THESIS

INTERPRETING EXILE AND DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS IN CONJUNCTION WITH V. S. NAIPAUL'S *THE MIMIC MEN*

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WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER OUR SUPERVISION BY PRADEEP PAUDEL ENTITLED INTERPRETING EXILE AND DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS IN CONJUNCTION WITH V.S. NAIPAUL'S *THE MIMIC MEN* BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS.

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

INTERPRETING EXILE AND DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS IN CONJUNCTION WITH V.S. NAIPAUL'S *THE MIMIC MEN*

Written in multi-genre form, this thesis interweaves the personal and academic writing by negotiating among various forms of genres, such as non-fictional prose narrative, epistolary writing, poetry, interior monologue, short fiction and literary criticism to study exile and double consciousness. The genres employed in the thesis are reflective of the ruptured double consciousness, and they also give expression to different emotional instances caused by the sense of exile, dislocation and alienation. The core philosophy of multi-genre writing is to express what is inexpressible through traditional expository narrative and to engage the readers by using vivid expressionist writing. The personal writing in the thesis offers a personal narrative of exile, and the academic writing studies V.S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* and provides an analysis of exile and its various ramifications, most particularly, double consciousness. By contextualizing the personal experience with the textual analysis on theoretical ground, the thesis tries to develop a synthetic resolution to the traumatic experience of cultural and geographical dislocation.

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PROLOGUE: MAPPING THE WRITING[1]

Dear Reader:

I would like to begin with a few words about the structural organization of this multi-genre thesis. The thesis is divided into five parts, in relation to which this prologue is somewhat exterior and self-reflexive. It is envisioned to inform you about the structural and thematic significance of the thesis and set your boundaries of expectations. It explains what the thesis is about, how it stands unique, and in what ways it contributes to academic discourse.

First of all, it is important to note that this thesis contains a collection of narratives, and every narrative, shaped in a distinct genre and seemingly fragmentary, stands alone by virtue of its uniqueness, but functions in collectivity to shape the entire work as a meaningful discursive utterance. Secondly, the fragments of multi-genre narratives (reflective of the fragmentary episteme and/or double consciousness) are interwoven with emotionally-charged personal as well as disinterested academic voices. The interplay between the personal and academic voices destabilizes the hierarchical

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[1] In the convention of multi-genre writing, the process of documentation often begins with a 'Dear reader' letter as an introductory part of the body content. The epistolary form of introduction is conceived to serve as a guideline to the readers and set their boundaries of expectations.

distinction between the personal and academic writing and, thus, works to blur the arbitrary boundary between them.

Chapter 1 is, more or less, a leaner narrative and provides an extensive background overview as a personal story of migration and prepares the readers for more intensely emotional and intellectual engagement in the chapters to follow. Chapter 2 consists of various genres and exposes the psychological interior of the narrator. It is, in fact, a chapter of inward gaze, full of fleeting images and obsessions brought about by the experience of dislocation, homesickness, acculturation and the tensions and dilemmas resulting from them. Yet, even in the personal narrative, you will find a sparse extrapolation of external citations, employed to support the personal narrative and give it an academic aspect. Chapter 3, which deals with the novel *The Mimic Men* on the theoretical plane, is more impersonal than any other part of the thesis, and it also begins with a fantasy tale that incorporates metafictional elements, especially magical realism. This tale works to introduce the text in the historical, biographical, theoretical and textual contexts and prepares a ground for the critical analyses of various issues concerning the process of emigration and exile, one of the most common and emotionally harrowing experiences of modern and postmodern life, accelerated on the global scale first by European colonialism and then by globalization.

Since every person bears a socially constructed identity and subscribes to socially endorsed roles, it is more revealing to analyze one's self and subjectivity in relation to the texts and theories dealing with questions of subjectivity and identity formation. By analyzing *The Mimic Men*—a novel by V.S. Naipaul, that deals with the crises caused by colonial encounter and intervention in both national and individual levels—in reference

to the relevant theories in Chapter 3, I try to better understand my social and historical subjectivity, and, by the same token, by bringing my experiences to the text, I try to analyze the central motifs of the text in a personalized manner. The interactive process of studying the self by its textualization and the text by its personalization, I believe, is one of the innovative strengths of this thesis. It is an undeniable fact that the inner and outer conflicts and tensions are the real and essential ingredients of human existence. They create drama and propel life forward. We read literature to escape into the world of imagination, and we read it also to engage with life. The epilogue at the end of the thesis gives an account of my research findings and records in what ways they contribute to the expansion of my worldview and appreciation of literature, and in what ways I try to resolve the conflicts and crises. There is no claim to nirvana, a state of transcendental enlightenment, however.

Having said much about the structural organization of my research work, I also need explain how I justify its multi-genre structure and in what ways it is academically valid and significant. In *Hunger of Memory*[2], Richard Rodriguez—an American author alienated from his Mexican background resulting from his academic pursuits—gives expression to the dilemmas and discontents a person feels after having crossed the cultural and linguistic borderlines. But at a certain point, Rodriguez also gives an expression to the annoying preoccupation almost every student, working on his/her dissertation or thesis work grapples with: "I began to wonder: Who, beside my dissertation director and a few faculty members, would ever read what I wrote? And:

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[2] This text, which beautifully interweaves personal narrative and academic discourse, was provided to me as a potential sample by my thesis advisor at the very beginning, and my writing process has been thoroughly influenced by its thematic and structural formation.

Was my dissertation much more than an act of social withdrawal? These questions went unanswered in the silence of the Museum reading room" (75). The problem, in my view, lies in the secondary status of an academic thesis to any other kind of published work and the ritualized process of thesis writing that disregards—if not completely denies—the students' desire for self-expression through the individual creative voice and their desire for authority and authenticity. I do not mean that there is no learning involved in doing an academic thesis, but cannot we do it in a different way so that it appeals and engages more readers? Besides, where does an academic thesis fit into contemporary discourse theory that departs from the traditional conceptualization of text-as-a-self-referential-entity to text-as-a-social-discourse stance? In my view it is important for the research students to participate in the process of discourse formation and contribute to the ongoing conversations of discourse communities, and there ought to be an space in thesis/dissertation writing to foster the joys of social engagement rather than the anxieties of 'social withdrawal'. Also, we need to address Donald Murry's concern that, "I find a great irony in the fact that our profession, through many of its scholarly journals or writing, encourages a professional discourse that communicates to fewer and fewer" (xviii). There are persistent assumptions in the departments of humanities and liberal arts that if a student wants to do his/her thesis seriously and intends to be published, a traditional academic paper is the only option. No form of creative writing carries similar weight. I contend that it is high time we addressed the concerns that the traditional thesis-based argumentative writing risks—not always, of course—alienating students and academic professionals from their writing and developed alternative ways to assimilate the changing trends and expectations.

I do not think the use of a non-traditional, non-expository narrative mode is detrimental to the spirits of academic writing so long as the writing is based on academically sanctioned research methodology and is supplied by research findings. Arguably, traditional expository narrative is one among many other available options for writing, and it is up to the writer to decide what genre or what narrative mode best conveys the message s/he wants to convey. Here, I need to state that multi-genre writing is not entirely a new concept in the field of literary studies; nor is the practice in itself so postmodern. What is new, however, is its insertion into the frame of academic writing, a liberal approach theorized and popularized by Dr. Tom Romano, an author of a number of books on composition and pedagogy, who emphasizes trying the untried and blending the factual, emotional, and imaginative through multi-genre writing whereby the writer not only informs the readers, but also emotionally engages them. In Romano's words:

> A multi-genre paper arises from research, experience, and imagination. It is not an uninterrupted, expository monolog nor a seamless narrative nor a collection of poems. A multi-genre paper is composed of many genres and subgenres, each piece self-contained, making a point of its own, yet connected by theme or topic and sometimes by language, images and content. (x-xi)

Explaining how multi-genre works, Camille Allen says, "Conventional devices do not connect the pieces in a multi-genre paper, nor are the pieces always in chronological order. The paper is instead a collage of writing and artistic expression with an overarching theme that engulfs and informs the reader" (2). My writing, in this sense, can be defined as a collage of discrepant pieces glued together by an overarching theme i.e. exile and double consciousness.

Also, I do not think one set of rules and modalities should exclude another or function in co-terminal relation. I have no reason and intention to discredit academic

writing altogether and over-exaggerate the merits of multi-genre writing, but I need to maintain that the persistent exclusivist mindset in the academy reflects how we are inculcated by the traditional ideological values and how our indoctrination has become the naturalized everyday perception. Why do we so readily appreciate the exclusivist dichotomy and hierarchy between the academic versus personal writing? The problem, in my view, lies in the fact that many discriminatory ideological undertones remain fossilized and continue to inform our consciousness inside the academy and beyond. The philosophical and aesthetic discourses of the West are still informed—consciously or unconsciously—by the either/or Manichean binary formation[3] and by the phallo-, logo-, ethno- and Euro-centric ideals of the Renaissance Man which later culminated in colonialist discourse.[4] The Renaissance Man stands in sharp contrast to the effeminateness of the other (women and tribal men) in the patriarchal colonialist discourse. In Jerry Brotton's words, "It is no coincidence that the period that witnessed the invention of the term was also the moment at which Europe was most aggressively asserting its imperial dominance across the globe...In this respect, Renaissance Man sounds like the Victorian ideal of an imperial adventurer or colonial official" (32). Unlike the tribal men and women who, like a child, are driven by impulses, the man of the Renaissance ideal maintains strong personal integrity, demonstrates the higher level of rational intellect, works with flaw-free sophistication and composure and lives for the

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[3] Manichian binary (also known as Manicheanism) is a dualistic theological worldview—developed in the 3rd century AD in ancient Persia by a religious sect leader called Mani—that divides the world into good and evil.

[4] For more detailed discussion of the evolution of the Renaissance Man as a bourgeoisie and colonialist ideal please refer to *Renaissance Man* (1978) by Agnes Heller.

greater ideals. He ventures to the far-off unknown territories, vanquishes the barbarous races, and proves himself a superior race and gender.[5]

These notions of manly uprightness and steadiness continue to underwrite the Western (and by extension, the global) standards for normal behavior as pervasively in the academy as in other social, political, and cultural spheres. There is a longstanding tradition of viewing the study of literature and the other areas of fine art as a deviation from the natural, normal, and normative standards of manliness. The study of literature is still largely viewed as something analogous to the domestic sphere, a female dominion of sentiments and sensibilities. Likewise within the departments of literature and literary studies, tightly written, rhetorically complex, and jargon-ridden papers are the norm. Such a view, in my opinion, reflects the gender-informed conception of the literary genres. In an academic thesis paper, for example, one is expected to demonstrate less subjective reflection and more objective analysis in the manner of scientific or pseudo-scientific writing.

A multi-genre thesis, like this, in this sense, is a deconstructive mode of writing, which works to discredit the rigid disciplinary conventions of the traditional academic paper and invites the readers to feel the writing rather than read it disinterestedly from a distance. I have chosen the multi-genre mode of writing because, for me, my unwritten experiences of dislocation and loneliness are no less poignant and thematically/theoretically significant than the ones described in the novel of my choice i.e. *The Mimic Men*. Since I largely share the sense of identity crisis, alienation, and

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[5] Probably, Rudyard Kipling's (in)famous "The White Man's Burden" (1898) serves as the latest version of the most vocal expression of the Renaissance Man ideal. He calls for his countrymen to "take up the White Man's burden" to civilize "your new caught sullen peoples, half-devil and half-child" (307).

entrapment experienced by the narrator in *The Mimic Men*, documenting my experiences as a testimony for the discussion of the issues in question is as important for me as alluding to the theoretical and contextual references. In this context, a singular genre and a linear narrative are radically inadequate for me to contain the message I would like to convey. What I need is a variety of genres to give expression to my fragmentary episteme, the rupture I feel within myself. In literature, the form corresponds to the content. An intense eruption of the deeply felt sensation, for example, is best expressed through a poem, and, likewise, a leisurely reflection on the past can be best expressed through a prose narrative. I have opted for the different narrative forms to make my writing as appealing and engaging as possible for my readers and as expressive as possible for me. Besides, every genre employed in my writing carries a possibility of an extension in the future. The beauty of multi-genre is that every single genre is a whole in itself and, when put together, they form a composite of multi-voiced and multi-layered narratives, intertextually complementary to each other and reflexive of hybridity and multicultural hetroglossia. Sharon Draper's *Tears of a Tiger* and Walter Dean Myers' *Monster* are good examples of multi-genre novels, but Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and Adorno's *Minima Moralia* are the sophisticated philosophical and theoretical works to incorporate fictional and personal narratives as in the multi-genre writing.

Finally, I need to remind my reader that what I am telling you is a hyper-reflective narrative, but it is not a singular or coherent 'I' who is the narrator of the shifting voices of the narratives: it is the schizophrenic 'I' of the double consciousness. Schizophrenic double consciousness, therefore, is the central metaphor of my narrative both in terms of

form and content, but I advise you not to take schizophrenia at its face value. My schizophrenia is not to be understood in literal medico-psychopathological terms. The fact that I experience a split in my personality and fragmentation in my identity—caused by ontological realities—does not mean that I reside in the abyss of incomprehensibility. Metaphoric schizophrenia, I believe, best defines Ralf Singh's (the first-person narrator protagonist in V.S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Men*) and my sense of self in relation to the environment. My aim, however, is not, to use Sass's words, "to denigrate selfhood as a false transcendence and to glorify loss of self as if it were necessarily a more authentic and liberated expression of the free play of desire' (2). However troubled and fragmentary, the selfhood I describe is not completely incoherent or false.

CHAPTER TWO

BACKGROUND OVERVIEW[6]

There is no other author with whom I am more engaged than with the Indo-Caribbean-British Sir Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul. My engagement with Naipaul began with a kind of naïve fascination. In 2001, Naipaul won Nobel Prize for Literature, and a national daily in Kathmandu, *The Kathmandu Post*, celebrated his accomplishments. The reason was in his Nobel lecture Naipaul mentioned that his ancestors on his father's side could have come from Nepal. Naipaul said, "I knew nothing of the people on my father's side; I knew that some of them came from Nepal" ("Two Worlds" 10). Suddenly, Naipaul became a celebrity in Nepal because we found a connection between the recent Nobel Laureate and us.[7] Certainly, we had many great authors writing in Nepali, but, for various reasons, we did not have internationally renowned authors of Naipaul's height. In a mood of euphoric fascination, I conducted

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[6] In this chapter I intend to foreground my experiences in a non-fictional linear narrative so that the readers become better acquainted with the tensions and anxieties I experience as an outsider in the different socio-cultural setting in America. This process, I believe, prepares the reader to understand the multi-genre form used in Chapter Two.

[7] Nepal is also a surname for a group of Brahmins in Nepal. In his Nobel lecture Naipaul suggests that his lineage must have a connection with the Nepalese groups, who lived in the holy city of Banaras in India and who carried Nepal as their surname. Presumably, when Naipaul's grandfather's generation was brought to Trinidad, the surname became corrupted from Nepal to Naipaul.

some research on Naipaul, and he turned out to be one of the most acclaimed—but not less controversial—living authors in English literature. I have been engaged with Naipaul ever since, and I find his works compelling, engaging, and geopolitically significant.

As Lillian Feder says, V.S. Naipaul "is one of the most controversial of contemporary literary figures" (1). Naipaul may not be agreeable as a person, but this can hardy be a reason to diminish the value of his writing, the controversy his works inherently provoke and the mediocre perceptions they challenge. Without any doubt, Nepal is one of the best world-class authors of our time. In her introduction to Naipaul, Fawizia Mustafa writes, "Few non-western twentieth-century writers of English have gained a readership as extensive and various as V.S. Naipaul. Few have been as prolific in both the genre of fiction and non-fiction and managed to develop and sustain such a singular expressive and literary idiom" (1). Naipaul has earned more foes than friends in his life as much by his sharp and sardonic writing as by his snobbish conducts. He has said something unsavory about every place he has been to: for him, Trinidad, the country of his birth, is a half-made society condemned to rotting;[8] Africans are the garrulous bow-and-arrow people who cannot be helped;[9] the non-Arab Muslims are nihilistic converts, who have succumbed to an imperial religion.[10] His travel book *An Area of Darkness* was briefly banned in India, his ancestral homeland, for its harsh critique of the society, which he finds at once repulsive and at once fascinating. In another West Indian

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[8] According to Kelly, "In *The Middle Passage* (1962), Naipaul portrays Trinidad as a down-at-the-heels, cultureless, noisy, exploited, and imitative society" (26).

[9] In Paul Theroux words, "Most of Africa seemed to represent his worst nightmare of brutishness and illiteracy. He was without much hope" (285).

[10] Mittapalli and Hensen write, "In both *Among the Believers* (1981) and *Beyond Belief* (1988) Naipaul condemns Islam as catastrophic, a belief-system that, like colonialism. attempts to enslave or destroy other cultures" (69)

Nobel Laureate Derek Walcott's view, Naipaul is "V.S. Nightfall" (Gorra 74). Appalled by Naipaul's unrestrained critique of the newly-independent third-world societies, Edward Said calls him "an intellectual catastrophe" (qtd. in French 469). For his staunch detractors, Naipaul is a 'brown sahib' and an apologist for empire, who, taking the license of authenticity and authority as a native son, has served his white masters by producing virulent infamy about the barbarian people of the third-world societies ("A literary Brown Sahib"). But Naipaul, unquestionably, stands among the finest authors of English literature, and his prosaic elegance is universally acclaimed. Moreover, as Leela Gandhi aptly puts it, Naipaul mostly evades the either-or strictures of reductionism by virtue of his works' inherent ambiguity and multiplicity ("A Complicated Occidentalism"). If his works are sharp and cutting in their intensity, they are also conducted with the visceral scrutiny of the societies he has visited. Naipaul has always been an extensive traveler and investigative writer.

As uncompromising militant tendencies of Fanon and radical tendencies of Said are becoming reassessed and revised in today's colonial discourse analysis theory (widely recognized as post-colonialism in the academia), Naipaul's works are becoming increasingly acceptable inside the more sympathetic and synthetic trajectories of post-colonial studies; he no longer is anathematized as a threat to the cause of third-worldlism. Instead, he is studied as an important contributor to the genera of exile literature.[11] It, however, is not the case that Naipaul now resides on the high pedestal beyond controversies. Instead, the inherent contradictions, controversies, and ambiguities of his

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[11] Defining exile literature, Florida Digital Newspaper Library, University of Florida, writes, "Exile literature attempts to nurture the collective memory and culture of individuals who find themselves displaced from their native land" ("Cuban Exile Newspapers at the University of Miami").

works and the unrestrained anger, anxiety, and rage they express are seen in the lights of pluralistic post-colonial reality. As the strict thought policing mode of post-colonial discourse analysis theory is becoming supplanted by the liberal attitudes informed by postmodernist acceptance of multiplicity, hetroglossia (Bakhtin), and hybridization and mimicry (Bhabha), Naipaul's works—despite and because of the controversy they stir—offer a fertile terrain for discourse analysis.[12] Naipaul's best works are also the works of somber realities of human existence, existential predicaments, and anxieties. Homelessness, loneliness, dislocation, alienation, identity crisis and quest of selfhood are the fabrics that weave into Naipaul's fictional and nonfictional oeuvre.

1.1 An Introduction to *The Mimic Men*

Exile is a word burdened with multiple connotations. It is an episteme of banishment from the place of origin, and, therefore, an existential condition marked by the sense of absence and lack. To be an exile is to be far and away, to be somewhere else, beyond the borderlines of the conventional and coherent (one)self. It is to be separated not only from the familiar tongues and the familiar landscapes of cultural aesthetics, but also from oneself, the familiar 'I' of the past. To be an exile, therefore, is to put an end to the old life and its social fabrics, its rhythms and patterns, and to try to begin life anew by mimicry. In exile, one becomes the ghost—an uncanny phantasm that is "almost the same but not quite" (Bhabha 122)—of himself and haunts the familiar landscapes of memory so as to escape the anxieties of being lost and to construct, albeit self-deceptively, the

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[12] Discourse analysis is a method of close and informed literary study, which conducts linguistic and textual analysis to find out how and to what effects peoples, cultures, societies and values are constructed, represented, and projected in the specific narrative and textual discourse. Edward Said's *Orentalism*, for example, is the best work of discourse analysis, which studies how the western orentalist discourse constructs, represents, and projects the non-western societies. Today, discourse analysis is widely used in the areas of race and gender studies.

ontological significance of being here and now among the unknown in the condition of radical unknowablility. For the exile, it becomes necessary, as part of the survival strategy, to wear a camouflage in order to reduce the inherent asymmetries and potential tensions between the self and the other or between the being and its immediate surroundings. But the camouflage is only a self-deception, a lie told to oneself in a manner of self-consolation. In exile, one is doomed to hear the echoes of the past and not to know what to do with them. Exile is an experience of psychic trauma wrought by some invisible violence, which cannot be easily recompensed. In exile one lives with double consciousness, like a schizophrenic, perpetually divided between the nostalgic/melancholic sensibilities and the pragmatic desires to recreate oneself in a different form and develop a rapport with the environment.

In his London boarding house, forty-years-old Ralph Singh considers writing history, but he ends up writing a memoir that comes to us as *The Mimic Men*. Ralph says:

It was my hope to give expression to the restlessness, the deep disorder, which the great exploration, the overthrow in three continents of established social organizations, the unnatural bringing together of people...But this work will not now be written by me; I am too much a victim of that restlessness which was to have been my subject. And it must also be confessed that in that dream of writing I was attached less by the act and the labour than by the calm and the order which the act would have implied. (38)

The book in itself signifies an attempt of constructing a coherent self out of the chaos. In his disturbed mental state in exile, where self-consciousness becomes acute; Ralph certainly cannot write a history book. He writes the autobiography, as he says, to find a pattern in his life and to impose a meaningful order to his existence, but the very

act of remembering is marked by confusions: the book lacks chronological order of events as memories drift from one shore to another. The book, which, in essence, is a political memoir of Ralph Singh as a defeated politician in exile, is punctuated by childhood memories of the ghettoized Indian neighborhood and of Isabella Imperial, a school he attended as a boy. Though Ralph repeatedly maintains that he never felt keenly about his childhood days and never found himself at home in Isabella, childhood is something he constantly talks about, albeit sans nostalgic sense. For Ralph, as for anybody, his childhood is an escape route and a reservoir of his identity. He needs to hang on his past to anchor himself to a place on earth. Reduced to nonentity in a corner of a Byzantine city, remembering and writing about himself is Ralph Singh's way of dealing with identity politics. There is no other recourse available to him. Due to his desire to distance himself from others in Isabella, he had already become an exile in his own county, but after coming to England, the promised land for him, he becomes doubly exiled both from the real and ideal places. In Timothy Weiss' words "Ralph Singh is a political exile from the Caribbean island of Isabella and an intellectual exile from his youthful, colonial vision of the metropolis as center of the world" (89). Upon his arrival to England, he begins to experience the disillusionment which culminates in existential dilemma and despair. "Along with disillusionment comes a sense of exile as deracination and fragmentation, and the twentieth-century metropolis, once a magic center, become for the colonial a disenchanted margin, a place of outcasts and automations" (Weiss 89). *The Mimic Men* provides a story of an individual migrant's dislocation and desolation, which makes the novel everyman's story in our time, in which a large number of people

are displaced from their traditional homes and have migrated to the western metropolitan centers for various reasons. Nana Wilson-Tagoe says,

In *The Mimic Men* the image of shipwreck, symbol of displacement, is of a past from which there is no escape. Its real and frightening symptoms are presented as existing inside the protagonist and as persisting wherever he is. The image of Crusoe archetype is appropriated and enlarged to include all the psychological disorders which Caribbean people inherit from their condition of displacement and their status as colonials. (60)\

Although Ralph Singh is a representative of the dislocated Caribbean people, he also has a larger implication for the universal human condition. The symbolic "image of Crusoe archetype" can be extended to encompass the experience of the migrants and exiles, who experience similar "psychological disorder" once they leave their home and arrive in a new place. I use *The Mimic Men* as a core text of my study of exile and double consciousness because Ralph's story resonates to my experiences in many levels and provides me a strong textual reference.

1.2 Reflections on Exile

As I begin to write about my experiences of cultural and existential isolation as an outsider in the U.S., I find myself confronted with some ethico-moral questions: In a world where millions of stateless refugees, forcibly driven away from their ancestral homes or homelands, live in the dehumanizing conditions of exile, is it not a kind of intellectual escapism or navel-gazing narcissism on my part to trumpet about my individualistic experiences as if they were more urgent and important than anything else? Secondly, can a student, like me, who has left his country for a few years for the

privileged education in the metropolis with the high hopes that the education will, ultimately, earn him a vaunted position among the intellectual elites in his county call himself an exile? What is it that really defines the condition of my consciousness and how should I write about it?"

An exile, by definition, is an asylum seeker, and exile is also a condition of banishment from the homeland, however, neither did I come to America seeking asylum nor was I forced to leave my homeland against my will. But again, exile is not only a status marker. It is experience, more than status alone, that defines and constitutes exile literature[13] to which I relate my experiences. Johnson-Roullier defines exile "as [an] instance of rupture with the social group into which an individual was born, whether voluntary or involuntary," and alluding to Proust, Joyce, and Baldwin, he argues that basically it is "the quality of *self-consciousness*" (italics original) arising from the sense of separateness/otherness that positions them as exiles inside or outside the societies of their origin (20). Although I may not truly fit into the legal and literal category of exile, my experiences of over two years' stay in the U.S., however, can best be explained, understood, and analyzed in relation to the exile sensibilities characteristic of exile literature, specifically, the sense of loss, alienation, homelessness, identity crisis, double consciousness etc. It is the profound acuity of experience that makes me see my stay in the U.S.—which otherwise I would have called a happy sojourn—as exile. Regarding the ethico-moral question about the self-obsessive writing, I have to say that although I begin

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[13] Although there is no unifying category of exile literature, and although 'exile literature' was a term used to refer to the Jewish writing in the Diaspora and also alternately to German literature in exile during the Nazi times, today, it is used to cover the literature written in exile or the one that deals with the experiences of exile. I have used the term to loosely refer to the literature that deals with cultural and geographical dislocation, specifically of the post-colonial times. Hence, exile literature connotes both the exile in literature and the literature in exile.

from the self, the hermeneutic exchange[14] will lead me to develop a broader understanding of exile as a transhistorical and universal experience with various psychological, cultural, and geopolitical facets.

Historically, exile has been both a source of deep affliction and a reason for writing. "For a man who no longer has a homeland, writing becomes a place to live" (Adorno 87). According to Edward Said:

> Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted. And while it is true that literature and history contain heroic, romantic, glorious, even triumphant episodes in an exile's life, these are no more than efforts meant to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement. The achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind forever. (173)

From the early classical period to the postmodern era, exile has served as a fertile ground in the production great works of literature. More than the common exiles, exiled writers and artists reflect on and respond to the conditions of exile and give creative expression to their experiences because "[f]or the creative artist exile is an especially traumatic experience, not just because of the physical displacement from the native land but because his/her professional tools are inextricably related to the cultural and linguistic realities of his/her country of origin" (Lagos-Pope 8). Many great works of literature, spanning between Homer's *Odyssey* to Walcott's *Omeros*, have been created out of the intimidating sorrows of homelessness and homesickness. It is, however, not true that people do have uniform experiences when they leave their home country for different

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[14] According to Brice R. Wachterhauser, "The hermeneutical circle involves the "contextualist" claim that the 'parts' of some larger reality can be understood only in terms of the 'whole' of that reality, and the 'whole' of that reality can be understood only in terms of its parts" (23).

reasons. As Samir Dayal says, "It would be fatuous to suggest that all diasporics are automatically in possession of double consciousness, that they are fully self-reflexive 'ambivalent' and cosmopolitan nomads 'riding' cultural difference" (49). Age, cultural, educational, and economic backgrounds; personality type; sense of bond to the family and society; and career goals are the factors that influence the process of accommodation and assimilation into the society where one arrives. When some people pine for the home they have left behind, others find themselves at great ease in their newfound homes abroad. Besides, the living conditions and opportunities available in both home and host countries become decisive factors when it comes to making decisions to return home. "All exiles do not sit by the waters of Babylon and weep, remembering Sion," Francis MacManus says, "But for the artist who exiles himself or who is banished there is always the endless voyaging of Odysseus" (101). Many exiles, however, begin to regret much later when the return voyage becomes impossible. Having spent all his life in Britain, old Henry James was to confess:

> "If I were to live my life over again, I would be an American. I would steep myself in America, I would know no other land. I would study its beautiful side. The mixture of Europe and America which you see in me has proved disastrous. It has made of me a man who is neither American nor European. I have lost touch with my own people, and I live here alone. ....I shall never return to the United States but I wish I could." (qtd. in McElderry 433-434).

Every year, thousands of Nepalese youths leave their homes either to work or to study abroad; it has been an essential part, although in different form, of the Gurkha legacy.[15] For this 'lost generation', no amount of heartbreaking homesickness and mental anguish

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[15] For over two hundred years Nepalese youths, also known as Gurkha from the foothills of the Himalaya, have been serving in the regular Gurkha Battalions in the British and Indian army. They have been assigned for the dangerous tasks to the battlefronts in various wars in Borneo, the Falklands, Kargil, Afghanistan and Iraq. Many of the folklores in Nepali culture give accounts of the husbands and brothers who never returned back from the battlefronts in the wars fought for others.

offers returning home as a viable option. They dwell in cyberspace and try to maintain some measure of connection to the home culture, but the virtual world can hardly compensate for the three-dimensional sensory feel of the real world, the drama of face-to-face human interaction.

1.3 Expatriation to America: A Personal Narrative

For me, America was a long-cherished escape dream. It was a 'promised land' which beckoned me from afar—just the way it has ever beckoned the newcomers who have come here to begin their life anew—with the hopes for the changes for which I was so yearning. I remember the beautiful morning when I first landed in America. It was a moment of dream accomplished for a village boy who had herded his buffalos in the grassy fringes of his village until he reached his college age and began to think about going away. I remember the moment in the plane bound for America when I had a Coke can in my hands for the first time ever, but I was too ashamed to ask the airhostess how to open it. I had only drunk from the bottles before. "This is America!" I was overwhelmed seeing the crimson horizon of Los Angeles from the sky in sunrise. It was a glad moment, something like a *déjà vu* experience. Tara, a friend of mine who has lived in America for twelve years and been naturalized, says, "Nowhere in the world can an immigrant walk holding his head high in dignity as in America." It has always struck me as true. What Italo Calvino mentioned about France—"The ideal place for me is the one in which it is most natural to live as a foreigner" (341)—is true for me about America, but long gone are my joys of walking on the road, mingled into the crowd, abuzz with the familiar voices.

Shortly after I first landed in California, my port of entry, on August 20, 2007, I found myself nervous in a plane bound for Denver. Everything—the language, the landscape, the look of the people—in America, even the smell, was so different. The long journey from Kathmandu to Bangkok to Narita to California had left me completely fatigued, and I was feeling dehydrated. I was not able to sleep well during the journey partly because I was sad to leave home, partly because I was nervous, and partly because I cannot bring myself to sleep in a place where there is no sense of privacy. I had already begun to find myself at odds with the completely different environment, and a sense homesickness had begun to trickle into my mind. My difficulties were compounded by the fact that just a couple of days before leaving home, I got infected by a bacterial eye disease. No medicine, but only time, would bring recovery to this tropical ophthalmic epidemic. In spite of my vision problems, I wore dark glasses throughout my travel periods as a safety measure.

At my Bangkok transit, where I had to wait for twelve long hours for my next flight to Narita, Japan, I became feverish. I spent the night, coiled on a couch, feeling cold all the time. The omen seemed to herald the unknown difficulties ahead. "How many years would it take before I went home?" I began to wonder. "Will I be able to fulfill the myriads of expectations my family and friends have rested on me?" Time kept ticking by, and again we were in the American sky the next day. Throughout the journey, I remembered all the dear faces I had left behind. How would my wife (we were married for four years) and daughter (she was only two) live without me? How would my mother feel when I am not there during the festivals? Prakash, my brother and my lifetime companion, was sure to miss me. He was going to leave for Czech Republic on

scholarship. No doubt, my sister will miss me during Teej and Tihar.[16] Above all, I could not keep my father's face aside from my thoughts—his sun-tanned swarthy face and cigarette-tainted teeth—forcing himself to make a gesture of smile, and seemingly making efforts to hold his tears back when he had come to see me off at the bus station in the town nearby our village. I had gone home to bid adieu to my villagers and old friends a fortnight ahead of my journey to the U.S. He was aggrieved to see me drifting away in spite of his attempts to keep his hold on me.

When I completed my graduate studies in Kathmandu and got married, he wanted me to come home, permanently this time. He did not like my idea of being away from the society, living an isolated life in the city.

"What good comes of your education if you forget your background, the society you were grown in?" he asked.

"But father, I cannot sacrifice my life in the name of the society," I responded. "Besides, I cannot get as many good opportunities here as in the city."

"So you don't think that man is a social being, and he has social responsibilities?" he asked in his typical idealistic tone. "What good comes of you if you turn your back on the society and say you've nothing to do with it?"

I tried to convince him that living in city was not a lifestyle choice. Instead, it was a choice between moving with the flow of time and getting stuck. How could I settle for

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[16] In Nepali culture, Teej is exclusively a women's festival in which married women go to live in their parental house where they sing and dance with their old friends and relatives for five days, giving a free vent to their joys and sorrows. Tihar, on the other hand, is a festival of lights observed for five days. On the day of Bhai Tika, sisters worship Yama, the God of death, for the long life and wellbeing of their brothers and observe the ritual of exchanging tika (seven color marks on the forehead) and gifts.

the small gains in the village and not explore and realize my potentiality? My father became convinced that he had no way to persuade me.

"Well, do as you like. After all, it's your life," he said in a resigned manner.

Years later, when I went home to stay with my parents for a few days and to bid the last adieu to my friends and villagers before leaving for America, my father offered all his time to me. He accompanied me everywhere I went. My parents were sorry to see me go, and I was sorry that we might not see one another for many years to come, but we knew life needed to be pushed ahead. Before leaving home, I bowed and touched my parents' feet with my forehead, as our custom was.

"Son, tell me you'll come back soon," my mother said, biting her lips in agony.

"I will. I promise," I assured her.

"I feel proud of you. I feel proud of my children," she said in a wet voice. "But I fear you might want to settle in America."

It was a moment of mixed emotions. My throat was getting tighter. I turned to hide my tears. "I should come back, achieving my dreams," I said to myself.

For a person of my background, small achievements become the matters of great pride. I had lost touch with my childhood school friends because only four among the sixty-three tenth graders passed the 'iron gate' School Leaving Certificate (SLC) exam. I can say that when I completed M.A. in English in Nepal, I was filtered through thousands of students. It, certainly, has a lot to do with my family background, but we were never comfortably positioned financially because although an educated person, my father never earned anything. He spent much of his time in politics, and he gave himself to frequent drinking. For about ten years of my student life in Kathmandu, a single rented room was

the private world for me, for my sister, and for my brother. My unlettered mother had reasons to take pride in her children's achievements. She was single-mindedly determined that we got a good education.

Considering the bleak realities in my country, I feared that I would not be able to keep my promises to my mother. A hybrid third-world society like ours, consumed by the hungers for the better life and frustrated about the lack of opportunities, believes that once you have left the country, you do not want to return to the old haphazard life. Whenever nostalgia settles, I think about the possibilities of becoming a cosmopolitan citizen in a place where it is most natural to live as a foreigner. Despite all sentimentalism, life seeks a way to move ahead, but I also feel sorry for my parents and the country who have invested all they could afford to make me what I am today. I cannot imagine how my father would receive the news if I said: "Father, I don't want to return to my old life in Nepal. The village is too narrow and Kathmandu too deprived and unsafe. I do not want to be a part of the world that I struggled so hard to escape. I'm thinking about settling in America, and if that does not work out, I'll go to Canada or Australia or New Zealand. I'm sorry, but I'm too tired to struggle forever."

It is certainly not what my father would expect. The news would certainly make him feel deserted and helpless at his old age. He frequently used to complain about having none of the children at home.

1.4 Something Goes Missing Within

Reflecting on life, I am torn between two opposing desires: a desire to blend into the cosmopolitan life in America, and another to retreat—retreat and reassimilate myself into the locales of my past. Ihab Habib Hassan writes of the people of our kind:

> Men and women have flocked to America, fleeing or seeking, driven by the most diverse motives. But the psychological exile stands apart, his case shadier, thicker with complicity and silent intrigue. Who are these beings, full of dark conceits, rushing to meet the future while part of them still stumbles about, like a blind speleologist, in caverns of the past? (106)

My past is the point of reference for my identity: I should not be drifting away from it. The romantic part me—'the jungle boy' who freely wandered, humming to himself, in the tropical forest around his primitive village, looking at birds and collecting berries and diving deep into a creek on a scorching hot day and whom father occasionally flogged in the evenings for his unruly manners—feels the longings to go back and to relive the past, to reverse what seemingly has become irreversible. Hassan says, "All leaving is loss, every departure a small death" (ibid). I should not continue to live the compromised death moments. The pragmatic part of me says life is all about reconciliations among the myriads of opposing—or even of antagonistic—desires. Since one cannot live the dreamed-of ideal life, I should not take the reverse course. I will be a damn fool to go back to Kathmandu to stand in a long queue and fight with the housewives for a bucketful of water. I cannot be sure that I will have a respectable position in a country deeply infested by corruption, nepotism, and bribery. I should not return at all when everybody is dreaming of going away. Thinking about life, I am always hounded by disquieting ontological questions: what is it to exist? Days pass, and memories pile up: is life all about counting the days down and waiting that someday in the unknowable future something good will happen? Sometimes I feel, I would have been a happy ignorant if I had not left the familiar territories of my village life. Many of my friends opted to be farmers; I perceive them to be blissfully unconcerned about the uncertainties of the tomorrows I experience in my everyday life.

1.5 English Tongue and Estrangement

I began learning English very late, not seriously and systematically until I was college age, late enough to suffer the sense and consequences of belatedness. For me, there is always an aura of otherness, something of otherworldliness about English. A person finds certain words of a language more emotionally stirring than others. For me one of the Nepali words is *jijibisha*, which means an 'instinctive desire to survive' or 'life instinct', in brief, but something becomes lost in translation[17]. The English words do not sound as meaningful and natural as the words from my mother tongue. I work with the awareness that I will never be able to overcome this feeling because English will never be entirely my language. I will live with the never-ending language anxiety that, as a learner of English as a second language, I am more prone to make mistakes and that experiences of cultural-linguistic gaps will remain unavoidable. There are moments I have failed to articulate myself eloquently in English, and there are moments I have missed the humorous undertones of the jokes, being unaware of the cultural idioms. One does not learn the cultural innuendoes by simply learning a language. There are also the moments of regrets, frustrations, and disappointments, but I have walked too far to turn back and take a reverse journey the way my father, who was my first English teacher, did by allowing himself to forget what he had learned of English in long disuse. I see something of apocalyptic-ness in my father's handing his zeal for the English language over to me. He completely undid his learning once he taught his children the basics of English grammar with the drills on translation and transformational rules.

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[17] An indirect reference to the American comedy-drama film *Lost in Translation* (2003), by Sofia Coppola, which plays upon the idea that cultural and linguistic gaps cannot be bridged by translation, and those gaps can be the primary reason in a person's difficulties to accommodate into the new cultural/linguistic space.

Years have passed by, and I have not written anything substantial in Nepali, which triggers guilt. Have I not become a collaborator of the post-colonial globalization of the western values through the monolingual phenomenon of Anglicization? My grandfather was a Hindu priest, well versed in ancient Sanskrit language and greatly knowledgeable of the Vedic wisdom. Why didn't I dive into the Sanskrit language—the root of my mother tongue—instead? In Nepal, English has gained the highest hierarchical position among about one hundred twenty-three languages and dialects spoken and used in the country. Today, a person who possesses better English skills is treated differently in the job market and other social spheres. I am aware that a language is also a cultural-political tool that can be deployed for the ideological, cultural, and economic hegemony. Have I not allowed myself to be an indigenous agent of the Western cultural hegemony? Am I not a cultural convert who remains oblivious of the legacies of his own cultural and literary roots? Joshua A. Fishman says, "The destruction of language is the destruction of a rooted identity" (4). What happens to my identity when I alienate myself from my mother tongue? Above all, every language is culturally coded, and to speak a language is also to linguistically perform the cultural identity. It is, certainly, not viable in our age to opt for isolationism as Kenyan author Ngugi Wa Thiong'o tried to do by writing in Gikuyu, his native tongue, instead of English for the effective decolonization of the African mind. Of the European languages, he said, "In my view language was the most important vehicle through which the power fascinated and held the soul prisoner. The bullet was the means of the physical subjugation. Language was the means of the spiritual subjugation" (9). But the undeniable and unforgettable part of the story is that English has not always remained a tool for colonization or even unilateral globalization.

The languages of European colonization—English, Spanish, French and others—have also been used to bring the linguistically divided world together and to fight for independence and decolonization. Today, the number of people who use English as a lingua franca far surpasses the native population of European descent, and a large number of indigenous authors write in English and enjoy extended cultural exchange. The progress of history brings irreversible inevitabilities. However conflictious my relation with English language may be, I have no option but to reconcile with its natural unnaturalness. Like in other countries in South Asia, English is evolving as an important national culture in Nepal, and I expect to carve my own niche into it. Many years ago, in response to Thiong'o's rejection of English language, Achebe wrote, "Is it right that a man should abandon his mother tongue for someone else's? It looks like a dreadful betrayal and produces a guilty feeling. But for me there is no other choice. I have been given the language and I intend to use it" (qtd. in Mair xvii). Probably, this is the way for me too.

CHAPTER THREE

NOSTALGIA AND MELANCHOLY IN THE MULTI-GENRE MOSAIC[18]

"It may be that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt."

—Salman Rushdie, *The Imaginary Homelands*

Like others, I am a person with conflicts and contradictions in my thoughts and behaviors. I bear the marks of the time and place I occupy. Like Ralph feels about the coca estates in *The Mimic Men*, I feel nostalgic about the lost glories of the idyllic childhood days of growing up in a small village surrounded by the dense semi-topical forest, bereft of modern facilities and cut off from the external world, but, at the same time, I realize that retrogressive isolationism is not an option. When I am skeptical about, what is often referred as 'cultural genocide' of the ethno-endogenous cultures under global cultural homogenization, I also want to celebrate the possibility of the hybrid universal civilization, as celebrated by the postmodern idealists. I often wonder what the

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[18] This chapter consists of various genres of equal importance and although largely creative, it incorporates allusions to various literary and theoretical contexts.

best age to live in the world would be, and I conclude that despite its contradictions and cruelties, ours is the most fulfilling time in human history. Despite the reification[19] effects of high capitalism and its greed for total accumulation, I believe in human capacity to press for and to come up with more engaged and more equitable societies in the future. I believe in Sartrian existential philosophy that although human beings are thrown into the world without any fixed *telos*, they also have the capacity to form their *telos*. I cannot stop wondering about my *telos* in relation to the over six billion other lives on the face of earth.

It is an undeniable fact that romantic or philosophical idealisms do not feed everyday life. One has to grapple with the immediate needs for survival and deal with the harsh realities as an individual. After I arrived in America, I became a broken chain of events. After many years of struggle and relative stability in the later days in Kathmandu, I have again found myself burdened with having to begin my life all over again. Certainly, changes were not unexpected, but it had not occurred to me that the very fabric of my being would be disrupted by the traumatic sense of dislocation. Many nights, I still go to bed wishing to wake up at home the next morning.

I had worked hard to come to America, but soon I began to be doubly disillusioned.[20] America was not the Hollywood depiction of Disneyland and Las Vegas everywhere. Besides, I had expected that the hangover of homesickness would dissipate in a few days, but, as time passed, the pangs of loss and regrets began to creep into my

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[19] According to the Marxist theory, capitalist production system has a tendency, defined as reification, to thingify people and their social relations into property and convert everything—even the human relations—into the marketable commodity through commodity fetishism.

[20] My words echo what Naipaul says in *An Area of Darkness*. "I came to London. It had become the center of my world and I had worked hard to come to it. And I was lost (45).

bones. In *The Mimic Men*, Ralph talks about his disillusioned fascination of the city: "We seek the physical city and find only a conglomeration of private cells. In the city as nowhere else we are reminded that we are individual units. Yet the idea of the city remains; it is the god of the city that we pursue, in vain" (22). I felt something similar about my pursuit of dreams in America. I became increasingly obsessive of the things which used to have little significance in my life: The cacophony of the village life—a rooster crowing, a dog barking, an old man shouting, a pig grunting, a hen cackling, a child crying, a cart passing through the road, somebody cutting wood, a goat bleating and many more—which was of no value to me when I was there have become so distant and so dear to me.

2.1 A Letter to my Wife[21]

October 12, 2007

Bachchu,

I know I shouldn't be writing a letter that further aggravates your feelings, but I need to be honest to you, as I have always tried to be. As time passes by, I more and more miss the life I have left behind. Does Niha still wait for me, looking out of the window? I can hear her babbles, ringing in my ears, but can offer no lullabies. Soon she will forget me and grow up, trying to imagine about her absent father. It is sad that we will meet as strangers after many years of separation. I often wonder if children can feel a natural sense of attachment with a parent after a long gap.

Sometimes, a strange feeling comes to me that I have become like Vanka in Chekhov's story. There are only the things to complain about. It has been very difficult to

[21] This letter is based on my first semester experiences at CSU-Pueblo, approximately two and a half months after I arrived in the U.S.

accommodate my life with the teenage students I live with. Some of them seriously lack commitment to their studies. They don't know or even don't want to know what they are here for. Every weekend our apartment buzzes lively with a noisy party. They are pampered children from rich families. Underage drinking is a serious crime here, but they do not care. Many of the students are planning to transfer to the community colleges once the semester is over. I cannot entirely blame them. However rich a Nepali family might be, it cannot afford the education in an expensive university in the U.S. I have not decided what exactly I will be doing. I will try to stick to my education with every possible means available. Fortunately, I will not be alone. Ajaya, with whom I share my bedroom, is staying. He is a good guy. I feel pity for him. Every night, he calls his girlfriend in Kathmandu and begins crying. It makes me realize our common fate, and I feel sad.

I have never been out of Pueblo, so I can't tell you what America is really like. In winter, I am planning to go to Estes Park. They say it reminds you of Pokhara. Pueblo is too desolate; there is no public life. On Sundays, Bob, a retired U.S. soldier who has been to Nepal twice and supports a missionary project in Kathmandu, takes us to the Baptist Church downtown. That is the only public gathering I have seen in Pueblo. I enjoy going to church because I need to know about the American cultural life and about the Bible itself. Last week Bob took us to the Lutheran Church, instead. I liked the traditional homely feeling of the interior. I liked the rituals of that church better than the sermons of the Baptist Church. It might be because we are very ritualistic in our culture. A group of people were playing traditional music and singing hymns from the balcony. I thought I would write a poem about the church atmosphere, but I have not written it yet.

Sadly, nobody walks on the roads here, and it makes me feel as I if I were an alien from another planet. I wonder if there are places in America where children play in the street and neighbors talk on the porch just like people in our villages do. People are very polite and kind, though. They nod at you on the road. No man harasses a woman simply because she is a woman. I remember how badly aggravated you were when you were hit with a half-chewed carrot from a running truck. I admire the American system and its rule of law and wish we had a well defined system in our country too (If we had a fully developed system in our country, I, probably, would not have come here!), but I also dread its lack of social life. Maybe, I have not seen the real life yet.

Happily, in spite of everything, I have made good progress in my studies. The resources in the university are abundant. Libraries and classes are filled with computers. We did not have a single computer for students in RR Campus. There were over one hundred students in our M.A. program, and here are only sixteen in one class and nineteen in another. Isn't that amazing? After every evening class, my classmates drop me off at home. Strangely, professors check assignments and provide feedback! Besides, professors also care about every individual student. Yesterday, I went to see Bill Sheidley, and he gave me three books! I feel glad to have escaped the plight of having to grade the papers of sixty students in an average of seven classes everyday (four hundred twenty altogether!), but I also badly miss the joys of teaching. The faces of students come in my eyes, and I feel concerned about them like the parents feel about their children. Despite the ordeals of being a teacher, there was also a sense of accomplishment, a glad feeling that I was contributing to my country. A few days back, I received a mail from Alok. He says, "We talk of you all the time." I was tearful remembering fifty-six staff

members in a big staff-room hall. Our hot political debates, our discussions on history, philosophy, geography and various aspects of life. Our readings to one another. Maybe, I will never have those highly charged moments in my life again. Here I live a solitary life that I want to escape again. My roommates do not have any interest in 'political headache.' Yesterday repeats itself in tomorrows. I had applied for a vacant tutoring position in the Writing Room, and I was politely turned down on the grounds of my accent. It could have been a way to engage with the native students, polish my accent, and make some extra money.

As the season of festivals begins, there must be preparations going for *Dashain*[22] and *Tihar*. I know you will be missing me. It will be my first *Dashain* without *tika* and *jamara*. I badly miss the smell and feeling of the season between the two festivals. When you go to village, convey my wishes to everybody. As Prakash also has gone away, it will be hard for parents. I am sure you will be doing your best to enliven the moments.

Missing you,

Baba

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After leaving home, 'home' has become something of special significance to me. It is what I define myself with, and it is what I miss all the time. A sense that I am an outsider, defined by the U.S. law as 'an alien', heightens my sense of alienation. The most intolerable sense of alienation, sometimes, has come in the classroom. When my classmates start chatting among themselves in their fluttering native tongues, I feel

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[22] Dashain is the biggest of the festivals in Nepal, celebrated for fifteen days. The festival commemorates the Gods' victory over the demonic powers. Throughout the festival, Durga, the Goddess of power, is worshipped with animal sacrifice. Family gathering is the most important social aspect of this festival.

rejected. This sense of rejection further adds to my withdrawal, and I perceive myself as a lonely island among other people. Sometimes, I even feel shipwrecked in the wrong place the way Ralph repeatedly feels in *Then Mimic Men*. I realize how crippling this sense of alienation is, sometimes leading to despair and helplessness. I realize how important the sense of private territory is where you go when you want to be alone. In *Reading Lolita in Tehran* Azar Nafisi writes: "That room, which I never paid much attention to at the time, has gained a different status in my mind's eye now that it has become the precious object of memory" (7). I miss the corner of my room back in my county, where I used to go—as a rodent goes into its burrow during its times of hibernation—on holidays and feel fulfilled after I have finished reading a book, which was, for a long time, on my want-to-read list. Having nowhere to go, I ramble in the terrains of memory, the idyllic life of my childhood.

2.2 A Night from the Childhood Days

A wintery full-moon night, we—Hiralal and I were—on our buffalo cart, pulled by a pair of buffalos. I cannot tell you when exactly it happened. It happened during one of my childhood days. Maybe I was seven. Maybe nine. As our cart, with a pair of wooden wheels, moved along on a narrow dusty trail, amidst the barren winter trees of the semi-tropical forest in the western lowland of Nepal, known as Terai, the cart produced sad mournful moans as if it were complaining about the long journey it had taken. The cart was half full with mashed hay to make my sleep comfortable. I was lying, wrapped in a quilt, observing the constellation. The moon in the sky had accompanied us all the way, and there were countless stars in the sky. Some were brighter than the others. Some were static; some seemed to be moving. My elders used to say when you die, you

can go to the place where the moon and stars are, or even you can be one of the stars as Dhruba, the son of King Uttanapada, did. I kept thinking while looking at the constellation. Jackals howled suddenly. One, another, and all of them together. Our buffalos were startled, and I was frightened of the sound that came from the dark forest.

"Kaka, mahin darlagata," I said to Hiralal, our old worker.

"Gidarse kakare daraito?" he asked.

"Geet gaona. Mai jaati se daraitu," I implored.

"Sakhiye ho...!" Hiralal began singing.[23]

Slowly, the jackal howls became distant. We continued our journey home, passing through a narrow dusty trail covered by dry leaves. I was returning home after many days' stay with my relatives in a faraway village.

The night, despite its non-specificity, is in my mind as a fond memory. We capture certain moments of life, and relish them for our entire life. Hiralal is long dead. The forest is long gone. No jackal howls disturb my nights, and it has been years since I spoke Hiralal's Tharu language with anybody. No Tharu songs any longer. Life has changed tremendously. The forest journey on a buffalo-pulled cart seems to myself a surreal picture, a time lived in a dream.

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There are moments I have truly felt ashamed of my country and my lack of identity. A country which has no identity in the global community is like a person with no name. During many occasions, I have had a hard time defining who I am and where I

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[23] "Uncle, I'm scared."
"Why are you scared of the jackals?"
"Please, sing a song. I'm really scared."
"O, my friends...!

am from. In many occasions, I have passed for an Indian. When you are away from home, your country becomes your identity. When the geographical or historical references do not work, it becomes impossible to establish the identity reference.

"Do you know where Mt. Everest is?"

"Yes, that is in China/Tibet."

"Do you know where Buddha was born?"

"In India. I'm damn sure!"

What a shame to be robbed of identity by the neighbors!

2.3 Hippie Nostalgia

When I was working in a convenience store, a dandy guy spoke to me, "Hey man, I like your accent. Where are you from?"

"Nepal."

"Nepal!" he almost shouted. "Hey, that is a wonderful place to come from! That's where I want to be when I'm rich. I'm an adventure loving Americano. Jacob is my name. What brings you here, man?"

We began talking. Jacob remembered how Bob Seger's song "Kathmandu" made him think of the place which, during the 1960s and 70s, was the final destination for the hippies. We talked in length about how the hippies, 'the flower children' coming from the post-World War II baby boom, have left their impact on our societies.

With the onset of the counter-culture movement, the hippies in Europe and America, angry that modern lifestyle had deprived them of the spontaneous ways of living, began to turn to the Orient as a place to escape. In those days hashish and ganja were feely sold in the streets of Kathmandu. They found many similarities, in terms of

lifestyle and philosophy, between themselves and the Hindu yogis, the people who renounce the worldly life and enjoy the marijuana-induced hallucinatory communion with the divinity. The valley of Kathmandu—with its traditional architecture and temples, with its hashish-smoking Hindu spiritualists and sacred Buddhist monks in saffron robes, with its narrow and damp alleys, invariantly smelling of homebrewed wines and traditional cuisines, with its famous culture of smiling hospitality, with its never-ending festivities on the streets and with its myths, legends, and rituals as old as its civilization itself—was at the center of this exotic and mythical Orient known as Shangri-La, as a hippie paradise. Freak Street in Kathmandu was the capital of this paradise. In those days, people, even the foreigners, believed in the existence of yeti, the abominable snowman. Even after the hippies were gone, Nepal did not remain the same. Tourism, trekking, and mountaineering flourished, and trade expanded, and the urban societies, for the first time since the mediaeval times, went through the golden age of capital entrepreneurship, expanding the gaps between the cities and countryside. Many became aware that they needed to learn English to benefit from the expanding tourism industry. According to Nanda R. Shrestha,

> the hippie movement had not only arrived, but also gripped Nepal. It symbolized the Western pot culture that had gone pop (become popular). While smoking marijuana could certainly be considered part of the Nepali culture, it was never a cultural movement. But now suddenly, Nepal was thrust into this rapidly unfolding dope dance performed by the hippies. As countless hippies poured into Nepal, they played a big role in tourism development. (159)

Unlike the other directly colonized countries, Nepal volunteered to learn English as a language of privilege that opened up better opportunities, and I see myself following this legacy in the post-hippie age. But long gone are the days of pristine innocence of Shangri-La; only the nostalgia remains. As India treats Nepal as its protracted colony and

meddles with its everyday politics, we fear our country will remain in its present shape twenty years from now. The hippie paradise is, now, counted among the courtiers as in a 'high alert' critical situation.[24] Strangely, Jacob and I—and Ralph Singh in *The Mimic Men*—carry romantic views of the places we have never been to. When I had met a young man from Casablanca, Morocco, in a convenience store in New York, I had complimented him about the place he was from. Casablanca, for me, is a name of multiple associations: a boy in the burning ship, waiting for his father to wake up and speak.[25] "Say, Father, say…" I remember the words of a poem my father had read when I was a child. Casablanca: a city of intoxicating Moorish art and architecture, a home for Jewish exiles and expatriate writers, a movie I watched, drawn by its name, not even with the slightest idea that it was a history in itself. Like me, the Casablanca man must have his reasons to arrive to America despite the name and beauty of his place.

"Casablanca!" I had said to him, "I want to be there someday."

Ironically, we all dream to be somewhere else, and when we are there, the mythical cloud covering the place goes away, and we begin to miss the place we have left behind.

*** *** ***

Everyday, I try to come to terms with the changed realities of my life and my in-betweenness. Paul Gready says, "The figure of the migrant is at once unsettled and unsettling, in-between, hybrid/polyglot, and continually engaged in cultural translation

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[24] In its Failed States Index 2009, The Fund for Peace, a Washington DC-based institution, ranks Nepal in the 25th position among the alert level countries. For detail information please visit: http://www.fundforpeace.org/web/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=362&Itemid=524

[25] I have found that the original title of the poem written by Dorothea Browne Hemans is "Casabianca" (1826), and it tells about the tragic death of a boy on the deck of a burning ship when his chieftain father lies unconscious. I am not sure what altered or appropriated the title of the poem in my mind.

and mediation (135). No doubt, the creative urge resulting from the restlessness is a compensatory equation for the loss one suffers in exile. Eva Hoffman says, "In exile, the impulse to memorialize is magnified" (51). Every day, I try to memorialize my past in order to make a meaningful connection to the present. It seems life has changed tremendously.

2.4 Coming to Terms

Soft and red

Like a drop of blood

Trickling through my palm

A velvet mite[26]

Runs in my green memory

And a thousand toads bleat

In the night

Monsoon rains intermittently

Trees howl

But when tomorrow comes

I am no longer a mushroom collector.

*** *** ***

During my stay in the U.S., I have come to realize that when you miss home, you do not miss only the actual concrete and wooden structure. It is the feeling of being at

[26] The Asian velvet mite (also known as 'giant red velvet mite') is the most beautiful insect I have ever seen. I have a vivid memory of collecting them attracted by their smooth and simmering velvety beauty during the monsoon days. During the monsoon season, we also used to collect a variety of mushrooms in the forest.

home that goes missing. You miss the small things which you grew up with, but never paid much attention to. In the full moon nights, I watch the moon and remember how during such a night we used to sit in our yard and talk till late night. It feels strange we live under the same moon but so separated by time and distance.

2.5 Take Me Away: An Interior Monologue

Come, take hold of my hand and take me home. One longs to be out and away in such a night. I want to breathe the air you breathe—the aroma of night flowers—and talk, talk of the scarred time that has passed between us in the distance unbridgeable. There is so much to talk about: the arrested life I have lived by myself faraway from each of you, wishing I were transported back to the previous life. I want to talk to the content of my heart. This night—the moon, the stars, the stretch of the furrowed clouds in the sky and the trees dancing with the wind in the dark—reminds me of you. It makes me more keenly aware of the time I have spent in incarceration, and my body feels a jarring metatemporal awareness that aging comes unavoidably and our years are limited. You see this is not the way I would have chosen to live on free will, waiting for the unknown, waiting for the life to begin in some unknown day. Listen to what Nietzsche has to say about living and life: "[W]e should consider every day lost on which we have not danced at least once. And we should call every truth false which was not accompanied by at least one laugh" (323). You know I am not good at dancing, but I love to be around and talk. I miss the hilarious laughter we laughed. Many years ago in the village, a maggoty pariah dog got into our house, and we spent hours trying to drive it away, but it would not budge. Then we made a fire on a stick and pocked at that creature. It sprang and ran away, and sister peed from the staircase with a burst of laughter. Khem—poor village

boy!—was standing below the staircase, and he got drenched with her pee. We laughed and laughed, rolling on the ground, and we laughed later remembering how we laughed that day.

Acutely miss home at this moment. I am getting tired of this never-ending preparation to live! Come, take hold of my hand, and lead me home through the grassy trail with the yellow-yellow mustard fields all around, wild bees dancing in cosmic silence and cattle grazing in the field. Take me away from this peripheral solitary existence and this anxiety-induced despair. I want to be the child again who enjoyed throwing pebbles into the river and gazing at the water ripples. I have had too much of the worries about the tomorrows and slept too many long hours of insomniac nights. What is this advancement for if not the soul's comfort? I want to work in the field for the whole day, get tired to my bones, and go to sleep a good sleep. Miss the days when we used to work in the field until the western sky turned crimson. Miss the time in British Council: I wanted to read all the books, but I had many other things to do. Now, I have ample time, but reading does not tickle my tentacles the same way. How can I enjoy reading under the shadow of anxiety?

Colorado rarely gathers the dark clouds. A dry wind blows all the time, and it barely rains. No white cranes fly in the evenings, making a sharp contrast against the dark clouds. It does not get foggy in the winter days either, and no winter rains. I badly miss the monsoon days when I used to sit on the windows, observing the clouds gathering in the western sky above the immense farmland or reading a book about the people in faraway countries. See, nobody walks on these tar-topped roads, except for the glittering cars, with green lawns around. So neat. See the houses—so meticulously arranged—look

deserted from the outside. People seem to be scared to be exposed, exposed to the nature and exposed to each other. I feel one dimensional here. Do you think it is only a blind cry of an outsider? I had the same dream a third time, passing through a mountain trail in a place I called home, and I kept wondering about its significance. It only heightened my longing for home. Never tasted green mustard in America. No more of the organic leafy vegetables, and no more of fiber intake. They are expensive. The chicken stored in the freezer is the staple food. That is what we can afford. Miss the sounds of mother's churning of the curd early in the mornings for *mohi*[27], the smell of freshly boiled ghee in rice! Never had a freezer at home, not even electricity all my school life in the village. Never drank soda at home. Everything was homemade and organic, and we were so contented there. Don't you think the happiness of the life is the sum of small happiness we collect on our way? Miss the smell and the feeling of the changing seasons. The half moon, the full moon, the changing moon. Miss the moonlit nights, when the half-naked children came to the dusty streets to play. Miss the thick bamboo bush in which robins sang all night long. Miss the cranes on the banana leaves. Mother would say to the hunters: "Go away. You cannot kill the birds of the night." She read from the pages her life as the night went by, and I listened with my throat tight. Dogs barked the night away in the neighboring villages.

"Mother, what's the name of the mountain far-far away, across the immense stretch of green land in front of our house in the mountain?"

"Pathivara."

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[27] *Mohi* used to be the indispensable drink in our village life. It is produced by liquefying curd by mixing water into it and running a wooden fan into the wooden jar by pulling two stings for an hour or so. Apart from liquefying the curd, another purpose of this process is to separate butter from the curd. When boiled, the butter becomes ghee.

Pathivara, a meaningful name beyond translation, a name from the twilight memory.

"Mother, I still remember the "ting…ting…ting" sound coming all the time."

"There was a blacksmith down our village."

"Mother what did they say when they found that you had attempted a suicide by poisoning yourself?"

"Nobody said anything. Your grandmother cried. Not in pity, but in angry exasperation."

"Mother, someday, when I am able to write nicely, I will write a book about you."

"Wish I could read and write."

"Don't cry, mother. I will read it for you."

Take me away: I feel outlandish here, and there is no outside to go except for the shopping malls, restaurants, and bars where I cannot feel at home. They are all right, but they are not my things. They lack the native air in their atmosphere. They lack the ground-touch feeling I was so much used to. Maybe, there is too much of an aboriginal about me, maybe, too much of the native primitivism. But I am not alone to resent this corporate arrangement of live: A Cherokee Indian I met in Louisiana lamented: "Look, what they have done to the mother earth! This obesity, this junk-food life cannot go forever! They tried to exterminate our race from the face of the earth, but we managed to survive. One day we will get our land back." The scarred history of colonial America. Running on the multi-lane highways with the gigantic constructions all around, I have wondered what happens to the free movement of the animals, the people who want to be free of the car culture. An Amish couple I talked to in the Greyhound station in the city of

Mobile, Alabama was sorry that modern life has gone far beyond god's design. "There is only a hungry stampede for more and more comfort. The real comfort comes from the family, which is no longer relevant to many people," they said. No wonder, having grown up in a traditional village which in itself was an extended family, and having seen dozens of heads living under a single roof, I yearn for the comforts of traditional life. There is too much of monotonous segregation here. Take me away to the open of my village. I want go on a bicycle ride, intruding the sleeping villages and passing the farmlands and dark forests on my way.

You see, how I grieve for home. Come take hold of my hand and take me home. I want to be strolling on the dirty and dusty village road with all of you. After all, it is not where, but it is how we live that matters in life. Don't you think there is no other place like home?

*** *** ***

In the moments of intense thought and emotion, I let my imagination wander. Who am I? What am I? Why am I here? Do I really need to be here at this juncture of life? I become swarmed by free-floating symbols, images, ideas. More than thought, my memory makes me who I am. I remember, and therefore I am. Loneliness feeds on memory.

2.6 Writing Graffiti[28]

The constant buzz of cars

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[28] I use graffiti as a creative expression of anger, frustration, anguish and the condition of voicelessness. In Nepal, walls are colored by political slogans, but graffiti is a rare thing. I was stunned by the prevalence of graffiti in New York City in summer 2008. Why do people write tattoos on their body and graffiti on the wall? My answer is to form a different identity and make oneself heard in the public sphere. I was so much influenced by the graffiti culture in New York that I began imagining of writing graffiti myself.

Like the one

Coming from a distant river

The perpetual silence of human voice

Indoor captivity

(air-)conditioned greenhouse vegetation

Isolation

"Goodbye. See you at Wal-Mart!"

*** *** ***

Superhuman perfection obsessions

Unattainable

Moving like a mirage

E-addiction of simulacra[29]

Fragmentary hypertextual episteme

Fleeting chimera of an identity

Real-surreal-hyperreal

Like water-reflected sunbeams dancing on the wall

Oedipal longing for the (m)other earth

Existential despair

Pandora's Box lies open

Buzzing things sting into my conscience

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[29] Here, I use Jean Baudrillard's concept of simulacrum (pl. simulacra), the reality produced through the process of simulation, which, Baudrillard says, "is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal (1). Hence, simulacrum is not just a creation of virtual reality, but a reality in itself. A simulacrum (initially a copy of the original) takes the place of the original and becomes more original than the original. Cyberspace, for example, has become an alternative world in itself into which we are increasingly drawn from the material world.

Horror! Horror!

"But why is it that Kurtz cannot come home?"[30]

*** *** ***

I am a schizophrenic cogito[31]

Trying to sleep on the rock of the past

My legs in a cool brook under tropical the trees

I gaze at the dark water bugs afloat on the surface

Going merrily in rapid swirls

Dragonflies hover over

Blue, red, green, yellow

Twittering parrots

Green as the shrubbery

"Where am I?

Transported to the life before?"

*** *** ***

I have a pocketful of berries from my memory

The car-river lulls me into a slumber

I sleep smelling the aroma of the berries

Soon in a dream

Damn-angry-like-the-beats

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[30] An allusion to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* in which Kurtz, an European Ivory trader employed by a Belgian company, gets stuck into the interior of Congo. He is a European who has gone native. Marlow, the narrator of the novel, goes to rescue him, but on the way back down the Congo River, Kurtz dies of jungle fever. The last words he speaks before dying are: "The horror! The horror!"

[31] Cogito is elf-consciousness or ego that develops from self-aware contemplation. It is related to Descartes' rationalist analogy: "Cogito, ergo sum" ("I think, therefore I am").

I write graffiti over and over again on the walls

"Repatriation Now!"

CHAPTER THREE

READING EXILE AND DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS IN *THE MIMIC MEN*

After my arrival to the U.S., my fascination with Sir V.S. Naipaul has became more and more pronounced and grounded on the real experience. The study of exile literature or the literature on exile, which used to be restricted to the hypothetical conditions of existence, has, now, become a lived experience for me, both theoretically and empirically significant. *The Mimic Men*, which I had read many years ago, trying to imagine what it would be like to live a perpetually solitary life in the hotel rooms in a cosmopolitan city like London, has now gained a different status in my mind. Despite many differences between us, I share Ralph Singh's sense of dislocation and the fragmentary sense of being. Although it is next to impossible that I would ever meet V.S. Naipaul in my real life—let alone meeting Ralph Singh, only a construction in the pages—I wonder what it would be like to stand face to face with Naipaul and talk about the books he has written and the characters he has created. Having developed a long-term literary communion with an author, it is not unnatural for me to meet him in my imagination.

*** *** ***

3.1. An Evening with Sir Vidia

The last day of my London visit was an escape to my private life and to my own narcissistic fantasies. It rained intermittently throughout the day, stirring something like gloom, forlornness, or a yearning for something undefined and unknown deep inside me. This kind of negative emotion used to come to me during the first few years of my student life in America. I allowed drowsiness to pass and spent the entire day in my hotel room, falling now and then asleep with the rhythm of the winter rain and gazing momentarily at the rain-drenched landscape of London towers outside my hotel window. There was historical Tower Bridge and there was River Thames, hazy and blurred, in the distance. Life was constantly on the move as was the eternal flow of the river. Desperate images floated in my mind with different shades and textures, briefly evoking discrepant emotions. There came a mental snapshot of Brooklyn Bridge with the white cruises plodding through the East River, and there came an algae-green pond with a blanket of water hyacinth covering the water surface in my village. I allowed myself to relive the moments of the yesteryears: a young man's frenzied languishment far away from home in an unknown land and a child's excitements of fishing in a village pond at the same time.

One needs a private life and moments of respite and reflection, especially, when one is stressed, and I was suddenly catapulted into the business-like drudgeries of book promotion, the dramatic formalities of reading sessions, auditions, interviews and dinners. It is not enough to produce manuscripts: a writer of our times also needs to work as a brand ambassador of his own works. It is important to form connections with the literary establishment—the writers, reviewers, and publishers—of the metropolis and the book clubs and the target audience to be accepted into the canon and to carve a niche of

one's own. I already had private meetings with Salman Rushdie and Aravind Adiga, and Sir Vidia Naipaul was next on the list Random House, my publisher, had provided me. I waited for the evening to fall and to be driven away to stand face to face with Vidia, the abominable craftsman of English prose. Of Vidia, Aravind reminded me, "There are two V.S. Naipauls, and the wrong one has become famous" (Adiga, "Truth Be Told"). Needless to say I was slightly nervous.

I entered Vidia's territory in the softly drizzling dusk. The traditional-style country house was much of a hermitage in the secluded Wiltshire suburb, surrounded by a green lawn and palm trees. A shallow brook ran nearby the house yard, meandering among the trees and bushes where birds chirped in unison, much like an evening orchestra. It was a writer's place. Nadira, who was said to be more Naipaulian than Naipaul himself, came to receive me at the door. Destiny had it that Vidia should marry this twice-divorced Pakistani journalist in his middle age. It made a unique couple: the so-called Islamophobic Vidia and this 'Nairobi girl' in Paul Theroux's *Sir Vidia's Shadow*. Vidia married her immediately after his first wife Patricia's death, a blighted lower-middle-class English woman who nourished Vidia's literary career with her silent services and sufferings for forty-one years until her death. She wrote twenty-four volumes of diaries in the manner of Emily Dickinson, never to be published in her lifetime. She was a captive wife in Theroux's words. Why did Vidia need another woman in his life so immediately? Why did he have to bring Nadira to this house six days after Patricia's death? This cruel obituary to Patricia disparaged his admirers and critics alike. It was such an unfeeling act of a man of letters. Vidia's idiosyncratic life and eccentricities are a jumble of enigmas, probably, subjects for psychoanalysis. I have

always tried to differentiate between Naipaul as a writer and Naipaul as a man, giving my consensual nod to the reader response theory, which argues for the need of metaphoric killing of the author to bring meaning to the text, but in Naipaul's case it is difficult—if not impossible—to completely disregard the authorial shadow.

"Vidia is in his dark moods," Nadira whispered, gently shaking my hands. It was a warning for me that I needed to take precautions in what I talked about. It was also a modest reminder to me that I should not be infringing into the sore parts of his private life. I knew Vidia suffered bouts of depression. He once tried to kill himself by gas poisoning when he was a depressed lonely young man in London out. Probably, the bitter experiences of life developed Vidia as an embittered person. He is famous as the most arrogant and outspoken writer.

As I got into the house, Lady Naipaul directed me into Vidia's study parlor with an extended balcony. Vidia was an old hunchback sitting on a leather-bound dark couch and reading a book in the corner of his well-furnished study parlor. He did not lift his head from the book to see me as if he did not care about the intruder, as if my arrival was unwanted. It was known that Vidia seldom accepted people at his home, but I did not expect total ignorance. The meeting was scheduled by our publisher, and he had given consent to that. I stood studying the writer's room, soothingly cozy, the bookshelves on the wall stuck with books and binders. The walls were decorated with some bizarre antiques and some old paintings. Possibly, Vidia collected them on his global voyage from Iran to India to Congo to Argentina. I finally decided to sit on a chair beside the door.

"It must be chilling outside, eh?" Vidia finally broke the silence without lifting his head from the book.

"It is," I said, in my uneasiness.

"It will soon begin to snow," he said again without looking at me.

"It will. In a few days, as they have forecasted," I responded.

"I hate the cold; it aches my mind and body. The dancing and drifting snowflakes will make me feel desolate. It takes efforts to stand like a man. Father died, then Sati, then Siva. There lingers an old regret that I could not help. Pat was the last one to go. I had to be single minded, even cruel, to keep my footing, to keep the pace going, and not to be succumbed to insanity. There was no reverse course in life. There always remained a book unwritten. A man gets stuck in the world with dreams differed," he said as if speaking to himself.

I listened to him.

"Why did you kill him? The poor guy lying in a blood pool in a convenience store! I identified myself to him. And I felt as if it was me whose body was pierced with bullets. I wonder how his girlfriend receives the death message in Nepal. Five years' wait in futility, and then the tragedy strikes!" Vida continued. I noticed he was reading my semi-autobiographical fiction, *The Crimson Dreams*.

"You cannot apply poetic justice to the true events, can you?" I asked him.

"True," Vidia's eyes twinkled inside the pouches of his eyelids.

"He was my friend in South Carolina," I said in a smothered voice.

"Oh, please, don't tell me that," Vidia waved his hands. "I'll write a review for you. It's the first book I have read after a long time. Hearing about it from the Random

House people struck something unusual, and I thought I should read it. I went to India many times, but it never occurred to me there was Nepal just beside. How the big shadow the small! My ancestors must have become Naipaul from Nepal. It is a major accomplishment for a writer of your background, but don't you expect sugarcoated words and pampering attitudes from me. You know I am not that kind. People hate me," Vidia said with a leering smile on his face.

The doorbell began to chime.

"It must be him," Vidia said. "You must know the wretched buffoon if you have read *The Mimic Men*."

"I did my MA thesis on it."

"Really? Then you know him."

"Who?" I was puzzled.

"Ralph Singh."

"Ralph Singh?" I asked in disbelief.

"Yes, the same Ralph Ranjit Kirpal Singh of *The Mimic Men*. He travels out of the pages of the book."

"How is that possible?"

"'How is that possible?' is the question I ask too, but I suddenly ran into him a few days ago in my London trip. He came running to me in the Bloomington train station and asked me if I knew him. I said there was something familiar about his appearance, but could not tell who he was. He introduced himself to me, and I had no doubt that it was the selfsame Ralph Singh, but I can't tell how he came into being. I was completely dumfounded. Imagine a character you have created in the book has been walking freely

and talking to you! Talking in the manner of a philosopher of metaphysics, Ralph says we all are, in the end result, the figments of somebody's meta-dream. He says every life is invoked into being by imagination, and the experience of the material is not the real experience; it is only the experience of the imaginary experience. The meeting has worked as if I have disturbed a sleeping ghost. The bugger is coming to see me tonight."

Nadira brought Ralph in. He was what I had imagined of him. The young dandy with a distinct Indian physiognomy, just like Naipaul himself, in a dark hat and a tweed jacket. If Shiva had not died in the prime youth of his writing career, one could have said it was Vidia's younger brother Shiva himself. He looked a little wasted, like a faded black-and-white picture.

Vidia introduced us and informed him about my thesis.

"I would love to read that," Ralph said. "I am reading *The Crimson Dreams*. It is such a moving story of homesickness, cultural shock, and loss of coherence in life. I could not help crying when the second protagonist dies saying, 'I wanna go home.' Wish one had a place called home where one could return when grown weary of the outside world. And what was your inspiration to write that book?" Ralph asked.

"The concept came to me when I was doing the thesis. It was partly an autobiographical thesis. So, I have to say partly the credit of inspiration goes to your memoir. I greatly sympathize with you, but you should not have gone into exile. That was your opportunism." I said.

"Then you did not read the novel to its depth. I do not blame you. I cannot suppose you to put your feet into my shoes. When the English colonizers left, The West Indian rundown plantation colony of Isebella was a junkyard, you know—a racial

junkyard. People sneer at me and at Vidia for telling that, but it was the bitter reality. I do not say there was no beauty in the island; there was. The rundown coca estates were still beautiful, but they did not offer us an escape from the racial hostility, from the lust and scavenging, and from the tyranny of the past. As I have said in the book, we did not have the real power: the real power was somewhere else in England. We could pretend to be in power until our bluff was called. Our independence was a fake independence that came without any revolution, without any bottom–to-top structural change in the society that Fanon advocates. England left us only to handle us as a satellite colony from a distance. We were only the mimic men, devoid of any originality. We had no force of nationalism even, only the negative frenzy of a deep violation which could lead to further frenzy alone, the vision of the world going up in flames: it was the only expiation.[32] Did I come to England on my choice? No, it was a forced exile. If I hadn't left when the crunch time came, I would have been shot dead just like my father. Reading your novel I have seen that it is the same story everywhere. Nobody leaves home happily," Ralph continued in a slow voice that lacked vigor.

Then we fell in a moment of deep consternation. For a while nobody said anything. The rain began to splatter hard on the windowpanes, and the wind howled.

"Vidia, are you going to write a sequel for *The Mimic Men*?" It was Ralph again.

"No, I cannot do that," Vidia replied.

"Why not?" Ralph asked with a frown.

"Why should I?" Vidia answered the frown.

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[32] This sentence comes from *The Mimic Men*, page 245.

"I want to go home. Please set me free. I am tired of this solitary existence. I have no home, no family, and no friends. There is nowhere to go. I'm stuck in the middle of nowhere, in this no-man's-land," Ralph lamented to the verge of tears.

"But thirty-three years have gone by, Ralph. Isabella has massively changed. Even your Kripalville has changed beyond recognition. You will feel shattered, and you'll want to come back to England again. A man pines for the things that are familiar," Vidia said with a consoling gesture.

"Then write a sequel and kill me, please," Ralph implored.

"I cannot," Vidiya answered.

"Why not?" Ralph asked.

"Firstly, because fiction is no longer my genre; secondly, I cannot write about the Caribbean any longer, and thirdly, killing you will be suicidal. I cannot kill my alter ego. It's better to go howling like a wolf," Vidia said.

I felt sudden pangs of regret deep inside me. I wanted to go home before it was too late. Once things change beyond recognition, you cannot associate yourself with them any longer, and you are lost.

"Have you met Patricia ever after your break with her?" I asked Ralph in an effort to maintain my composure. I realized my grave mistake as soon as the words came out my mouth. Patricia for Sandra.[33]

"I mean Sandra," I said correcting my mistake.

But nobody said anything. Stunned, Vidia looked sternly at me, and I noticed Ralph was silently crying.

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[33] Here, two mistakes coincide: first, Patricia is not Ralph's wife; it is Sandra, and second Vidia finds it offensive when somebody lacks carefulness in his/her conducts.

"Call me tomorrow to arrange the next meeting somewhere outside," Vidia finally said. "I do not find myself in a good mood. There are things I could not tell Patrick French, my biographer. To tell events is one thing and to tell how one feels about the events just another."[34]

He offered his hands to me. I touched the hands of a great writer that produced the great works of literature and the hands of a sadomasochist that bruised the face of his Anglo-Argentine mistress, Margaret Murry.

"You'll see it takes efforts to stand like a man," Vidia said patting on my back. "Never ever let others put you down."

Nadira came out to see us off. The rain had begun to subside.

On the asphalted pathway among the trees Ralph asked me, "Pradeep, is it possible for you to write a sequel to *The Mimic Men* and send me home?"

"Ralph, how can I write about the life of the other places I have never been to?" I answered.

Ralph produced a deep sigh. He was only a dark figure in the night.

As we were walking, I saw a wolf running before me. I stopped to look and noticed that Ralph was gone. I heard a wolf howling in the bush in the moonless cloudy night.

"Yes, there are two V. S. Naipauls," I said to myself, walking briskly towards the car that waited to deliver me to my hotel room in London.

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[34] Naipaul's authorized biography *The world is What it is* (2004), by Patrick French, gives a ruthlessly truthful account of Naipaul's personal life and portrays Naipaul as a person with dark conceits, but since Naipaul did not directly involve in the writing process, it fails to show how Naipaul felt about being a domestic tyrant, misogynist, sadist and snob.

3.2 *The Mimic Men* in the Theoretical Context

"We here on our island, handling books printed in this [western] world and using its goods, had been abandoned and forgotten. We pretended to be real, to be learning, to be preparing ourselves for life, we mimic men of the New World, one unknown corner of it, with all its reminder of the corruption that came so quickly to the new."

—Naipaul, *The Mimic Men*

V.S. Naipaul's sixth novel, *The Mimic Men* (1967) is one of the most complex fictional narratives of the post-colonial condition of exile to be written in the twentieth century; yet, for various reasons, the novel has not gained the phenomenal appeal and appraisal as other masterpieces by Naipaul—*A House for Mr. Biswas*, *A Bend in the River*, or *The Enigma of Arrival*, for example. Though it is important to consider why the readers, in general, prefer to read one text to another by the same author, this fact alone, however, does not govern the relevance of studying *The Mimic Men* in the academic setting. Despite its relatively narrow circulation and marginal readership, *The Mimic Men* best yields to the issues of socio-politico-cultural concerns of postcolonial studies. According to N. Rama Devi,

> Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* marks an important phase in his fictional career. The novel is significant for various reasons. It is perhaps the clearest expression of the themes that shape Naipaul's novels, namely, the escape of the Third World into fantasy on being poverty-stricken and isolated on the fringes of power, the sprouting up of various political and religious movements which though ineffective, offer a sense of drama and empty excitement finally ending up in disorder, politics dominated by appeals to race and color, the absence of real power, myths, culture or competence which have resulted in a tendency to mimic, and a feeling of homelessness and identity crisis. (30)

These reasons account for why this novel becomes central when it comes to studying the factors that tacitly govern—most specifically but not exclusively—the formation of post-/colonial subjectivity through education and through many other structures of cultural hegemony. More importantly, the motifs of the novel distinctly resonate to the defining post-/colonial experiences such as hybridity, mimicry, acculturation, identity crisis, cultural shock and so forth and establish the novel as a core text for textual reference. In Helen Hayward's words, "[t]he work is held together by a vision of universal desolation, shipwreck and disorder: a consistency of mood and theme links this disparate and fragmentary material" (69).

Though Naipaul identifies himself as an author without a cause to advocate and without a political school to affiliate—"I have no system, literary or political. I have no guiding political idea. I think that probably lies with my ancestry (Naipaul "Two Worlds"14)—there can be hardly any apolitical, ahistorical, and purely aesthetic reading of his fictional and non-fictional narratives. Instead, by virtue of their inherent geopolitical, socio-cultural, politico-ideological and historiographical significance, his works immediately call for an engaging and politically informed reading. Like many other novelistic works of the Naipaulian oeuvre, *The Mimic Men* bifurcates between the Conradian profundity (an influence that remains pervasively palpable in Naipaul's writing) and the Naipaulian dark vision (a defining tendency for which Naipaul has been almost universally chastised). The complexities of *The Mimic Men* are due to the fact that it gives an account of an individual (i.e. Ralph Singh) in the larger historical backdrop (i.e. the social crises brewing up as a long-term ramification of the colonial encounter in the imaginary Caribbean island of Isabella), which in itself functions as a

historiographical narrative of the symbolic post-colonial society in which the novel is set. For this reason, *The Mimic Men* is as much a narrative about an individual as about a society in transition. Moreover, as Ashcroft at el. argue, the novel also deals with writing and "examines the dilemma of the post-colonial writer" and "incorporates an extreme version of the opposition between centre and margin" (87).

But considering the educational/cultural upbringing of Ralph Singh, the first person narrator, considering his ideologically-indoctrinated subjectivity under a colonial education system, and considering his expressed biases against Isabella and its people in favor of England, the issues of truthfulness, objectivity, and authenticity of the narrative become questionable. Does the novel, as a first person reflexive narrative, offer the readers an unmediated/undistorted picture of the history? Is Ralph Singh—who, as a narrator, enjoys the privileges of passing comments about other characters and influencing the events—so reliable a narrator? Having these questions in mind, we have to move further to deal with the novel as it is and focus on Ralph Singh—whose life is marked by disquieting anguishes of Caliban syndrome[35] and cultural dislocation—to see how the internalization of the discursive and ideological values inherited through colonial education culminate into epistemic disorientation and how the borrowed episteme works to hollow out the very sense of being and self-knowledge. Importantly enough, we also need to study how Ralph Singh's borrowed orientalist episteme tragically snaps him off from the real world he belongs to and how he begins to gaze himself through the eyes of the others. Certainly, it is tempting to hurl insults at Ralph as an ill-begotten native

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[35] Although the term has various definitions, I use it to explain the damaged sense of identity in which, like Caliban in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, the colonized subject fails to reclaim his self-identity by rejecting the colonizer's authority altogether. Caliban hates Prospero's oppression, but dreads to be left alone.

bastard of colonialism and censor his version of the story, but a more sympathetic view into his life and into his sensibilities will help us to review the colonial history and develop insight into the invisible structures of cultural hegemony in the neo-/post-colonial era, for every history produces its victims in different forms and in different ways. Also, over-exaggeration of authorial shadows on Ralph Singh or misinterpretation of his life experiences can lead to view the novel as an ideological endorsement of orientalism, but reading between the lines and reading against the grain, we can see that the narrative by no means is watertight. On the contrary, it is fraught with ruptures, slippages, and inconsistencies, which reflect the narrator's dilemmas, emotional disintegration, and double consciousness.

3.3 Notes on Biographical Echoes

What strikes true about V.S. Naipaul as a writer and his works is the unmistakable connection between the two. "I am the sum of my books," Naipaul said in his Nobel lecture in 2001 (Naipaul, "Two Worlds" 11). "Each book, intuitively sensed and, in the case of fiction, intuitively worked out, stands on what has gone before, and grows out of it" (ibid. 4-5). In fact, both fictional and non-fictional works of Naipaulian oeuvre are palimpsestically intertextual, and what lies in the centre, as an implied but recurrent motif, is the writer himself. No doubt, to completely depend on the author to interpret his/her works would amount to an interpretational fallacy[36], but Naipaul's works are too close to his personal experiences and attitudes to ignore his conspicuous shadow on his writing. By reading Naipaul's works without making references to his personal life,

[36] A combined form of the fallacies opposed by New Criticism i.e. intentional fallacy (making an interpretation on the basis of what the author intended to say) and affective fallacy (making an impressionistic interpretation on the basis of how the writing has affected the reader).

according to Gillian Dooly, "one runs the risk of seriously misunderstanding his work" (1). Certainly, a text can be interpreted in multiple ways—with or without making references to the author—and my aim is to show how the authorial experiences have influenced Naipaul's writing, rather than to prove that Ralph is not a fictive character with his own extra dimensions, but I would argue that so long as autobiographical references are relevant to better understand the historical contexts of the text, they must not be eschewed simply to escape the blame of any kind of fallacy. Despite the general consensus on the death of the author, the immediate historical circumstances in which s/he once lived and produced a text can provide contextual references to the text and its discourse. Despite of his/her death, we cannot completely disregard the author because, as Foucault says, "[t]he author's name manifests the appearance of a certain discursive set and indicates the status of this discourse within a society and culture (148). In Naipaul's case, however, to refer to his life experiences is also to refer to the history of colonial indenture in the Caribbean and then the escape to the western metropolis, the experiences which Naipaul explores through his books.

Naipaul has mentioned in his lectures that going back to the author to understand his work "is a beguiling method" bound to mislead the process of reading," he, however, explained in the same occasion that "[w]hen I became a writer those areas of darkness around me as a child became my subjects" (Naipaul, "Two Worlds" 11). In fact, a close reading of his works reveals that in every work, Naipaul revisits his Caribbean experiences or their extension in London. Dooly further says, "In *The Mimic Men* there is no evident dichotomy…between author and narrator, no sense that the author is communicating with the reader behind the narrator's back. The fact that Ralph is so

explicitly engaged in writing this book could make it even more difficult to distinguish him from the author in some ways (54).

As a semi-autobiographical fiction, *The Mimic Men* closely follows the life and life experiences of the author as a young man. Dooley points out that "there is more general fusion of fact and fiction in *The Mimic Me*n...This blurring of boundaries between fact and fiction can have the effect of heightening the realism" (54). One can draw several parallels between Ralph Singh and V.S. Naipaul in the Caribbean and in their exile in London, but "[a]lthough some of his background and some of his experiences resemble Naipaul's, this is not Naipaul's memoir" (Feder 194).

To refer back to the historical context, the Indians as a late arrival and a minority had a precariously marginal position in the New World which was populated by the Spanish Creole, English, French, Dutch, Portuguese, Africans and Chinese. Like Naipaul, from the very early age, Ralph becomes obsessed about the stigmatic family history and the mythical ancestral land in India. Moreover, the moderate success of their fathers and their mental breakdown in the struggle to escape poverty and their dependency to the tyrannical arrangements of the extended but influential families on their wives' side encouraged the sensitive and bright boys to dream their life elsewhere.[37] In this context, it should not sound odd that Ralph, as a schoolboy, feels himself to have been shipwrecked in the desert island and dreams of rejoining the ancestral Aryan horse-riders in the snow-covered plains of Central Asia. What sounds odd is, as soon as he arrives to England, Ralph begins to feel that he has been shipwrecked to another wrong place. Ralph says,

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[37] The sticking similarities between Ralph's and Naipaul's family background are that in both cases, the ancestry of the fathers is obscure. Naipaul's father was a journalist and a writer, and Ralph's father was an Education Department employee. In both cases, the families on the mother's side owned a Coca-Cola Company in the island.

"But even as I tried to put words to what I felt, I knew that my own journey, scarcely begun, had ended in the shipwreck which all my life I had sought to avoid" (10). The most pathetic tragedy in Ralph's life is the fact that he becomes bounced back to England as a political exile when he goes to Isabella to begin a new life. Unlike Ralph, Naipaul left Trinidad never to return to his old life. Deeply embittered, Ralph says, in a typically Naipaulian tone: "I no longer seek to find beauty in the lives of the mean and oppressed. Hate oppression; fear the oppressed" (14). If there is anything called a dry-cry, Ralph Singh, no doubt, cries through his words. The memoir crystallizes Ralph's "desire to emerge as "authentic" through mimicry—through a process of writing and repetition," which in Bhabha's words "is the final irony of partial representation" (126).

The novel is set in the imaginary Caribbean island of Isabella in its bickering politico-racial turmoil of the 1960s and 70s. Implicitly, the island stands for Naipaul's native country, Trinidad. Ralph's father (only referred to in the novel by his pseudonym Gurudeva[38]) features in the novel as an important character and bears many character traits and circumstances of Naipaul's father, Seepresad Naipaul. A marginal character in his family, Gurudeva organizes a pseudo-religious revolt, renounces family life, and lives as an esoteric mendicant after the revolt fails. Ralph later builds on his father's political legacy, he considers his father a dislocated person like himself: "Poor Gurudeva! There on the beach I had felt linked to this power, madness, and humiliation" (198). Like Naipaul, Ralph Singh leaves Isabella as a scholarship-boy to study in England and gets married to a London girl, Sandra. Among the foreign-educated boys in Isabella, it is a

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[38] A failed writer, Seepresad Naipaul had published *Gurudeva and Other Indian Tales* from which the name comes. Many of Naipaul's early works are based on his father's writing. According to Patrick French, "If Pa's *Gurudeva* was the prequel to *A House for Mr. Biswas*, Shiva's *Fireflies* was a sequel" (287).

vogue of the time to have a white woman as a marker of higher social status and of cosmopolitan exposure. Of such people, including himself, Ralph says, "on Isabella they were linked by their background and professional standing than by their expatriate and fantastically cosmopolitan wives and girlfriends" (66). Upon completion of his education, unsure about his career prospects, Ralph returns to Isabella with his wife, a move which contradicts his long-held antipathy (an attitude shared with the author) about his native island, which he defines as a "little bastard world" (146). As a schoolboy, Ralph had developed negative sensibility about Isabella. Ralph's vision of his country is ruthless: "To be born on an island like Isabella, an obscure New World transplantation, secondhand and barbarous, was to be born to disorder. From an early age, almost from my first lesson at school about the weight of the king's crown, I had sensed this. Now I was to discover that disorder has its own logic and permanence (141-2). He could never feel at home in his birthplace and among his family and friends. Ralph says, "I had made my decision to abandon Isabella, to eschew my shipwreck on the tropical desert island" (158). The feeling of shame and projection of self-hatred by making the native country a surrogate object of hate must have to do with colonial upbringing. N. Rama Devi notes that the novel helps the readers "to have a clear picture, yet in an embryonic form, of the maladies and evils, which are later to loom large over the postcolonial settings. They are, the tendency of the children to mimic, their eagerness to disown and escape from their past and reality and live masked and unreal lives to an extent where they conceal their real names and live with false identities, or without any identity for that matter (36).

To turn back to the author, Ralph's experiences and expressions have a strong autobiographical echo: Naipaul, as a schoolboy in Trinidad, had been hounded by similar

fears and desires. In *The Middle Passage* Naipaul remembers, "When I was in the fourth form I wrote a vow in the endpaper of my *Kennedy's Revised Latin Primer* to leave within five years. I left after six; and many years afterwards in England, falling asleep in bedsides with the electric fires on, I had been awakened by the nightmare that I was back in tropical Trinidad" (41). This paranoiac fear of being stuck in the native country tells much about the negative childhood experiences and the colonial mentality at work. Almost as a rule, most of the characters (typically of Indian origin) in Naipaul's novels—at odd with their homeland or entrapped amidst the xenophobic hostility in the aftermath of colonial withdrawal—make a journey from the third-world periphery to the metropolitan centers only to become aware of and lament about the existential and emotional cost of cultural and the other forms of dispossession. David Ormerod observes, "Naipaul's world is one of homeless nomadic migrants, making a middle passage from Africa or India to the West Indies, thence to England and back again, for, after three hundred years, there is no society or no system of values in which they can take root" (76). Because of his controversial writing, Naipaul has remained a polarizing figure: while many critics denounce him as "an exponent of the metropolitan values and ideologies," others praise him for this biting frankness and truthfulness (Rama Devi 30). The powerful depiction of diasporic sensibility out of his own experiences makes Naipaul one of the strongest voices of exile literature, and *The Mimic Men* in Ralph's voice ingeniously captures the mood of our time.

3.4 Hybridity, Mimicry, and the Colonial Self

Ralph's is a seamlessly polysemic and hyphenated identity conditioned by the historical colonial encounter. His hybridity, to borrow words from R. Radhakrishnan, is

the "deferral, differe(a)nce, and dissemination" (753). Radhakrishnan reminds us that hybridity is not a value free qualifier for the pure cultural amalgamation. It is, in effect, a condition of limbo in which the original identity is de-territorialized, the cultural self is acculturated, newly-acquired cultural self-identification is provisionally assigned through which the imbalance between the indigenous and the western remains strikingly apparent. In Radhakrishnan's view, "although avant-garde theories of hybridity would have us believe that hybridity is "subject-less," i.e., that it represents the decapitation of the subject and the permanent retirement of identitarian forms of thinking and belonging, in reality, hidden within the figurality of hybridity is the subject of the dominant West" (753). Radhakrishnan's contestation is that the very concept of hybridity is governed by the normative westernization of the indigenous self but not vice versa. This kind of hybridity, Bhabha argues, becomes the metonymical trope for self-dispersal, rather than an unproblematic closure of transformation. This explains why Ralph Singh, despite his efforts to reinvent and reinscribe his identity through his memoir is confronted with the condition of indecisiveness in the deterministic world. Unable to assign himself a fully formed and recognizable identity, he says, "We become what we see of ourselves in the eyes of others" (25). His narcissistic contemplation—symptomatic of Lacanian mirror-stage[39]—again and again gets stuck in a caricature of 'the other'. He distrusts himself, and, in a manner of self-denial, he tries to disown his Indo-Caribbean legacy and become somebody else. He ends up being a socially alienated dandy of London. Both literally and metaphorically, he drifts apart from the Caribbean, but fails to forge a meaningful

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[39] In this stage a child differentiates himself/herself from the (m)other, forms an independent ego, and enters into the world of language. By becoming too self-obsessive and by failing to interact with the external world, Ralph fails to develop his free-functioning agency and believes what others tell him that he is.

connection to the society he has arrived. Consequently, he becomes a cosmopolitan vagrant without a home, identity and a coherent sense of being. Since Ralph's subjectivity is more historically conditioned, he is more reflexive about the past and less engaged in the present, and this attitude gives raise to passivity, determinism, and escapism. Throughout his life, Ralph is led by accidental events or other peoples' interests, including his marriage and political involvement. According to Shashi Kamra "Nothing mocks the lack of politics in Trinidad more than the protagonist's accidental entry into it: by virtue of money, brains and opportunity rather than choice and commitment" (55). Because he lacks the sense of cause and commitment—originally resulting from his lack of attachment to his country and community, which, in turn, has resulted from self-stigma coming from colonial education and upbringing—whatever he does has a quality of passive role-play.

From an early age, Ralph begins to practice mimicry. When he is eight he secretly alters his name from Ranjit Kripalsingh to Ralph Ranjit Kripal Singh. It comes both as correction and corruption. He corrects his father's mistake of putting Kripal and Singh together and appropriates his name in the manner of his white classmate of French decent, Deschampneufs, who "had five apart from his last name" (113). He adopts an English first name which renders his name hybrid and signifies the gesture of mimicry, an effect of colonial education. Lillian Feder opines that Ralph "compensates for his feeling of inadequacy by changing his name" (189). It is important to note that Ralph is not an exceptional but rather a prototypical representation of the hybrid 'mimic men'. The extreme form of self-humiliation, the internalization of the inferiorizing colonial gaze, can best be seen in Ralph's friend Hock, a mulatto of Chinese and Negro blood,

who denies publicly recognizing his black mother. Ralph says, "Hock had dreams like mine, was probably also marked, and lived in imagination far from us, far from the island on which he, my father, like myself, had been shipwrecked" (117).

To put in poststructuralist terms, if language is foundational in (in)forming the (self-)consciousness and constructing the self and thereby realizing the identity—in other words, if a person's perception and comprehension of the self and other are channeled though the bipolar schema of semiotics[40]—Ralph does not have a free access to the neutral language. His language (and therefore his consciousness) is always and already contaminated by the colonial vocabulary and its system of signification. For Ralph, to be an Indo-Caribbean, for example, is not simply to be located to a geographical place, but also to carry the complex of inferior connotations it signifies. The inferiority complex inculcated by the colonial education has been so thoroughly rationalized that he can be called a post-colonial Caliban who cannot think outside the metanarratives of the colonial mythology. In Naipaul's own words, the novel is "about colonial shame and fantasy" and "about how the powerless lie about themselves, and lie to themselves, since it is their only resource…It [is] about colonial men mimicking the condition of manhood, men who had grown to distrust everything about themselves"(14).

In fact, as a colonial man, Ralph can only speak through the vocabulary of the colonizers, and his desperate exercise of self-fashioning amounts to arriving to the same

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[40] According to structural linguistics, the construction of linguistic form and meaning takes place through selection and combination of the given linguistic units. While selection is related to syntax formation, combination is related to semantic formation. According to post-structural theories of social constructionism, even consciousness cannot function outside the language because to think one has to use the given language and to use language one has to select and combine the linguistic units which are already there in the language system. Consciousness, hence, is predetermined by language. For detail please see *Social Constructionism* by Vivien Burr.

dead-end over and over again, and his writing—a gesture to understand the past (him)self from the distance—is nothing more than rendering the self into metonymical dispersal. Ralph, no doubt, is a post-colonial conveyer of colonialist ideology, but he is also a victimized subjectivity who has suddenly lost the sense of agency in the post-colonial world. He is a product of Macauley's design, whose civilizing mission was to produce "a class of interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern—a class of persons Indian in blood and color, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals and intellect" (qtd. in Bhabha 125). Ralph's sense of dislocation, in this context, has more to do with temporal dislocation than cultural and geographical ones. He, probably, would have better fitted in the colonial structure of Isabella as native elite than in the post-colonial one. Explaining Ralph's internalization of colonial ideology, John J. Su says:

> His internalization of imperialist nostalgia, to recall Rosaldo's term, leads him to perpetuate this exploitation when he himself is in power, reproducing many of the policies of his colonial predecessor. Indeed, the estate to which he longs to retire stands as a literal marker of the remnants of the colonial order and his desire to find himself occupying a central position within it. (70)

Ralph's case provides a context to Sartre's outline of the colonial education project: "The European elite set about fabricating a native elite; they selected adolescents, marked on their foreheads, with a branding iron, the principles of western culture, stuffed into their mouths verbal gags, grand turgid words which stuck to their teeth; after a brief stay in the mother country, they were sent back interfered with" (136). Although a native-born, Ralph, as a London-educated elite, is culturally alienated from his background in the Caribbean, and in London he is socially alienated to the extent that he is reduced to himself. Consequently, he more and more dwells in the internally constructed world, and there is no mediation between the world that exists outside of him and the internally

projected reality. He becomes the archetypal victim of colonialism with a distorted sense of reality. Fanon, in this regard, explains, "Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grips and emptying the natives brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of oppressed people and distorts, disfigures and destroys it" (132). Typically, Ralph maintains a deliberate silence when it comes to talking about colonialism and its tyrannies in Isabella and elsewhere, but his narrative provides a fertile ground to read the novel against the grain. As the title of the novel suggests, the 'mimic man', represented through the character of Ralph Singh, illustrates the long-term psychological consequences of the western cultural hegemony during the colonial and post-/neo-colonial times. What makes Ralph's case in *The Mimic Men* specifically significant is not only that his story provides a close glimpse into the pathetic human condition caused by colonial encounter, but his story also offers a ground to study the complexities of cultural transition and transformation in the age of mass migration.

EPILOGUE: METACOGNITIVE REFLECTION

Reader, before I delve into the theoretical exegesis to wrap my writing, allow me to introduce John, a new character, whom I have seen almost everyday this last semester. He is a twenty-two-year-old American, born to an Iranian father and an American mother. John has been unbelievably closer to me during the past few months. Like a person you have known for years, he mostly resorts to imperative sentences and profanities. If it had been my first semester, I would surely have avoided him and locked myself indoors, as I used to do. After all, we have many differences age-wise and otherwise. An outgoing and party-loving young American and a student of business would not find much to share with me (well, that is how I used to think), but we have gotten along very well, and every evening he comes to our apartment and literally drags me out of my den.

"Get out of here. Take the fresh air. Take some rest. Don't mess up your writing by overdoing it. Let's watch a movie tonight," he says.

John had first come as one of my roommate's friend, and soon he became attached to all of us. He has little passion to read the entire piece I have written.

But, everyday, he also reads some sentences over my shoulder and comments: "Oh, that's funny!" or "Did that really happen?"

"Why do you have to use the 'flashy' language?" he asks.

John knows what I am writing is something that incorporates my personal experiences and, therefore, demands his place in it. As a supportive friend, John rightfully deserves his place in the 'acknowledgements', but I had not imagined he would jump into the body text. A few days ago—on December 26, 2009, to be specific—John and I had a dramatic verbal war, and the contextual relevance of the event prompted me to begin the conclusion by introducing him. As always, John read a few lines from my paper, but this time, he seriously challenged my writing.

"Hey, let me tell you what, all you have written is crap. Home this, home that. Always bitching and whining! Why do you stay in America if you miss your home so much and if you have nothing good to write about America?" he yelled.

I was stunned and wordless for a moment. Talking about Khomeini's fatwa on Rushdie, V.S. Naipaul had described it as an extreme form of literary criticism, and, to me, John's was a severe form of literary criticism.

I wanted to provoke him to listen to what more he had to say.

After thinking for a while, I said to him, "John, that's typically an American way to respond to the immigrant experience."

"Crap! Why do people die to come here then—if Americans are inhospitable to them?" he asked.

"So, you think what I have written has no value? Why don't you try to put your feet in my shoes and walk on the foreign land as I do?" I asked.

"Listen, I understand you miss your home, but why do keep on telling the same bullshit? Why don't you write how America has made you a different person, and how this country has offered you opportunities? You came here to study, and you're about to

complete it. Is that not a big achievement? Imagine the excitement of meeting your wife after so many years as a graduate. Think about the readers; won't they feel hurt if you keep on saying you miss home because it was good and America is a nasty place to be?"

Indeed. I have to emphatically mention that my experience in America has not been monolithically sad. Nor do I carry a prejudiced view about this country and its both complex and diverse socio-cultural setting. More than anything else, the main—and academically significant—purpose of my thesis is to analyze how an individual deals with the sudden changes when s/he leaves his/her comfort zone for social or political reasons and arrives to a different location with different cultural milieus. In fact, migration—short-distance or long-distance, brief or lifelong—is a transhistorical process, but we have come to a unique age in which global migration is rapidly altering the ethno-demographical composition of the world, which had remained relatively stable for many centuries. Due to the technological advancements and growing proximity, more and more people are leaving their rooted ancestral homes and becoming part of transnational communities. However real and essential, this process, inaugurated by European colonialism across the continents, also has its negative repercussions on both individual and social levels. Throughout history, a large corpus of literature has been written on this common human experience, and the escalation of the migratory process in our age has been reflected in the growth of writing on migration, exile and diaspora. Today, migration and trans-, multi-, and cross-cultural studies have become the important areas of literary studies in the academy.

The relevance of any great literature lies in its ability to record the circumstances and to capture the collective mood and consciousness of the time. *The Mimic Men*, for

example, poignantly records the political turmoil of a symbolic third-world nation and the predicaments of an individual, which can be read as an "existential allegory of the modern man" (Rama Devi 31). Although on the micro scale, my thesis tries to capture my personal experience of my move from an unknown village to the metropolitan center. The process has never been easy, but if I had never left home, I would not have developed broader understanding of human cultures and natures. I would not have been able to stand aside and conduct a comparative analysis of two different societies I have lived in. Most importantly, I would not have had the opportunity to rediscover myself in different circumstances and, thereby, enforce necessary changes in my monocultural convictions and conducts. As I have mentioned in the Prelude, "[t]he interactive process of studying the self by its textualization and the text by its personalization, I believe, is one of the innovative strengths of this thesis" (5). What I have learned from this interactive study is that one has to move forward by negotiating between the past and present, for negotiation is the best option for an exile to come to terms with the changes, to live as a happy amphibian, and to move between two cultural spaces as a cultural intermediator. In *The Mimic Men*, Ralph Singh tries to disown his past, which amounts to self-erasure, and leads him to rootlessness. His lack of sense of bond to his native country and culture renders him a person without identity. Likewise, I have to confess that my tendency hitherto has been to belittle the present and grieve about the lost glories of the past. Certainly, one cannot and should not forget the background from which one has emerged, but one should not be trapped in the past either. Moreover, the past does not wait for a person in the doors of the future. To borrow words from L. P. Hartley in *The Go-Between*, "The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there (17). We

may yearn for our home in that foreign country, but that would remain only an unfulfilled nostalgia. This is why Thomas Wolfe in *You Can't Go Home Again* writes:

> --but…you can't go back home again...You can't go back home to your family, back home to your childhood...to one's youthful idea of..."art" and "beauty" and "love," back home to the ivory tower...back home to someone who can help you, save you, ease the burden for you, back home to the old forms and systems of the things which once seemed everlasting but which are changing all the time—back home to the escape of Time and Memory. (666)

Like people, places carry the marks of changing time on their faces. However I pine for home, the home I will visit again will not be the one I had left behind. Chances are I will find myself as an outsider in my village, and chances are I will get the second wave of cultural shock in my own country, the way Adorno did when he returned to Germany after his exile in America from 1938 to 1953. Changes, albeit imperceptible, are inevitable in life. With the passage of time, I have learned to better appreciate the American way of life and get involved into it. I have come to realize that because exile has become my essential living condition, I have no option but to negotiate and make the best out of it. Grown up in a repressive feudalistic society, which valued silence as a virtue, I was first shocked by the American outspokenness. I used to spend alienated mute hours in the classes and regret not to have spoken a word on my favorite topic of discussion. Now, I spend many hours with my friends in the bars and talk in English with great ease. I have grown to value my life in exile as a privilege. I see my life as a gradual move from idyllic innocence to the postmodern condition and consciousness.

I agree with Lewis and Cho that "[w]ith the postmodern massification, transnational migrations, and the ubiquitous standardization of suburban sprawl, the grounds for the modern, bourgeois subject's constitution are no longer safeguarded," but I cannot claim to have already transcended the bourgeois nostalgia for the sweet home

and to have internalized the postmodern aesthetics of nomadic homelessness, which futuristic theorist like Deleuze and Gauattari enthusiastically celebrate as an essential condition for liberation (70). What I know, however, is that with the massive urbanization in late capitalism, the conventional concepts of home, family, and society have gone through rapid—and even traumatic—transformation. The cosmopolitan city, where Ralph Singh pursues god in vain and becomes disillusioned, has emerged as a deconstructed and deterritorialized home of the nomads and cyberpunks. The postmodern city, according to Fredrick Jameson, "is a space of dirty realism as a collective built space, in which the opposition between the inside and outside is annulled" (qtd. in Lewis and Cho 86). Since changes are inevitable in the evolutionary process, and certain aspects of life are irreversibly lost in the birth of new epochs, we have no option, but to move with the flow of time.

As for the double consciousness, I have learned that if channeled productively, it also comes as double knowledge, an asset like bilingualism. This is why Doris Sommer says, "Double consciousness may be our best cultural safeguard for democratic practice, because doubleness won't allow the meanness of one thought, one striving, one measure of value (165). Double consciousness, is not always a disabling entrapment between the two; it can also liberate a person "by pointing to the hybridity that has always been internal to the cultures of the world; it can also trouble the ossified notions of nationality and ethnicity" (Dayal 53). With double consciousness, I can make myself a better cross-cultural interlocutor.

Certainly, retrogressive isolationism is not a viable option in life. I would like to use Ralph's words to underline my conclusion: "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 (300). I do not claim to have reached to the state of transcendental enlightenment, beyond conflicts and tensions, but with this research, I have arrived to assert my role and agency in the making of a new age. Soon, I am leaving my academic habitat in Pueblo, and I am sure I will be missing the great friends and academics I have found here. I had never lived in a place away from home culture for such a long time.

Reader, I would like to thank you for your time and patience in reading.

Pradeep Paudel

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