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A Postcolonial Interpretation of the Colonized: A Study of the Autobiographical Elements in V.S. Naipaul's *The Mystic Masseur*

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V.S. Naipaul has extensively and meaningfully made use of his personal experiences as a boy and adolescent in his fictional world. In his *The Mystic Masseur* we can see how he has represented his personal experiences. It is clear that he has refused the traditional base of the society and adopted some kind of attitude which is ironical or sarcastic or there may also be a touch of rebellion and protest. Naipaul organizes his autobiographical material in a chronological and intelligible manner.

Helen Hayword Comments:

"The Autobiographical element forms a substantial component of Naipaul's output, appearing not only in explicitly autobiographical works, but also in fiction and travel books." (Huges, 103)

Naipaul's memories of his whole life experience are converted in the autobiographical material, represented in his writings. This paper concentrates on such extensive autobiographical elements which are found in V.S. Naipaul's *The Mystic Masseur*. To begin with, *The Mystic Masseur* is his first published novel. It is a dramatic fictional biography in which the autobiographical elements are blended in a way that, Ganesh, the protagonist of the novel, represents events and actions that are real in the life of both Naipaul and his father. The boy-narrator of the novel, an admirer of Ganesh, seems to play no role in the story. The Novel *Miguel Street*

*"But one who adopts the posture of a biographer, or mock-biographer as Kenneth Ramchand describes him, both the tone and the fact that the narrator's source material is primarily made up of the protagonists autobiography and self-promotional publication immediately establishes the satirical cast of *The mystic masseur*" (Mustaf, 44)*

The novel is set in Trinidad and it highlights the success of Ganesh. Chronologically, the novel shows his ostensible struggle after accomplishing his study at Queen's Royal College, a Christian school in Port of Spain, where Naipaul himself studied before traveling to England. Through Ganesh, Naipaul has depicted his dislike of the thread ceremony, which is held during the holidays of his family because he is afraid of being extremely embarrassed to face his schoolmates at the college with a shaven head. At the college, Naipaul, himself as another Hindu migrant student, is subject to the same humiliations that Ganesh is experiencing in the novel:

"But the episode is significant. His head was still practically bald when he went back to school, and the boys laughed so much that the principal called him and said, Ramsunair, you

are creating a disturbance in the school wear something on you head." (Naipaul, 17)

Naipaul has expressed the same personal experience through Anand in A House for Mr. Biswas.

"During the long holidays..... Anand, shaved and thoroughly Brahmin, but ashamed of showing his bald head, stayed in part of Spain and no boy with a shaved head could go to a predominantly Christian school."(Naipaul, 403,404)

In Most cases, Naipaul's description of those rituals is satirical in a way that they seem to lack spiritual meaning. Ganesh failed as a pundit but to let people believes in him as a religious man-

"It was a strain for him to talk correctly and the women noted, with obvious satisfaction, that he was moving his lips silently before every sentence, as though he were mumbling a prayer" (Naipaul,121)

Similarly, Anand told his father that

"He was unable to offer up the usual prayers with sincere the words had become meaningless "(Naipaul, 403).

Naipaul reflects his understanding of the East Indian community in The Mystic Masseur, which spans nearly over twenty-five years of the first migrant generation of the East Indians concerning the problems of arranged marriages, the inevitability of one's Karma or fate, tradition versus modernity, and the act of writing as a means of appropriating one reality. Has studied at Queen's Royal College, where for the first time in his life he discovered his marginality as an Indian. At the college, he became ashamed of his cultural background and tried to hide his Indian identity as well. This is expressed through Ganesh, who like Naipaul, is sent to study at the Queen's Royal College for four years. Ganesh never loses his awkwardness. He is so ashamed of his Indian name that for a while he spreads a story that he was really called Gareth. This does him little good. He continues to dress, he does not play games, and his accent remained too clearly that of the Indian from the country:

"At the end Ganesh, like Naipaul, could not stand it in Trinidad and traveled to London, to the center which he was searching for. In London, Ganesh is ashamed of his Indian name, which he changes from "Ganesh Ramsumair to G. Ramsay Muir" (Naipaul, 215.)

In the novel, Ganesh starts his career as a teacher which he could not cope with. He returns to his village after the death of his father and unsuccessfully tries his luck as a Pundit. Ganesh's marriage is also reminiscent to that of Seepresad's who's in -laws trapped him for their daughter without a dowry. The story starts with Ganesh befriending Ramlogan, whose relationship with Ganesh goes through ups and downs. Ramlogan's method of marrying Ganesh can be compared to that of Mrs. Tulsi's. It is noticeable that the wedding rituals and dowry are more factual in A House for Mr. Biswas than in The Mystic Masseur. Therefore, the marriage story is an autobiography of Naipaul father and his struggle with his in-laws. Ramlogan, like Mr. Tulsi, tries to deceive Ganesh into marrying his daughter, Leela, without giving him a dowry:

"You is not like Soomintra damn fool of a husband', Ramlogan told him." "You is a modern man and you must have a modern wedding." So he didn't send the messenger around to give the saffron-dyed rice to friends and relations and announce the wedding that old fashion' he said." (Naipaul, 44)

Ganesh appears more intelligent than Mr. Biswas and he is aware of his father-in-law's trap. When Ramlogan starts setting the trap, Ganesh assures him that "If is the dowry you worried about, you could stop, I don't want a big dowry."

Although Ganesh has seen Leela once before the night of their wedding,
"Both he and Ramlogan pretended he had never seen her at all, because they were both good Hindu and knew it was wrong for a man to see his wife before marriage."
 (Naipaul, 43)

Unexpectedly, after announcing Ganesh and Leela as husband and wife, Ganesh refuse to eat the kedgerree unless he gets a very big dowry. Which makes Ramlogan gets mad kedgerree custom happens in the morning after the wedding, when the girl's further gives the groom a plate of kedgerree in front of people and keeps offering money to the groom till he finishes eating the plate, this is another wish that Naipaul hoped his father could get a dowry from his in-laws that would help live in a house of his own instead of moving from one house to another. Naipaul's wish is fictionalized through Ganesh that:

"In the end Ganesh got from Ramlogan: a cow and a heifer, fifteen hundred dollars in cash, and a house in fuente Grove. Ramlogan also called the bill for food he had sent to Ganesh's house. The ceremony ended at about nice in the morning; but Ramlogan was sweating Logn before then" (Naipaul, 45)

Naipaul's depiction of Ganesh as a Pundit runs parallel to that of Seepersad Gurudeva who is uneducated and regarded as a Pundit Ganesh and Mr. Biswas started their careers as Pundit but both of failed Ganesh, A Mystic Masseur, is sarcastic and ironical, in which he seems as a pretender to religious enlightenment. However, he is capable to offer his patients 'spiritual solace and comfort' because he is regarded as

'The only true mystic in the island'. It is important to show that Naipaul's depiction of Ganesh's eastern experience of mysticism, which is totally different from that of the west, is autobiographical in the first place. That is to say, Naipaul seems to be referring generally to the progressive alienation in the modern world but more specifically to the relationship between Ganesh's life in Trinidad and the history of East Indian community in the West Indies.

Selwyn Cudjoe Comments

"The mystic masseur is not in keeping with the tradition of "Hindu Mystical Classics" because it is couched as an autobiographical statement and records the activities of Ganesh. The Author, however, is forced to use this autobiographical style precisely because he is in the wilderness 'The mystic' in a new land is forced to compromise". (Cudjoe, 44)

Naipauls strong belief in predestination and karma runs through his entire work, showing the character interaction with certain circumstances. In the protagonist, Ganesh autobiography shows that he naturally believes in predestination, which plays a big role in his success. In his autobiography, *The years of Guilt*,

"The autobiography show that he believed strongly in predestination; and the circumstance which conspired to elevate his seem indeed to be providential. If he had been born ten years earlier it is unlikely, if you take into account the Trinidad Indian's attitude to education at that time that his father would have sent him to the Queen's Royal College. He might have become a pundit, and a mediocre pundit. If he had been born ten years Later his father profession-the Indian attitude to education had changed so completely and Ganesh might have become an unsuccessful lawyer or a dangerous doctor." (Naipaul, 200)

The protagonist, Ganesh, charts the rise of the picaroon hero, from a masseur to mystic and then to a radical politician to a colonial 'Yes man'.

Conclusion:

Overall, the novel is the story of the rise, and rise of Ganesh, from a failed primary school teacher and struggling masseur to author, revered mystic and MBE- The Mystic Masseur is surely destined for greatness and memorable for its hilarity as bewildering success.

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