

CHAPTER THREE

READING HYBRIDITY: *THE SUFFRAGE OF ELVIRA*
AND *A HOUSE FOR MR BISWAS*

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

(Naipaul *A House for Mr Biswas* 128)

Postcolonial theories of hybridity do away with the old dichotomy of colonizer/colonized, which is substituted by ideas of multiplicity, plurality, and difference in a less specifiable way....They all aim to privilege agency in the struggle against assimilation or homogenization. (Anjali Prabhu, *Hybridity* xiii)

Hybridity is making one of two distinct things....Hybridization can also consist of the forcing of a single entity into two or more parts, a severing of a single object in two, turning sameness into difference....Hybridity thus makes difference into sameness, and sameness into difference, but in a way that makes the same no longer the same, the different no longer simply different....Hybridity thus consists of a bizarre binate operation, in which each impulse is qualified against the other, forcing momentary forms of dislocation and displacement into complex economies of agonistic reticulation. (Robert Young, "The Cultural Politics of Hybridity" 158)

Postcolonial diaspora narratives demonstrate the nostalgia for their distant homelands and their quest to retain their racial and ethnic identity in a hybridized world. Naipaul's work deals with displacement and homelessness resulting from diasporic movements. The aim of this chapter is to examine how westernization, acculturation and a continuous process of hybridization lead to crises of identity and disintegration of Indian migrants in *The Suffrage of Elvira* (1958) and *A House for Mr Biswas* (1961). Both the novels portray the life worlds of Indian immigrants under the influence of new and alien cultures, leading to 'mimicry' and 'hybridity.'

Different disciplines have addressed issues of identity in various ways. Concepts of identity have also changed dramatically over time. It is no longer a stable given but subject to agency and interpretation. In the words of Stuart Hall (2003):

In common sense language, identification is constructed on the back of a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established in its foundation....Though not without its determinate conditions of existence, including the material and symbolic resources required to sustain it, identification is in the end conditional, lodged in contingency. (*Identity: A Reader* 16-17)

Identity implies an idea of sameness, coherence, continuity. However, identifying sameness, coherence also requires difference. It requires tracing the outline of boundary and also classifying insiders from outsiders. Therefore, it is not only similarity but also difference that is required in the formation of identity. Thus, identity is based on comparison and it is relational not absolute.

The postcolonial discourse of identity questions stable points of reference and acknowledges the destabilization and fragmentation affecting the concept of identity. It rests on the exclusion of the other, other individuals and other identity groups. Difference is always considered a potential threat to its stability. The postmodern notion of identity is one that decentres the individual. The decentred subject is perceived as multifaceted and contradictory. Hence, identity is no longer viewed as singular and stable, but rather as plural and mutable. It is based on difference, on comparison: it is relational not absolute. It is a social construction. As observed by Rutherford in *Identity, Community, Culture*:

We can use the word difference as a motif for that uprooting of certainty. It represents an experience of change, transformation and hybridity, in vogue because it acts as a focus for all those complementary fears, anxieties, confusions and arguments that accompany change. But... it can be a jumping-off point for assembling new practices and languages, pulling together a diversity of theories, politics, cultural experiences and identities into new alliances and movements. Such a politics wouldn't need to subsume identities into an underlying totality that assumes their ultimately homogeneous nature. Rather it is a critique of

essentialism and mono-culturalism, asserting the unfixed and 'overdetermined' character of identities. The cultural politics of difference recognizes both the interdependent and relational nature of identities, their elements of incommensurability and their political right of autonomy. (10)

Identity is neither essential, immutable or independent. It is open to change as strategies, circumstances fluctuate. Identities are never unified, finalized, fixed. Rather, it is emergent, always evolving. It is a process not a finished product. As pointed out by Rutherford, elements of incommensurability are obtained in identity or identities.

In multicultural societies, hybridity implies mingling of diverse and discrete ways of living. This blending of opposites calls into question certainties of cultural purity. In *Culture and Imperialism* Edward Said comments: "Far from being unitary or monolithic or autonomous things, cultures actually assume more 'foreign' elements, alterities, differences, than they consciously exclude" (15). So, from cultural hybridity we move towards "culture's *hybridity*" (Bhabha). Cultural hybridity challenges the very foundation of polarized identities. Postcolonial writers use hybridity as an anticolonial tool in examining culture and identity. Hybridity questions the essential modes of identity formation. The assimilating strategies of hybridity negate the inequality of power relations or the strict hierarchical nature of the colonial process. In a way hybridity problematises boundaries fixed in the process of constructing identities. It consists of border crossings, exchanges, negotiations. It also implies an unsettling of identities. The concept of hybridity occupies a central place in postcolonial discourse. In such discourse, fixity of identity and purity of culture are always questioned through continuous process of cultural negotiation.

Hybridity can take many forms including cultural, linguistic, racial etc. The concept of hybridity overshadows the specificities of distinct cultural situations and refers to the creation of new transcultural forms in an indeterminate space. Hybridity emphasizes interrelations of culture that diminishes oppositionality and suggests cross-cultural interchange. In the postcolonial discourse, the concept of identity as stable and monolithic is replaced by a pluralistic and hybridised one. Bhabha posits identity as a form of liminal or in-between space. In *The Location of Culture* (1994) Bhabha argues that "it is the 'inter'- the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between space - that carries the meaning of culture" (38). It is the indeterminate subject positions that

negates essential cultural practices. This space questions monolithic concepts of identity and purity and distinctiveness in culture. This space “constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity...”(37). It is a space that calls into question the inherent originality or ‘purity’ of cultures and engenders new possibilities. Thus, the notion of hybridity questions ‘purity’ and originality of culture. Bhabha further argues that the Third Space “may open the way to conceptualizing an *international* culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture’s *hybridity*” (38). Thus, Bhabha’s theory proceeds from multiculturalism to hybridity, from cultural hybridity to culture’s hybridity. Cultural identity is produced in the contradictory space of *in-betweenness* which always stresses on the interconnection of cultures and reciprocal construction of subjectivities.

Hybridity reevaluates the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects. Bhabha argues that this discriminatory effects of the discourse of cultural colonialism donot simply refer to “a dialectical power struggle between self and other, or to a discrimination between mother culture and alien cultures” (111). Rather it implies “a discrimination between the mother culture and its bastards, the self and its doubles...” (111). Thus, hybridity can be viewed as a process of *transculturation* of cultures of both the colonizer and the colonized.

Hybridity cannot be simply defined as a peaceful resolution of conflicts between cultures. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha writes: “The display of hybridity...terrorizes authority with the *ruse* of recognition, its mimicry and mockery” (115). He also argues that hybridity is not “a third term that resolves the tension between two cultures...”(113). It embodies negotiation of ideas, influences, energies which challenge any monolithic notions of identity. The inner workings of energies and counter-energies produce multiple meanings that questions the authority of any dominant discourse. Hybridity implies a doubleness—a curious interweaving of antagonism and coalescence. It reveals the fluidity of both the dominant and the dominated.

Frantz Fanon argues that the colonial encounter gives birth to a psychological dependancy among the colonized subjects in their futile attempt to become ‘white’. They take on western values, religion and practices of the white man and reject their own

culture. In Fanon's phrase, the native puts on 'white masks'. However, this 'mask' over the black skin is not a perfect solution or suitable.

In recent postcolonial studies, the concept of hybridity is an influential one. In *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, Ashcroft *et al* comment:

Most post-colonial writing has concerned itself with the hybridised nature of post-colonial culture as strength rather than a weakness. Such writing focuses on the fact that the transaction of the post-colonial world is not a one-way process in which oppression obliterates the oppressed or the coloniser silences the colonised in absolute terms. In practice it rather stresses the mutuality of the process. (137)

Bhabha suggests that hybridity is the necessary attribute of the colonial condition. He offers an analysis of ambivalent colonizer/colonized relations and the mutual construction of their subjectivities. For Fanon, the notion of mimicry is a sign of inferiority and powerlessness of the colonized. But for Bhabha mimicry is active resistance. It poses a "threat to both 'normalized' knowledges and disciplinary powers" (86). He also argues that "mimicry is at once resemblance and menace" (86). Bhabha's idea of 'mimicry' is connected with his concept of hybridity. Bhabha says that the "effect of mimicry on the authority of colonial discourse is profound and disturbing" (86). He further explains colonial mimicry as "the desire for a reformed, recognisable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite.*" (86) He also comments that:

the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference. The authority of that mode of colonial discourse that I have called mimicry is therefore stricken by an indeterminacy: mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal. (86)

Bhabha also shows how, in the colonial encounter, the native becomes Anglicised through Western education. This Anglicised native is prepared to behave like a white man. But, the native becomes a mimic man as he is never fully and truly white. This mimic man is "the effect of a flawed colonial mimesis, in which to be Anglicized is emphatically not to be English". (Bhabha 87). This Anglicised English is not distinctly

English. Thus, mimicry is sought through western education, religion where the native people are habituated to follow the white man and his culture.

Discussing hybridity, Prabhu observes that:

the most productive theories of hybridity are those that effectively balance the task of inscribing a functional-instrumental version of the relation between culture and society with that of enabling the more utopian/collective image of society. Privileging what is hybrid in today's world cannot, even parenthetically, leave out the moment of capitalism in which such a view is offered—a moment that invites and, indeed, celebrates the hybrid through heterogeneity, multiplicity, and difference. (2)

If hybridity flourishes in the contemporary world, it cannot be seen apart from the capitalism which encourages it. Prabhu goes on to observe that

In privileging subaltern agency, these theories simultaneously suggest that hybridity is a positive, resistive force to cultural hegemony. What is less obvious is the ways in which such cultural resistance is tied to other types of social resistance to economic oppression. (7)

Naipaul's work addresses constant processes of negotiation in diasporic subject formation. Such cross-cultural negotiations produce hyphenated identities. Naipaul's fiction deals with postcolonial displacement and homelessness resulting from diverse diasporic movements. His novels explore new cultural negotiations resulting from multicultural mixing of displaced individuals in changed geographical and cultural space. As these people are displaced from their homeland, their pasts can be revisited and realized only in partial and fragmented ways. In a diasporic situation, 'Home' and 'Abroad' are mingled in s no longer remain merely as fixed geographical locations. It is also important to note that as only the first generation diasporas have direct experience of displacement as a result of migration, the sense of alienation they encounter is more intense than their next generations. The later generations of diasporas *may* not feel the same eattachment with the homeland of their ancestors. *The Suffrage of Elvira*, shows how politics in Elvira is mixed with racism, religion, superstition and greed. Exploitation, corruption, bribery, tricks and cunning are well defined in this novel. It examines the "crazily mixed up" socio cultural situation in multi-racial Elvira. The loss

of ancestral homeland leaves these characters alienated as they do not belong to the original homeland and at the same time cannot feel 'at home' in the new territory. But in spite of their physical separation from India, they continue to retain their past beliefs, customs and traditions. In the novel, they attempt to cling to their past ways of living. However, they are also seen in their attempts to assimilate with the new environment.

Elvira is a place where there is a mixture of different people from different races, cultures and religions. Throughout the novel there are examples of religious hybridization. The characters express both resistance and acceptance so far as the process of assimilation is concerned. There is both religious rigidity and fluidity in the novel as it shows how the East Indians negotiate their religious identity in the multicultural world of Elvira. It is seen that the Muslim couple Mr and Mrs Baksh chose "alternate Christian and Muslim names for their children": Iqbal, Herbert, Rafiq and Charles (22). Pundit Dhaniram, the Hindu priest, who had been educated at a Presbyterian school of the Canadian Mission, often "found himself humming Hymns like 'Jesus loves me, yes, I know'"(53). This synthesis of Hindu and Christian elements indicates the multiple religious affiliations of the East Indians. It also expresses the dilemma of living in a state of involuntary exile.

Exiles always have to negotiate between two polarities – former homeland and the new territory. While they are strongly drawn towards their lost homeland, they are also no less drawn towards the adopted country. In the words of Said:

For an exile, habits of life, expression, or activity in the new environment inevitably occur against the memory of these things in another environment. Thus both the new and old environments are vivid, actual, occurring together contrapuntally....Exile is never the state of being satisfied, placid, or secure.
(*Reflections* 186)

Thus, the state of exile creates a sense of restlessness among the displaced individuals because of their attempt to retain ethnic identity in terms of the original country, while simultaneously seeking recognition and assimilation in the newly adopted one.

In the multiracial world of Elvira, people from different cultural backgrounds live together. On the one hand they had to allow themselves to be a part of the assimilation

process. On the other hand, they also try to restore their cultural identity. There is both resistance and acceptance. The characters have to play different roles in their public life. As Lloyd Best, two years junior to Vidia at QRC (Queen's Royal College), points out:

The most important single feature of Trinidadian culture is the extent in which masks are indispensable, because there are so many different cultures and ethnicities in this country that people have to play a vast multiplicity of roles, each of which has got its own mask depending on where they are. It's true of the whole Caribbean, and Trinidad is the extreme case in my view. (quoted in French 53)

In this novel, Naipaul criticizes colonial mimicry and colonial politics in Elvira. He makes a mockery of the D.M.O in this way: "The D.M.O was a young Indian with a handsome dissipated face. He hadn't forgotten his association with England and continued to wear a Harris tweed jacket, despite the heat" (196). Baksh, a Muslim tailor and the leader of the Muslims in Elvira, "kept designs of Californian-style houses from American magazines to show the house he wanted"(13). Such metropolitan fantasy can bring no fulfillment as the impoverished and unorganized society fails to offer any real alternatives for its inhabitants to achieve success and meaning in life.

Lorkhoor is another interesting example of mimicry who

had grown the moustache after seeing a film with the Mexican actor, Pedro Armendariz. In the film Armendariz spoke American with an occasional savage outburst in Spanish, it was the Spanish outbursts that thrilled Lorkhoor. Teacher Francis loyally if sorrowfully agreed that the moustache made Lorkhoor look like the Mexican, but Lorkhoor's enemies thought otherwise. Foam called Lorkhoor Fu-Manchu, that was how Mr. Cuffy thought of him too. (75)

Lorkhoor for all his stunts and fancies, liked to project himself as the village intellectual. During election time he went around exhorting the people to stand united irrespective of race or religion and vote for Preacher, the candidate for whom he was acting as campaign manager. At other times his insistence on speaking correct English made him look like an outsider and added to his unpopularity. His aping of the Mexican actor's mannerisms made him the butt of further ridicule amongst the people of Elvira. When he spoke English like that outside Elvira, people "thought him to be a tourist;

because he spoke correct English they thought he came from Bombay” (76). Besides, his practice of speaking English with correct pronunciation becomes ludicrous when he addresses Mr Cuffy as “Mr Coffee,” Mr Cuffy frowns upon Lorkhoor and says: “I is not something you does drink, sir”(76). Humour apart, Naipaul tries to underline the futility of colonial mimicry in those situations. Further, as pointed out by Prabhu, hybridity allows for “the inscription of the agency of the subaltern” (*Hybridity*1). By bringing in the motley crew from Elvira, Naipaul appears to make space for such agency.

To return to the elections in Elvira, it is seen that they have all kinds of effects on the people. If some suspect that unscrupulous agents were practicing *obeah* on the others, more pragmatic people like Mrs. Baksh keep warning her husband and son, Foam, about the election, saying that all the sweetness of election in the beginning will turn sour in the end: “Everybody just washing their foot and jumping in the democracy business. But I promising you for all the sweet, it begin sweet it going to end damn sour” (*SE* 40). She continues with her warnings “Is this election sweetness that sweeten you up so. And now you seeing how sour it turning” (*SE* 72). Like her there were others who have no faith in elections. One white woman describes it as a man-made evil. Others like Harichand the printer were ready to negotiate: “If you want my vote, you want my printer” (82). And so it goes on, engaging everybody’s attention whether they like it or not. What is significant about the elections in Elvira is that it brings out people and their assorted cultures into public focus.

Despite Lorkhoor’s attempts to unite the people for the elections, the opposing candidate, race and religion still manage to play an important role. Harbans goes to meet Baksh, the leader of the Muslim voters. Elvira is an isolated and impoverished locality where people are guided by superstitious ignorance. Here, Naipaul offers a bleak vision of politics and politicians. In this connection Coovadia comments: “Almost no question of political ideology arises in the course of the election campaign. Since no community is predominant, candidates attempt to build coalitions across religious and racial lines by promising rewards to the various communities” (*Authority and Authorship in VS Naipaul* 99). Throughout the election, politicians are motivated by trickery and opportunism. Cultural understanding of each other is pushed aside by unscrupulous people who make weird allegations against the other candidate and his supporters. This is seen in the tension between Foam (the agent for Harbans) and Lorkhoor (the agent for Preacher). This, however is crucial to the elections as each faction presses for advantage.

The ethno-religious profiling continues even after the elections as people want gratification for their votes. They had helped to elect Harbans and been promised some whiskey in return. However, as the members of Harbans' campaign committee try to renege on the deal, unrest spreads amongst the common people. Under pressure Harbans offers ten cases of whiskey but Chittaranjan turns the tables on the people and asks them what they have to offer their elected member. He says:

‘Most of you is Hindus. Mr. Harbans is a Hindu. He win a election. You should be giving him something. You should be saying prayers for him....Say a *Kattha* for him.’(232)

This is greeted by silence and confusion till someone (Rampiari's husband) points out that it would cost a lot of money. At that Harbans gets up to speak:

‘Ooh Goldsmith. If they want to honour me with a *kattha*, we must let them....Ooh. Tell you what, eh good people of Elvira. Make a little collection among yourself fust.’ The crowd was too astonished to protest. Only Haq staggered up and said, ‘Why for we should make a collection for a Hindu *kattha* ? We is Muslims.’ (233)

As the dissent continues Haq says:

‘Muslims vote for Harbans too. What happen? They stop counting Muslim vote these days?’ ‘All right,’ Harbans cooed. ‘All you Muslim make your collection for your collection for your *kitab*. And for every dollar you put, I go put one. Eh? Then somebody else leapt up and asked what about the Christians. (234)

This is followed by utter chaos but finally when it calmed down a little, a few decisions were taken:

The people of Elvira were to get religious consolation. The Muslims were to get their *kitab*, the Hindus their *kattha*, the Christians their service. But nobody was really pleased. (235)

Harbans' attempts at pacifying the people post election do not have the desired results as his new Jaguar is burnt down on the streets. The crowd anger is however not contained along communal lines. They are angry with politics and politicians and they hit out at

each other for a while. At other times the mixed community of Elvira thrives amidst its cultural diversity.

As if to highlight this aspect of life on Elvira, Naipaul observes:

Things were crazily mixed up in Elvira. Everybody, Hindus, Muslims and Christians, owned a Bible; the Hindus and Muslims looking on it, if anything, with greater awe. Hindus and Muslims celebrated Christmas and Easter. The Spaniards and some of the Negroes celebrated the Hindu festival of lights. Someone had told them that Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity, was being honoured; they placed small earthen lamps on their money boxes and waited, as they said, for the money to breed. Everybody celebrated the Muslim festival of Hosein. In fact when Elvira was done with religious festivals, there were few straight days left. (74)

In Elvira, people take part in different religious festivals regardless of their own religious affiliation. These are the people who were being called upon to vote without discriminating on grounds of race or religion. That notwithstanding hybridity opens up possibilities of alternative thought, contradictory beliefs, ideas and values.

In *The Suffrage of Elvira*, it is seen while some characters are caught up in their hybrid island culture, others manage to achieve a kind of balance and avoid mimicry. Chittaranjan's daughter Nelly is able to free herself from the limited and confined world of her father. She is able to arrive at a synthesis between the orthodox Hindu world of her father and the liberal modern world. Her negotiation between the two worlds is nicely highlighted at the end of the novel:

In September of that year she [Nelly] went to London and joined the Regent Street Polytechnic. She went to all the dances and enjoyed them. She sent home presents that Christmas, an umbrella for her father, and a set of four china birds for her mother. The birds flew on the wall next to the picture of Mahatma Gandhi and King George V. The umbrella became part of Chittaranjan's visiting outfit. (240)

Contrary to parental expectations, Nelly did not want to settle down in marriage. She was happy to pursue her education in London and stretch her wings. Her Christmas presents to her parents are indicative of her widening outlook. Naipaul informs that the china

birds she had sent her mother shared wall space with pictures of Gandhi and the King of the British Empire. The two pictures in Chittaranjan's sitting room represent the East and the West. Nelly's gift to her father, the umbrella, as part of his 'visiting outfit' is obviously reminiscent of the English gentleman.

The colonized subject adapts and appropriates the language of the colonizer that it challenges. This process of appropriation challenges certainty and authenticity of the English language. It questions grammatically consistent Standard English. It is adapted, modified and even distorted. In the novel, the colonized subjects are placed in an *in-between* position. As users of English, they appropriate the usage of 'standard' English to make it suitable in their own context. Language is bound to change. In the performance level, the rigid theoretical norms of language are challenged.

The placing of the anglicized colonized subject in an *in-between* position, opens up further scope for cultural hybridity and layering of experience and expressions. Hybridity in language reflects the hybridized and textual nature of colonial experience. It also implies the mutual transformation of cultures of both the colonizer and the colonized. So, it can be argued that the colonial encounter is not a unidirectional process. As pointed out by Ashcroft *et al* "[T]he appropriation and reconstitution of the language of the centre, the process of capturing and remoulding the language to new usages, marks a separation from the site of colonial privilege" (37). It follows that the colonial process is full of contradictions and ambivalence. When the English language is adapted and made suitable to express their multifaceted experiences it loses some of its originality and authenticity, its cogent and coherent structures. This process of appropriation in turn carries a sense of instability.

In the novel, the name of the character "Lutchman" seems to be the anglicized form of Indian name "Laxman". In Naipaul, the anglicized name is often viewed as a sign of mimicry so far as the colonized subject is concerned. In this connection, Patrick French in *The World Is What It Is*, points out a different kind of historical evidence which is related to the history of the Indian indentured labourers during the period of British empire. French writes that the registering officer who recorded the names of the Indian migrant might have anglicized the names due to lack of standard transliterations for Indian names. He notes:

Each migrant would sign or thumbprint a document agreeing to be indentured. Their names were written down as they spoke them, since there were no standard transliterations for Indian names, the spelling might indicate the regional pronunciation of the speaker or the ignorance of the registering officer. To someone with a knowledge of Indian names, these transliterations now seem bizarre and anglicized: thus (some of these guesswork) Lutchman was Laxman, Beharry was Bihari, Gopaul was Gopal, Permanand was Prem Anand, Teeluck was Tilak, Ramkissoon was Ram Krishna, Sammy was Swami, Gobin was Govinda, Capildeo was Kapil Dev and Seepersad was Shiv Prashad or Shiv Prasad. (10-11)

What French points out is interesting, as it is not just the casual documentation of names and their loss through linguistic misunderstanding at the immigration counter. It is also the beginning of new family genealogies instituted through those carelessly recorded names of Indians bound for the West Indies.

Further, the Indians were from different parts of the country and spoke different languages to the extent of not understanding each other as they were ‘mustered’ along and placed aboard ship. French observes as much:

The recruits were mustered at a high-walled depot...fed, inspected for disease and given clothes and a red woolen hat for the sea voyage. Often they would not understand each other, speakers of Marathi, Kashmiri, Telugu, Punjabi, had no common tongue. Most single women who chose to emigrate were recruited from urban areas rather than villages....At the dock in Calcutta a registering officer, usually a junior magistrate, recorded the migrant’s name, sex, caste, village and occupation. It was a casual act of lasting significance: the name written in roman script probably for the first time, would provide a label for their descendents. (10)

It follows that hybridity amongst the East Indians in the West Indies was not necessarily a consequence of their settlement in the new land far across the ocean. They were already a mixed lot, speaking languages they could no longer communicate with on the long sea voyage. It was as if with a new version of their Indian vernacular names they had enlisted on their way to a new life and culture, sure to contain multiple threads that would in time be woven into hybridity.

The fusion of Trinidadian English and 'Standard' English bears implication of the tensional relationship between the cultures of the colonizer and the colonized. The words which remain untranslated in the novel carry a cultural identity. The co-existence of standard English and English variants indicate the co-presence of the colonizer and the colonized. The use of such English variants has a metonymic function in the ambivalent cultural space of the erstwhile colonies. It implies the mutual presence of both the colonizer and the colonized culture. The interweaving of 'standard' English and Trinidadian dialect indicates the interaction and mutual transformation of the colonizer and the colonized. Such linguistic hybridity reveals the complexity of the colonized society with a variety of cultural influence.

The linguistic multiplicity symbolizes the complexity of multi-racial and multicultural Elvira with a long history of colonialism. The violation and distortion of theoretical norms of language can be viewed as a reflection of concrete alterations in the material reality of the colonized. The language variants contradict the apparent coherence, uniformity and authenticity of language. It also demonstrates the multifaceted and hybridized nature of postcolonial reality. Instead of one absolute meaning, it produces multiple meanings. Thus, diversity replaces the authenticity of postcolonial experience. Instead of viewing such linguistic hybridity as a strategic assimilation of colonizer and the colonized; we can consider it as negotiation and transaction of multiplicities whereby meaning and reality are endlessly deferred. The placing of 'standard' English and its variants side by side demonstrates the co-existence of different cultural codes which raises doubts about the apparent uniformity and authenticity of both languages and cultures. Ashcroft *et al* argue that

the syncretic and hybridized nature of postcolonial experience refutes the privileged position of a standard code in the language and any monocentric view of human experience. At the same time, however, it also refutes the notions that often attract post-colonial critics: that cultural practices can return to some 'pure' and unsullied cultural condition, and that such practices themselves, such as the use of vernacular terms or grammatical forms in English literature, can embody such an authenticity. (*Empire* 40-41)

In the novel, the narrator and the characters use different languages. The few words which remain untranslated in the text foreground cultural distinctions. Words like

doolahin, maharajin, roti, obeah, jharay, puja, kitab, kattha etc. remain in the text untranslated which stand for cultural significance of the different groups.

The English language is transformed by numerous strategies of appropriation adopted by postcolonial writers. As Ashcroft *et al* argue:

Such strategies enable the writer to gain a world audience and yet produce a culturally distinct, culturally appropriate idiom that announces itself as different even though it is 'English'. In this way post-colonial writers have contributed to the transformation of English literature and to the dismantling of those ideological assumptions that have buttressed the canon of that literature as an elite Western discourse. (*Empire* 76)

In the novel the narrator comments in 'standard' English and the characters use Trinidadian dialect. This intermixing of Standard English and Trinidadian English constantly undermines the notions of essence and authenticity of language. It also foregrounds the hybridized nature of postcolonial society.

The mixed language that the characters in *The Suffrage of Elvira*, speak is somewhat like the Trinidadian English. When Dhaniram's abandoned daughter-in-law leaves his house he is more worried about who would look after his household than about her. Being a Brahmin he could not take on a non-Brahmin to cook his food or take care of the daily chores.

When Dhaniram and Preacher left the room they were met by Chittaranjan. Dhaniram almost fell on Chittaranjan's shoulder, because he had to stoop to embrace him.

'You overdoing this thing, you know, Dhaniram,' Chittaranjan said. 'You ain't fooling nobody.'

'She gone, Goldsmith,' Dhaniram sobbed. 'She gone.'

'Who gone, Dhaniram?'

'The *doolahin* gone, Goldsmith. She run away with Lorkhoor.'

'Come, sit down and drink some coffee.'

'She take up she clothes and she jewellery and she gone. She gone, Goldsmith. Now it ain't have nobody to look after me or the old lady.' (203-204)

In the passage the “linguistic multiplicity outlines both the complexity of the society and the complexity of a language in the process of formation” (*Empire* 74). Dhaniram still refers to his daughter-in-law as *doolahin* which is a corrupt version of the hindi *dulhan*, meaning bride. All the Indian words in their new versions—*kattha*, meaning recital of Hindu religious texts, *kitab*, referring to the Quran, to name a few—show that these settlers in the West Indies still cling to traces of their original cultural ancestry. Further his determination to hold on to his ‘Brahmin’ purity or superiority in the new world of the West Indies appears weird and a little pathetic. The juxtaposition of standard ‘code’ of English and its reconstituted and appropriated usage foregrounds the discursive social world of the colonized. It also reveals their crisis of identity and a special kind of psychological insufficiency in their social lives.

The changes that have come to the Hindu world order are clearly hinted in the novel. The advent of modernity in Trinidad led to dilution of some orthodox Hindu traditions. Dhaniram expresses his suspicion about Nelly, a Hindu girl, for her modern attitudes.

‘In the old days,’ Dhaniram said, talking about Nelly, and sounding Harbans further, ‘you coulda trust a Hindu girl. Now everything getting modern and mix up. Look, Harichand tell me just the other day that he went to San Fernando and went to a club place up there and he see Indian girls’—Dhaniram had begun to whisper—‘he see Indian girls openly soli-citing.’ He made the word rhyme with reciting. ‘Openly soli-citing, man.’ (147)

Dhaniram’s attitude towards young women including his daughter-in-law is patriarchal. But there appears to be an element of salaciousness in his speculations on the sexual exploits of young Hindu girls. No traditional Indian priest would dare to openly speculate about the secret dalliances of the women of his experience. Dhaniram’s conservatism is combined with some of the less rigid codes of conduct in the Caribbean.

In the novel there is a juxtaposition of actions and attitudes of the characters and the attitudes of the narrator. This mixture of perspectives, voices, and attitudes create a space of interaction which challenges the possibility of a single perspective, an authentic voice. It also suggests the multifaceted nature of postcolonial experience. In the words of Timothy F. Weiss (1992):

The novel's double voicedness, its counterplay between the narrator's voices and attitude makes it a book that can be easily misread. The narrator pokes fun at Elvirians, yet also shares with them a sense of social malaise. He satirises their superstition, prejudice and money mindedness, yet also gives them a self critical reflex....Especially in its humour the novel partly conceals, partly reveals, an incipient social trauma; it shows a collision of forces shaping people's lives and the future of the society. (36)

The element of self criticism is interestingly most evident in Harbans as he assesses his chances in the election. Even after he wins the election he continues with his self-directed irony. He says there should be a ceiling on election expenses by any candidate, meaning he had had to open his purse in a big way. The election also brings to the fore the petty superstitions and prejudices of the people in Elvira. Like any other multiracial town, Elvira thrived on its skirmishes religious functions.

The issue of racial assimilation is also hinted in the novel. Lorkhoor campaigned for Preacher. In the campaign speeches Lorkhoor urges "unity of races and religions" of Elvira. He goes around in his loudspeaker van playing "records of Hindi songs and American songs" between his speeches (74). His speeches can be regarded as "a mixture of utopian and Marxist slogans" (Cudjoe: 48):

'People of Elvira, the fair constituency of Elvira,' Lorkhoor said. 'Unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains. Unite and cohere. Vote for the man who has lived among you, toiled among you, prayed among you, worked among you. This is the voice of the renowned and ever popular Lorkhoor begging you and urging you and imploring you and entreating you and beseeching you to vote for Preacher, the renowned and ever popular Preacher. Use your democratic rights on election day and vote one and vote all. This, good people of Elvira, is the voice of Lorkhoor.' (74)

Most Indians, Hindus and Muslims were offended with Lorkhoor for supporting and campaigning for Mr Preacher, who was a negro. On the other hand, "Preacher's negro supporters looked on him [Lorkhoor] with suspicion" (75). These things made Lorkhoor unpopular, but the interesting thing is that Lorkhoor took "pleasure in his unpopularity" (75). He wished to stand out and he did.

The novel also foregrounds a related tension between their public and private lives. There are examples of complexity and fluidity in the public life of characters. Their projection in the 'public' is viewed as a mixture of 'private' and 'public'. Aspects of the familiar indoor world are suppressed or partially presented in the 'public' which led to the construction of a hybrid subject. In the culturally alien environment of Trinidad the dispossessed individuals had to project themselves in a different way and they construct a different hybrid identity.

Nomination day came. The three candidates filled forms and paid deposits. There were only two surprises. Preacher supplied both. The first was his name, Nathaniel Anaclitus Thomas. Some people knew about the Nathaniel, but no one suspected Anaclitus. Even more surprising was Preacher's occupation, which was given on the nomination blank as simply, 'Proprietor.'

Harbans described himself as a 'Transport contractor', Baksh as a 'Merchant Tailor.' (174)

The novel also focuses on the growing tendency among the colonized towards westernization. During election, the photographs of Baksh and Harbans sprang up everywhere in Elvira where they were "promptly invested with moustaches, whiskers, spectacles and pipes" (175). After becoming a Member of the Legislative Council Harbans comes to Elvira for the case of whisky, which Ramlogan has promised the committee of the winning candidate. The "presentation" was made according to Ramlogan's style: "On the tablecloth they placed the case of whisky stenciled WHITE HORSE WHISKY PRODUCE OF SCOTLAND 12 BOTTLES. On the case of whisky they placed a small Union jack-Ramlogan's idea: he wanted to make the whole thing legal and respectable" (225). Besides, Ramlogan prepared himself in special manner.

Ramlogan prepared with the utmost elaborateness. He rubbed himself down with coconut oil; then he had a bath in lukewarm water impregnated with leaves of the neem tree; then he rubbed himself down with Canadian Healing Oil and put on his striped blue three piece suit. A handkerchief hung rather than peeped from his breast pocket. His enormous brown shoes were highly polished; he had even bought a pair of laces for them. He wore no socks and no tie. (225)

Mahadeo, a devout Hindu, did his puja every morning and evening. But gradually Hindu religious practices had become quaint and exotic in Elvira. In all his prayers now “all the ritual, the arti and bell-ringing and conch blowing... seemed in the most discouraging way to have nothing to do with what went on in Elvira...” (188). It shows how Hindu religious rites and rituals have slowly lost their importance in Elvira.

Thus, the novel shows how the Election in Elvira brings out racial and religious differences among the inhabitants. Although they are temporarily united, it cannot bring any lasting change as the residents are burdened by a borrowed culture, mimicry and psychological dependency.

A House for Mr. Biswas deals with the identity crisis of rootless Indian immigrants in the colonial world. In this novel Naipaul deals with the issues of shifting identities, dislocation, roots and changing realities of the Indian migrants in the multicultural and multiracial society of Trinidad. The Indian migrant society in Trinidad was a rootless, improvised society. The society offered no security in the present and no hope for the future. The Indians here are adrift, unanchored, dispossessed with no alternative to escape. In the words of Harish Trivedi (2008):

The Indian girmityas may have no longer lived in India but that had not erased their residual cultural Indianness and sense of identification with India. Many of them continued to look upon themselves as involuntary exiles, as helpless poor people washed up on a strange shore by the tides of cross-continental colonial history, and they continued to live within a tenacious emotional frame which was foundationally India. (28)

The novels of Naipaul deal with plurality and diversity of ways in which dispossessed individuals live, narrate and strive to make sense of their lives. Most of the characters in his novels are heterogeneous and they approach their ethnically diverse origins in the *in-between* spaces. The spaces where these characters try to make sense of their present are in a constant process of transformation and change. These individuals fail to connect with the cultural heritage of their ancestors because they have been dislocated from their roots. Moreover, they cannot develop the sense of belonging to the adopted culture in the new environment. These novels represent displaced individuals who constantly produce and reproduce themselves and problematise in different ways the spaces they inhabit and the relations they develop. In such a setting where spaces are constantly contested and

negotiated, new spaces emerge that reflect fluidity and hybridity of their existing conditions.

The constant pressure of outside influence leads to the erosion of traditional Hindu customs and beliefs. With members of diasporic communities, the so called “necessary compromises” necessitate the erasure of their former communal, cultural and religious identity. Naipaul’s early novels especially appear to conceptualise and express a condition of communal and social fragmentation and cultural disintegration, of a sense of nationlessness in multiracial Trinidad after decolonization.

Trinidad, the setting of the novel, is full of people with different cultures and languages. Multiculturalism refers to a variety of traditions, beliefs, behaviors and values. The mixing of different cultures establishes a kind of Creole society in which different cultures, religions and languages interact with one another. Creolization is the “process of intermixing and cultural change that produces a creole society” (Ashcroft *et al. Key Concepts* 58). *A House for Mr. Biswas* shows how people from different cultural background try to adjust in a creole society through a process of resistance/acceptance. According to Brathwaite “creolization is not a product but a process incorporating aspects of both acculturation and interculturalization, the ‘former referring . . . to the process of absorption of one culture by another; the latter to a more reciprocal activity, a process of intermixture and enrichment, each to each’”(Ashcroft 58).

A House for Mr. Biswas deals with Mr Biswas’s search for identity in the multi-racial society of Trinidad and the cultural and religious disintegration of the Tulsi family under the impact of westernization. The novel is regarded as a fine specimen of cultural conflict, assimilation and negotiation. It underscores the predicament of Indian migrants in the culturally alien environment of Trinidad. In the novel, the story of the Tulsi household is the story of the consolidation of Indian diaspora in Trinidad, its growing fascination with western culture and its final disintegration. It shows the disintegration of the Hindu culture of the immigrant Indians in a multicultural space where the idea of a stable cultural identity is questioned throughout. The novel exemplifies the dynamic and fluid nature of social spaces where social meanings and identities are articulated.

Residing outside the geographical territory of India, the Indian migrants tried to retain their Indian identity. Migrants come from different cultural, linguistic, racial

and class backgrounds and their purpose of emigration is not always identical. The novel clearly suggests diversity of purposes of emigration of the Indians to Trinidad. Diaspora is governed by heterogeneity of interests, and hence, the claim of an essential diasporic subject is always questionable.

The Tulsis had some reputation among Hindus as a pious, conservative, landowning family. Other communities, who knew nothing of the Tulsis, had heard about Pundit Tulsi, the founder of the family...The fortune he had made in Trinidad had not come from labouring and it remained a mystery why he had emigrated as a labourer. One or two emigrants, from criminal clans, had come to escape the law. One or two had come to escape the consequences of their families' participation in the Mutiny. Pundit Tulsi belonged to neither class. His family still flourished in India – letters arrived regularly – and it was known that he had been of higher standing than most of the Indians who had come to Trinidad, nearly all of whom, like Raghu, like Ajodha, had lost touch with their families and wouldn't have known in what province to find them.(81)

The members of the house attempt to preserve the memory of their native country and the Hindu way of life in the new territory. The novel shows the dilution of Hinduism in the expatriate Indian community as a result of its contact with the surrounding creole society which imitates the Western life style by following Christianity and speaking English. “The Tulsis celebrated Christmas in their store and, with equal irreligiosity, in their home. It was a purely Tulsi festival” (198). The novel shows the endeavour of the first-generation immigrants to preserve the Indian way of life which gradually disintegrates as the world outside influences the members of succeeding generations.

In the novel, Hanuman House stands as a symbol of the old Hindu culture. Hanuman House “stood like an alien white fortress...when the narrow doors of the Tulsi Store on the ground floor were closed the House become bulky, impregnable and blank...The sidewalls were windowless.” (81). It symbolizes vain attempts of the Tulsis to keep intact the Indian culture which has become exotic in the face of modernization. Their religion has also been “reduced to rites without philosophy” (80). The windowless walls of Hanuman House implies “an enclosing self-sufficient world...a static world awaiting decay.” (79).

Naipaul deals with identity crisis, rootlessness and cultural conflict of Indian migrants in Trinidad. The Tulsi family and Hanuman House represent Hindu culture. Gradually, coming under western influences, the orthodoxy of the Tulsi family begins to crumble. As a result of the process of assimilation and the impact of the west-oriented culture in Trinidad, certain aspects of Hindu culture take new forms that share aspects of both the cultures which ultimately lead to cultural hybridity. Mrs. Tulsi is very keen to preserve the Hindu culture. The daily puja or worship, and the various rituals prescribed by the religion are regularly performed in the house. But, under the influence of materialistic western culture the sacred Hindu religious practices gradually loses its sanctity. The Hindu rites and rituals are still practiced but the meaning has gone out of them. The westernized creole culture of Trinidadian society slowly weakens the traditional Hindu beliefs and customs. With the passing of time, the society moves towards the west and away from India leading to hybridization.

Regularly... she [Mrs Tulsi] had *pujas*, austere rites aimed at God alone, without the feasting and gaiety of the Honuman House ceremonies. The pundit came and Mrs Tulsi sat before him; he read from the scriptures, took his money, changed in the bathroom and left. More and more prayer flags went up in the yard, the white and red pennants fluttering until they were ragged. The bamboo poles going yellow, brown, grey. For every *puja* Mrs. Tulsi tried a different pundit, since no pundit could please her as well as Hari. And, no pundit pleasing her, her faith yielded. She sent Sushila to burn candles in the Roman Catholic church; she put a crucifix in her room; and she had Pundit Tulsi's grave cleaned for All Saints' Day. (551)

Naipaul presents the picture of hybridization and the disintegration of the orthodox Hindu rites and rituals. Owad, the younger son of the Tulsis, likes to give the impression of eclecticism by wearing a crucifix but at heart he is a devout Hindu. Hanuman is replaced by Christ as Hindu rituals get conveniently diluted. The line "And, no pundit pleasing her, her faith yielded," is a stinging satire on the indifferent religious faith of some of the East Indians in Trinidad, with Mrs. Tulsi showing the way. To find out who had stolen money from her room, Govind's wife Chinta tries out other options: "Sometimes she spoke Hindu incantations; sometimes she searched with a candle in one hand and a crucifix in the other... Finally she decided to hold a trial by the Bible and the key" (446). This fluctuation of religious faith amongst the people in Trinidad is

indicative of the appropriation of each other's religious values and rituals by different groups, pointing to a hybridity which had set in without anybody setting out to consciously bring it about.

The lives of the members in Hanuman House are not left untouched by change. Mrs Tulsi, "the orthodox Roman Catholic Hindu," (142) pretends to be a Hindu, but she celebrates Christmas with her family and also allows her sons to wear crucifixes while doing Hindu puja. She leaves her daughters uneducated, but sends her sons to the Roman Catholic college in Port of Spain for their education. Mr Biswas and Shama also decide that Anand would go to college as "it would be cruel and foolish to give the boy nothing more than an elementary school education." (512)

Although the dead body is always cremated according to Hindu rites, in the novel Raghu's dead body is buried which is against the Hindu rituals. "Cremation was forbidden and Raghu was to be buried. He lay in a coffin in the bedroom, dressed in his finest dhoti, jacket and turban... Pratap, the eldest son, did the last rites, walking round the coffin" (29-30). In the alien landscape of Trinidad, some of the Hindu rituals lost their meaning. The Indians in Trinidad tried to re-create India through the observation of Hindu rites and rituals. But their customs and ceremonies became strange, exotic in Trinidad. Naipaul writes:

The temples and mosques exist and appear genuine. But the languages that came with them have decayed. The rituals have altered. Since open-air cremation is forbidden by the health authorities, Hindus are buried, not cremated. Their ashes are not taken down holy rivers into the ocean to become again part of the Absolute. There is no Ganges at hand, only a muddy stream called the Caroni. And the water that the Hindu priest sprinkles with a mango leaf around the sacrificial fire is not Ganges water but simple tap water.

(Literary Occasions 40-41)

What Naipaul draws attention to is the fact that either through volition or compulsion, The East Indians, mainly Hindus, have had to make compromises as far as strict adherence of religious rituals were concerned. Given the changed set of circumstances, they had to curtail their religious fervor and adjust to local arrangements. A small muddy

river in Trinidad obviously could not compare with the huge Ganges, believed to be sacred, in India.

W.C. Tuttle, another Tulsi's son-in-law, is a product of cultural hybridity who is able to assimilate both eastern and Western values. He is a Hindu but he is ready to accept Western ideas and life styles. Coming into contact with western culture he has been modernized. Tuttle "regarded himself as one of the last defenders of brahmin culture in Trinidad; at the same time he considered he had yielded gracefully to the finer products of Western civilization: its literature, its music, its art" (485).

W. C. Tuttle began with a series of photographs, in large wooden frames, of himself. In one photograph W. C. Tuttle, naked except for dhoti, sacred thread and caste-marks, head shaven except for the top-knot, sat cross-legged, fingers bunched delicately on his upturned soles, and meditated with closed eyes. Next to this W. C. Tuttle stood in jacket, trousers, collar, tie, hat, one well-shod foot on the running-board of a motorcar, laughing, his gold tooth brilliantly revealed...W. C. Tuttle in Indian court dress; W. C. Tuttle in full pundit's regalia, turban, dhoti, white jacket, beads, standing with a brass jar in one hand...In between there were pictures of the English countryside in spring, a view of the Matterhorn, a photograph of Mahatma Gandhi. It was W. C. Tuttle's way of blending East and West. (486-487)

The assorted photographs show his liking for both worlds and also expresses a hilarious clash of cultures. Unfortunately, in his case the blending of East and West gives him the appearance of motley.

The first generation immigrants attempt to hold onto their religious rules, but their descendants do not share the same respect for those traditional religious beliefs. What is seen is a hybridization of conventional Hindu rituals. The novel provides various instances of dilution of orthodox Hinduism. During the time of Christmas the Tulsi store becomes

a place of deep romance and endless delights... Gramophones played in the Tulsi Store and all the other stores and even from the stalls in the market. Mechanical birds whistled; dolls squeaked; toy trumpets were tried out; tops hummed; cars shot across counters, were seized by hands, and held whining in mid-air. The

enamel plates and the hairpins were pushed to the back, and their place was taken by black grapes in white boxes filled with aromatic sawdust; red Canadian apples whose scent overrode every other; by a multitude of toys and dolls and games in boxes, new and sparkling glassware, new china, all smelling of their newness, by Japanese lacquered trays.... (221)

The Store showcases Western values and products meant to attract outsiders. It tries to capture the spirit of Christmas by stocking up all the desirable commodities, including imported goods, connected to the holy season. While dressing up a shop for the festive season is not out of the ordinary, the fact that it was owned by the rigid Hindu family—who clung to their ‘Indian past’—hints at a dualism or at best an attempt to meet others halfway during the season of goodwill as well as drumming up business. That however, is one side of the picture.

When pundit Hari dies, W.C. Tuttle, one of the sons in law of Mrs Tulsi performs the last rites while wearing “an embroidered silk jacket” (438). After Hari’s death, there was none to take his place in performing duties of Pundit in religious ceremonies. Besides, the duty of the *puja* had to be performed by many and the idea of sanctity is lost as these duties are performed only for the sake of performance. It indicates the disintegration of Hinduism with the passing of time. It reveals the fact that, due to generational differences, the descendents of migrants may not share the same cultural affiliation along with their ancestors. When pundit Hari dies, Anand attempts to perform the religious duties in an artificial manner.

The duty of the *puja* was shared by many of the men and boys. Sometimes even Anand had to do it. Untutored in the prayers, he could only go through the motions of the ritual. He washed the images, placed fresh flowers on the shrine, diverted himself by trying to stick the stem of a flower in the crook of a god’s arm or between the god’s chin and chest. He put fresh sandalwood paste on the foreheads of the gods, on the smooth black and rose and yellow pebbles, and on his own forehead; lit the camphor, circled the flame about the shrine with his right hand while with his left he tried to ring the bell; blew at the conch shell, emitting a sound like that of a heavy wardrobe scraping on a wooden floor; then, his cheeks aching from the effort of blowing the conch shell, he hurried out to eat, first making the round of the house to offer the milk and tulsi leaves which,

unbelievably, he had consecrated. When he dressed for school he brushed the caked sandalwood marks from his forehead. (439)

Thus, it can also be argued that diasporas are diverse in their nature. So their response to the traditional values and ideas may not be the identical with the members of the previous generation. Diaspora identities are multiple and varied. Diversity of subject positions and multiple experiences challenge the possibility of an essential diasporic subject.

To create order out of his chaotic life Mr Biswas takes up writing. Writing helps him to escape from the limited, pointless world and also to assert his identity. By juxtaposing fact and fantasy in his writing, Mr Biswas attempts to address the emptiness that surround him. Naipaul comments on the novel in the following way:

[T]he book is a work of the imagination. It is obviously not “made up,” created out of nothing. But it does not tell the literal truth. The pattern in the narrative of widening vision and a widening world, though I believe it to be historically true of the people concerned, derives also from the child’s way of experiencing. It was on the partial knowledge of a child—myself—and his intuition and emotion that the writer’s imagination went to work. There is more fantasy, and emotion, in this novel than in my later novels, where the intelligence is more in command. (*Literary Occasions* 132)

Mr. Biswas is not the only Naipaul character who seeks to organize his life by trying to write it down. This may be taken as Naipaul’s ‘momentary stay against confusion,’ if one were to borrow the words of Robert Frost from his essay, “The Figure a Poem Makes.” Writing gives Naipaul’s characters some stability, a sense of order, of purpose and of identity.

Returning to the Tulsi family, caste plays a major role in the arrangement of marriages, but now, Mrs Tulsi and her daughters think that “ their brother’s bride should be chosen with a more appropriate concern” (239) which results in a “search for an educated, beautiful and rich girl from a caste family who had been converted to Christianity and had lapsed” (239-240). At last, Mrs Tulsi’s elder son, Shekhar’s marriage is arranged with a girl in a Presbyterian family. It means that Shekhar has given up his rigid brahminical beliefs of keeping the ‘purity’ of the high caste by marrying a Brahmin girl. The marriage takes place in a registry office and after that:

contrary to Hindu custom and the tradition of his family, he did not bring his bride home, but left Hanuman House for good, no longer talking of suicide, to look after the lorries, cinema, land and filling station of his wife's family. (240)

Shekhar's wife does not follow the custom and traditional culture of the Tulsi family. From the beginning, the relations between the sisters and Shekhar's wife were uneasy because "Shekhar's wife had from the first met Tulsi patronage with arrogant Presbyterian modernity. He flaunted her education....She wore short frocks and didn't care that they made her look lewd and absurd...(385). Despite the lack of warmth between the daughter-in-law and the rest of the family members, what stands out is that the marriage was allowed to take place with the family's support. It shows a clear dilution of the family's traditional values and attitude towards a more open secular outlook.

Mrs Tulsi's younger son Owad, returns to Trinidad after qualifying as a doctor. Owad writes mainly about the English landscape in the letters he sent from England.

Those of Owad's letters which went the rounds were mainly about English flowers and the English weather. They were semi-literary... 'The February fogs have at last gone,' Owad used to write, 'depositing a thick coating of black on every window sill. The snowdrops have come and gone, but the daffodils will be here soon. I planted six daffodils in my tiny front garden. Five have grown. The sixth appears to be a failure. My only hope is that they will not turn out to be blind, as they were last year. (556-557)

Owad is received like a hero by the Tulsis when he returns from England after completing his medical studies. They go to the harbor to welcome Owad who "was wearing a suit they had never known, and he had a Robert Taylor moustache. His jacket was open, his hands in his trouser pockets" (567). He had become a member of the elite class.

Owad's educational superiority places him ahead of everyone else in the family. He has been deeply influenced by the Communist revolution in Russia and he tells of his "meeting with Motolov, of the achievements of the Red Army and the glories of Russia..." (571). The whole house falls under Owad's spell when he narrates his

adventures in England. Chinta begins to show a great antipathy for Krishna Menon, whom Owad dislikes. One afternoon, the Tulsi family's reverence for India is shattered:

Owad disliked all Indians from India. They were a disgrace to Trinidad Indians; they were arrogant, sly and lecherous; they pronounced English in a peculiar way; they were slow and unintelligent and were given degrees only out of charity... their Hindi was strange... their ritual was debased; the moment they got to England they ate meat and drank to prove their modernity.... (570)

Owad marries Dorothy's cousin, "a handsome young woman who had graduated from McGill University and had all the elegance of the Indian girl from South Trinidad" (578). The newly emerging society has become indifferent to the customs of their ancestors as they try to copy the lifestyle of the westerners, which they have become acquainted recently. The traditions of the Indians undergo changes in the face of modernization and their customs and rituals remain strange and even exotic.

Multiculturalism foregrounds the coexistence of multiple religious traditions. Diaspora space is marked by diversity which makes possible multiple religious affiliations. Living in a multi-religious context, the East Indians of Trinidad appropriate other religious elements. The synthesis of Hindu and Christian elements foregrounds their eclectic cultural orientation. In their day to day life Hinduism constantly interacts with Christianity. Religious pluralism questions the seeming coherence, unity and harmony of any given religion. It recognizes diversity and contingency inherent in different religious practices. Considering the religious pluralism of Trinidad, Patrick French notes: "Each community was divided and subdivided. Among Indians there were Hindus, Muslims and Christians; among the Hindus, there were caste divisions; among Indian Christians, there were Anglicans, Presbyterians and Roman Catholics. People of African descent followed a multiplicity of Christian faiths..." (53-54). What French points to is the variety of religious faiths obtaining in the region. Each religion had different denominations and followers. People were already exposed to different religions and denominations within them, and any attempt to hold onto the 'purity' of a particular faith in the middle of that multiplicity would have been extremely limiting.

In the novel, Mr Biswas is caught in a dilemma between the abstract world of writing and the world of practical activity. He strives to achieve an order and meaning in life through the act of writing. But as his material reality remains unchanged he still

continues to be unanchored and alienated. In him we find a constant oscillation between the realms of mental and physical, abstract and the concrete. The abstract world of words fails to provide him the much needed security, solidity and meaning in life. The abstract world of writing cannot offer him recovery from the sense of alienation and loss whose root lies in the material condition. Due to the lack of activity in the material world, Biswas fails to attain solidity and meaning through the metaphysical act of writing. In the words of Selwyn Cudjoe (1988):

Words may be the necessary starting point for articulating one's condition, isolation, and emotional dissonance, but social reality can be transcended only through concrete activity. Mr Biswas takes only the first step of mental abstraction; he is unable to proceed to the second step of practical activity to resolve his conflicts. As a result, he can recede into obscurity and slow decay.
(62)

Biswas turns to the art of writing with the attempt to organize his disordered life. To overcome the sense of loss and alienation he enters the world of writing. For him, the house is not simply a material reality. It is the symbol of coherence and identity. Biswas is oscillating between a 'real' house and a metaphorical sense of home and belonging which makes his journey a spatial one.

The novel deals with the predicament of East Indians in the complicated social environment of Trinidad. It foregrounds the clash of cultures and the dilemma of uprooted Indians in their process of adjustment in an alien place. The process of assimilation and acculturation in a new location lead to erosion of older traditions and values, as expected. Displacement profoundly impacts the mind and spirit of those who still think of their ancestral homeland. The society and the characters depicted in the novel are affected by confusion and disorder, stemming from a lack of close affiliations and steadfast convictions. It is as if these people who were of migrant stock or themselves migrants had failed to cement their cultural roots or at least to consolidate them in the new land.

In both the novels, the constant pull of hybridity dismantles unitary assumptions of essential subject positions. Most of the characters analyzed above oscillate between different positions thereby making it impossible to sustain any fixed notions of identity. Mixing of people from different geographical territory facilitates cultural and racial

hybridization that opens up ambivalences in polarized ideological oppositions. The novels demonstrate the constant processes of creolization and hybridization which perpetually undermine cultural and racial purity.