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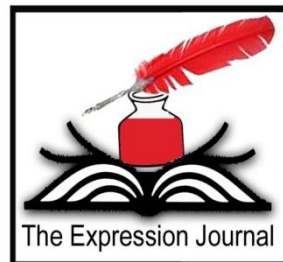
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**V.S. NAIPAUL'S *THE MYSTIC MASSEUR*:  
A CRITICAL APPRAISAL FROM THE POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVE**

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**Abstract**

V.S. Naipaul needs no introduction in the present world because he has had identity as an international writer. He is considered one of the top most writers of the contemporary world. He has been an expatriate writer and has been in controversy due to his views on imperialism, Islamic related views and his attack on the women writers. He is very reputed writer of the English literature. He has elegant craftsmanship in writing the diaspora writings. He has written many short-stories, essays, fictions and travelogues. He had bad experiences in the foreign countries, that is the reason that rootlessness, placelessness and placelessness are found the main theme in V.S. Naipaul's all works. In this paper, Naipaul's novel *The Mystic Masseur* has been taken for the analysis from the postcolonial perspectives and it has also been tried to shed light how the immigrants face many people in a different country due to language barriers, dress codes and the cultural clash. The novel seems to be matching with Naipaul's personal life and thus, it can be stated that the novel has autobiographical elements in it.

**Keywords**

Post-colonialism, *The Mystic Masseur*, Indian English Diasporic Fiction, Cultural-Clash, Autobiographical Elements, V.S. Naipaul.

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V.S. Naipaul was born 1932 in a small town in Trinidad. He belongs to a Brahmin family and his grandfather emigrated from Banaras, Uttar Pradesh to Trinidad to work as an indentured labourer. Naipaul's father Seepersad worked as a correspondent in *The Guardian*. It was his father who inspired him to become a writer and he wanted to see his son as a writer. His mother Droapatie was the seventh daughter of his father. His mother belonged to Capildeo family. Not only Naipaul, his brother Shiva Naipaul, cousin Vahni Kapildeo and Neil Bissoondath are also writers in his family. When their family was shifted to the Port of Spain, Naipaul was merely six years old. Naipaul got his education from Tranquility Boys School 1939-42. He was educated at Queen's Royal College in Port of Spain (1943-49). He won a scholarship to go to Oxford to study and he got his English Honours degree in English. Now Naipaul has started trying his hand in writing and he wanted to show it to his father but unfortunately his father died and he could not get this opportunity to show to his father. While studying at Oxford, he came in contact with an English woman Patricia Ann Hale. She died in 1996 by cancer. Naipaul got married again. He breathed his last in August 2018. He was awarded the most prestigious Nobel Prize in Literature in 2001. Apart from that he has won the Booker Prize in 1971 for his novel *In a Free State*.

The novel *The Mystic Masseur* is a worth reading book. Richard Kelly speaks about this book, *The Mystic Masseur* is a comic masterpiece, much underrated by the critics" (Kelly 36). The first chapter of the novel is "The Struggling Masseur" in which the novelist describes the narrator boy's personal experiences. His leg is swollen due to an injury while playing. One day a boy mocks at Ganesh to see his pale, jaundiced leg, "Eh, eh, your feet don't see sun at all, at all!" (Naipaul 22). Since that day, Ganesh tops playing football with the students. Instead of taking him to hospital, his mother takes him to a local masseur. Thus, the novel is about the

blind-belief, illiteracy and orthodoxy of the native people of Trinidad. Roger Celestin comments about his works, "Naipaul and his work enable us to see an evolution: from "colonial" to "postcolonial" ... (Celestin 179).

Narrator boy's mother says that doctors kill two-three people daily before their breakfast; that is why she prefers to take him to a local masseur. But the treatment of the masseur does not bring any good result to narrator boy. Ganesh Ramsunair is seen in the local attire and he is greatly impressed by the books Ganesh has in his house. When Ganesh asks his wife how many books he has bought last week, Leela replies that he has bought three books this week. Not only this, Ganesh gives a booklet to his mother also.

Unfortunately, Ganesh's treatment does not bring any good result to the boy and the boy has to go to the doctor at Saint Vincent Street where he comes to know that an ulcer has developed and the doctor treats him and charges \$10 for his treatment.

So far is the second chapter of this novel is concerned, this chapter tells about the Ganesh Ramsunair's four year experience is at the Queen's Royal College. When Ganesh was admitted in this college, he was merely fifteen years old.

It was a strange thing that he was the oldest boy in the class and the other boys were three-four years younger to him. It was a moment of pride for the family members that Ganesh is going to get education from a prestigious college. His father takes Ganesh in his neighborhood and he pronounces says that his son is going to get admission in a reputed college.

Ganesh Ramsunair's father had a traditional mindset and he thought that the artificial light of the night can harm the eyes of the child and he advises his son to study only in the day. Ganesh faces many more problems in his college. The students of the college mock at Ganesh Ramsunair and they tell that Ramsunair boy is a real crammer. In fact, Ganesh remains an average student in the class and the students mock at him for his dhoti-kurta, khaki topi and bald head.

When Ganesh was in his final year, he gets a letter from his father that he has chosen a girl in his village. Ganesh start teaching in school but he is not pleased with the teaching why he has to leave his school it was his first failure in his life. The headmaster of the school talks frankly with him about his views about the education:

Mr Ramsunair, I don't know what views you have about educating the young, but I want to let you know right away, before even we start, that the purpose of this school is to form, not to inform. Everything is planned. (Naipaul 24)

Naipaul's first novel *The Mystic Masseur* was published in 1957. In this novel, Mr Ganesh Ramsunair is the main character who lived in an imaginative Island of Isabella. His character has been described as teacher, a masseur and a politician. He becomes Member of the British Empire.

In the phage of his struggle, he meets Mr Stewart to become a mystic. Ganesh was studying in his college and he returned to his house at the death of his father. Mr Ramlogan is a shopkeeper in his village who was close to his father. He was the same person who helped Ganesh in the funeral arrangements of his father.

Ganesh develops intimacy with him and finally Ram Logan persuades Ganesh to marry his daughter Leela. He starts speaking in very oily words with him, "I know is hard to believe, sahib. But it is the gospel truth. I think is a good idea, sahib, for you to married Leela" (Naipaul 48). Finally, he remains successful in his efforts also.

Leela was very shy, meek and down to the earth girl but her father was a cunning man. When the marriage comes close, Ram Logan starts showing his true colours and he starts changing his behaviour also. He tells that somebody is trying to rob his two houses in Sipariya. He begins to weep and Ganesh convinces him that he will not get in his marriage. But by now Ganesh has come to know that the things are not going to be so easy in future also; that is why he gets a good dowry from Ramlogan but he does it by his clever tricks only otherwise Ramlogan was very displeased with this behaviour in front of the public. Ramlogan feels humiliated in front of the people. People get excited to see the pedigree ceremony and dowry scene. One man becomes excited and cries, "Well, this thing was bound to happen someday" and people also say, "Come on Ramlogan. Give the boy money, man. What you think he sitting down there for? To take out his photo?" (Naipaul 56). Finally, Ramlogan had to give money for the sake of his image but he decides to take revenge.

When Leela and Ganesh are shifted to their new house, they meet a person Beharry there who becomes Ganesh's best friend. Ganesh comes to know that Leela is unable to give him any child. Naipaul has depicted the wife-beating practices in his novels and this novel is also not an exception when Ganesh beats his wife for the first time:

It was their first beating, a formal affair done without anger on Ganesh's part or resentment on Leela's [...] it meant much to both of them. [...] It meant that they had grown up and become independent. (Naipaul 59)

Ganesh loses interest in her and he stops beating her also when he comes to know that she cannot bear a child. Ganesh decides to become a writer. He wants to publish his book from the Street and Smith Publishers but this publisher does not give him much attention and the publisher keeps putting off the things that he will publish the book but this book is never published. His aunt the Great Belcher advises him to become a masseur.

Ganesh starts his business as a mystic masseur and people start coming to him to get cured their diseases. Ganesh becomes so famous in the area that the people become passionate for his treatment. There is always a great rush for his services and people come from far off places for their treatment. Ramlogan puts some taxis on that way but Ganesh buys all the taxis and makes Ramlogan's business idea a flop. Ramlogan shows his anger in these words, "Sahib, you know you getting me vex now. I ain't like other people, you know. I know you is a mystic, but don't provoke me sahib. When I get vex, I don't know what I could do" (Naipaul 150).

Ganesh decides to enter the politics also. He gets ample money from his business. Then he builds a grand house from his business. There were two stories and hundred windows in his house and only VIPs own such kind of house. There is a change in the life-style of his wife Leela also. She also starts wearing costly sarees.



Ganesh fights the election of the Legislative Council of Trinidad and he succeeds. He gets a chance to dine with the Governor and but he does not feel comfortable there when he finds meat in the feast. Ganesh reaches his house and eats the home-made food. He becomes MBE and his place becomes highly important in the politics. The family shifts to Port of Spain and Beharry helps the family in the shifting. Thus, the novel ends on a positive note.

There are many autobiographical elements in the novel because many incidences in the novel resemble with life Naipaul's life also because Naipaul also lived in the complete state of dilemma in his life and he could not settle in his life properly. This is what happens with the Ganesh Ramsumair also. He is unable to settle in his life and his experiences at the Queen's Royal College remain very bitter. Perhaps Naipaul also had to face some difficulties in his initial college years. Naipaul had also studied in the same college in which his character Ganesh Ramsumair studies. This character also has been in the writing line like Naipaul. There are other things also that resemble with V.S. Naipaul's life. Thus, we can say that this novel has some autobiographical elements also.

Thus, from all this, we can say that it is V.S. Naipaul's novel *The Mystic Masseur* deals with the problems of the immigrants. They face many obstacles on a foreign land and all this has been beautifully depicted in the novel. Naipaul has depicted the postcolonial concerns in his other works also. Nyla Ali Khan observes about this writer, "Naipaul delineates this painful split in diasporic consciousness for his readers" (Khan 28). Apart from that, the condition of the women in the Hindu houses also has been aptly narrated in *The Mystic Masseur*. Bruce King also writes about this novel:

*The Mystic Masseur* (1957) is like early Evelyn Waugh or R.K. Narayan in its speed, economy, understated satiric ironies, incongruities, comedy, undeveloped characterization, and unexpected changes in the direction of the plot, contrasts between what is said and done, parody and the ironic placing of characters by a few details of the scene or by habits of speech. (King 34)

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