

NAIPAUL'S *THE MIMIC MEN*-A POSTCOLONIAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Colonialism is the expansion of a nation's sovereignty over foreign territories through violent occupation. European colonialism began in the fifteenth century and reached its culmination point in the late 19th century. At the height of European colonialism, more than three quarters of the earth belonged to European nations (Britain, France, the Netherlands, Spain, Portugal, Belgium, Italy, and Germany). These colonial powers were interested in increasing their own political power and in exploiting the colonies' resources. Most of the indigenous peoples of colonial territory were oppressed and enslaved by the occupying power. *The Mimic Men* is an important land mark in the literary career of Naipaul. The novel presents the condition of a newly independent country in the Caribbean, the island of Isabella and projects before us the condition of the people in postcolonial era. The title of the novel signifies the condition of colonized men who imitates and reflects colonizers lifestyle and views. The novel presents the life of formerly colonized people of the island who are unable to establish order and govern their country. The colonial experience has caused the colonized to perceive them as inferior to the colonizer. Colonial education and cultural colonization have presented the English world, with its rich culture, as a world of order, discipline, success, and achievement. As a result, the natives who are devoid of their own culture, customs and traditions, religion, and race consider themselves to be inferior to those of their master and try to identify themselves with the empire. As they are far away from their original homeland, their own original traditions and religions have become meaningless to them and being completely different from the master in cultural, traditional, racial, and religious backgrounds, they can never successfully associate themselves with the colonizer either. They suffer from dislocation, placelessness, fragmentation, and loss of identity.

Keywords: *The Mimic Men*, A Postcolonial Study

1. INTRODUCTION

Colonialism is the expansion of a nation's sovereignty over foreign territories through violent occupation. European colonialism began in the fifteenth century and reached its culmination point in the late 19th century. At the height of European colonialism, more than three quarters of the earth belonged to European nations (Britain, France, the Netherlands, Spain, Portugal, Belgium, Italy, and Germany). These colonial powers were interested in increasing their own political power and in exploiting the colonies' resources. Most of the indigenous peoples of colonial territory were oppressed and enslaved by the occupying power. Sometimes they were even deported from fertile land or murdered to make room for new settlements. At the same time, they were forced to give up their cultural

heritage and to assimilate to the colonizers' culture. This strategy, which is also known as culture colonization, was supposed to manipulate the colonized people's minds.

The Mimic Men is marks an important land mark in the literary career of Naipaul. The novel presents the condition of a newly independent country in the Caribbean, the island of Isabella and projects before us the condition of the people in postcolonial era. The novel presents the life of formerly colonized people of the island who are unable to establish order and govern their country. The colonial experience has caused the colonized to perceive them as inferior to the colonizer. Colonial education and cultural colonization have presented the English world, with its rich culture, as a world of order, discipline, success, and achievement. As a result, the natives who are devoid of their own culture, customs and traditions, religion, and race consider themselves to be inferior to those of their master and try to identify themselves with the empire. Colonial powers always argued that third world countries were

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inferior and needed the West's help and assistance in order to gain moral integrity and economic wealth. Indigenous people were presented as uncivilized "barbarians", who have to be subdued, or as childlike and naive savages, who have to be "domesticated" and educated. These racist stereotypes of colonial discourse can still be found in science, historical writing, literature, and mass media.

Post-colonialism can take the colonial time as well as the time after colonialism into consideration. In a literal sense, "post-colonial" is that which has been preceded by colonization. The second college edition of *The American Heritage Dictionary* defines it as "of, relating to, or being the time following the establishment of independence in a colony". It deals with the cultural identity matters of colonised societies, the dilemmas of developing a national identity after colonial rule. Post colonialism has increasingly become an object of scientific examination since 1950 when Western intellectuals began to get interested in the "Third World countries". In the 1970s, this interest led to an integration of discussions about post-colonialism in various study courses at American Universities. Post-colonialism is a subject of ongoing debate in contemporary literary and critical studies. Colonialism, in a wider sense implies conquest or domination that controls other people's land and goods. It controls the political, economical, and cultural structures of another territory or nation. Hence, post-colonialism is a state after the formal end of colonialism. Post colonialism is unorganized perspective with some likeness of a coherent methodology came to originate in the European minds, though there have been some important examples when even natives attempted to point out the hegemony handled by colonial powers. Post-colonial study has the western origin.

Postcolonial theory aims at the liberation of native cultural identity from the colonialism. The postcolonial Indian English fiction witnesses at least three generations of Indian novelists in English. The first generation consists mainly the prominent figures like Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao, the second like Bhabani Bhattacharya, Manohar Malgonkar, Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sehgal and others enriched the fiction. But the third generation of writers like Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Arundhati Roy, etc. established the fame in international arena.

The novel presents the state of a newly independent country in the Caribbean, the island of Isabella and projects before us the condition of the people in postcolonial era. The title of the novel signifies the condition of colonized men who imitates and reflects colonizers lifestyle and views. The novel presents the life of previously colonized people of the island who are unable to establish order and govern their country. The colonial experience has caused the colonized to perceive them as inferior to the colonizer. Colonial education and cultural colonization have presented the English world, with its rich culture, as a world of order, discipline, success, and achievement. As a result, the natives who are devoid of their own culture, customs and traditions, religion, and race consider themselves to be inferior to those of their master and try to identify themselves with the empire. As they are far

away from their original homeland, their own original traditions and religions have become meaningless to them and being completely different from the master in cultural, traditional, racial, and religious backgrounds, they can never successfully associate themselves with the colonizer either. They suffer from dislocation, placelessness, fragmentation, and loss of identity.

Ralph Singh, the narrator of *The Mimic Men*, is a forty-year-old colonial minister who lives in exile in London. By writing his memoirs, Singh tries to impose order on his life, reconstruct his identity, and get rid of the crippling sense of dislocation and displacement. In other words, Singh is the representative of displaced and disillusioned colonial individuals, and colonization is depicted as a process that takes away their identity, culture, history, and sense of place. Thus, the novel considers the relationship between the socio-political and the psychological consequences of imperialism (Thieme 1987: 113).

The themes of alienation, homelessness and mimicry still preoccupy Naipaul but the perspective has changed. They are now viewed as a universal condition of the modern world afflicting both colonized and colonizers alike. Besides the familiar themes that still haunt Naipaul's pen, there are themes that appear for the first time- the broader post-colonial themes of power and freedom and neocolonialism. We can establish a relevant connection between Ralph Singh and V.S.Naipaul, the author himself. While in his other works Naipaul maintains separateness from his characters that provides objectivity to be technique in use of irony to showcase the follies of the characters. But in *The Mimic Men*, Naipaul makes no attempt to maintain such separateness of identity. The autobiographical portion covers his early days in England, his meeting Sandra, his marriage and breaking up of it. The merger of identities is further underscored by the fact that many of Naipaul's attitudes and tastes have been transferred on to R.Singh. As a child, Singh responds to his sense of abandonment by dreaming of India, the homeland, and of his origin.

Hindu rituals have lost their meaning in Isabella as the people have lost their connection with India, its culture, customs and traditions. Thus, as Bruce King observes, "The process of losing one's Indianness started with leaving India. That was the original sin, the fall. After that Indian traditions could only either decay into deadening ritual or become diluted, degraded and eventually lost through outside influences and intermarriage with others." (1993: 68) In his room in a hotel in a London suburb Singh reevaluates his life in the hope of achieving order, as the place in which he is born is associated with chaos. Singh does not follow any chronological order in his writing but he constantly moves backwards and forwards, writes about his childhood and adulthood, his life in Isabella and in England, his political career and marriage, and his education to give shape to the past and his experiences, and to understand himself. By analyzing and interpreting his own experiences he hopes to find some order within the chaos of the present, and the uncertainty of the future in the contemporary colonial society.

He considers the notions of colonisation, decolonisation, history, culture, race, and politics, to write his own story and to give meaning to his existence. The constant shifts between

the past, the present, and the future may also reflect Singh's internal chaos. His writing truthfully reflects the shaping influence and the effect of imperialism on the life and personality of the colonized individual. As he is born to disorder, Singh longs for a sense of control over his life and, therefore, he turns to writing which becomes a "means of releasing" from the "barren cycle of events" (White 1975: 180). As Kelly has pointed out, it is through the expression and presentation of the events that he can reduce the pain of being a displaced colonial man: the act of writing his memoirs provides him the final solution to his sense of dislocation, for through writing he is at last able to take control of the fragments of his past and shape them into a spiritual and psychological autobiography.

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