



Colonial man's experience in V.S. Naipaul's: *The Mimic Men*

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Abstract

In Naipaul's *The Mimic Men*, Ralph Singh has showed different aspects that reflects his nature of a "prototypical colonial character" who is quite commonly estranged with the biased and pluralistic society he has inhaled most of his breaths in it. For Ralph, identity is a core issue that is depicted by his mimicry of European or Western views on different aspects of life. Also, Ralph's self-identification is in strong conflict with that of the Western world. The theme acquires universality and observes and presents the fragmentation and alienation happen to be the universal location of man in the present day world.

Keywords: alienation, colonies, existence, representation

Introduction

V.S. Naipaul has always represented a denial of the third-world spirit, and has represented societies that have recently emerged from colonialism. He describes the way these societies function in the post-colonial order. Though imperialism has passed and the colonies have attained an independent status, but these nations of the Third World faces a lot of problems like economic, social and political, and these are emerged identity crisis in the society.

The Mimic Men 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 title of the novel signifies the condition of colonized men who imitates and reflects colonizers lifestyle and views.

Born of Indian heritage, raised in the British-dependent Caribbean island of Isabella, and educated in England, forty-year-old Ralph Singh has spent a lifetime struggling against the residence at a quaint hotel in a London suburb, where he is writing his memoirs in an attempt to impose order on a chaotic existence. His memories lead him to recognize the cultural paradoxes and tainted fantasies of his colonial childhood and later life: his attempts to fit in at school, his short-lived marriage to an ostentatious white woman. But it is the return to Isabella and his subsequent immersion in the roiling political atmosphere of a newly self-governing nation – every kind of racial fantasy taking wing – that ultimately provide Singh with the necessary insight to discover the crux of his disillusionment.

Ralph Singh, the forty-year-old narrator-protagonist of *The Mimic Men*, being from a formerly colonized Caribbean island which has recently taken its independence, decides to write his memoirs about his painful experience. Pain is the word to describe what has taken hold of his soul. From the beginning of the novel to the end, it is always with him and normally one who reads the novel would label it 'melancholic,' 'gloomy,' and 'pessimistic.' The experience the peoples in the Caribbean have gone through can only be a history of their persecution, oppression, extermination, enslavement, uprooting, dehumanization, humiliation, degrading, and discrimination by the European colonial

powers. Ralph, as a representative of the Caribbean peoples, feels he does not have a history, a background, a past, a pedigree, a character, and authenticity on which he can base himself. He feels he does not belong to anywhere, including the Caribbean, because of his up rootedness. In short, he suffers from a deep identity crisis and a lack of a sense of belonging.

The representation of this mimicry can be viewed in the character of Ralph, and the creation of his identity and reality, by accepting colonial language as part of his culture and traditions. Naipaul has imitated the English language by contrasting it with the Hindi language. Words from Hindi language, local reality, and cultural alteration vividly describe the alienation of Ralph's identity and, most importantly, show his resistance in uprooting his origins, thereby accepting the dominance and authenticity of the English language.

However, while Singh believes that this will be the last word on the matter he closes the book with the Latin word, *dixi*, suggesting that there is nothing more to be said. His return to cultural fantasy suggests that the self-knowledge to which writing has given him access may not be as certain as he believes. His exile, he says, has been 'fruitful' in that it has freed him from attachment and allowed him to 'simplify' his life:

"My life has never been more physically limited than it has been during these last three years. Yet I feel that in this time I have cleared the decks, as it were, and prepared myself for fresh action. It will be the action of a free man. What this action will be I cannot say. I used to think of journalism; sometimes I used to think of a job with the UN. But these were attractive only to a harassed man. I might go into business again. Or I might spend the next ten years working on a history of the British Empire. I cannot say. Yet some fear of action remains. I do not wish to be re-engaged in that cycle from which I have freed myself (TMM 274).

It also echoes the young Singh's fantasies of origins, of claims that he no longer Desires such fantasies,

"I have seen much snow. It never fails to enchant me, but I no longer think of it as my element. I no longer dream of ideal landscapes or seek to attach myself to them. All landscapes eventually turn to land, the gold of the

imagination to the lead of reality but this reincorporation into the narrative prescribed by his Aryan ancestors” (TMM25).

It is the Third- World’s blind mimicry of the West that he cannot stomach. He lashes out at the shortcomings of Third-World societies, which have their roots in their traditional cultures, but are unmindful of them in their blind following of the West. They are thus able to maintain a distinct identity. But for the generation born in exile, life in the foreign soil proves almost fatal, as they have not been blessed with the insularity of their forefathers, who went there from India. For the new generation, India loses the sense of reality that it had conveyed to their ancestors. The major themes that emerge from a reading of his novels are related to the problems of the colonized people: their sense of Alienation from the landscapes, their identity crisis, the paradox of freedom and the problem of neocolonialism in the ex-colonies. The people who can no longer identify with a cultural heritage lose the assurance and integrity which the locating racial ancestor provides. Champa Rao Mohan writes in this connection:

“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 postcolonial themes of power and freedom and neocolonialism (140)”.

References

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