ABSTRACT

The present study deals with the history and culture of the Caribbean in the postcolonial context. The Caribbean society bears the legacy of exploitation, marginalization and colonial oppression. A culturally and racially divided pluralistic (creole and hybrid) society was created, its hierarchical structure held together by force (Smith-772-75). Despite the physical isolation, colonization, de-colonization, displacement, slavery and emancipation, the Caribbean society is conducive to the emergence of a ‘New World,’ a ‘new ethnicity’ (Stuart Hall), a national culture and literary identity. Today, postcolonialism is an important discipline in cultural and literary studies. In the postcolonial Caribbean, identity is considered as multidimensional or pluralistic. Identity is never fixed or static; it is fluid and always in process. Identity in the postcolonial Caribbean has become synonymous with ‘cultural homogenization,’ ‘hybridity’ and ‘creolization’. This study makes an attempt to study the process of creolization and the historical background of postcolonial Caribbean society. The concept of creolization in the Caribbean context is a social process that lies at the very centre of discussion of diversity, hybridization, transculturalism, transnationalism, and multiculturalism (Young, Robert). In this thesis, an attempt has been made to locate the ‘creole’ and ‘hybrid’ identity in Selvon’s novels against the background of the postcolonial Caribbean.

Writers like Samuel Selvon, Derek Walcott, Jean Rhys, George Lamming, V.S Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Chinua Achebe, Kazuo Ishiguro and many other writers left their respective place of birth (mostly former colonies) for ‘better opportunities’ and thereby became expatriates. The concern with the consequences of history, with the social world, and its impact on the West Indian sensibility, led almost naturally to another major theme in the 1950s and 1960s. Metropolises are usually looked upon as the land of fortune for the West Indian writers and other Third World expatriate writers. The theme of emigration and self-exile was a response to both a historical phenomenon and a psychological colonial problem. During the period of 1950, West Indians were actually emigrating from the islands to the metropoles in search of what they called a ‘better break’ and for ‘better future,’ ‘better opportunities’. Novel after novel, poem after poem, explored the pleasures and perils of exile and their impact on the sensibilities of West Indians. Lamming’s The Emigrants, Water with Berries and The Pleasures of Exile; Selvon’s Ways of Sunlight,
The Lonely Londoners, Moses Migrating, Moses Ascending, Brathwaite’s Rights of Passage and the novels of Austin Clarke have all revealed the enlarged consciousness of the migrant side by side with his peculiar disorientation in an alien world. The idea of emigration has become almost a ‘global phenomenon’ and a new extension of West Indian consciousness and that vision has already begun to emerge in England and North America.

The main Caribbean literary figures such as C. L. R James, Samuel Selvon, George Lamming, Wilson Harris, Derek Walcott, V S Naipaul, Edward Brathwaite, Earl Lovelace and others focus on colonization, ethnicity, hybridity, creolization, racial trauma, gender identity, mixed blood, and other key concepts of postcolonial studies. Most of the postcolonial writers like Selvon and Naipaul undergo a kind of cultural and linguistic translation. This ‘translational’ characteristic feature and identity have placed them in the position of ‘not quite’ or ‘in-between’. Bhabha observes that the postcolonial migrant writing is the writing of ‘not quite’ and ‘in-between’. ‘Creolization’ and ‘hybridity’ arise due to cultural and linguistic translation and transformation to the ‘New World’. This study, therefore, attempts to mark out ‘creole’ and ‘hybrid’ identity in Samuel Selvon’s fiction.

The Caribbean region is not ethnically, culturally or nationally homogenous. Selvon himself was a creole from Trinidad. He says “I was creolized from an early age, which is a good thing, in my opinion as a mixing of tradition makes for a more harmonious world” (Nasta, 1988: 70-71). Selvon’s novels reflect the diversity of West Indies. His immigrant novels: The Lonely Londoners, Moses Ascending and Moses Migrating explore the first phase of British Black community from their arrival as West Indian migrants and their transition to becoming what Stuart Hall calls the ‘New Ethnicity’ and the ‘New World’ (Postcolonial Theory: A Reader, 110).

Creolization and hybridization mainly arise through migration and diaspora when the new middle classes and their cultural and social practices intermix. It involves different meanings not only across time but also cross (Trans) cultural contexts. Creole and hybrid characters deeply feel the “double consciousnesses in their mind” (Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks). Here the characters live in between two worlds, namely, the nostalgic world of ‘old world’ and the practical world of ‘new world’. Creole and hybrid characters are always ‘in-between’ their ‘roots’ and the present place. Derek Walcott in his poem “A Far Cry from Africa” captures this liminal situation and his sufferings due to his hybrid state.
For several decades in the postcolonial Caribbean, the process of creolization plays a very significant role in the heart of historical, social, psychological, cultural and literary discussions. This study focuses on the interaction of different ethnic, multinational and multi-racial identifications in the postcolonial Caribbean. An extremely heterogeneous population of multi-social, multi-racial and multi-ethnic people populates the Caribbean which provides a silent example of contemporary postcolonial society. In such postcolonial settings exist a high degree of ethnic, cultural and social heterogeneity and in which a majority of the world’s population lives today. ‘Creole identities’ and the ‘process of creolization’ often play an important role in the process of interaction and exchange and, hence, identity formation. The process of creolization is closely connected with ‘re-configurations,’ ‘re-constructions’ and ‘transformations’ of society in both historical as well as contemporary social contexts.

Factors such as ‘trans-cultural/cross-cultural contact,’ ‘psychological aspect,’ ‘globalization,’ ‘hybridization’ and ‘acculturation’ are entailed in the process of creolization. Selvon’s peasant novels—*A Brighter Sun, Turn Again Tiger* and *Those Who Eat the Cascadura*—are stories of the East Indian experience in the Caribbean which has been one of an acculturation process, where the indentured labourers who came to work on the West Indian sugar plantations, and Africans, who came as slaves, have become one ‘creole melting pot.’ However, the process of creolization has become familiar in the works of Naipaul and Selvon, the most significant Caribbean East Indian Writers. Selvon’s immigrant novels—*The Lonely Londoners, Moses Ascending* and *Moses Migrating*—provide a glimpse of the immigrant society’s social identity in London. These novels depict a strong sense of social and cultural identity. Moreover, the characters became aware of themselves as ‘West Indian’ or ‘black/creole.’

Samuel Selvon’s fiction unfolds the diversity of cultures and he does not compel people to assimilate blindly, but at the same time, he considers all the fellow citizens as equal. Selvon portrays all the characters in a humanistic way. Migration is still ‘on-going phenomenon,’ even now people are becoming intolerant of racism in the postcolonial society. Therefore Selvon’s works are relevant in this regard and in the present context. Being discriminated as ‘black’ or ‘coloreds,’ the West Indians suffered from a cultural complex of ‘inferiority’ when ‘Black/colored’ people came into contact with western culture and system of beliefs and values. In the white
dominated society, white man is considered as ‘superior’. As a result, ‘Black/colored’ people feel alienation and despair, which are seen in Selvon’s ‘peasant’ and ‘immigrant’ novels, and which reflects his own experience of ‘cultural dislocation’ and ‘social marginalization’.

The process of creolization in the Caribbean context entails an intermingling of different cultures and linguistic elements which constituted the ‘New World’ experience. In Selvon’s novels, different ethnic groups are depicted like Indian, Black, European and Chinese. Selvon, like the other writer, V.S. Naipaul, opted for a mixed and impure ‘creole’ identity. He considered the process of creolization as the only viable answer to cultural problems and divisions in the Caribbean society. Hence, today, the process of creolization ‘unites’ the different cultures and enriches the concept of ‘national identity’ in multi-ethnic and multi-cultural postcolonial Caribbean society.