

## **Lack of Cultural Roots in V. S. Naipaul's Novels**

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### **Abstract**

The society that V.S. Naipaul came from was a colonial society, originally a slave society to which, later Asians went. There was a double inferiority about it: the slave society which created nothing, which depended for everything on the master society - and the Asiatic living in this closed society of myth. For an individual so very doubly removed, the societal structure represented in European literature holds no association or relationship with the immediate surroundings of a colonial from a slave society.

**Key Words:** association, colonial, myth, population, reaction, relationship, society

### **Introduction**

When Naipaul talks about this “not - so - whole” inferior slave society in an “Interview with Israel Shankar”, quoted in the Robert D. Hamner edited, V.S Critical Perspectives on. Naipaul, he says. “...There were eight or perhaps twelve free places in, the secondary schools. Twelve free places in an island that had a population of over half a million. What an attitude to human beings!” This attitude to the native population is a “horrifying” realization for the Nobel laureate. Continuing to discuss the subject of slavery in connection with the reaction of the British he says: - The British have a Sunday school reaction to all this.... You have very nice liberal people who go out to a colony which is a deliberately created inferior society and wonder why people in that place are inferior, and why if they wish to become writers they have to leave. They would not ask Hemingway why he left his own provincial town, they would not ask Pound why he left the Middle West, but they will always ask the man from what they accept as inferior society. (Hamner, 50). This awareness in the author of being, if not unacceptable, at least questionable on account of his “inferior” origins or roots, leads to cultural vacuum in Naipaul. There is the immense realization of inadequacy:

... I started by thinking that I was a totally whole person, and part of the falsity of my literary ambition was that I took the models of writers who came from whole societies - England, Russia, France. Then I was let down by my material, my life, my own background. For me to come to London and to be a writer, as a colonial was a grotesque misreading of the world. As I grow older I'm more and more aware of the great vacuum behind me. (Hamner, 50)

This feeling of “vacuum” is what gives rise to rootlessness. The fact that Naipaul feels let down by his own background is an indication of the inadequacy that he feels pertaining to his own culture. It is just not the British who are questioning him owing to his inferiority but he himself feels liable to question his own heritage. This questioning of one's own culture and roots is what results in a major lack. This lack of cultural roots, as made evident in his various writings, is the focus of this paper.

Naipaul's feeling of being an “artist in a vacuum” in contemporary London society results from a lack of association between his own life and background and the society that he is living in. The London society is the society he has read about, the Society with which he cannot relate. It is very difficult for a colonial subject like Naipaul to identify with the allusions of European literature, as he makes clear in “Jasmine”: The Times Literary Supplement, 4 June 1964.

This literature was like an alien mythology. There was, for instance, Wordsworth's notorious poem about the daffodil. A pretty little flower, no doubt; but we had never been it, could the poem have any meaning for us? ...To us without a mythology, all literatures were foreign. Trinidad was small, remote and unimportant, and we could not hope to read in books of the life we saw about us. Books came from a far;

they could offer only fantasy.<sup>2</sup>

This sense of the language and its literature not belonging to the Trinidadians, of alien mythology and an expression of the uprootedness of the colonial or the colonized subject in connection with a “doubly inferior” situation, makes him feel even more suspended, “...You are just hanging in the air and being an artist in vacuum, which is nonsensical...” (Hamner 50). This self-knowledge is the focal point in this paper. Most of his protagonists are victims, of this feeling of “hanging in the air.” They seem to be suspended from a very thin thread into a world which is hostile to them, which they are unable to comprehend - a world which, like the one depicted in European literature, might be beautiful for someone who is aware of it, but to them it holds no meaning - like the daffodil in Wordsworth’s poem.

From the very beginning of Naipaul’s fiction the reader is made consciously aware of the rootlessness of his fictional characters. The protagonists are, more often than not, like plants that have been mercilessly uprooted from their native soil and planted in alien ground without any ancestral heritage. They lack the kind of cultural support that is generally present in the representations of the middle-class protagonists in most of European literature. As a result they seek to find it in external elements since they are unable to locate it within themselves. This attempt at external association of this basic impulse is what results in the crisis that issues as a by-product. This crisis is evident in his work from the very beginning.

In *The Mystic Masseur*, for example, the setting of the novel is a society under transition it takes place entirely within an East Indian community undergoing a change from feudalism to capitalism. This kind of “influx” setting gives the characters the very salient aspect of being unconnected. They are caught between the battles of tradition versus modernity and are unable to reject the one in favour of the other. The text examines the rise of Ganesh Ramsumair to prominence from masseur to mystic to the position of a Member of the British Empire (MBE), one of the highest honors a colonial subject could hope to achieve. This duality of the East Indian’s experience in Trinidad, the problematic of the displacement is very well exemplified in the description of Ganesh’s hut:

Nothing had prepared me for what I was to see inside Ganesh’s hut. As soon as we entered my mother winked at me, and I could see that even the taxi-driver was fighting to control his astonishment. There were bookshelves, here, there, and everywhere; books piled crazily on the table, books rising in mounds in the corners, books covering the floor. I had never before seen so many books in one place...

I tried to forget Ganesh thumping my leg about and concentrated on the walls. They were covered with religious quotations, in Hindi and English, and with Hindu religious pictures. My gaze settled on a beautiful four-armed god standing in an open lotus.<sup>4</sup>

At one pole is Ganesh’s attempt to appropriate the Western world through books; at the other is the centrality, of Vishnu, the Hindu icon. This constant shift between these two supposedly opposing impulses is the basic cause of the tussle within the protagonist of trying to place his own roots in one of these traditions, which he is unable to do owing to the fact of his double displacement from his own cultural background and the inability to identify with a foreign one.

The picture of Vishnu “standing in an open lotus” on Ganesh’s wall would suggest a number of meanings to the East Indian, thrust as he is into the wilderness of the Caribbean. Although Vishnu symbolizes the eternal qualities of the East Indians’ existence - man’s common origin, the limitless powers of his mind, the illusion of the world and its powers, and the sovereignty of man’s individuality - he also represents man’s transitory nature and existence in a changing universe. These two conflicting symbolizations of the figure of Vishnu could problematize their simultaneous understanding for a Hindu who in turn cannot seek solace in his cultural roots as he is far removed from them.

Allusion plays its part in, clarifying the progress of Ganesh’s career and the most significant body of allusions in the text is to various aspects of Hinduism. Naipaul’s early novels document the process of acculturation which Hindus have suffered in the West Indies and in *An Area of Darkness*, where he explores his own relation to his ancestral homeland of India, he discusses this subject at some length and

makes comments like the following:

My grandfather had made a difficult and courageous journey. It must have brought him into collision with startling sights, even like the sea, several hundred miles from his village; yet I cannot help feeling that as soon as he left his village, he ceased to see. When he went back to India it was to return with more things of India ... he had abandoned India; and ... he denied Trinidad. Yet he walked on solid earth...We who came after could not deny Trinidad ... to our condition as Indians in a multi - racial society we gave no thought.<sup>5</sup>

The Mystic Masseur reflects the attenuation of Hindu culture in various ways. From boyhood Ganesh has a strain in his character, which is ashamed of his Hindu origins. When his father, clad in traditional Hindu dress of dhoti, koortah and white cap, first takes Ganesh, dressed in akhaki suit, to the prestigious Queen's Royal College in Port of Spain and he discovers that such attire renders them the laughing - stock in town, he attempts to repudiate his Hindu self by pretending that his name is Gareth. The detail is noteworthy, not only because it anticipates the ending where Ganesh anglicizes his name, but also because Naipaul's names often have an allusive significance and, according to John Theme in *The Web of Tradition*, "the Arthurian echo here suggest the romantic nature of Ganesh's attempt to deny his Hindu background."<sup>6</sup> The scope of this ironically observed progress makes *The Mystic Masseur* far more than just a satirical portrait of a putative Hindu guru and yet the sections that deal with Ganesh's reactions to Hinduism as a boy and, later, with his pretended espousal of some of its values as a mystic are the most memorable parts of the novel.

As an adolescent Ganesh, like his creator, shows himself to be disenchanted with Hinduism and this comes out most vividly in three set - piece scenes in which Naipaul documents the absurdity of observing Hindu rites in Trinidad. During his first holiday from the Queen's Royal College, where as a country Indian, he is a misfit, Ganesh is made to go through the Brahmin initiation ceremony.

A fresh mortification awaited him. When he went home for his first holidays and had been shown off again, his father said, "It is time for the boy to become a real Brahmin."<sup>7</sup>

...They shaved his head, gave him a little saffron bundle, and said, "All right, off you go now. Go, to Benares and study."

He took his staff and began walking away briskly from Fourways.

As arranged, Dookhie the shopkeeper ran after him, crying a little and begging in English, 'Noboy. No. Don't go away to Benares to study.'

Ganesh kept on walking.

"But what happen to the boy?" people asked. "He taking this thing really serious."

Dookhie caught Ganesh by the shoulder and said, 'Cut out this nonsense, man. Stop behaving stupid... You think you really going to Benares? That is in India, you know, and this is Trinidad.'

They brought him back home. But the episode is significant.

Naipaul's neutral presentation leaves it unclear whether Ganesh is being naïve or consciously endeavoring to draw attention to the irrelevance of the custom in Trinidad. But either way the reader cannot miss the incongruity of the custom in Trinidad and the author makes his own attitude very clear in *An Area of Darkness*. I had no belief; I disliked religious ritual; and I had a sense of the ridiculous. I refused to go through the janaywa, or thread ceremony of the newborn..., the ceremony ends with the initiate, his head shaved, his thread new and obvious, taking up his staff and bundle... announcing his intention of going to, Kashi - Banaras to study... It was a pleasing piece of theatre. But I knew that we were in Trinidad... and that the appearance... of a Hindu mendicant - scholar bound for Banaras, would have attracted unwelcome attention...<sup>7</sup>

This kind of ridicule of own cultural customs is what results in the non - existence of cultural solace and moral support when it is most required - in the time of crisis. Much the same attitude is implied in the description of Ganesh's father's funeral, where to Ganesh it seems like that "ritual had replaced grief".

Ganesh didn't sleep that night..., in the early morning, the preparations for the cremation. He had to do many things, and he did without thought or question everything the pundit, his aunt, and Ramlogan asked

him. He remembered having to walk around the body of his father, remembered applying the last caste - marks to the old man's forehead, and doing many more things until it seemed that ritual had replaced grief.

But the clearest evidence of his rejection of Hinduism comes, in the account of the kedgerree -eating ceremony which, in keeping with Hindu tradition, follows his marriage to Leela. According to the custom, the morning after the wedding the bridegroom is offered a plate of kedgerree and, in a scene of ritualized play acting like that involved in the janaywa, is entreated to eat it. Until such time as he does eat, his new father - in - law has to ply him with gifts of money and property. Prior to Ganesh's wedding, his father - in - law tries to persuade him to eat quickly, perhaps even without waiting for any gifts. Ganesh, predictably, asserts himself to be a believer in the proper observation of the custom. When the preliminary wedding celebrations take place, Ganesh is bewildered by the presence of dozens of unknown finale relatives. But it is only on the day of the wedding that he thinks to enquire who is paying for the entertainment of these guests and is shocked to find that Ramlogan has arranged that Ganesh himself will foot the bill for all the hospitality. This sets the context for the Kedgerree - eating ceremony', where Ganesh, by refusing to eat, extracts, in addition to the payment of the "hospitality bills", fifteen hundred dollars, a house, a cow and a heifer from Ramlogan. The crowd begins to treat Ganesh as a hero. But it is difficult to be clear about his motivation: is he simply impelled by a desire for revenge or is it an attempt to ridicule the custom? The former seems to be the evident reason, but his action definitely accomplishes the latter purpose as well. Although internally driven by the basic tenets of the cultural traditions of Hinduism, his continuous efforts at disowning his own religion and practices is a very stark example of the ambiguity that underlies the response of the protagonist to his displaced situation.

In his ultimate changing of his name, he is trying to get rid of the feeling of being "ashamed of his Indian name" thereby making a final gesture: of non - acceptance of his entire cultural heritage, including his own name. This gesture is what clearly highlights and sustains the fact that the protagonist can never be connected to his roots in future.

V.S. Naipaul is someone who, in his search for identity, has the poignant recollection of his life and ancestry that evokes the slow dereliction of an unwanted one, betrayed and cheated into a contract of indenture, and further disowned by the communities. He is, "... Eternally an outsider- an Indian in the West dies, a West Indian in England, and as described by many. a nomadic intellectual in the non - descript Third World."8

This recollection of his life and ancestry is what gave rise to so autobiographical a novel as *A House for Mr. Biswas*. In this novel the protagonist continuously keeps making a sustained attempt to search his own self and the House epitomizes that search. Right from the start of the narrative, the reader is introduced to the protagonist as being Mr. Biswas. He is rarely, if ever, addressed to on first name basis, even as a newborn baby. This deliberately imposed maturity on this child gives the reader an impression of Mr. Biswas lacking a childhood, thereby the initiation of the picture of rootlessness. This first initiation is very faithfully maintained throughout the narrative. Mr. Biswas is never allowed to settle down so that the narrative is in continuous displacement from one geographical setting to the other, in accordance with the protagonist's mental state. Throughout the narrative, Mr. Biswas keeps searching for his roots, which he is unable to locate. Maureen Warner Lewis says:

I consider the theme of cultural clash to be one of the most dominant to emerge from a reading of V.S. Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas*. It not only accounts for the background to and explanation of many events in the novel, increasingly so in the latter half, but is also responsible for Mr. Biswas' difficulty of adjustment in his relationship with Tulsidom, an aspect of the central theme of the work, that of the individual's assertion of himself. (Hamner, 94)

Born in a Brahmin family, he finds himself the victim of the superstitious beliefs of his family members owing to the fact that he is born 'with the "evil sixth finger," supposedly the harbinger of ill - fortune. In spite of these superstitions, Mr. Biswas grew up in a more liberal and changing environment, than that

which obtained at Hanuman House. And here, the definition of the role played by Hanuman House in the creation of that system Naipaul chooses to call "Tulsidom" is very important. Hanuman House was founded by a pundit, a Hindu priest, a venerable man not only in Trinidad but also in India, an immigrant who had not come as an indentured labourer, one of the rare Indians in Trinidad who knew his relatives in India and was in constant touch with them. As head of the Tulsi clan in Trinidad, he provides, after the style of the princely great houses of India, a sanctuary for succeeding generations of the family. It is perhaps the fault of nature and of circumstances that a cultural anomaly arises out of this, for it is the Tulsi Sons and their wives who should have populated the house, but Pundit Tulsi and his wife apparently had more daughters than sons, and since the daughters were either older or less educated than the sons, they married earlier.

Furthermore, nearly all of the Tulsi daughters seem to have married men in need of Tulsi money and prestige who were glad for a space at Hanuman House. In addition, Hanuman House was a virtual cloister for the Tulsi family as outsiders were rarely admitted. On the other hand, Biswas was the descendant of hut-dwelling peasants. And although the extended family system was operative in Mr. Biswas' personal experience previous to his encounter with the Tulsis, the absence of a single family house made arrangements looser. For instance, Bipti, although dependent on Tara, stays with "some of Tara's husband's dependent relations in a back trace" far from Adjodha's house; Pratra and Prasad go to distant relation in another town, Dehuti lives as a maid with Tara, and Biswas, although living with his mother, becomes emotionally estranged from her. The moment of his father's death is like the herald of bad - luck for this young child. The uprooting of the plants in Raghu's garden by the villagers, in search of his "hidden fortune" signifies the moment of Mr. Biswas's cultural and emotional uprooting. The only place he could have called his own, his father's house, is taken away from him at a very early stage in life. His father's hut is no more, his grandparents are dead, and he very early begins his picaresque-like journey through life from this day onwards, he was to be a wanderer with no place he could call his own, with no family...with his mother's parent dead, his father dead, his brothers on the estate at Felicity, Dehuti as a servant in Tara's house, and himself rapidly growing away from Bipti... it seemed to him that he was really alone. (HFMB, 40)

After Bipti sells the house where Biswas was born and where his navel - string and redundant sixth - finger had been buried, he is dispossessed of his origins, of his roots. Later he comes to see this house as the only place where he has ever truly belonged. Though the Hindu world he is born in is on the point of decay, it is still a kind of paradise, for it is the one place that Biswas has ever belonged to. His subsequent history is a history of displacement and an accompanying psychic fragmentation, but here in this first home he is mentally "whole", because of his unquestioning acceptance of the physical situation. His continued attempt throughout his life to have a house of his own at any cost whatsoever, is an attempt to return to this nurturing "womb" that was taken away from him when he was in dire need of it, it is an attempt at gaining the security he has lost with the loss of a place to call his own.

When he gains this sense of being on his own, it becomes increasingly difficult for him to associate with the established norms of the strongly feudal society in which he was to have his existence. Later in life when he goes back to the place where he was born, he is unable to locate the exact spot where his parents' and grandparents' huts had stood. As he ruminates on the fact that his navel - string and sixth finger must have disappeared too, he realizes that "The world carried no witness to Mr. Biswas's birth and early years." Even his birth certificate is an afterthought and the date given on it guesswork. The very small fact that even his mother doesn't know what his exact date of birth is, adds to the sense of his lack of roots...Ghany...asked impatiently, 'date of birth?'

"Eighth of June," Bipti said to Tara. "It must be that."

"All right," Ghany said. "Eighth of June. Who to tell you no?" (HFMB, 40)

The obvious lack of authority of this man and yet his half - suspicious questioning of the authenticity of Mr. Biswas's date of birth, gives it a very uncertain color. Something as trivial as his birthday reinforces the already persistent thought of absence of a soil for this fortune - swept plant.

He experiences the comparative cosmopolitanism of primary school life, he then undergoes the rigid

discipline of a pundit-in-training for a brief period, but abandons this for the insecurities and vagabondage of a sign-painting career, so that before he encounters Tulsidom he has met not only a few people of other races, like his friend Alec, but also Indians like himself, yet subscribing to non-traditional mores, like Lal, his Christian school-teacher and Bhandat and his sons who have un-Hindu sex lives. With all this, his little education has excited his curiosity-and, on afternoons at Adjodha's his eyes and mind zealously explore the new worlds opened up to him by the "Book of Comprehensive Knowledge". He continues to be a rebel throughout his life, even in the strongly hierarchical Tulsi family. When he goes to Pundit Jairam's house to be trained as a scholar to enable him to earn his living in future, his education seems to be completely futile as he continues to recite the prayers and perform the more ritualistic offices of a religious ceremony without gathering their import. Further in the chapter where there is a description of his early morning puja ritual, it becomes quite evident that he personally does not feel any reverence for such sanctified Hindu customs...

Mechanically he cleaned the images, the lines and indentations of which were black or cream with old sandalwood paste; it was easier to clean the small smooth pebbles, whose significance had not yet been explained to him... Mr. Biswas chanted from the prescribed scriptures, applied fresh sandalwood paste to the images and smooth pebbles, decked them with fresh flowers, rang the bell and consecrated the offering of sweetened milk... (HFMB, 51)

The very monotonous way in which the description moves gives an indicator to the emotionally and intellectually numb condition of Mr. Biswas. According to John Thieme in *The Web of Tradition*, His eight - month residence at Pundit Jairam's is extremely significant as this is the time that demonstrates both the distance that separates Biswas from orthodox Hinduism and the extent to which his destiny is intertwined with such Hinduism (Theme, 66-67).

It is as if he is predestined to live in a society that is very orthodox, as it seems in the abrupt manner in which, he is forced to marry, quite unexpectedly, into the extremely orthodox Pundit family of the Tulsis. The Tulsi family is renowned to be one of the most prestigious Indian families in the community and the moment he enters it, he makes himself into a subject of the matriarchal authoritarianism that is practiced in the family.

His initial entry is based on the presumption that this house will provide him with the roots that he has lost very early in life. Unfortunately this dream does not materialize. Instead it turns into a nightmare in which he is not only expected to give up any romantic notions that he might have about the house but also, quite, literally, himself. This proves to be something that he is not prepared to do, he might not have roots but he definitely has himself. Throughout he tries to keep his own space, epitomized in the quest for the house, intact. No wonder then that Mr. Biswas feels "trapped" when he falls into the clutches of Tulsidom, for Naipaul depicts Hanuman House as a symbol of traditionalism, rigidity, cultural infallibility (to its inmates), ritual duty, hierarchy, and communal life.

Sharing is behind the principle that at Hanuman House "floor space is bed space" and therefore at Short-hills Mr. Biswas finds that, under the hotel-like arrangements which obtained, his property, "like his children at night", were "disposed about the house." One reads of "mass flogging" at Short-hills. Similarly, parents are absolved from the responsibility of buying Christmas gifts for their offspring; the identical gifts received by the children are offered in the general name of Tulsidom - a good system for suppressing jealousy, individuality and inferiority or superiority complexes. The car at Short-hills is collectively owned - at least in theory.

Such a system fosters a strong sense of cohesion, demonstrated in various situations. Because of her age and ancestral role, Mrs. Tulsi holds an honorary presidential position in domestic affairs; Seth is her man-of-business, the chief prosecutor at "family tribunals", her counsellor and the agent of her will. Older sisters, like Padma, are respected because of their age; Han, as family priest, is highly placed; but there are "some lesser husbands", and there are generally divisions and subdivisions among the adults as well as the children. Apart from age classification, there is a clearly defined division of labour, well demonstrated at times when Mrs. Tulsi has a fainting spell. In times of normalcy, however, the women

cook the general food and feed their individual husbands. The children are fed in common. At Wood brook widows feed “readers and learners”, and both mothers and widows punish the young ones for their misdemeanors. This last duty is not in the province of the fathers for Tulsis husbands serve their purpose by relieving Tulsis daughters from the single state, by fathering new generations of “Tulsis”, and by contributing to Tulsis commercial interests. In addition, there is evidence of discrimination on the basis of caste, particularly as it affects marriage. And older Hindus are so particular about caste that they disapprove of Owad’s travelling to England since they believe, ironically, that the act of crossing the waters causes loss of caste!

Fixed roles naturally lead to an awareness of duties, conventions and rituals. It is the duty of the new wife to adopt an air of self-satisfaction and a studied blasé air, well captured in her mannerism of sitting with her legs apart. After a quarrel with or a beating by her husband she adopts a piqued air of martyrdom which must be publicly vaunted as a part of the badge of her married status; once pregnancy begins she must sigh and spit, both frequently. Husbands offending Mrs. Tulsis and therefore Tulsidom in general must subject to communal hostility and the offender must show his repentance by making fervent and frequent inquiries after the health of the stricken Mrs. Tulsis. Old women like Mrs. Tulsis and Bipti take up a patient, suffering posture, inviting compassion by their tears and the pulling of their veils over their foreheads. Daughters-in-law must observe punctilious respect towards their mothers-in-law; and Shama knows it is her duty to cry at Bipti’s funeral. In any case, funerals are occasions when it is socially necessary for female relatives to display uncontrollable grief. It is likewise part of the social ritual to attend the inconvenience of an irresponsible husband can be counteracted by the checks and balances provided by the extended family unit.

Into this apparent monolith of conventions, prejudices and conservatism, then, Mr. Biswas barges. He openly disapproves of many of the Tulsis practices and policies. He even challenges their religious belief and associates with Hindus of another sect with whom the Tulsis disagree. He disregards everybody’s acceptance of superior and inferior grading within the household and is very disrespectful to the matronly Mrs. Tulsis and the headman, Seth, and sarcastically taunts the young Tulsis boys with the name “gods”. To the total disgust of the entire household

- for he offends the Hindu’s scorn of another’s saliva - he spits upon one of the “gods”! Then he refuses to work for the Tulsis as a labourer. He only submits to work for them when he is given jobs commensurate with his sense of his own importance and human worth- the jobs of shopkeeper and estate manager - jobs where he would be semi-autonomous from Hanuman House and where he could command and decide and not be continuously pushed around. In brief, he refuses to feel inferior to the Tulsis, though he has no money to his credit. He actually feels that he is better than they are because he has strong intellectual interests, has vague ambitions for greatness and, most of all, because he dares, to have an independent mind. So where the glory of Tulsidom is its capacity to induce conformity among its members, Mr. Biswas revels in and exalts his individuality. And he therefore upsets the Tulsis appallingly when he buys Savi his personal Christmas present and one as obvious as a dolls’ house! He differentiates himself by speaking Creole English in Hanuman House while everyone else speaks Hindi (which Naipaul translates into Standard English); he ridicules Han, the symbol of religious reverence and ceremony; he sees chaos in their communal family arrangements; he feels the birth of yet another child as a psychological and economic burden on himself; and he continually shows up the hypocrisy and illogicality which inevitably creeps into conversation and ritual.

He quickly sports the contradiction in the “gods” doing Hindu puja and wearing crucifixes at the same time. In the same way, Chinta later comes to use Hindu incantations in combination with candle and a crucifix. When sickness strikes, Hindu prayers, Indian and African superstition and Western science are all called upon to contribute their complementary offices. Mrs. Tulsis herself succumbs to practices of Catholicism while remaining a devout Hindu. Even long before this no one in Hanuman House objected to the observance of Christ’s birthday and this they did in good Creole style, with English apples, cakes and ice-cream, and Portuguese cherry brandy. Likewise the Catholic-influenced Creole custom of eating salmon on Good Friday finds unquestioning acceptance in Tulsidom. Biswas’ own children, though not Christians, attend Sunday school, yet Biswas at one time speaks of Christianity as “a recent superstition

that was being exported wholesale to savages all over the world.”

This religious ambiguity and syncretism and; in some cases, even neglect of traditional religion, is one of the earliest aspects of cultural confrontation with which Naipaul deals in his novel. And he progressively shows the sometimes subtle, sometimes obvious, way in which the Western-oriented Creole culture of Trinidad corrodes Hindu traditional customs and beliefs, and the shifting of attitudes and psychological bewilderment this produces.

It is the combination of the external force of Westernization and urbanization aided by impulses which bring about the decay of that highly structured social organization, housed at Hanuman House and which, in fact, impels Mrs. Tulsi, the head herself, to suggest and execute the clan's removal from Arwacas, as if she herself recognizes the inadequacy of the ancestral home in the face of modern aspirations: Hanuman House belongs to. “a different age”.

The role of formal education in the decay of Hindu tradition must not be underestimated. It is, for instance, Biswas' education, which makes him think differently from his illiterate brothers, which exposes him to a life different from theirs. It has awoken his naturally alert mind and made him a rebel and a misfit in the midst of acceptors and conservatives. On another level, education has brought the “Gods” into contact with ideas and religion foreign to those of their ancestors. In fact, the abnormally exalted position of two teenage boys in the Tulsi' household where tradition demands that the greater the age the higher the respect accorded, is precisely due to their educational advantage over everyone else around them; and on his return from Europe, it is. Owad's educational superiority that automatically secures him recognition as head of the clan, over Shekhar, over his elder sisters, over almost, Mrs. Tulsi herself. It is in interests of Owad's education that Mrs. Tulsi forsakes the nest at Arwacas and goes into a five-day-a-week residence in Port-of-Spain and its well-reputed schools. And “Tulsi retainers”, taking advantage of this convenience, continuously migrate from the country to the town.

In other cultural aspects, Western education differs from the traditions of the Trinidadian. Anand comes to see the sacred thread ceremony merely as a convenient excuse for absenting himself from school, for he and Mr. Biswas know that he could not have a shaven head in school without inviting the pitiless ridicule of the European-based school children and teachers. Furthermore, after Anand's “brahminical invitation” Mr. Biswas encourages Anand to spend his retreat in learning school notes. No wonder Anand is “untutored” in the Hindu prayers when he is called upon to help do the puja after Han's death.

The disappearance of the values symbolized by Hanuman House is also associated with the exposure of what is Trinidad. It is very largely a rural way of life to an urban environment. In this connection, Mr. Biswas' first few days in Port-of-Spain are very revealing. He finds himself in the midst of a world dominated by European values and ideas - orderly lawns and gardens, primness, the new and glistening, a world of antiseptic cleanliness and the muted whisper (the latter assimilated by Dorothy's sophisticated daughters). It is a world of spaciousness and luxury, which is why Biswas is so sensitive to the fact that under Tulsidom he lives in a human chicken-run. It is a world of exquisite class-consciousness, which is why he squirms whenever Shama drops green verbs in conversation with Miss Logie. And the attitude of paternalistic toleration of ‘natives’ meted out to him by the city receptionist is to be paralleled by the well-meaning Miss Logie whose cultural values are so different from Tulsidom's that she has second thoughts about the seaside trip when she beholds Tulsidom's “swarm of children”.

Another reason for the cultural upheaval through which Tulsidom passes is the economic boom precipitated by the American presence in Trinidad during the Second World War. Govind is a product of this ‘wind of change’ and the sight of the ex-crab catcher manipulating a large American car and exhibiting his suits (plural) is enough to incense not only Mr. Biswas, but also to increase that spirit of competition that dominated life from the very first moment of life at Short hills. Under the incentive of the Yankee dollar, larger-scale depredations of Tulsi Short-hills property take place and a ‘dog-eat-dog’ commercial rat-race begins. All the adults make money from the common Tulsi property. W.C. Tuttle sells cedar trees. Govind disposes of citrus fruits and other agricultural products by the lorry-load, the saleable parts of the



Ford V8 car, bought out of the common Tulsis purse, are stripped by someone when the car could move no more. Mr. Biswas takes off daily with a paltry number of oranges, someone privately owns a cow.

But the spirit, of selfishness and rivalry was also the outcome of other factors-human factors. These had always been present among the Tulsis, but under a highly disciplined system and given a favorable environment, these human passions had been suppressed. But why was it that some sisters tried to distinguish themselves in particular ways, for instance, by brutality towards their children? Why was reaction so hostile when my member tried to break the hierarchal order and make them self superior by building his own house or giving his own children Christmas presents? Both jealousy and individualism were long at work in Tulsidom, for the need for individuality is instinctive in the human race despite the fact that man is a social being. In this connection, it is worthwhile to examine Anand's reaction to the doll's house episode. Because his sister gets a large doll's house, Anand in turn wants a car, which shows that the, system of joint ownership and subsistence-level amenities loses it hold' upon the individual once the opportunity for novelty, private ownership and unique grandiose schemes is presented. But Mrs. Tulsi's absenteeism changes the ambiance at Hanuman House. The living symbol of the past deserts, if only for part of the time, and the system founders. And once Seth is temporarily head of the establishment, a struggle for power ensues between himself and his sisters-in-law. They refuse to accept his authority unquestionably. Only now do they see fit to point out the cultural anomaly the intrinsic weakness in the organization of Hanuman House-that Seth is merely a Tulsi's son-in-law and therefore not a rightful inheritor of power. The sisters therefore make a bid to "paddle their own canoe". It is this squabbling for power that causes Tulsidom to disintegrate rapidly. Eventually Seth moves out-he too is jealous, of Mr. Biswas' success and Mrs. Tulsi takes the decision to move the whole chaotic household to a new setting and this again furthers disintegration.

So, because of various influences, Tulsidom is exposed to change. Of course, the Tulsis try to resist these innovations at times. This shows in their objection to Dorothy's way of life. It conflicts with theirs and the less contact between Dorothy and themselves the better. She outrages the long-skirted, veiled sisters by her unseemly short European dresses. She has European toilet habits and is immoral as far as the sisters are concerned. There are other changes too, such as readjustments in relationships. A significant one is that between Mr. Biswas, and Mrs. Tulsi and Owad. Although he was an object of ridicule at Hanuman House, but once he became a public figure through his newspaper work he rose in the estimation of Tulsidom and his intellectual interests brought him closer to Owad. But gradually, syncretism provides a natural way out of the cultural dilemma. So that apart from the religious hybridization already mentioned as practiced by the Tulsis, there is the compromise made by Shekhar in the matter of his marriage. Having absorbed modern ideas and mixed with other ethnic groups whose marriage procedures are different from the Hindu's, Shekhar objects to having a. 'life chosen for him and after suicide threats, he eventually compromises with an Indian, educated, rich, high caste, but Presbyterian wife with an English name. But, it is W.C. Tuttle who is a blatant product of cultural cross-breeding. He is a strict Hindu, but he is as interested in the material as the spiritual life, and while he is a modern man, his manner of blowing his nose is definitely uncivil in terms of the modern society. As a matter of fact, Naipaul subjects the process of syncretism to satiric humor. He gives a pathetic but highly comic exposition of the attempt at cultural transplantation at Short-hills. Now this estate in one of the valleys of the Northern mountain range is a relic of the old days of the white planter class, of grand Creole life-its English tastes and luxuries in a tropical setting.

The Tulsis encounter here neither rice-nor cane-field, but citrus and fruit and forest. Their neighbors are French- patois-speaking Negroes. Telling changes occur in architecture-the toilet becomes a sewing-room, the electric plant provides W.C. Tuttle, the physical, culture enthusiast, with dumbbells, a cowshed is raised on the cricket pitch, a temple is created. This apparent insensitivity to gracious living is really imposed by deep-seated customs and cultural habits. Then Naipaul shows up the irony in the fact that the Tulsis, in following the lure of education as the gateway to material and social progress and money, at the same time create new and slightly modified versions of Hanuman House both at Short-hills and in Wood-brook Space is still at a premium, the widows scandalize the bourgeois Wood-brook society by putting out trays of oranges on the sidewalk, and the Tulsis make themselves objects of

curiosity when the invasion from the country for Owad's farewell ceremonies begins, and to a limited extent communal eating arrangements for "readers and I earners" are operated in the old fashion by a group of widows.

### Conclusion

The cultural gap between the old and the new widens relentlessly. So that in the urban situation the individual family unit-father, mother and children-is certainly more in evidence than at Arwacas. Less Hindi is spoken now. Trinidad Creole English holds sway, and we are informed that the young generation of Tulsi children understand, but cannot speak, Hindi. Meanwhile Dorothy and her girls even speak Spanish. At the same time, the Wood-brook household becomes a brain-improving community for the children, and among the adults, an arena for competitions over status symbols like cars, bicycles, glass cabinets; side-tables, suits, and radiograms. Indeed, it does not take ever so long before Mr. Biswas begins taking pride in his suits and ties, which he, like the Creole society, accepts now as symbols of Westernization, progress, and respectability.

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