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A REVIEW OF POST-COLONIAL FACETS IN NAIPAUL'S *The MYSTIC MASSEUR*

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Abstract:

The Mystic Masseur is one of the V.S. Naipaul's finest comic creations wherein, we see huge sensibility, humour, success, politics and endless creative imagination that have become the hallmarks of the author's genius. The story of the novel is not only the life history of Ganesh Ramsumair; rather it is a story of social and economic life of the Indian islanders. The author shows his alienation and rootlessness of the people migrated from India to Trinidad. Here he puts stress on the importance of imagination for survival. The question is whether the novel *The Mystic Masseur* depicts the real Trinidad, the question is answered in King's observations in his book. "Those familiar with Trinidadian history should recognize how Naipaul has used local events, characters and such politician characters and politicians such as Uriah Butler, Albert Gomes, Arthur Cipriani and Naipaul's two uncles, Rudranath and Simbhoonath Capildeo in the novel. The paper proposes to examine how V.S. Naipaul uses the post-colonial myth and reality in his novel *The Mystic Masseur*."

Keywords: Independence, identity, non-political society, politics, individual, success, Post-Colonial Myth, Reality.

V.S. Naipaul's *The Mystic Masseur* is an account of a typical aspirant to power and prestige gravitating to politics as the supreme possibility. It is a story of *rise* and *decline* of Ganesh Ram sumair, the protagonist. The story of the novel is set in Trinidad which is one of the group islands together known as West Indies. It has mixed population. There are white men who are included the English, the French, the Spanish and the Portuguese settlers. There have also colour people who are chiefly native Africans and Indians whose forefathers came from India to Trinidad to work as laborers in the sugarcane fields.

In this novel, Naipaul concerns with the political reality of Trinidad just before and after independence. Independently, the novel examines different aspects of the reaction to political independence of the individuals and the group. The novel dramatizes a particular feature of Trinidad to generate national identity. There is an arrested movement of reality which is not a final assessment of the situation. The novel can be seen as the document to an emerging maturity of vision. It discusses the politics of mutual self-deception which flourishes untended in a nonpolitical society. Such a system gives the impression of self-sufficiency until a crisis reveals its hollowness and unreality. In Trinidad, there were no parties, only individuals. Corruption, not unexpected, aroused only amusement and even mid approval.

The novel dramatized the period of transition from colonial rule to self-government. The turmoil of this period is the consequence of the loss of the colonial order. But it is not a political novel. The political background does not become a metaphor for philosophical, psychological and politics as ideology or

government by consent does not exist in Trinidad either in fact or in knowledge. Electioneering is viewed in a social context - a form of participation in public life which creates the opportunity for success. Trinidadians had retained a confused racial and cultural memory but no political memory. Whatsoever, in the novel Ganesh Ram sumair, the protagonist, as politicians expresses the Trinidadians greatest conflict with objective reality? Ganesh comes up against situation to which he must submit. He can only huff and puff at his humiliation as M.L.C., when he is invited to the governor's dinner, but he cannot deny it. It is his first experience of cultural shock. The novel, in spite of its claims of objectivity, is a subjective account of the island politicians in 1950s. For Ganesh, politics has success of a kind. Ganesh as M.B.E. can forget his political defeat by Indarsingh, the propagator of socialinduigm.

In fact, Naipaul cannot take the novel as a serious realistic statement of accusable offence of a colonial society, but as a superbly humorous blown up of human flaws and fanciful fashions. The novel is a funny book; eccentricity, failure, inefficiency and immaturity are gently mocked. The novel has its setting of in rural Trinidad with Port of Spain providing to stepping stone to the metropolis which is London. London provides the distinct scope which guides the subconscious and conscious thinking of Ganesh and others. The people immersed in physical labour and material existence are content to live circumscribed lives. Naipaul attempts to reconstitute, in colonial sense of success, in full view of questing and questioning. He presents Ganesh as a man of excellence, who knows when it is time to move on. The novel is the history of Ganesh Ramsumair and shows how he raised from a failed primary teacher, struggling masseur to the author of books, revered mystic, an M.L.AC and an M.B.E. It is truly ironical that a series of failures lunches Ganesh into international eminence. It is his failure as a teacher that turns him into a masseur, and his lack of success with massaging away even ordinary pains that nudges him towards mysticism. What is in his favour, however, is his strange belief in his own genius, no matter how frequent his failures.

Ganesh, being optimistic and visionary, aims to transform apparent hopelessness to hope and to point to the inevitable light at the end. Ganesh believes that he was supposed to give up his teaching job at that moment because he was destined to do something far greater in his life. Ganesh has decided to take every chance; he is offered to change his career which helps move even deeper in order to attain fame and fortune. Indeed he revolts against *failure*.

The novel tells the genuine story of Ganesh Ramsumair belonging to Trinidad. In the character of Ganesh, the author has presented the crisis consisting to the problem of integration between two conflicting views in Ganesh's early life events happen to him but he made no effort to control the events. He was almost passive in actions. Even he married to Leela Ramloganas her father decided upon her match. During this period Ganesh believed that the success and achievement

in life depends on God's will or as destiny forethought. He has found himself as a failure primary school teacher, a masseur and an author. But soon he realized the truth. He realized that the success or achievement in life depends on deliberately planning, and accurately and energetically execution of the plan. From this point of view his success in life has grown. Soon he becomes a successful businessman. Now he moves on the business venture regarding his success as a religious and psychological adviser or a pundit. His fame spreads over the whole of Trinidad. This fame later opens a new vista in his life. In 1946, when the first election was held on this island, he manages to catch his popularity in the island and gets elected as a member of the legislative council. In his new role, he shows himself as a great patriot and a defender of the rights of people of Trinidad. He refuses even to participate in the rituals of the British rulers of the island. He even supports the strike of the sugar-workers, expressing some vague Marxist ideas.

Ganesh asserts his independence of thought again and again, rejecting his superstitious, materialistic and garrulous society. (Kamra, 61).

However, when he is roughly handled by the crowd, his sympathies turn in the opposite direction; as a consequence, he adopts the clothes and attitudes of the Britishers. When he is no longer an elected member of the Legislative Council, he is nominated to that body and afterwards receives the title of M.B.E. Finally he appears in England under the name of G. Ramsay Muir. Ganesh rejects his Indian name and adopts an English name to go with his political career.

There he transforms so thoroughly from the Caribbean Ganesh Ramsumair to G. Ramsay Muir that he becomes "...a complete colonial even more Philistine than the white. (Naipaul, 89)

He rejects his Indian culture and allows him to fully embrace the British culture because that culture would not earn him the money that he was making as a politician. Soon he becomes a true politician fully ensconced in the British culture. "Here Naipaul employs almost Swiftian irony to belittle Ganesh's assumption of a new national identity" In each step of his career Naipaul satirizes the rise to power of a representative of the people in a country which is about to achieve its independence from British rule. In the novel V.S. Naipaul shares his own experiences as an Indian in the Caribbean island, a Caribbean in England and a nomadic intellectual in the post-colonial world.

While the others characters of the novel influence Ganesh's change greatly, the transformation of his character is best shown through Ganesh himself. Ganesh Ramsumair is a product of Indian Hindu Tradition in which he was raised and the western values he learns in his student life at Queen's royal collage. He moves from the Indian culture to the British culture and changes himself according to the circumstances, forced him to change. He has been formally educated to only a low level; but he has read widely and by making use of this wide reading, he is able to establish himself in his later life. Charda B. Joshi comments on the existential condition of Ganesh:

Ganesh's sense of displacement and his groping towards a solution are presented with full understanding of his predicament, caught as he is between an Indian past and Creole present. To see Ganesh merely as a character in a face does not quite do justice to the author's treatment." (Naipaul,116-117)

Throughout the novel, Ganesh reveals awareness to the demand of the educated and the uneducated. This is shown in his skill with which he manipulates people and events to his advantage in the novel. Fortunately he has become successful as a mystic. He is regarded as "the only true mystic in the island." V.S. Naipaul employs a characteristic bathetic humour of foreground how the 'fullness' of the stereotype is always conditioned by a 'lack'. The journey of Ganesh's life is the journey from socio-cultural self to the real self that has been set in the background of the certainty of life. Ganesh's 'struggle for existence' teaches us amidst many difficulties and failure one should have positive outlook towards the future and venture for the next with optimism and visionary power. Naipaul's work is very relevant in the world in which we all are facing complexities and uncertainties in every walk of life.

V.S. Naipaul's intention, therefore, is probably to present the reality of the world. He has simply presented the world of Trinidad that he saw and knew to be real; a world which he saw to be tied with nihilistic tendencies. In *The Mystic Masseur* Ganesh seems to move between two cultures- Indian and Western; he moves from the Indian culture to the British culture. Cultural background of the novel is equally live, based on much of the time on Naipaul's first-hand knowledge of how East Indians lived in Trinidad. The novel records the failure and highlights the success in Ganesh's life, and tells us how Ganesh changes throughout the novel. Each time that Ganesh moves to a different career in his life, marks a shift in the socio-culture of Trinidad. Ganesh struggles to find his place in the economical establishment in Trinidad. Ganesh serves as representation of contemporary life in Trinidad. While we see the changes that Ganesh undergone, we realize more and more that the chances were time's demand. Ganesh ultimately was able to overcome all barriers of his life. Naipaul also offers Ganesh sympathy and admires him for his perseverance and determination to rise above his situations. Ganesh's wife 'Leela' is seen as a major influence on his life throughout the novel. The narrator and other characters in the novel served as a background on which Ganesh could be evaluated and influenced from a post colonial point of view.

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