

Postcolonial Disintegration and displacement in *The Mimic Men* by Naipaul

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The novel *Mimic Men* is started with the image of a ship wrecked existence. This image dominates the theme of whole novel with its message of direct loss and the nothingness. This message is mingled with the sense of achievement and success. The writer represents its characters with the complexity and the paradoxes of human life. The main content of the novel is a mixture of fictional and non fictional elements. The third world is represented by Naipaul in this novel. It has the third world's realities of politics, social and historical upheaval. He analyzes the colonizing hollowness and emptiness of this world. The colonized people always flights from past to future. The bad habits and the rotten customs all are the barriers which force them to leave the own world and lend to the culture which is ruling and in power rather than secondary one. All these factors damages psychologically to them. The next generation to the colonized is caught between the fantasy and reality and between corruption and destruction. This is the fight between old and the new trends of the world and the social and global culture. These people are called mimic men as they tried to copy the style of the colonizer culture. Naipaul explains this psychological struggle in an interview with Shanker Israel:

“The people I saw were little people who were mimicking upper- class respectability. They had been slaves, and you can't write about that in the way that Tolstoy wrote about, even his backward society – for his society was whole and the one I knew was not”

Both took a mission with their friends to marry with multi racial person. But the community is ended as Ralph Singh is indulged in extra marital relationship. This caused a lot of quarrels between the couple and Sandra left him and returns to England. The too much indulgence in the political affairs is also the reason of their break up. Now Singh became mad to be the Prime Minister of this country. He started his political career and has no care of the personal relations. William Walsh's statement is too much relevant in this regard:

The *Mimic Men* a very much more substantial novel is the dramatized reminiscences of an exiled politician. The framing effect of the reminiscences, the

distancing of exile and the sieve of memory, give form to the novel and enable us to grasp the quality of detachment in the protagonist and the weariness sapping a soul corrupted by power” (*Commonwealth Literature*.251).

The events of the novel are not chronological but they have moves backward to forward and there is no link between his memoirs chronologically. This introduces not only the character and his deeds but also allow us to take the deeper essence into his fringed inner self. He played the all roles of a son, husband, business man and politician and also of a leader but failed in all them. He finds nothing but the failure and rejection and now leading a rejected life in the hotel room of London.

Ralph Singh has the quality of his father to create a dramatic scene and then take its advantages. With this idea he became the leader of dock laborers and all called him Gurudeva. He also chooses the political career just to achieve heights in life and considers it as a deed to refresh the mood. To be politician he does not mean to serve the country or to do something patriotic but this just a profession to him and he takes as a professional. He plays the game to win the election and it also gives him immense pleasure. He also succeeds in his mission and becomes the Prime Minister of his country. But when failed to control or handle the situation it became a worse thing to him. The island has acquired new independence and they are become habitual of the foreign rule without knowing its good or bad. They want to live on this island as different community. Ralph Singh declared to unite the all communities and make them one society which has equal rights and duties. But the racial people are not agreed with decision and they revolt against the government. They believe in the supremacy of their race. So Ralph Singh finds it too much difficult to save his life from these attacks. The government has lost the centre and people consider the foreign rule much better than the local government.

So as politician he failed completely and escaped to London to save his life. He has horror of the Negro rule over the country and his blames of a radical and corrupt politician. Here he feels helpless and alone. He feels that the civilization has been ended with these racial riots which became more and more severe on his island. Now he has no place to go or no person to share his feelings of despair and gloom. This failure of his political career takes him to his deeper inside and he decided to leave the country and the career of politics. He now wants to become a writer and to write the story of his life which gives him failure and rejection. Blaise says about him.

“ Ralph Singh does not fully convince, either as an ex politician, or an exile, or land developer, his banishment to London to write his memoirs at forty is something of a pose, a convenient war of gathering up several selves into a single narrative” (Clark Blaise, “ The Commonwealth Writer and His Material.” 124).

The new decolonized society of this Caribbean island has the mimicry of the colonized powers. In the dialogues of the protagonist we find the duality between the realities and unreality, eastern and the western construct and the presence and the absence. These narratives nowhere show the unity and a unified identity of the Caribbean people. But everywhere there is a loss of self identity and individuality. Some critics call Naipaul like Singh a black colonizer, the lover of West and the mimic man too. The main character of the novel reflects the colonial ruling class with their reforming and the destructive powers. Like the foreign rule also brings a lot of reforms in the society. He wants to unite the different races in a single frame of society but people are ignorant. They are unable to understand the real meaning of freedom. So Singh is forced by them to follow the same ruling system of the colonizers. When he tried to understand the situations, it is too late and when he thought to control the damage it became too late. The Negro leader took the advantage of the opportunity and the communal and racial riots abrupt on the whole island. The Negro people want to kill him as they think that Singh wants to suppress them so that the Hindu supremacy can be established over them. It is the fear of death that Singh left his island and lived an exile life in an unknown hotel room of London. However we can't deny the quality of mimicry in Singh which Homi Bhabha called him Decoud and says in the essay *The Parodists of History*:

“Despite their intensions and invocations they inscribe the colonial text erratically, eccentrically across a body politic that refuses to be representative, in a narrative that refuses to be representational. The desire to emerge as authentic through mimicry- through a process of writing and repetition- is the final irony of partial representation” (Bhabha.88).

Bhabha sees the colonial mimicry as a sign of reform and improvement of colonial condition. The generation of Singh's mother represents the colonial fantasies which have both trends of their original culture. She rejects to accept Stella as her daughter in law but when Singh make her to accept Sandra she performs all rituals of her culture. But soon the

wide gape closed and open mind make Singh to take away his wife away from the house. So Singh begins to live with her in other house and left her mother and her house.

“My mother’s sanctions were pretence, no doubt; but they were also an act of piety towards the past, towards ancient unknown wanderings in another continent. It was a piety I shared” (*Mimic*.57).

This work deals with the colonial identity, it does not give social or political priority to the colonial countries of the Caribbean island. In this way it is quite preferable to say that Naipaul accused the European powers to the Neo- Colonial conditions. He has nothing useful to write about the colonial society. The theme of the exile is the dominating element of the postcolonial period. It is the racial and generation conflict in itself. When Naipaul wrote this novel, the Caribbean country Trinidad got its independence recently. So in this fictional story Naipaul weaves the early step of a decolonized nation with its emerging problems. The newly gotten powers and the impact of the earlier rule make the people to swing in the dilemma between the good and the bad system of rule and law. So they begun to mimic the earlier powers as they are superior to them in the every field of life, they think so. This is the result of the difference between the cultures and the effect of modernity and the technology. The whole novel gave the idea of a newly powered country who is celebrating its powers without knowing its inter connections. Ralph Singh also represents the same symbol of the nation with its separated realities. One problem of this character is his fragmented life and his complicated originality. He swings in the whole novel between these two binaries. These led him to the images like shipwreck and the loss of stability. He represents an exiled and an alienated colonial subject who is being indulging in losing the self even after knowing own self.

“The restlessness, the deep disorder, which the great exploration, the overthrow in three continents of established, social organizations, the unnatural bringing together of people who could achieve fulfillment only within the security of their own societies and the landscapes hymned by their ancestors.... The empires of our time were short lived, but they have altered the world forever; their passing away is their least significant feature” (*Mimic Men*.32)

Ralph Singh a colonial exiled politician in England who finds it impossible to tackle away the problems of the past fantasies. His illusions, shipwreck image and the exile seems real to him. His western identity and assuming of the western character expose the

otherness of immigrants and Singh. Ralph says about the island: “to be born on a island like Isabella, an obscure New World transplantation, second- hand and barbarous, was to be born to disorder” to make his life perfect and complete; he begun the work of memoir writing as it is the only instrument in his hand to gain some sense of stability. To the protagonist and the other colonial immigrants of the third the western world is a kind of Promised Land which promise them order, law and stability. This desire is seeded in their mind since their Euro centric education system. They want to earn and stay in these countries to live a sophisticated life. As Bhabha and the other postcolonial critics also mention those people who flew from their country and became the citizen of these countries. However beside their citizenship they are still called the citizen of the colonized nations and face a lot of racial discriminates. Said also criticized these personalities who have no fellow feelings for their native land, culture and its social and economic problems. That is why most of the postcolonial critics criticized Naipaul as the lover of western culture and condemned him for his self chosen exile in the West.

This novel can be divided into three parts to understand the displacement, cultural disintegration and the exiled fate of the protagonist- Ralph Singh. These parts divided his journey of life into three different parts to his culture as we find in the case of Mr. Biswas.

Nationalism was impossible in Trinidad. In the colonial society every man had to be for himself; every man had to grasp whatever dignity and power he was allowed; he owned no loyalty to the island and scarcely any to his group. To understand this to understand the squalor of the politics that came to Trinidad in 1946 when, after no popular agitation, universal adult suffrage was declared. The privilege took the population by surprise. Old attitudes persisted: the government was sometime removed, the local eminence was despised. The new politics were reserved for the enterprising, who had seen the prodigious commercial possibilities” (*Mimic Men*).

The first part of the novel is about college life and his marriage with Sandra- an English girl. This is the part that introduces him with the citizens of the decolonized nations. These citizens are there for the higher studies and who are too much attracted by the free environment of the west that does not want to go back their own country. Naipaul's envision of colonial historical ramifications and effect of the capitalist products. The society of this island is framed by slaves and labours. As Singh belongs to a rich family, he

hates the poverty of black population. One thing that Naipaul wants to show through this novel is that hybridity or multiracial population is not easily accepted by the society.

Singh belongs to a family which has a contract of bottling for the coca cola company. The factory spreads on a vast land. The maternal uncle of Ralph is not a good person. He is few year elder to Singh and good friend to him. He is named Celie and has no liking for Ralph's father. Singh says about him that he is an arrogant and has no respect for the elders when he takes the charge of factory in his hand. It begun to decrease and the result of his hatred is that he murdered Singh's father. Singh father loved his family once he took the whole family on trip to the whole island. This is the first time that Ralph Singh saw the poverty of his island. As he belongs to another community which no so much ruined like the black population as they are slaves and Singh's community came here as the labourer for the sugarcane firms. That is why his friendship with Browne has come to an end when both are in school. Browne is a black students and introvert child. He has social motif in his life. Browne wants to change the gloomy fate of his society. He wants to abolish the poverty from his community and to do something for his nation. But Ralph does not like this kind of thinking and poverty at all. So he breaks down his friendship with him. Molly Mahood analysis this work in the *book A Reading of Six Novels* as:

“The primal wrongness of Caribbean colonialism in all its phase- the creation of a slave society and economy, the prologation through indentured labour of a form of serfdom long after black slavery ended, and the relegation of the islands for many decades to the status of slums of empire, a relegation culminating in an ill- prepared “ granting of independence”. This was the violation the novel never lets us forget, as it traces out the pattern of rejection, impairment, alienation, in individual lives as well as the groups that composes this heterogeneous society” (The Colonial Encounter. 1977).

Work Cited

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