

# Imbalance Hybridization of Cultures and Hollowness of Mimic Man in the Lonely Londoners and a House for Mr. Biswas: A Diasporic Reading

Desequilibrio de la hibridación de las culturas y la vacuidad del hombre mimético en los londinenses solitarios y una casa para el señor Biswas: una lectura diaspórica

Desequilíbrio na hibridização de culturas e ociosidade do homem imitador nos londrinos solitários e uma casa para o sr. Biswas: uma leitura diaspórica

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## Abstract

The postcolonial Indian diasporic literature as one of the most discussed topics in world literature demonstrates the nostalgia of diaspora for their distant homelands and their quest to retain their racial and ethnic identity in a hybridized world. As postcolonial migrant intellectuals, Selvon and Naipaul deal with postcolonial displacement and homelessness resulting from diverse diasporic movements. Rootlessness displacement, and searching for the roots and 'home' and the transformation of the identities are an integral part of diasporic study of *The Lonely Londoners* and *A House for Mr. Biswas*. Selvon and Naipaul in their fictional works are renewing a kind of novel in those cultures where their search for a sense of identity and the need to establish a past on which the present can properly stand has a special force. The study examines how westernization, acculturation and a continuous process of hybridization lead to crisis of identity in the selected novels. The selected authors depict the disintegration of the society of Indian immigrants in Trinidad under the influence of borrowed culture, of mimicry and hybridity.

**Keywords:** Hybridity, Mimicry, Indian Diasporic literature, Diaspora, Migration, Social Identity.

## Resumen

La literatura diáspora india postcolonial como uno de los temas más discutidos en la literatura mundial demuestra la nostalgia de la diáspora por sus tierras distantes y su búsqueda por conservar su identidad racial y étnica en un mundo hibridizado. Como intelectuales migrantes poscoloniales, Selvon y Naipaul se ocupan del desplazamiento poscolonial y la falta de vivienda como resultado de diversos movimientos diaspóricos. Desplazamiento sin sentido, y la búsqueda de las raíces y el "hogar" y la transformación de las identidades son una parte integral del estudio diaspórico de *The Lonely Londoners* y *A House for Mr. Biswas*. Selvon y Naipaul en sus obras ficticias están renovando una especie de novela en aquellas culturas donde su búsqueda de un sentido de identidad y la necesidad de establecer un pasado en el que el presente pueda mantenerse adecuadamente tiene una fuerza especial. El estudio examina cómo la occidentalización, la aculturación y un proceso continuo de hibridación llevan a una crisis de identidad en las novelas seleccionadas. Los autores seleccionados representan la desintegración de la sociedad de inmigrantes indios en Trinidad bajo la influencia de la cultura prestada, de la mímica y la hibridación.

**Palabras clave:** Hibridez, Mimetismo, Literatura Diaspórica Indígena, Diáspora, Migración, Identidad Social.

## Resumo

A diáspora literária pós-colonial indiana como um dos temas mais discutidos na literatura mundial mostra a Diáspora nostálgica de suas terras distantes e sua busca para manter a sua identidade racial e étnica em um mundo hibridizado. Como intelectuais migrantes pós-coloniais, Selvon e Naipaul lidam com o deslocamento pós-colonial e a falta de moradia como resultado de vários movimentos diaspóricos. Deslocamento sem significado e a busca por raízes e "lar" e a transformação de identidades são parte integrante do estudo diaspórico de *The Lonely Londoners* and *A House for Mr. Biswas*. Selvon e Naipaul em suas obras ficcionais estão renovando uma espécie de romance em culturas onde a sua busca por um sentido de identidade e a necessidade de estabelecer um passado no qual este pode ser mantido adequadamente tem uma força especial. O estudo examina como a ocidentalização, aculturação e um processo contínuo de hibridização levam a uma crise de identidade em romances selecionados. Os autores selecionados representam a desintegração da sociedade de imigrantes indianos em Trinidad sob a influência de cultura, mímica e hibridização emprestadas.

**Palavras-chave:** Hibridismo, Mimetismo, Diáspora, Literatura Indígena, Diáspora, Migração, Identidade Social.

## Introduction

The adaptation in mimicking Western modes of European modernist writing and the ambivalence of the image of the black British wanderer capture the doubleness of hybrid identities in literature. The mode of postcolonial/diasporic modernist writing influenced by 1920s highmodernism might be understood as a literary enactment of Bhabha's idea of the desire for colonial mimicry (*The Location of Culture* 86). Homi Bhabha admits that marginalization is a form of castration and that colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed and recognizable 'other' as a subject of difference that "is almost the same but not quite" (86). The colonized subject who has internalized the rhetoric of colonial culture and identity is condemned to a life of inadequate mimicry, forced to adopt identity. Bhabha argues, mimicry must still reproduce its slippage, its excess and its difference continually (86). Mimicry, "as the sign of the inappropriate and as a difference or recalcitrance" coheres to the dominant colonial power and thus poses a threat to the former centre (86-7).

This study deals with the imbalance hybridization of cultures in the selected novels of Selvon and Naipaul that make the characters 'mimic' men and alienates them from their origins and create diasporic identities. Hybridity and mimicry have been influenced by multiple diasporic routes of Western/belatedly Westernised colonial literary representations. Selvon and Naipaul believe in the hollowness of 'mimic man' who lost their originality, creativity and thinking ability by imitating the colonial authority. The mimicry of

the colonial language by the postcolonial writers is a way of resistance to colonial authority.

The images of Caribbean "boys" in Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* propose a different angle in reconstructing the idea of the wanderer in the process of re-presenting the different "self" in a postcolonial metropolis and Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas* deals with plurality and diversity of ways in which dispossessed individuals live, narrate and strive to make sense of their lives. Most of the characters in these novels are heterogeneous and diverse and they approach their ethnically diverse origins in the hybrid spaces of in-between. These spaces where these characters try to make sense of their present are in a constant process of transformation and change. The selected novels represent displaced individuals who constantly produce and reproduce themselves and problematise in different ways the spaces they inhabit and the relations they develop. In such a setting where spaces are constantly contested and negotiated, new spaces emerge that reflect fluidity and hybridity of their existing conditions. In Naipaul's fictions, space and identity undergo constant processes of revision, redefinition and change. The failure of the dispossessed individuals to retain the 'purity' of the cultural heritages of their ancestors and the force of western influences in an alien landscape gradually lead to their adoption of hybrid identities.

By embodying the traditional sense of the "modernist self" in European modernism, Selvon could propel his black male characters into a

status more equal to European white males. In Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*, the assertion of the masculinity of West Indian male migrants actually reveals the reality of their marginalised and sub-cultural identity and only by doing so can they pretend that they are equal to European white men in the fictional world. The masculine characteristics of the black British wanderer challenge the normalised modernist conceptions of race in European modernism, but not the conceptions of gender and sexuality. White women characters in *The Lonely Londoners* are portrayed as unnamed girlfriends or sexual objects, which suggests that the women in the novel occupy even more peripheral positions in comparison to the experience of the black male immigrants, thereby performatively empowering black male immigrants. As such, this foregrounds the racist threat from the dominant white male population in the 1950s. Selvon's intention is to dramatise the prejudices involved in the stereotypical constructions of black identity in the fifties through laying stress on inter-racial sexual encounters. However, in 1950s British society, inter-racial sexual relationships were still considered to be unacceptable for many white families. In the episode when Bart visits his white girlfriend's family, Selvon depicts the brutal reality and the difficulty of inter-racial relationships at the time:

'You!' the father shouted, pointing a finger at Bart, 'You! What are you doing in my house? Get out! Get out this minute!' The old Bart start to stutter about how he is a Latin-American but the girl father wouldn't give him chance. 'Get out! Get out, I say!' The father want to throw Bart out the house, because he don't want no curly-hair children in the family (*The Lonely Londoners* 50-51).

In this context, the depiction of black British characters who have love affairs with white women has long been used as a liberating action to fight against dominant cultural values and social realities. But in the process, Selvon's Caribbean and black British immigrant characters still consciously or unconsciously reveal their masculinist identity in order to solidify their male characters' status. One of the most representative figures of the black men, Old Cap, is described as "living without working, smoking the best cigarettes, never without women" (45). All of his girlfriends are white women—two of them who are mentioned in the novel are a French girl and an Austrian girl. In the novel, the white women are drawn to Old Cap's money,

though he is merely pretending to be a prince of Nigeria. Although objectifying white female characters can be seen as a form of resistance to the European white patriarchal values constructed in Modernism, but the essence of such resistance has not yet been liberated from gender inequality, as this simply represents a switch from a white male-centred to black male-centred patriarchal system. Being with white girls makes the male subjects in the novel feel "good" about themselves, but being with black women is entirely another thing. In postcolonial urban writing by male authors such as Selvon, colonised female bodies are usually negatively represented as a disturbing presence. In the following passage, a black woman is portrayed as a comic embodiment of cultural backwardness. Tolroy's ma Tanty for example, is presented as a risible character in the novel, particularly in a scene where she forces Harris to dance to a Caribbean calypso song:

Now all this time Tanty was looking for Harris, and when he take the floor with this sharp thing she spot him dancing. Tanty get up and push away dancers as she advance to Harris.

"My boy!" She say, putting she hand on his shoulder, "I been looking for you all over. What happening, you avoiding the old lady, en? Too much you girl here to bother with Tanty, eh?" [...] "What happen for that?" Tanty say, eyeing the white girl who look so embarrass. "You think I can't dance too? I had a set already with Tolroy, ask him."

[...] "Tell this girl to unlace you: you know what they playing?

'Fan Me Saga Boy Fan Me', and that is my favourite calypso.

These English girls don't know how to dance calypso, man. Lady, excuse him," and before Harris know what happening Tanty swing him on the floor, pushing up she fat self against him. The poor fellar can't do anything, in two-twos Tanty had him in the centre of the floor while she swing she fat bottom left and right (109-110).

As a black female character, in Selvon's narrative Tanty seems to be an inadequate subject of modernity in the city. Though Harris is also a comic character whose "black" bourgeois experience and self-consciousness distances him from his fellow West Indian friends in the city, the figure of the woman in the novel is displayed as a proponent of old-fashioned ways and cultural backwardness. In contrast to the Caribbean

black men in London city, who are more confident in wandering in the streets, the black woman subject, as symbolised by Tanty in Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*, is not only depicted as backward and an improper "modernist" subject in the metropolis, but is also constrained by domestic chores and family obligations and is therefore unable to move independently beyond her comfort zone associated with her Jamaican homeland. In the episode which describes Tanty's journey from her migrant community on Harrow Road to Lyons Corner House, where Ma works, Selvon shows Tanty's travel in the city. However, she does not wander the city as an "everyday practice" since this (un)consciously marks men's privilege, and is thus dangerous for female city dwellers. Consequently, such literary depictions illustrate the gendered hierarchy within black immigrant culture in London. As Selvon writes:

Like how some people live in small village and never go to the city, so Tanty settle down in the Harrow Road in the Working Class area.... "Why you don't take a tube and go and see the big stores it have in Oxford Street," Ma say, but Tanty shake her head. "I too old for that now," she say, "it don't matter to me, I will stay here by the Harrow Road." (68)

The formation of diasporic identity is for intercultural or international border-crossing. Selvon represents his diasporic Trinidadian identity through writing in English to show his hybridity as a diasporic Caribbean (Trinidadian) writer. Although concurring with the idea that the coloniser imposes a dominant discursive representation of the colonised subject in postcolonial societies, Homi Bhabha observes that there is a space for the subaltern or the native to speak—in a reformed, mimicking voice which can subvert colonial discourse—and the colonised subject can therefore find a space for speaking and resisting. Therefore, Bhabha's ideas on hybridity and the ambivalent or subversive use of English, though it is a painful mark of the expansion of colonial culture, is often considered "the most common and effective form of subversive opposition" (Ashcroft et al. 11). As Ashcroft et al. also point out, appealing to essentialist notions of cultural identity is doomed to failure as the nature of human experience is usually heterogeneous and hybrid (261). Many postcolonial writers thus claim that English can be used as a cultural vehicle to introduce diverse

features of postcolonial cultures or diasporic societies (277).

In *The Lonely Londoners*, Selvon mixes features of Caribbean oral tradition with the modernist stream-of-consciousness mode of writing. In constituting the identities of his West Indian characters, Selvon uses Caribbean hybrid linguistic structures to convey the features of a particular race, colour or class, pointing towards certain modes of existence and methods of survival. In an interview he explains that while writing the stories of Caribbeans in London, he found it difficult to write in "Standard English." The "Caribbean language" is Selvon's literary language, which is based on Trinidadian Creole English.

Selvon's London writing brings together stories of Caribbean/African "boys" of different backgrounds and of different emigrant routes to create a hybrid diasporic Black British community in his fictional world. Located at the corner of Chepstow Road and Westbourne Grove, Moses' basement room in Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* serves as a safe zone for the new-comers from the West Indies. Like a Sunday chapel, the room offers a space where the West Indian "boys" get together to complain, meet with old friends and exchange news and information. Moses' basement room, though dim and wet, is still a castle for these Caribbean "boys." In here, it is London's black "utopia." It isolates them from the harshness of daily life in London and divides the world into daylight and of darkness. Moses and the other West Indian "boys" are often offered some of the worst jobs in the city. As Procter argues, "the metropolitan basement room becomes the site at which a local West Indian landscape is conjured, offering a familiar territory, a communal reference point for conversation beneath the alienating streets of London" (*Dwelling Places* 41). By positing such a space in black British writing, Selvon focuses not on the poor and bleak condition of the basement dwelling space, but rather on uncovering the non-negotiable boundaries between races. Selvon in his novel creates a "Third Space" in the metropolitan city. The "Third Space" is a term used by Homi Bhabha to refer to the in between space that inscribes and articulates culture's hybridity (*The Location of Culture* 56). Procter analyses the ways in which British writers transform their street experience into a new mode of living during the post-war period, and this highlights the formation of the significant

new identity of the 1950s solitary male in the streets of London (*Dwelling Places* 4).

In Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*, Galahad thinks of himself as a king walking in London city by dressing up his finest clothes and "bowing his head in a polite 'Good evening'" (75). The Anglicised man Harris dresses like an Englishman with an umbrella, a briefcase under his arm and *The Times* folded up in his pocket, making sure that the name of the newspaper is seen, and walks upright as if he is alone in the world (103-4). He even throws a party in St Pancras Hall and acts like an English gentleman although he is a black immigrant (103-4). Big City, who comes from an orphanage in Trinidad, likes to talk about the big cities of the world: "Big city for me [...] None of this small time village life for me. Is New York and London and Paris, that is big life." (83). He is a dreamer and likes to talk about his big dreams of living in the big cities and living a flamboyant life. He says to Moses that when he wins £75,000 one day, he will travel to Paris, Brussels, Berlin, Rome and then to San Francisco, Chicago and New York, and then sail his yacht in the Mediterranean and date women on the river in Italy. Old Cap, a West Indianised Nigerian, is wandering between women and always dresses in clean and pressed clothes with his hair combed and a white handkerchief, smoking cigarettes of the best quality. By placing such characters in their writings, authors such as Selvon and Naipaul challenge the racial and class boundaries between white and non-white societies so as to seek ways of redefining the hybridity of their characters and their new identities in the host country.

Selvon and Naipaul, as Caribbean diasporic writers, used the immigrant experience as a prism through which to reinterpret the European metropolises, and re-defined their diasporic identity by mimicking high modernist writing. The detoured black British modernist writing that depicts their diasporic movements and the passage from the history of slavery to living in modern European cities can thus be seen as a strategy to survive among the London literary communities and to go beyond their literary boundaries in the Caribbean setting.

Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas* shows the disintegration of the Hindu culture of the immigrant Indians in a multicultural space where the idea of a stable cultural identity is questioned throughout. The novel exemplifies the dynamic and fluid nature of social spaces by depicting such spaces as constantly being negotiated and

hybridized. Naipaul presents the picture of hybridization and the disintegration of the orthodox Hindu rites and rituals. The novel shows the dilution of Hinduism in the expatriate Indian community as a result of its contact with the surrounding creole society which imitates the Western life style, follows Christianity and speaks English. In the novel, Hanuman House stands as a symbol of the old Hindu culture. The members of the house attempt to preserve the memory of their native country and the Hindu way of life in the new territory. The novel shows the endeavour of the first generation immigrants to preserve the Indian way of life which gradually disintegrates when the Creole world outside influences the members of the next generations.

Cultural conflict is one of the most dominant themes of the novel. The Tulsi family and Honuman House represent Hindu culture. Gradually, coming under western influences, the orthodoxy of the Tulsi family begins to crumble. As a result of the process of assimilation and the impact of the west-oriented culture in Trinidad, certain aspects of Hindu culture take new forms that share aspects of both the cultures which ultimately lead to cultural hybridity. Mrs. Tulsi is very keen to preserve the Hindu culture. The daily *puja* or worship, and the various rituals prescribed by the religion are regularly performed in the house. But, under the influence of materialistic western culture the sacred Hindu religious practices gradually reduces to business and bargains. The westernized Creole culture of Trinidadian society slowly weakens the traditional Hindu beliefs and customs. Trinidad Hindus feel unsafe religiously for religion is a great source of fortitude at critical times and this sense of insecurity among religious minorities engender inferiority. Towards the end of the novel when Pundit Hari dies, and no one can be found to replace him, Mrs. Tulsi, a preserver of Hindu culture, too bends in her faith. With the passing of time, the society moves towards the west and away from India leading to dilution of Hinduism. The Hindu rites and rituals are still practiced but the meaning has gone out of them.

The elder son of Mrs. Tulsi, Shekhar, marries to a very rich family because he is known to be "well educated". But the family that he marries to is not Hindu. Dorothy and her family are Presbyterians. So, Shekhar had given up his brahminical beliefs of keeping the purity of the high caste by marrying in to another Brahmin family. The marriage takes place in a registry office and after that, contrary to the Hindu

customs, Shekhar goes to Dorothy's house. In the Tulsi family, caste plays a major role in arranging marriages, but now, Mrs. Tulsi and her daughters think that "their brother's bride should be chosen with a more appropriate concern" (239) which results in a "search for an educated, beautiful and rich girl from a caste family who had been converted to Christianity and had lapsed" (239-240). At last, Mrs Tulsi's elder son, Shekhar's marriage is arranged with a girl in a Presbyterian family. It means that Shekhar has given up his rigid brahminical beliefs of keeping the 'purity' of the high caste by marrying a Brahmin girl. The marriage takes place in a registry office and after that: "Contrary to Hindu custom and the tradition of his family, he did not bring his bride home, but left Hanuman House for good, no longer talking of suicide, to look after the Lorries, cinema, land and filling station of his wife's family" (240). Shekhar wanted to have material gain by marrying Dorothy, but at Dorothy's house, Shekhar finds himself in an inferior place same as Biswas or the other poor husbands of the daughters of the Tulsi house. And he burst into tears when he learned that Owad is going "abroad to study, to become a doctor." (349). It is not like that Shekhar did not gain anything materially, but he has lost a lot psychologically and culturally. That is what made Shekhar cry. Shekhar's wife does not follow the custom and traditional culture of the Tulsi family. From the beginning, the relations between the sisters and Shekhar's wife have been uneasy because "Shekhar's wife had from the first met Tulsi patronage with arrogant Presbyterian modernity. He flaunted her education.. She wore short frocks and didn't care that they made her look lewd and absurd... (385). But to talk about Owad, "studies abroad" could not really provide him the qualities that Shekhar lacks. Owad comes back to Trinidad after becoming a doctor. This has made him a different person. His appearance is changed completely, and he starts to look down on the other members of his society, even at his family members. He criticizes Anand for his 'conceited selfishness and egocentricity', but his own actions reflect the same characteristics. He had become a member of the elite class, "released" from both of the Indian and Creole sections of Trinidad. The new society proudly announced themselves to be different from the native people and tried to copy the lifestyle of the westerners, which they have become acquainted recently. Owad married Dorothy's cousin, "the Presbyterian violinist", and left Port-of-Spain, which clearly

indicates that he cuts off all the relations that he had in his former life. As a matter of fact, Owad is successful in his new world. Yet the "readers and learners", Owad and Shekhar, and even Anand are caught in a dilemma, on the one hand they simply hold on to their traditions, in which case they will stagnate and decay; or they will try to be successful in their new lives, in a more western way where they will have to become hybrid beings and lose the very basis of their personalities. But for Mr. Biswas, there is one other problem along with this dilemma he has to fight for his honour even within his own society. With the death of his father, Mr. Biswas and his family were confronted with the brutality of this world and as a result, the family was torn apart. Mohun's two older brothers were sent to a distant relative "in the heart of the sugar estates; they were already broken into estate work and were too old to learn anything else" (38). His sister goes to their aunt Tara, where she is treated as a maid, but hopefully she will be provided with some dowry when she gets married. Mohun Biswas, as the youngest son, stays with his mother at Pagots "on Tara's bounty...and some of Tara's husband's dependent relations." (40)

Owad, Mrs Tulsi's other son, comes back to Trinidad after becoming a doctor which has made him a different person. In his letters, Owad writes mainly about English flowers and the English weather. 'The February fogs have at last gone,' Owad used to write, 'depositing a thick coating of black on every window sill. The snowdrops have come and gone, but the daffodils will be here soon. I planted six daffodils in my tiny front garden. Five have grown. The sixth appears to be a failure. My only hope is that they will not turn out to be blind, as they were last year. (556-557) Owad is received like a hero by the Tulsis when he returns from England after completing his medical studies. They go to the harbor to welcome Owad who "was wearing a suit they had never known, and he had a Robert Taylor moustache. His jacket was open, his hands in his trouser pockets." (567). He has become a member of the elite class. Owad's educational superiority places him ahead of everyone else in the family. He has been deeply influenced by the Communist revolution in Russia and he tells of his "meeting with Motolov, of the achievements of the Red Army and the glories of Russia..." (571) the whole house falls under Owad's spell when he narrates his adventures in England. Chinta begins to show a great antipathy for Krishna

Menon, whom Owad dislikes. One afternoon, the Tulsi family's reverence for India is shattered: Owad disliked all Indians from India. They were a disgrace to Trinidad Indians; they were arrogant, sly and lecherous; they pronounced English in a peculiar way; they were slow and unintelligent and were given degrees only out of charity...the moment they got to England they ate meat and drank to prove their modernity... (570) Owad marries Dorothy's cousin, "the Presbyterian violinist", and "left the Colonial Hospital and moved to San Fernando..." (618). the newly emerging society has become indifferent to the customs of their ancestors as they try to copy the lifestyle of the westerners, which they have become acquainted recently. The traditions of the Indians undergo changes in the face of modernization and "their customs and ceremonies remain quaint and even exotic" (The Middle Passage 79).

In *A House for Mr. Biswas*, Naipaul portrays a very vivid picture of Caribbean history, colonial encounter, and the disintegration of Caribbean culture. He warns the Caribbeans about their hollow mimicry of the Western culture that has demoralized their souls. Naipaul wants them to come out from their complacent state and to recreate their place and identity in the new world. He uses English to transmit his own thoughts and feelings and to introduce his own culture and identity to a world audience. The Trinidadian Indian was bound by customs and conventions. In the Caribbean plural culture, the displacement and disposition of cultural identity and the sense of alienation create a kind of self-awareness that enables Naipaul to rediscover his 'identity' 'and self'. He urges for the wholeness of 'home' and 'self-questioning at the heart' which is also found at the heart of all postcolonial people. Naipaul seems to find his home through writing to respond to his own history, culture and identity. Naipaul, a third generation Indian born and brought up in an extended Hindu family in Trinidad, was bound by customs and conventions, rites and rituals. What the Trinidadian Indians do is the mimicry of the Indian culture. Naipaul's predicament is that of one, caught in the various threads of multicultural society. "His identity is problematized under the disparate socio-cultural forces which occasioned his escape into the metropolitan centre of London for pursuit of a writing career" (qut in Chakrabarti 3).

The Caribbean accept and imitate the western culture, language, customs and outlook.

Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas* is regarded as the cross-cultural story of the Tulsi household and the consolidation of Indian Diaspora in Trinidad (a Caribbean island), its perpetuation and its final disintegration and confrontation with the waves of western culture. Hanuman House (Tulsi House) was a timber and corrugated-iron building in the High Street at Arwacas and it stood there like an alien fortress. Hanuman House represents the old Hindu culture which had incorporated to Trinidad by Pundit Tulsi and by thousands of other Indians who had emigrated from India to Trinidad. The house is a miniature India and its members tenaciously preserve the memory of their native country. It holds on exclusively to immigrant Hindu way of life in the first and second generations but yields to a syncretism in the third generation when the Creole world outside steeps into the Tulsi household and it disintegrates.

There is evidence of the disintegration of Traditional Hindu Indian practices in their celebration of Christmas. This sort of religious ambiguity and disintegration is the result of the impact of west-oriented culture of multiracial Trinidad on the Tulsi family. The family Hindu deity 'Hanuman' seems to be replaced by Christ and the observance of the holy rituals has been diluted. The family now celebrates Christmas day as their religious festivals: "The Tulsi celebrated Christmas in their store and ...in their home. It was a purely Tulsi festival" (119). Mrs. Tulsi is very keen to preserve the Hindu culture, but she celebrates Christmas with her family and also allows her sons to wear crucifixes while doing Hindu *puja*. She leaves her daughters uneducated, but sends her sons to the Roman Catholic college in Port of Spain for their education. Mr Biswas and Shama also decide that Anand would go to college as "it would be cruel and foolish to give the boy nothing more than an elementary school education." (512). The daily *puja* or worship, and the various rituals prescribed by the religious orthodox are regularly performed. Household worship makes use of fire and water for purification; food offerings, incense, flowers etc. The family has acquired a pundit in one of its son-in-laws. But the sacred Hindu religion in the novel gradually reduced to business and bargains and dissipated under the onslaught of extremely materialistic western culture. Govinda's wife Chinta uses Hindi incantation in combination with "a candle in one hand and a crucifix in the other" (446).

The assimilation into the Creole culture is complete when Mrs. Tulsi starts sending Sushila

to burn candles in the Roman Catholic Church, puts a Crucifix in her room and has Pundit Tulsi's grave cleaned for All Saint's Day. "For every puja Mrs. Tulsi tried a different pundit, since no pundit could please her as well as Hari. And, no pundit pleasing her, her faith yielded. She sent Sushila to burn candles in the Roman Catholic church; she put a crucifix in her room; and she had Pundit Tulsi's grave cleaned for all Saints' Day" (522). The younger Tulsi son, Owad worships the Hindu deities though he wears cross, an emblem of Christian faith. Naipaul sarcastically presents the complete picture of hybridization and the disintegration of religious values in the novel. The observance of the holy rituals has been diluted with hybridization, hypocrisy and superstitions. The family Hindu deity 'Hanuman' seems to be replaced by Christ. Naipaul shows ironically how Shekhar, Mrs Tulsi's son, mixes Hindu customs with that of Christianity:

The elder god did wear a crucifix. It was regarded . . . exotic and desirable charm. The elder god wear many charms and it was thought fitting that someone so valuable should be protected. On the Sunday before examination he was bathed by Mrs. Tulsi in water consecrated by Hari, the soles of his feet were soaked in lavender water, he was made to drink a glass of suinness stout, and he left Hanuman House, a figure of awe, laden with crucifix, sacred thread and cads, a mysterious sachet, a number of curious armlets, consecrated coins, and a lime in each trouser pocket. (125)

Another mark of hybridization is, it crumbles the solidarity and unity of Tulsi joint family and disintegrates it into nuclear families. Pt. Tulsi's enigmatic relation with India compels him for joint family system. So, he keeps his in-laws at home after their marriage. Warner Lewis' observation characterizes the family: "As head of the class in Trinidad, he [Pt. Tulsi] provides, after the style of the princely great houses of India, a sanctuary of for the succeeding generations of the family. It is perhaps the fault of nature and of circumstances that cultural anomaly arises out of this" (94).

The first generation immigrants attempt to hold fast their religious rules, but the members of the next generations mix Hindu religious rites with that of Christianity. The novel provides various instances of dilution of orthodox Hinduism. During the time of Christmas the Tulsi store becomes " a place of deep romance and endless

delights...(221) The whole place is transformed by the playing of Gramophone; the scent of Canadian apples; "by a multitude of toys and dolls and games in boxes , new and sparkling glassware...by Japanese lacquered trays...(221). When pundit Hari dies, W.C. Tuttle, one of the sons in law of Mrs Tulsi, "ferociously brahminical in an embroidered silk jacket, did the last rites." (438) After Hari's death, there was none to take his place in performing duties of Pundit in religious ceremonies.

Tulsi family maintained a united front against all outsiders. It believes in the ideal of family solidarity. Every member of the family has his/her own duties to perform. Later some members of Tulsi clan certainly imbibe new ideas and adopt new modes of life. Mr. Biswas is obsessed with his freedom and identity and rebels against the traditionalism, rigidity and communal life of Hanuman House. He finds pleasure in establishing his own identity. He separates himself from the other Tulsi members by reading books by such authors as Marcus Aurelius and Samuel Smiles etc. W.C. Turtle who is a firm upholder and defender of old Brahminical culture in the novel, has fallen under the deep influence of western civilization and its literature, music and art: "W.C. Turtle was all for modernity. In addition to the gramophone, he possessed a radio, a number of dainty tables, a morris suite." A symbol of this man's modernity is his purchase of a four-foot high statue of a naked woman. Then Shekhar's getting married to a Christian girl and leaving Hanuman House is a great blow to the family solidarity. Mrs. Tulsi feels compelled to compromise with the alien western culture. She feels compelled to send her son to a Roman Catholic educational institution. She goes to live in Port of Spain to look after her younger son. Thus, cultural confrontation between the rigid orthodox Tulsi family and the modern Western civilization breaks down the solidarity of the Tulsi family.

Linguistic habit of the members of the Tulsi family is also changed gradually. Hindi is now spoken much less than before. As Naipaul says, "Though the children understood Hindi they could no longer speak it. They started using words like 'Mummy' and 'Daddy' instead of 'Mai' and 'Bap'" (426). Language is related to identity of the Caribbean people. Biswas differentiates himself from the Tulsi members by reading English literature and by speaking Creole. By showing the disintegration of the Tulsi households in *A House for Mr. Biswas*, Naipaul



portrays the brutal texture of Caribbean culture which is trapped in the various threads of multicultural interactions and colonial mechanics. Here, in a colonial society, the hybridization of cultures does not mean the sharing of different cultures but the establishing of one particular powerful culture. In the Caribbean society, the Western culture influences the people in such a way that they deny their own culture and happy to live in a borrowed culture.

The dispossession and displacement that the uprooted, marginalized, diasporic Caribbean people are subjected to, bring them into a state of agony and they found that mimicry is the only way out. Naipaul takes the reader into the dimly lit corridors of the 'Caribbean's inner world. He seems to believe that in such society evolving out of slavery and colonialism, no comfortable acculturation is possible, and 'mimicry' of the colonial authority is obvious. There exists no opportunity to start afresh and there are no new and unsettling conceptualizations of identity to discover. The imitation of the colonizers' cultural habits, values and assumptions make them hollow man and create a dehumanizing and alienating impact on their social, cultural, political and the linguistic identity. For Frantz Fanon, mimicry is the result of a colonial indoctrination process through which Caribbean man and woman denied an autonomous cultural identity, have been coerced into seeking legitimacy through the imitation of western models - through the strategic adoption of 'white masks'. Memmi writes, "A product manufactured by the colonizer is accepted with confidence. His habits, clothing, food, architecture are closely copied, even if inappropriate" (121).

Mohan Biswas, a mimic man in *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1969), adopts and internalizes the colonial rhetoric of masculinity and heroic personality to assert his identities. Mr. Biswas' attempt to construct a stable heroic personality is constantly thwarted by wretched sense of inadequacy that comes from internalizing the imperial discourses, a discourse that insists that all colonized subjects are 'mimic' men. Mr. Biswas often evokes the image of a clown to construct his identities. The clown is a potent symbol of in-between's, neither man nor boy, railing at authorities and yet impotent and marginalized, inadequate mimicking normal manliness. The most important strategy that Naipaul adopts to render Mr. Biswas absurd is to refer continuously to unimpressive physique, his swinging calf muscles (Naipaul 353), his hairless

hands, the ridiculous knob on his nose, and his rising belly. Mr. Biswas rebels against the rigid unorthodoxy of Hanuman House and he uses the word 'tough' to insult the Tulsis and makes a virtue out of his hairless hands as a sign of intellectual superiority. Here, again Mohan Biswas is simply replicating the colonial discourse of constructing the colonized subject as either emasculated or British and hyper-sexual (Chatterjee 1999). Mr. Biswas' intense desire to adopt ideal European muscularity makes him ridiculous and alienated from other because mimicry is a blurred copy, never produces the exact thing. Then, the ideal of European intellectual, in-control and heroic man is something Biswas would try to emulate throughout his life. In his endeavour to build a masculine identity, Mr. Biswas inevitably turns to a British writer of conduct books and novels such as Samuel Smiles and the European tradition of the *Buildungsroman* or the development novel. Mr. Biswas' mimicking of Smiles' heroes and the very European tradition of the *buildungsroman* are doomed to failure from the very beginning. The very historical circumstances that have pushed the Smiles' hero to the centre have pushed Biswas to the margin. Again, the naming of his puppy "Tarzan" in the green vale is very ridiculous. Tarzan, a white man, is the heroic ideal of controlled masculinity. The puppy Tarzan, however, turns out to be as much of a coward as Mr. Biswas and simply rules over chickens. Mr. Biswas symbolizes the expatriate experience of minority culture adapting and imitating a cosmopolitan society's ideology and morality. This gives a split identity to his fleeting self and the life of an exile. As he is too much obsessed with western ideas and ideologies he is alienated from his inner being and seems to be ridiculous.

The mimicry of the colonial identity makes the colonizer hollow at the core. Mr. Biswas is stranger to themselves. Like a fragmented self, Biswas "as a boy...had moved from one house to another and since his marriage he felt, he had lived nowhere" (Naipaul 8). Being alienated from society, Mr. Biswas is passive spectators who 'see' never 'feel'. As 'mimic men' he lives without stable social identity. Empty and fragmented, he simply admit in the cross-cultural current of transitional society. His position is no better than exile, as Edward Said in *Reflection of Exile* says:

Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unbearable rift between a human being and a native place, between the self and it's true home: it's essential

sadness can never be summoned...the achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind forever. (173)

Naipaul, in *A House for Mr. Biswas*, uses Standard English. He applies the strategies of appropriation and transformation by adopting local idioms, and cultural references. He uses 'glossing', such as 'nakphul - a nose flower (32), untranslated Hindi words puja (50), baba (53), "roti" (88), "maharajin" (32), "rakshas" (387), etc. vernacular rhymes such as 'rama rama sita rama/ 'rama rama sita rama' (291). Again, the language of conversations in this novel shows adoption of English words into the syntax of Hindi language: Oh! Bipti cried "stop this bickering ickering" (28), or 'look, look why nobody ain't put anything to chock up the coffin' (33). In this regard, the conversation between Mr. Biswas and Alec about how Biswas could manage to marry Shama, the Tulsi daughter, is another important example: "How you manage this so quick? Well, I see the girl and she was looking at me, and I was looking at her. So I give she a little of the old of sweet talk and I see that she was liking me too. And well to cut a long story short, I ask to see the mother. Rich people you know. Big house."(91-92) Naipaul thus, is situating himself in relation to a European tradition but at an oblique angle. His mimicking of English language in his writing is not mere imitation of the colonial language, but subversion of the authority of colonial language. By using the master's tool, Naipaul introduces, the local reality, cultural identity, history, sorrow, suffering and pains of the Caribbean society and establishes his identity as a postcolonial writer all over the world. Mimicry here, is a mode of resistance and re-creation.

### Conclusion

It could be concluded that when post-colonial writers attempt to show hybridity as an anti-colonial tool regarding identity, culture and language, Selvon and Naipaul attempt to explore the fact that in colonial Caribbean society, the effect of hybridization is not 'sharing' but 'mimicry' or 'imitation' of the former imperial power and knowledge. In post-colonial literature, hybridity is celebrated because of its sense of mixing. Balanced hybridization can break down the strict polarization of imperialism based on colonizer and colonized. Selvon and Naipaul suggest that this kind of balanced

transformation is not possible in Caribbean society where is a multi-racial, immigrant, slave colonial society with the restlessness of immigrants. Though the colonizers are physically absent, they ruled over the society by their hegemonic power-ideology, education etc. The Caribbean finds the society as a theatrical stage where he has to perform his/her role as mimic man ascribed for him by the colonial authority. There is no other choice for the Caribbean.

Selvon and Naipaul are aware of the harmful effects of mimicry in their novels and they sarcastically present a comic but pathetic view of the demoralizing position and the incongruities and foibles of the mimic men- Mr. Biswas, Browne, W.C. Turtle, Moses and Galahad. These mimic men lose their originality and thinking ability by imitating the values and norms of imperial authority. This mimicry gives them a partial and fragmented identity that makes them alienated from their own communities, family and even from their inner selves. Their alienation is the consequences of the vivid imaginative life created and sustained by the alien influence of imperial knowledge and power. They attempt to escape into an ideal, static vision of the self and deny the continuity of life in Caribbean society. However, Naipaul's stand regarding mimicry is ambivalent. He says, "The English language was mine, the tradition was not". (Naipaul 26).

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