalties towards his parents, first for his father and latter to his mother. The narrator also learns that the world of his father is bare, lonesome, and without a world of comfort. 'The Enemy' reinforces Naipaul's theme of human dereliction and loneliness. It incidentally
suggests a solution in upholding the personal need to take its own stand, to be free from the tyranny of love.

"Greenie and Yellow" is more a parable than a short story and is strongly reminiscent of Naipaul's lost inheritance, the Indian inheritance in which the allegorical animal fables are embodied, The *Pancha Tantra*. Mrs. Cooksey, the landlady, out of her twisted tenderness, attempts an experiment in agencies, an act of ironic overcompensation for her own barrenness. In her anxiety to mate the birds, she only succeeds in interfering with their own natural rhythm of life leading to destruction. Naipaul's meticulous description of the cage-world is finely grained with microscopic details which in fact adds to the fearful sympathy in which the birds are trapped. The security and civilized refinement that Mrs. Cooksey confers on the cage birds is only an artificial reality, too much of which neither birds nor men can ever bear. Her fussy efficiency is a civilized barbarism reflecting how, entrapped in artificiality, the free spirit of man and nature wither away. Naipaul offers a bird story for grown-up people with stern realistic details pointing the delicate fancy of the narrative framework. Without explicitly stating it, Naipaul portrays the human predicament through the story of the birds. The displacement may
result from over-concern as much as total unconcern for man's individual and institutionalized worlds.

"The Perfect Tenants" is a story of the tyrannical landlady, Mrs. Cooksey, and the troublesome tenants, the Dakins. The narrator regards the Dakins as the perfect tenants. "The Perfect Tenants" is the human version of the caged pet animals or birds, which makes clear the hollow paganism of Mrs. Cooksey, the brutal landlady. The perfect tenants are changed from birds into human, but are treated no differently. The Dakins are exemplary tenants who are in the end changed into petulant and troublesome inhabitants of the seedy establishment.

The Perfect Tenants, the Dakins, arrive at the flat of Mrs. Cooksey. Mrs. Dakin is a tall and thin lady who worked as a police woman. Mr. Dakin looked rough, handsome, and did not encourage any conversation. His behaviour is exemplary. The Dakins become favourite tenants within a short time. Sadness enters their life in the form of Mr. Dakin's fall from a ladder, in which he breaks his arm. Mr. Dakin is unable to attend to his duties as an electrician. Knitmaster and the Knitmistress, the Dakins, and the narrator reside in the same
flat of Mrs. Cooksey. They all meet and enjoy in New Year’s Eve party, which is arranged by Mrs. Cooksey.

About four weeks after the party, there is a commotion in the flat. Mrs. Dakin rushes in and cries banging the doors of the other flats screaming, ‘It’s my ‘usband! ‘E’s rolling’ in agony.’(p. 108). Mr. Dakin is admitted in the hospital and it is confirmed that Mr. Dakin has appendicitis. Mrs. Cooskey looks anxious and Mr. Cooskey says ‘Nothing to it, Bess’ Mr. Cooksey said ‘Itler had the appendix took out of all his soldiers.’ (p. 109)

After a few days, Mrs. Dakin’s brother and his wife come from Wales to the house of Dakins on a motorbike for their honeymoon. He is a footballer. His motorbike leaks a lot. All the residents enquire about the recovery of Mr. Dakin. Finally, Mr. Dakin recovers from his illness. Mrs. Dakin says,

He’s coming back tomorrow’, she said.I hadn’t expected such a rapid recovery.(p. 113)
Mrs. Dakin feels very happy about her husband’s recovery and she celebrates her happiness by purchasing sherry, whisky, Guinness, and a duck to make apple sauce for her husband. She also asks the foreman to bring grapes and magazine to the hospital. The Dakins get more than three hundred pounds from their solicitor. Cooksey insults Dakin’s guests and her brutal behavior infuriates Mrs. Dakin. Mrs. Dakin says,

“Mrs, Cooksey, what do you mean by insulting my guests? It’s bad enough for them having their honeymoon spoilt without being insulted.” (p. 114)

... Mrs. Cooksey loved a battle. She lived for her house alone. She had no relations or friends, and a little happened to her or her husband.” (p. 116)

She always tries to hold command on her tenants:

In her battles with them she stuck to the rules, the Law of Landlord and Tenants was one of the few books among the room. And Mrs. Cooksey had her own idea of victory. (p.116)
She orders all her tenants to throw a loaf of stale bread into the garden to avoid the entry of the mice. Cooksey feels that her’s is the flat without mice. But, the narrator sees the mice in that flat. Mrs. Cooksey continues her search for mice. She enters all the flats with linoleum and puts wads of newspaper in the gaps between the tenants' floorboards. The Cookseys try to keep the tenants in their control; they hang the notice in the hall:

WILL THE PERSON OR PERSONS RESPONSIBLE SEE ABOUT THE IMMEDIATE REMOVAL OF THE OIL STAINS ON THE FRONT STEPS? In the bathroom there was a notice tied to the pipe that led to the geyser: WILL THE PERSON OR PERSONS WHO HAVE BEEN TAMPERING WITH THIS TAP PLEASE STOP IT. And in the lavatory: WE NEVER THOUGHT WE SHOULD HAVE TO MAKE THIS REQUEST BUT WILL THE PERSON OR PERSONS RESPONSIBLE PLEASE LEAVE THESE OFFICES AS THEY WOULD LIKE TO FIND THEM. (p. 117)
Mrs. Cooksey insists on the tenants not to waste the water and geyser and all they could do was smash the gas mantle in the bathroom. The Knitmistress enters the Cooksey’s house with her brilliant and terrible smile even in gloom complaining of power failure. The Knitmistress complains against the Dakins and insists on the Cookseys serving them a notice. Hence, the Dakins are defeated again bitterly. Mrs. Cooksey asks them to leave the flat; the Dakins reveal that they were just about to give the notice themselves. They depart from the flat without saying bye and a middle-aged lady called Nicky occupies the flat.

The calamities, illnesses, and accidents that befall the tenants are but convenient pegs on which the landlady could hang her rituals of possessive leadership. She deprives the tenants of all freedom except to live on her terms and part of her pleasure came from depriving of other human beings of their rights to other people’s efforts to acquire comfort, status or success filled Mrs. Cooksey with unbearable jealousy and fury. The tyranny of the landlady, Mrs. Cooksey and the gentleness of the tenants conspire to attenuate the very basis of social relationships. Although William Walsh values the story for its brilliant rendering of British suburban life and middle-class
manners and morals, the narrative mainly underlines “Naipaul’s acute perception of individual’s part in the social process as a precarious balance between the demands of privacy and the obligations of public human relationships.”

The story, “The Heart” deals with a rich boy, Hari’s treatment of his Puppy, the pet dog, and the destructive instincts aroused in the boy until he finally destroys the animal which he loved immensely. Hari, the protagonist of the story is the only child of his parents who is ten years old and weak hearted. He is fat and the doctors advise him against over – exertion and excitement. He imagines himself to be a fast bowler, but he is never picked for any of the teams. He is unable to run quickly, bowl, bat, and moreover, he threw ball like a girl. Hari wishes to whistle, but produces only hissing sounds out of his lips. He writes with a blotter below his hand and blots each line as he writes. At the bottom of the Rupert Street, where he turns right, there is a house equipped with Alsatians. Hari is always afraid because the paws of the Alsatians touched the fence and with a little effort the Alsatians could jump over the fence and bite him.
Once, he treads over the tail of a dog while cycling. The Alsatians came running beside him, without barking. This incident makes him dread of a painful death from the teeth of the dogs. The fear also results in his sensing a sudden pain in his heart, which he never knew before. Hari spends a month in a nursing home and absents himself from the school for the rest of the term. His father changed his own working hours to drive Hari to and from the school. Hari’s mother presents Hari a puppy as his birthday gift and says that it would never bite. They get closer and Hari feels relieved of the terror of the Alsatians and feels protected. An intimate but abnormal friendship develops between Puppy and Hari. Hari studies many books on dogs. He feels sad when he learns that dogs live only for twelve years, “He learned with sadness that they lived for only twelve years; so that when he was twenty three, a man, he would not have dog.” (p.127)

His sadness intensifies when he reads a poem beginning with ‘A barking sound the Shepard hears’ and by seeing the film ‘Lassie Come Home’, he comes to know about the importance of training for puppy. The next day, the Puppy is found missing, Hari is much distressed but he consoles himself by watching the film. When
the puppy returns home, he hugs it by saying 'you're my Lassie — my Lassie come home.' (p. 128) He reads American comic books and learns that dogs eat from bowls marked DOG. Hari fills the bowl with dog's food. Even as it eats the food, the dog sinks its teeth into the flesh of Hari causing swelling blobs of blood. Hari immediately takes away the bowl from the dog and throws it out of the kitchen. Hari in his fury kicks the puppy. The puppy looked with horror and utter bewilderment. Then on Hari becomes cruel and develops a sense of hatred towards the puppy. The puppy then licked the bitten hand of Hari, thus making him burn with pain. Hari looses his balance and stones the puppy over and over. From then on his hate for the puppy went on increasing day-by-day.

When Hari's mother asked Hari about the broken bowl and the food scattered all over the yard, he lies by saying, 'we are playing'. Hari punishes the puppy whenever his parents are away. Thus the puppy receives severe punishment for the smallest mistake if innocently commits. "If the puppy didn't come to the gate when the car horn sounded, he was to be punished; if he didn't come when called, he was to be punished." (p. 130)
Hari begins to tie the puppy at nights to prevent it from running away. Hari's cruel behaviour towards the pet animal finally ended with the puppy attacking Hari and with his parents pulling the dog back saying, 'you can never trust those dogs.' There after the dog was permanently chained. Hari unchained the dog only to test the strength of the dog whenever he was alone. But, the pet dog does not growl or attack. It hides among the anthurium lilies. Moreover, the dog allows to be punished even while eating. Hari is presented a Camera on the eve of his birthday and the film is wasted on taking many photographs of Hari and the Puppy together. The photographs do not come out well. The Puppy looked ugly and strained. Hari goes through the photographs and finds a sentence, 'In memory of Rex 'at the back of one photograph. Then Hari's heart melts into tears. His mother tries to console him:

"It was an accident, 'his mother said, putting her arms around him. 'He ran out just as your father was driving in. It was an accident.' 'Tears filled Hari's eyes. Sobbing, he stamped up the stairs. Mind, son. 'His mother called, and Hari hears her say to his father, 'Go after him. His heart. His heart." (p. 132)
Here again Naipaul's story acquires a disturbingly uneasy tension, revealing the awakening of the potential for evil at the heart of things. Here is a story of lurking horror of the power of darkness that conditions life. Naipaul reinforces the Indian animal tale with more than a comic insight into the operations of metaphysical evil.

To be a black Granadian is worse than being a black Trinidadian is what the story, the 'The Baker's Story' reveals and turns the practical insight into an advantage. The baker is black - face Ganesh, who frequently hears the voice of God and who has certainly mastered the ambiguities of his social condition by retreating into the shadows and living as an underground individual. The narrator offers a sparkling satire on the duplicity of the social process in "The Baker's Story". His mother brings the protagonist to Trinidad from Greneda when he is young. There is a Chinee shop adjacent to his Aunt's house with whom he lives. One day his Aunt has no money to buy bread. She sends him to the Chinee shop to get bread for trust. The Chinee woman asks him in turn to deliver bread to some Indian people. At first she does not believe him; the boy surrenders his crucifix from merino that has more holes than cloth as a token of warranty. He comes back with the money collected from
the Indian people. For that she gives him back the crucifix along with a few cents and the bread. This continues until it becomes a regular afternoon task of delivering the bread to the people. He finds that the Chinees are hard working people. The protagonist, a Grenadian, also thinks of himself as hard working: "We Grenadians understand hard work, so that is why I suppose I used to get on so well with these Chinee people and that is why these lazy black Trinidadians so jealous of We."(p. 137) The Chinees never allowed him to serve in the shop and did not trust him to sell across the counter and to collect the money in the rush.

Then the Chinee old woman gets sick and with the old man gambling all the time the boy looks after the bakery all by himself. The boy works hard and closely associates himself with them and besides he learns two or three words of Chinee. The boy begins to wear short khakhi pants and a merino like a Chinee and drinks the tea that Chinee people drink and works not saying much, like a Chinee. The rude black people start calling him a Black Chinee.

Then all of a sudden, a whole set of incidents occur that start him go bawling. The Chinee woman dies of pleurisy. As soon as the
woman died, the Chinee man gets mad. The Chinee man starts gambling like a bitch. One month after the death of the old woman, the Chinee man leaves the bakery because he loses the bakery in gambling to another Chinee feller. The new feller, who takes the shop, closes the shop, sets up a regular grocery and does not want the boy to serve due to the fact that the grocery buyers did not like black people to serve them. The protagonist, by the word of the Almighty and the financial support of an Indian feller, opens a new bakery with the experience he had acquired and with the money he saved. “Because God only saying to me, Youngman, take your money and open a bakery. You could take good bread.” (p.140) The boy buys a place near Arouca and spends most of what he had trying to fix the place up and feels pretty happy to see his name on the board. Then he begins to face problems.

Even though he produced good quality bread, no body purchases the bread, “I baking better bread than the people of Arouca ever see, and I can’t get one single feller to come in like man through my rickety old front door and buy a penny hops bread.”(p. 141) Day-by-day he bakes two or three quarts good and all this just remaining and going dry and stale, and the only one he
sells to is the man from government, purchasing stale cakes and bread for the food of cows and pigs. He kneels down and prays God to free him from the calamities. But he still gets the same reply from the God 'Youngman' — was always the way I uses to get call in these prayers — Youngman, you just bake bread.' (p.141)

Meanwhile, the interest on the loan taken piles up month to month, but he continues to bake bread for God's sake, as prompted by the voice of the God, 'Youngman, you just bake bread'. He bakes one or two quarts regular by every day. He reconciles himself and feels that this was the punishment for what he used to do to the Chinee people in the bakery. The Indian feller gives the baker three months grace period to pay the interest money. Percy, the friend of the protagonist and classmate in Laventille Elementary School, meets him and offers lunch for old time's sake. Percy's way of speech always degraded the Grenadians. He did a few of the usual ignorant Trinidadian jokes about the Grenadians:

"No, no. When I treat my friends, I don't like black people meddling with my food." - "We black people in Trinidad go to a restaurant they don't like to see black people meddling with their food." (p. 144)
The baker is reminded of the past when the Chinee people did not permit him to serve bread across the counter because they were afraid that there might be no rush at all. Before going back to Arouca, the baker meets with a yellow boy named Macnab who is half black and half Chinee and brings him to Arouca. The baker puts him in front of the shop dressing him in a merino and a pair of khaki short pants and instructs him to talk like a Chinee. The baker further gives Macnab a Chinee paper, not to go through, but just to pose with. The baker confines himself to the back room baking the bread. He hangs the Chinee calendars with Chinee women and flowers and waterfalls on the walls. After this, he kneels down and thanks the God. He receives the old voice but in a friendly and pleasant way. "Youngman, you just bake bread". His business grows up and he gives a new name to his establishment "YOUNG MAN BAKER", which sounded quite Chinese.

The baker never showed his face again in front of the bakery but went on producing good quality bread. With this he was able to open a new branch at Arima and another in Port – of – Spain. Each and every establishment of the young man, had a Chinee behind the counter, who were not even aware that they were working under the
ownership of a black man. Moreover, the baker's wife, also a Chinee, handled that side of the business.

The story reiterates Naipual's consistent view that in the picaroon society, if one is to avoid being the victim one must learn to be a trickster. "The Baker's Story" thus draws attention to the subtly graduated negations of ethnicity in the West Indian society showing how resourcefulness, intelligence, and manipulation pay off pragmatic dividends for an individual possessing these qualities of survival." It is the outward form rather than the inner substance that governed human attitudes, particularly in a situation dominated by racial prejudice.

Besides many other things, the story reveals Naipaul's capacity for broad humour and his skill in creating funny situations through exaggerations.

"A Flag on the Island", which was a commissioned scenario written for a film company, is set on a Caribbean Island, which is not specified, but is a synoptic setting of the West Indian scene. The transitions of island life already hinted at towards the end of A House
for Mr. Biswas, are taken up once again by the narrator who wears the fictional disguise of an American soldier-tourist. Naipaul comes back to Miguel Street to salute the world of his childhood from the vantage point of an established career with a matured understanding of the world he had left behind.

"A Flag on the Island" is a study of the island community in its historical transition from a colonial past to an independent existence. The coming of independence entails abolition not only of its characteristic past but also of the fantasies and the images which had been built around such a past. The 'flag on the island' still waves towards the past in the winds of change, even as the bugle summons one towards a future which is bound to be different. A spill-over of the colonial attitudes informs the tendency towards fantasy which still exercises its pressure on the reality of the present. As history abolishes the past, fantasy seeks to revive it, and the tension between the two shapes the reality that lies ahead. The transformation and change brought about by history is glossed over by a nostalgia striving to assuage the fear of permanence which independence brings in its wake to the society. Independence is a hard master demanding responsibility, industriousness, and
commitment to the future. It demands the surrender of the exotic luxuries conferred on individuals by their erstwhile dependence. The colonial past tends to inform a code of life identifying it with total freedom, whereas independence invokes a style of life implying the concept of diligent citizenship. By willful deviation from prescribed norms, the human psyche conjures up the imagined pleasures of an idyllic past in order to avoid pain of responsible existence under the flag. Consequently, "the shabby world of the past is romanticized and set up as a surrogate world of utopian permissiveness and instant rewards." 9 As the narrator himself realizes, people everywhere seem to be running away from the flag in search of usable past which is essentially historical and individualistic. Accordingly, the narrator begins his story by observing that "All landscapes are in the end only in the imagination; to be faced with reality is to start again." (p. 149). There are actually two islands, one with the flag and the other without any. The flag is the symbol of destruction, of a process which sweeps away something more than the name, subverting the very image of one's reality.

Frank, the American Soldier, who returns to the old island transformed by political change, goes in search of Henry's Place, a
symbol of his residual past, trying to discover through it a part of his own self lost in the shallows of time. He finds a place, an island within the island, which brings back to life all the easygoing pleasures that he had once enjoyed. The story moves on to its second phase, where Frank not only establishes recognition of scenes of the past but also discovers the emergence of new fears and neuroses affecting people with whom his old friend Henry is surrounded. Moving elf-like among these characters, among the procession of steel-band-men, singers, and women calling for his money Frank senses the complications of the picaroon society after the advent of independence. The people who haunt the night-club are found developing from persons into characters, the new freedom forcing the human personality into strange and unexpected disguises and subterfuges. As more and more Americans come to his establishment, Henry, in his attempt to catch up with the new reality, is changed from a spontaneous, forthgoing individual into a wizened and impotent plastic flower, longing for the impermanence of the old days. Priest, the preacher ('Pritcher'), is sponsored by the T.V. people and, with Americanized efficiency he turns to insurance, capitalizing on the fears and anxieties of the people trapped by the changed conditions of society. Still purveying immortality, Priest
double-talks himself into selling remedies for mortality. Selma becomes a nymphomaniac, resisting a permanent home as a threat to her dependency, and flirting from lover to lover, and seeking an uncontingent present not imperiled by the terrible responsibilities of freedom:

Selma belonged to that type of island girl who moved from relationship to relationship, from man to man. She feared marriage because marriage, for a girl of the people, was full of perils and quick degradation. She felt that once she surrendered completely to any one man, she lost her hold on him, and her beauty was useless, a wasted gift. (p. 189)

Mr. Blackwhite, who had once accepted his displacement as a starting point for genuine self-discovery, is forced into mimicry not allowing his vision to rest on his own perception of the unreality of island life. He panders his artistic taste to the manufactured images of the same unreality in which the tourists wish to fix up the island life.
The American visitors have their own compulsive need for a tropical island paradise, a heaven away from hell. Since American money and influence can go far enough, the islanders must themselves conform to the American image of themselves. As an artist, Mr. Blackwhite experiences a regression of personality. When he tries to escape from the falsity of his American dream, he is simply given the cold shoulder. The unreal island which erupts edgewise into the actual island becomes a source of pain. The truth of the genuine artist with the tormented face, with its deep furrows of sad contemplation emerges to the fore: "The back of each book had a picture of the author. A tormented writer's – photograph face." (p. 154)

The crisis comes when Frank finds traces of 'human inhumanity' even in his island paradise demonstrated by the ill-treatment meted out to Selma by the islanders. The time comes when he recognizes, with panic and agony, that irony rules life everywhere. This is poignantly demonstrated when an abandoned community abandons one of its members to her own fate. Frank's inner awareness is externalized by the hurricane which threatens the apparent serenity and composure of the island community. Even as
Priest's 'world-without-end' benediction is awaited, Frank and his shipmates make bid to escape from the island. Although the storm never materialises in fact, the night club at Henry's place is smashed up and along with it, all the pretensions of insular existence are dispelled. The storm does not appear but the island is taken by storm. Once more the islanders will be left to themselves making a new home, and tracing themselves to the task of achieving in the course of time something more than an imported view of themselves. It is an arduous task of self-education and self-transformation. It is a moot point whether people in this supposed utopia would really achieve the simple dignity of the new self-perception, so emphatically stressed. But, like the narrator in Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher", Frank achieves his own escape, leaving the island and its tempting Circean hallucinations.

"A Flag on the Island" is something more than a long short story: it tends to be a novella with a tensely regulated movement of action, culminating in a symbolic finish. The theme of escape controls the various movements of the story which in some ways anticipate the journey in In a Free State and the dystopian atmosphere of Guerillas. As William Walsh observes,
“The story is built around a precise notation of group habits and manners supporting and exemplifying Naipaul’s sense of the movement of the social process. - Change in “A Flag on the Island” is a silent, invisible but chronic condition.” 10

The story also reveals Naipaul’s increasing concern with the ironic foreclosure of man’s opportunities in an open society brought about by the imperatives of socio-political change. Reminding us of the climactic dissolution of the utopian society in Aldous Huxley’s Island, Naipaul’s island fantasy has the same implications of a future shock. For in the modern world no island can enjoy the self-sufficiency of the insular security. As Landeg White observes:

There can be no escape from this island with a flag, for the flag was a proclamation that an escape was no longer necessary. To that fantasy, only the hurricane can offer a solution. With the prospect that the island will soon be destroyed, people are returned from the pretence that this is their landscape. They can be real again because a denial
of the island, an acceptance of its smallness and unimportance, has always been a condition of their reality. ¹¹

The narrator's farewell to the night-club, like Prospero's farewell to his enchanted island, is a gesture towards the redemptive, if impossible, grace of reality. The Calibans may be left to their own "still-vexed Bermoothes", but the visitor is released from his own fantasy towards a perception of order that lies beyond the world of diminishing cultural frontiers. The Ariel is released.
REFERENCES

1. V.S. Naipaul. *A Flag on the Island*. (London: Andre Deutsch Ltd., 1967) p.15. **Further references to the text are to this Edition.**


9. Ibid – p. 41
