Preservation or progression: Indo-Trinidadian cultural fluidity as seen through the works of V.S. Naipaul and Shani Mootoo

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Preservation or Progression: Indo-Trinidadian Cultural Fluidity as Seen Through the
Works of V.S. Naipaul and Shani Mootoo

By

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A Thesis
Submitted to the University at Albany, State University of New York
in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements of the Degree of
Master of English

College of Arts & Sciences
Department of English
2014
Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to clarify and analyze the arguments about national and marginal identity made by two Indo-Trinidian authors, V.S. Naipaul and Shani Mootoo. Naipaul argues that Trinidad as a nation cannot survive because it must be dependent on colonial rule. He argues that Indo-Trinidadian’s are neither British nor Indian, and they lack identity and stability. In contrast, Mootoo argues that Trinidad is fully capable of establishing its own identity, and that Indo-Trinidadian culture does not need colonization nor India to define it. She argues that culture is a fluid and constantly changing idea. Mootoo recognizes the attempts at preserving Indian traditions and British standards in Trinidad, but argues that the attempt to make culture stagnant prevents progression. She also emphasizes in her work the marginal identity of gender set by societal standards, and understands that these gender identities must also fluctuate.

Part one of the thesis focuses on two novels by Naipaul: The Mystic Masseur and The Mimic Men. Both works show Naipaul’s critique of Indo-Trinidadians and their mimicry and ignorance of Indian traditions and culture. Both of these works also argue that Indo-Trinidadian’s will never be accepted in either Indian society or the British colonial hierarchy. Part two of my thesis focuses on Mootoo’s short stories “Out on Main Street,” “Sushila’s Bhakti,” and “The Upside-Downness of the World as it Unfolds” as well as her debut novel Cereus Blooms at Night. In these works, Mootoo expresses the marginal identities critiqued by authors such as Naipaul and shows that any attempt at preservation prevents progression in a culture. Mootoo also expresses the fluidity of individual identity in terms of gender and national identity.
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The term “post-colonial” is used to “cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 2). The occurrence of European colonization in the Caribbean resulted in a hybridized and globalized culture that still endures much conflict and social anxiety today. The post-colonial writer exists in the middle of this volatile imperial process, a process that continues long after the fall of imperialism. What remains is a diverse culture that is still to be interpreted for its international richness and its national insecurities.

The definition of the post-colonial writer is stated best in *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*: “the post-colonial writer, whose gaze is turned in two directions, stands already in that position which will come to be occupied by an interpretation, for he/she is not the object of an interpretation, but the first interpreter” (61). The West Indies is always in a state of “post-colonialism.” We depend on the West Indian writer and his/her works to better understand this cultural phenomenon, because they are our only gaze into this diverse world affected drastically by imperialism. However, this still results in conflicting views between interpreters.

Two such interpreters are V.S. Naipaul and Shani Mootoo, who reveal recurring moments of national and ancestral insecurity in their works. However, each of them perceive the conflicts differently. The purpose of this thesis is to examine their argument; how they share cultural anxiety, and their interpretation of cultural fluidity. Both authors remain distant from their ancestral land of India, even though both of them are products of different historical circumstances. V.S. Naipaul was born during the colonial period in 1932, while Shani Mootoo was born in Ireland in 1957, five years before independence.
Through their works they interpret their own upbringings, and recognize their displacement not only from their ancestral land of India but also from Trinidad.

Ashis Nandy, in his work *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism*, states, “Colonialism is a psychological state rooted in earlier forms of social consciousness in both the colonizers and the colonized. It represents a certain cultural continuity and carries a certain cultural baggage” (2). Colonial culture establishes codes of conduct that both the “rulers and the ruled can share,” unifying the two and maintaining dependency (2). But colonialism also emphasizes the reward system by “inducing the colonized, through socioeconomic and psychological rewards and punishments, to accept new social norms and cognitive categories” (3). This reward system is meant to praise the actions of the colonial, the one who follows the norms of English society. By establishing new codes of conduct through this reward system the colonized then become dependent on colonial rule. The colonized become blinded by their colonizer’s supposed grandeur, and eventually believe that the standards that are set for them will lead them to the best possible way of progress. Even if this progress means violence, the colonized will see it as necessary.

V.S. Naipaul understands the violence it takes to establish colonialism, and yet believes that there is no other choice but to accept this violence. Naipaul strongly believes that Trinidadians, because they are so distanced from their ancestral homelands, can only survive and thrive under colonialism and are incapable of independence. To be Trinidadian is impossible for Naipaul because Trinidadian as a nationality simply does not exist; at the same time Indo-Trinidadians cannot be considered Indian or English.
Despite continuous attempts to become European, Naipaul emphasizes their failure to do so. 

Dipesh Chakrabarty, in his article “Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for ‘Indian’ Pasts?” addresses the issue of the so-called “failure, lack, and inadequacy” that characterizes India’s history (Chakrabarty 8). Chakrabarty states that for Indians in the 1830s and 1840s to be recognized as a “modern individual” was to become “European” (7). This is a similar issue in Trinidad, where there is supposedly little history that doesn’t involve European rule or involvement. Though this is not necessarily true for India, Trinidad would not have existed without colonial rule, and its survival is dependent on this colonial identity. This anxiety to be part of the modern world is what Naipaul addresses in his earlier works. He feels that Trinidadian nationality is impossible because Trinidadians are so dependent on having a European image. However, Naipaul does not see the diversity of Trinidad as a potential opportunity for a new identity. He sees it only as a cultural handicap that is inevitably dependent on colonialism.

Because of this diversity in Trinidad Indian traditions, including Hinduism, undergo a type of “creolization.” They no longer bear strict attachment to India but become entities of their own, evolving in a diverse and unique environment. Naipaul denies that this creation has occurred, and raises the issue of national and cultural anxiety that colonization and multiple cultures have caused.

Shalini Puri discusses in her work, The Caribbean Postcolonial: Social Equality, Post-Nationalism, and Cultural Hybridity, this cultural creolization in Trinidad due to its diverse population: “The widespread Caribbean belief in the existence of distinct races with clearly distinguishable racial attitudes and characteristics raises pressing questions
for Trinidadian nationalism… If ‘the African’ and ‘the Asiatic’ are so ‘absolutely apart,’ then what does ‘the Trinidadian’ come to mean?” (Puri 174). Usually the borders of nations are defined by the major ethnic group, but the diverse population in Trinidad no longer bases itself on ancestry or ethnicity. They no longer resemble their African and Asian ancestors, and have become an entity all their own. They therefore have the capability of calling themselves a newly-established nation. To call oneself Trinidadian does not indicate a division in race and religion, but rather unity. Naipaul denies that such a culture could emerge. He firmly asserts in his travel narrative *The Middle Passage* that, “nothing was created in the West Indies,” and therefore there is no independent culture in Trinidad (29).

The purpose of this thesis is to look at Naipaul’s flawed interpretation of Indo-Trinidadians through the eyes of another Trinidadian author, Shani Mootoo. In *The Mimic Men* Naipaul emphasizes the masculine values of patriarchy, conquering, and colonialism. Naipaul recognizes the masculine features of colonialism, and asserts that to be anything but colonial does not lead to progress. Mootoo approaches the interpretation of national and marginal identity in a different manner. She recognizes Naipaul’s view of masculinity and questions it, asking what is considered a “correct” identity in terms of societal values and why? She also proves that Naipaul’s view is limiting, and offers a misguided interpretation of Trinidad. Throughout her work she expresses her understanding of how the identity of any culture is fluid, and capable of changing and expanding.

Shani Mootoo’s fiction provides insights into the concepts of nation, culture, and personal identity. She, unlike Naipaul who solely identifies with his colonial past, looks
forward to Trinidad’s future through a cosmopolitan perspective. Naipaul believes that the only thing that exists for Trinidad is colonialism. He clings to the past, and believes that it is impossible for Trinidad to establish its own identity with its variety of racial influences and “lack of history.” He believes that colonizers represent an advanced civilization, and the only way for a nation to succeed is to Europeanize itself. For Naipaul, western education is the only thing that can civilize the “uneducated” colonized of the Caribbean. Naipaul sees creolization as a bad term, firmly believing that the Asiatic and the African cultures cannot mix, and the Caribbean has no chance of surviving on its own without British rule. Creolization defies what he sees as the purity and the authenticity of a culture. Mootoo, however, embraces what Naipaul defines as an inauthentic culture, and appreciates the impossibility of Naipaul’s ideals. She believes that a culture is meant to be unique and that influence from other cultures cannot be avoided.

Here I think it’s best to quote the words of Franz Fanon, from his work *The Wretched of the Earth*:

> Culture never has the translucency of custom. Culture eminently eludes any form of simplification. In its essence it is the very opposite of custom, which is always a deterioration of culture. Seeking to stick to tradition or reviving neglected traditions is not only going against history, but against one’s people. (Fanon 160)

Here Fanon states that custom and culture are two different things, one immovable, and the other fluid. Culture is the opposite of custom, because it changes and develops. Thus
customs ultimately do not define a culture. Trinidad is an example of this because its culture is not based on ancestral customs but customs that Trinidadians have adapted to reflect their own progressing society. Preserving customs represents resistance to this change, and ultimately harms the people of that culture. One idea that I will repeat in this section, and that reflects Fanon’s statement above, is that *preservation prevents progression*. The attempt to preserve and mummify traditions can prevent the culture from growing and developing. Preservation creates a lack of connectedness to other cultures and leads to isolation and ignorance. Naipaul idealizes this preservation, and resists cultural fluidity, but does not see its failure. He keeps himself ignorant about the cultural development and potential for Trinidad, and puts too much emphasis and faith in British rule. He ignores the many variables of identity, and ignores the growing concerns and anxieties of this resistance in society, such as the resistance to the stagnant perceptions of gender and religion.

Mootoo, unlike Naipaul, acknowledges in her work these new sets of concern when independence is newly established in Trinidad. As she sees Trinidad transform, she acknowledges that gender and national roles are not meant to be stagnant. In her works she breaks the imagined borders of identity, specifically the borders of gender, racial, and religious identities, and shows that these identities constantly fluctuate. As the individual’s identity fluctuates so does the culture itself. Societal perceptions constantly change, and the culture is capable of growing into something unrecognizable compared to its ancestral origins. This fluctuation of culture can create a feeling of instability among its people, a constant asking as of “Who am I?” and “What nationality am I?” More importantly it is asked, “How will others identify me?” In a newly forming society, there
is a constant demand to establish and label identity, to establish a home land to be devoted to, and to specify what correct and incorrect conduct is.

In Mootoo’s work, the characters struggle with this labeling. They are not able to put themselves within the margins of the identities to which society says they belong. There is no confidence in a national identity because the various races and traditions compete for place in the nation. Indo-Trinidadians are not considered Indian, because they are distanced from their ancestral land, nor are they English, because the country that colonized them alienates them. Mootoo, however, does not believe that Trinidadians should be dismissed because of a “lack of stability” in their identity. For her, there is no authentic or inauthentic culture. The culture and its people were always meant to be cosmopolitan, constantly growing and learning from other cultures.

Mootoo’s ideas face resistance when someone, like Naipaul, finds it necessary to stay in the past, preserve it, because that is the “true” and “authentic” way of thinking. Tradition is emphasized for its power and influence, and must remain stagnant in order to preserve this influence. But history must be allowed to be history, and a culture must be allowed to move forward. Trinidad is a blank slate, prepared and then abandoned by British colonialism, destined to survive and develop on its own. Any attempt at preserving the ancestral cultures of Trinidad, and any attempt at preserving this colonialism, prevents the country’s progression, because Trinidad is not India, Africa, or England. Ultimately the preservation, and worshiping historical notions of society fails, creating strife, alienation, and racism. Mootoo uses the distinctions between race and class as part of her lens, but she also looks optimistically into Trinidad’s future, seeing that the culture can be reborn and unified, not divided because of ancestral customs. She
sees that Trinidad is not a culture entombed in its ancestral traditions. It is fluid and capable of taking traditions, transforming them, and making them their own.
Part I: V.S. Naipaul and Colonial Mimicry

Chapter 1: Performance and Mimicry in V.S. Naipaul’s *The Mystic Masseur*

In V.S. Naipaul’s travel work *The Middle Passage* he states, “The history of the islands can never be satisfactorily told. Brutality is not the only difficulty. History is built around achievement and creation; and nothing was created in the West Indies” (Naipaul 29). He believes that Trinidad and the West Indies have no history that is not based on British colonization, and therefore cannot survive without British rule. Naipaul uses satire and humor eloquently and strategically to express his opinion of the Indo-Trinidadian’s failure as a British citizen, an Indian, and a Trinidadian.

We get a glimpse of Naipaul’s critique of Trinidad in his first satirical novel *The Mystic Masseur*. The novel’s characters are Naipaul’s way of criticizing Indo-Trinidadians for their naivety and their ignorance. This is a particularly harsh critique of Trinidad as Naipaul’s characters fail in attempting to create their own identities and remain a mockery not only of England, but of India as well. The character Ganesh best represents this mockery, and is turned into a spectacle for the reader. He represents how colonization is unsuccessful as he fails as a masseur, a politician, and a Trinidadian writer.

Ganesh’s character progresses through a series of performances. His first performance is his attempt at writing books. He performs the act of an author by publishing books that really have no substance. When picking up books he determines their value by their size and feel, and when he is about to publish a book he is more concerned with the paper it is to be printed on than what he should actually write in the
book. In the stationary department of a store Ganesh takes “surreptitious sniffs at the paper, and, closing his eyes, passed his hands over many papers, the better to savor their texture” (Naipaul 70). He does not measure a book’s worth by content but by texture, smells, weight, thickness, and how many inches it was. The larger it is the more knowledge it holds, and the more knowledgeable he will look my owning it, or possibly even writing one like it.

On Saturdays and Sundays he rested. On Saturday he went to San Fernando and bought about twenty dollars’ worth of books, almost six inches; and on Sunday, from habit, he took down Saturday’s new books and underlined passages at random, although he no longer had the time to read the books as thoroughly as he would have liked. (Mystic 129)

The more books he had, and the thicker they were, the more knowledgeable Ganesh appeared to his friends and the rest of the community. He gets into the habit of collecting books for his library, making it a goal to fill it with nine-hundred books, with no intention of reading them all (69). And though he states to Leela and reassures her that he will write his own work, he instead continues to fill notebooks with notes and quotes from his collection, stating that, “A man may turn over half a library to make one book” (73), though he doesn’t read any of his books “as thoroughly as he would have liked” (129). Despite how many books he reads and how many notes he takes fails at being a true source of information to the public.

Ganesh’s failure is especially apparent though his début publication “101 Questions and Answers on the Hindu religion.” When it comes to the content of this work
Ganesh is troubled when trying to find the will and the inspiration to write. Instead of writing and forming his own ideas he takes out any books that reference the Hindu faith and India and takes notes on them (*Mystic* 102). Instead of providing new information to the community he recounts old information and does not provide particularly insightful information for the public. Though his statement, “A man may turn over half a library to make one book” sounds proverbial and wise, they are ultimately empty words. He is a failure as an independent thinker.

This section is not only satirical about the failure of Ganesh’s writing but also Naipaul’s critique of the Hindu religion and how it is viewed in Trinidad. According to him, the people of Trinidad perform and preserve traditions but do not fully understand them. Ganesh is an example, as he only states the apparent facts about Hinduism in his works and does not provide new interpretations for it. A quotation from the text demonstrates Ganesh’s lack of knowledge in the subject. For example: “Question Number One: What is Hinduism? Answer: Hinduism is the religion of the Hindus. Question Number Two: Why am I a Hindu? Answer: Because my parents and grandparents were Hindus” (97). Ganesh has no true understanding of Hinduism and has a naïve sense of his identity. Nevertheless, this book, and other books like it, get published and leads to his fame as a wise pundit, a teacher, in Trinidad. The community eventually becomes dependent on Ganesh’s “vast knowledge” and understanding of the Hindu faith.

Bhoendradatt Tewarie states that, “in many ways this [Ganesh’s] Hindu community has been transformed by migration from the Old World to the New, and the process continues as it tries to come to terms with existence in a colonial society that is
itself undergoing a process of transformation” (15). Because the Hindu community wants to establish an identity for itself, it turns to Ganesh for knowledge and truth. Most of the community is illiterate, unlike Ganesh, who has a proper and admirable colonial education. In fact, “the insistence upon writing is of significance to Ganesh because he has escaped illiteracy through his exposure to colonial education” (Tewarie 17). His literacy gives him power, but not understanding. His education is, thus, a mockery of his literacy, and he is incapable of thinking critically. In this way Naipaul uses Ganesh to mock Indo-Trinidadian naivety and ignorance about their ancestral religion by making him the center for knowledge on Hinduism, even though he is no real source of knowledge at all. And yet the community fails to notice Ganesh’s faults and ultimately is brought down with him.

When we are first introduced to Hinduism in the novel through Mr. Stewart, a descendant of British colonizers who adopts Hinduism as his primary faith, we see another of Naipaul’s examples of how a culture can easily be mocked. Mr. Stewart, obviously a European man, claims he is Indian, specifically Kashmiri, and wears a yellow cotton monk robe, though he will never stepped foot in India because of the “politics” (Mystic 26-30). Ganesh is very aware of Mr. Stewart’s mockery because Mr. Stewart is obviously not Indian, and not even willing to enter India. However, Ganesh is no better. Ganesh is alienated from his ancestral roots in India, and uses his literacy to gain a standing in society that he is obviously unfit for. Ganesh is a manipulative character who believes that Hindus are ignorant, unknowledgeable, and easy to control.

When it came to Ganesh’s effect on people, Naipaul tells us, “Christians liked him, Muslims liked him, and Hindus, willing as ever to risk prayers to new gods, didn’t
object” (101). Here Naipaul is being very critical of Hindus, believing that they will do anything for their own benefit, even if it means sacrificing their ancestral faith. This leads to empowering Ganesh’s performance as a mystic masseur, and the role he plays in Trinidadian Hinduism.

Ganesh “imagines” an India that alienates him. As Benedict Anderson states, “The great sacral cultures incorporated conceptions of immense communities…[they] were imaginable largely through the medium of a sacred language and written script… One crucial difference was the older communities’ confidence in…their ideas about admission to membership” (Anderson 12-13). Here Anderson shows us that the difference between a nation and a religious community is that a religious community remains global and connected not by borders but a similar language and faith. But for Naipaul Indo-Trinidadians have lost this connection because they are exposed to other races and cultures.

The Hindu religion in Trinidad is prone to change, and Naipaul questions its membership under the umbrella of Indian Hinduism. This is seen in the end of the novel, when Ganesh becomes the leader of the Hindu Association in Trinidad. As his first act he sends a message to the All India Congress in India stating his victory; his message is ignored (Mystic 184). This incident illustrates how Indo-Trinidadians have little contact with their motherland, and yet it continues to be a significant part of their daily life. This significance, however, is not mutual. Indo-Trinidadians still imagine themselves as part of this foreign entity, but their ancestral land has alienated them, evolving and changing without them. It then becomes difficult to establish an independent identity from India. Traditions inherited from India cannot be expunged after colonization and indentured

1 Emphasis added
labor, but because of the diversity in Trinidad, and also the Caribbean in general, Hinduism undergoes a type of “creolization” or transformation caused by the influences of Afro-Trinidadian culture and French-creole culture. Hinduism no longer bears strict attachment to India, and becomes a separate entity of its own. Naipaul sees this as a failure, and denies that this is how the fluidity of culture actually proceeds, developing and growing into what may become unrecognizable.

Reminding ourselves of Shalini Puri’s question — “If ‘the African’ and ‘the Asiatic’ are so ‘absolutely apart,’ then what does ‘the Trinidadian’ come to mean?” – helps us understand the particular problems this new idea of a unified culture presents in the Caribbean (Puri 174). This unity would not have occurred without British colonialism, but that does not mean that the culture is dependent on colonialism in order to survive. Trinidad is no longer African or Asiatic, but its own place as a nation. While struggling at the same time to remember mother India, Indo-Trinidadians undergo their own transformation as they connect with different cultures and races. To be part of a West Indian society is therefore no longer solely a matter of race or religion. Eventually Mother India will become a distant memory.

Naipaul’s Indo-Trinidadian characters undergo this “exile” from India, and show that their ideas of Hinduism and Indian mysticism are a misconceived mockery of ancestral traditions. The sacredness of India becomes a commodity throughout the novel, used instead as a business tactic by Ganesh to gain recognition, fame and wealth. Ganesh does not intentionally mean to manipulate the people of Trinidad; at most his understanding of mysticism is misguided as he truly believes he is helping his community. For example, after a long time of writing and collecting notes his aunt, The
Great Belcher, states that if he is a true Hindu “he must realize by now that he has to use his learning to help out other people” (Mystic 104). Ganesh is given a gift, a collection of Sanskrit books that once belonged to his uncle who was a masseur in his life. He truly believes that these books are sacred and that there is power in them. The books are so sacred that he forbids his wife Leela from touching them (Mystic 106). These books become his “props” for rituals and show his power to the community, a power that only he understands and has access to.

Ganesh also must keep up appearances as a masseur. As stated before he collects books to look the part of a scholar and a writer, but once he becomes a mystic Ganesh eventually wears a koorta and a dhoti to look the part of an “authentic” Indian mystic. This is reminiscent of when we first meet Mr. Stewart, who claims he is Indian and shows it through his Indian clothing. Though Mr. Stewart states that clothing “has no spiritual significance” he still uses it as part of his performance. Both characters use clothing to symbolize their power, education and status in the community. Even Leela eventually turns to dressing in a sari to look the part of a Hindu mystic’s wife.

Ganesh’s performance is not only through the material he possesses but through action:

He was a good listener. People poured out their souls to him and he didn’t make them feel uncomfortable. His speech became flexible. With simple folk he spoke dialect. With people who looked pompous or skeptical or said, ‘is the first time in my life I come to anybody like you,’ he spoke as correctly as possible, and his deliberate delivery
gave weight to what he said and won confidence. *(Mystic 128-129)*

The fact that he had a library made it impossible for clients to “deny his literacy or learning” (128). He demonstrates his education and experience through his books, and attracts his clients using his voice and his clothing, which is all part of his performance as a mystic. He pretends to have access to abilities and powers that no one else can because of his education and material. His performance as a mystic could not be maintained if he did not assert that the mystery of Hinduism in Trinidad could only be kept alive by him. He must first get the community to believe in him before he is capable of “banishing spirits.”

This is especially important in the case of the boy with the black cloud following him. Ganesh chants in Hindi and sits behind a screen, telling the boy that this ritual will work only if he truly believes in him. He tells the boy that if he does not believe in his power everyone in the room will die *(Mystic 122-123)*. The boy then screams, “I believe in him now” out of fear for his life. Then the cloud slowly recedes and dies (124). After the family leaves Ganesh speaks to his wife, and says, “It make them feel good, you know, hearing me talk a language they can’t understand. But it not really necessary” (125). The family sees what they want to see, and Ganesh comforts them by keeping alive this spiritual mystery that is his “power.” His wife then claims, “oh, man, don’t tell me you use a trick on them” to which Ganesh doesn’t reply (125).

The ritual is nothing more than a performance, a ruse that leads to Ganesh’s fame as a mystic:
In this way he made most of his money. But what he really liked was a problem which called for all his intellectual and spiritual strength. Like the Woman Who Couldn’t Eat. This woman felt her food turn into needles in her mouth; and her mouth actually bled. He cured her. And there was Lover Boy…a successful racing-cyclist [who fell] in love with his cycle and make love to it openly in a curious way. He cured him too. (127)

Ganesh’s rituals are merely performances, but the community has faith in Ganesh because the people need to be cured of their ailments. Eventually Ganesh begins to fool himself, as he truly believes that these rituals effect his clients. He sees himself as a true mystic and a scholar and eventually he makes speeches to the public, reading from sacred texts from all religions, to educate and inspire. “People sometimes understood,” Naipaul writes, “and when they got up they felt a little nobler” (150). The community grows to be dependent on Ganesh and his “powers,” and Ganesh’s ego blinds him. He becomes dependent on his imagining of India and of its exoticism and mysterious culture in order to present himself as a true mystic.

From a writer to a mystic Ganesh’s final performance is that of the politician, a leader of Trinidad. What is significant about this performance is not how he becomes a politician, but the results of his victory. Instead of actually speaking for the Trinidadian people, by the end of the novel “he went to cocktail parties at Government House and drank lemonade. He wore a dinner-jacket to official dinners. In the Colonial Office report on Trinidad for 1949 Ganesh was described as an important political leader…In 1953
Trinidad learned that Ganesh Ramsumair had been made an M.B.E.” (207). Ganesh becomes a Member of the British Empire and eventually turns his back on Trinidad.

In the novel’s epilogue the narrator is in at an English university when he runs into Ganesh. He cries, “Pundit Ganesh!” to him only to receive the cold correction that his name is G. Ramsay Muir (208). No longer does Ganesh recognize himself as Trinidadian as he takes a more Anglicized name. This is a crucial scene of Ganesh as his final mimicry is that of the British Empire. By the end of the novel he has been “successfully colonized.” Albert Memmi helps us understand Ganesh’s mimicry in his work *The Colonizer and the Colonized*:

> The immigrant who is prepared to accept anything, having come for the express purpose of enjoying colonial benefits, will become a colonist by vocation…The man is generally young, prudent, and polished…No matter what happens he justifies everything—the system and the officials in it. He obstinately pretends to see nothing of poverty and injustice which are right under his nose; he is interested only in creating a position for himself, in obtaining his share.

(Memmi 46)

The above statement describes Ganesh perfectly. Though he does not necessarily seek wealth, he seeks reputation and influence, even if it means being a member of the British Empire and leaving Trinidad behind. Ganesh is in a constant state of alienation. He alienates himself from Trinidad because he feels it will no longer benefit him. In this way, he represents Naipaul because Naipaul similarly believes that only the British
colonists can create progress and development. However, Naipual also shows that Ganesh will always remain alienated by the colonizers because he is still recognized as a colonized Trinidadian due to his race and birthplace. His title as M.B.E. is a title with no substance. He takes on the form, the shape, of a teacher, a scholar, a mystic, and a politician, but fails to inform or create anything new for the West Indies. Thus in Naipaul’s novel Ganesh, and the rest of Trinidad, is a failed product of British colonialism. For Naipaul there will always be displacement, and to remain in the West Indies only means failure. He believes that culture cannot be fluid, and Trinidad cannot form into its own nation. It can only survive with the support of its colonizers
Chapter 2: Colonizing Space in *The Mimic Men*

In the novel *The Mimic Men*, Naipaul opinion of the Indo-Trinidadian is reflected through his narrator Ralph Singh, who faces multiple environments that are colonized by British imperialism and must deal with constant displacement, instability, and alienation. The novel is presented as the memoirs of Singh, who traces his 40 years of life from Trinidad, to London and back again, though the story is not told in chronological order. There are three specific features I will address in the work. These features are best described as spaces, as they occupy both the narrator’s environment and his own state of mind. The first space is the industrial space, London. London, for Naipaul, represents the height of society. It is western civilization’s crowning achievement. Ralph is captivated by the city but also captive to it. He makes an attempt to be a part of it, but only feels disconnected from the city as he is to his life in the Caribbean. The second space is the home, the private space, especially the home the narrator shares with his ex-wife Sandra. They try to settle and establish a place for themselves that is alienated from everyone else. They attempt to “colonize” their home, and yet it remains empty. The final space is inevitably that of the narrator himself, who occupies a mental space of shame for his birth country and is constantly trying to re-establish himself by moving from place to place and asserting claims to roots that ultimately he feels he has no connection to. He wants to turn into a “proper” European citizen, but he finds that it is impossible to re-establish himself. Ralph uses these spaces as extensions of himself to try and colonize and educate himself. By changing the spaces around him he hopes he will be able to gain a better standing in society and be seen not as a West Indian but as a British citizen. Like Ganesh in Naipaul’s *The Mystic Masseur*, Ralph attempts to establish and claim British roots in
order to be taken seriously in society, gain a better social standing, and also get a clearer idea of who he is in terms of the world around him.

The novel itself is the memoir of our main character, Ranjit Kripalsingh, who changes his name to the more European Ralph R. K. Singh. This changing of his name represents his attempt at transformation into a British citizen. It is a means of changing and colonizing his identity. He believes that his early childhood problems were deeply rooted in his name. Bhoendradatt Tewarie argues, “Singh’s problems began with the fact that he is an East Indian from a Hindu background growing up in a multi-ethnic colonial society: ‘childhood was, for me, a period of incompetence, bewilderment, solitude and shameful fantasies. It was a period of burdensome secrets.’ Most of these ‘burdensome secrets’ that Ralph deals with in the novel are related to his ethnic background. His very name is a source of confusion” (Tewarie 73). Despite the name change he has trouble establishing himself as a British citizen. He hopes that writing memories of his Caribbean childhood, and the cultural paradoxes of living as a colonized Trinidadian attempting to be a British colonist will help stabilize his identity. To this end, he travels to London to establish his roots there. He recalls his past love affairs with various European women and how they affected his identity. He wishes to become a strong figure in British society but he realizes that it is difficult to do so as a West Indian. He tries to place himself in politics, and severs the ties to his birthplace only to find that this is not possible. He will always be identified as West Indian who will always be set apart from the European women he has affairs with. He therefore suffers from the distance between his Caribbean and British identities.
To start with the concept of the city, Ralph sees London as a possible extension of himself and makes it his home. Unlike his disorderly life in the Caribbean, he hopes living in London will help transform his thinking and his self-image. He wishes to achieve a better social standing by living within a high class society. He is inspired by his housekeeper, Lieni, and her goal to become a “smart London girl.” Her attempts at assimilating were more “like a duty owed more to the city than herself” (Mimic 14). As colonized people, Ralph and Lieni believe they have an obligation towards Mother England. Like Lieni, Ralph makes a similar attempt at becoming a good British citizen, and believes that relationships with various European women will lead him to achieving this ideal Westernized life that so many European men achieved.

Ralph’s relationship with women is unique because he depends on them to guide him towards his new British identity. When first introduced to the city, he is introduced to Lieni, and as he grows close to her all his actions are geared towards her approval. His motivation is ultimately her satisfaction. Though Ralph’s performance of the rich colonial is a ruse, Lieni nevertheless sees him that way. She unintentionally encourages Ralph’s performance, affirming what he believes is his rightful place in London. His performance becomes his reality. Ralph’s identity is solely based on how others view him, and in the beginning of the novel it is Lieni who dresses him, approves of him, and sends him out to “conquer” (Mimic 25). Naipaul uses the term “conquer” to define Ralph’s actions and goals in the novel. In this case “conquer” refers to sex with European women as a means to make the city his own and claiming his place amongst the people. When he is unable to be intimate with these women he feels disconnected not only from them but from his
claim on London. Here we can see that Naipaul establishes the relationship between Singh’s sexual escapades and imperial conquest.

Our narrator directly compares his desire for the city with his desire for sexual intimacy:

> It is so whenever, moving out of ourselves, we look for extensions of ourselves. It is with cities as it is with sex. We seek the physical city and find only a conglomeration of private cells. In the city as nowhere else we are reminded that we are individuals, units. Yet the idea of the city remains; it is the god of the city that we pursue, in vain.

(22)

He pursues the city as he pursues women, only to end up isolated. He hopes for a relationship with these women and pictures its grandeur just as he pictures his relationship with the city. However, he is left in his “private cell,” a prison that falsely presents itself as a safe haven of order and stability. Ralph is disappointed by this order and lack of intimacy with the city.

He hopes that London can offer him status, and make him feel important and powerful. For him, this status was something that could not be achieved on his Caribbean island of Isabella. He calls London “the great city, centre of the world, in which, fleeing disorder, I had hoped to find the beginning of order” (22). Ralph sees England as his colonial “motherland” and feels he has a right to claim his roots there. However, England is not his ancestral country; he only pretends it is. The fact that he establishes this in his
mind shows the beginnings of his mimicry. He believes that England can provide better opportunities, but he is utterly disappointed by the fact the city still alienates him.

Here was the city, the world. I waited for the flowering to come to me… But the god of the city was elusive. The tram was filled with individuals, each man returning to his own cell. The factories and warehouses, whose exterior lights decorated the river, were empty and fraudulent. I would play with famous names as I walked empty streets and stood on bridges. But the magic of names soon faded. Here was the river, here the bridge, there that famous building. But the god was veiled. My incantation of names remained unanswered. In the great city, so solid in its light, which gave color even to unrendered concrete-to me as colourless as rotting wooden fences and new corrugated-iron roofs- in this solid city life was two-dimensional. (23)

He could not feel the presence of this “god of the city” that he believed to exist.

Repeating English names and speaking formally did not give him the comfort of fitting in. In this grand city, he is given a small space to call his own, but this new home failed to give him any satisfaction. It was his prison, as it was apparent that he was not welcomed or accepted in this city. Ralph expected to be welcomed as an Englishman, only to realize that this was not his identity, and he was faced with no option but to return to his birthplace in the Caribbean.
When he returns to the island Isabella, he brings along his new British wife Sandra. Once back home, he realizes that he cannot make a home there either, for both he and Sandra feel equally as alienated as he had in London. Ralph was also ashamed to show Sandra this side of his heritage, his history. Because of his birthplace and his ethnic roots, he is scared and ashamed of the possibility that his wife will see him as less civilized than her, yet he feels that he rightfully belongs by her side because he is more literate than the locals. Like his apartment in London, which he had hoped to make a home for himself, the space of his house in Isabella is meant to attain stability. He wishes to colonize this space with Sandra who is also a means for order and stability. As he says, “it seemed to me that to attach myself to her was to acquire that protection which she offered, to share some of her quality of being marked, a quality which once was mine but which I had lost” (56). But like in London their attempts at ignoring their histories only end up alienating them further.

The description of their home together is intriguing as there is barely anything to describe. This disconnectedness from Isabella and this rejection of the rest of the world is reflected in their home:

It was one of those large timber town houses from the old colonial period, slightly decaying in spite of its modern kitchen. We both thought it attractive but for some reason never succeeded in colonizing it. Large areas of it remained empty; it felt like a rented house, which soon has to go back to its true owner. It had never seemed important to us.
to have a house of our own. I had no feeling for the house
as home, as personal creation. (84) ²

This old colonial house with a modern kitchen seems befitting for the couple, and yet
they are unable to “colonize” it and make it their own. It still belongs to the “decaying”
history of Isabella. They live in Isabella not as citizens or tourists, but as failed colonists.

Ralph eventually embraces this and refers to both of them as “cosmopolitan.”
They both celebrate the fact that they cannot settle. Ralph especially never settles, even
with the same woman. He continues to be promiscuous near the end of his relationship
with Sandra. He is never satisfied with the identity he creates for himself and continues to
go from woman to woman. He is constantly fluctuating as a person and is desperate to
stabilize himself in new landscapes, but fails. Indeed, Ralph realizes as much. When he
returns to Isabella he states, “This return so soon to a landscape which I thought I had put
out of my life for good was a failure and a humiliation” (60).

From the home to the self, Ralph, once called Ranjit, attempts to colonize himself,
transform himself, by changing his name, marrying a British woman, traveling and
educating himself. He wants to sever ties to Isabella, only to find it impossible when he
returns.

Coming to London, the great city, seeking order, seeking
the flowering, the extension of myself that ought to have
come in a city of such miraculous light, I had tried to
hasten a process which had seemed elusive. I had tried
to give myself a personality. It was something I had
tried more than once before, and waited for the response in

² Emphasis added
the eyes of others. But now I no longer knew what I was; ambition became confused, then faded; and I found myself longing for the certainties of my life on the island of Isabella, certainties which I had once dismissed as shipwreck. (32)

In his attempt to seek order he only finds uncertainty, and though he feels he no longer belongs in the place where he was raised, he feels it is only there can he get certainty.

There are striking similarities between Ganesh and our narrator. Both play the role of the politician, both find solace in writing, but while Ganesh hides in his comfortable space of the Indian community in Trinidad and gains power there, Ralph chooses to leave his birthplace and grow. Ganesh uses politics to gain power in his performance while Ralph understands the fault behind politicians and their imperialistic intentions. We can see that as Naipaul writes his novels his pessimism increases, and he even critiques his previous work *The Mystic Masseur*. For example, Ralph explicitly states that the politician is a performer: “The successful public performer in whatever field he operates, not perhaps from contempt, but from a profound lack of regard for his audience. The actor is separate from those who applaud him; the leader, and particularly the popular leader, is separate from the led” (136). Here we can cross both novels, as Ganesh is Ralph’s interpretation of a performer. Ganesh only helps his community as a means to gain power, and he maintains a barrier between them and himself. He sees himself as a leader, but does not wish to associate himself with his community. Both Ganesh and Ralph change their names to more anglicized forms in order to fit in with society, but while Ganesh believes in the end that he has fully assimilated and succeeded
in his attempt at achieving status, Ralph recognizes that this is an impossible failure and that he will never be accepted into English society:

I felt I had known double failure, and I felt I continued to live between their twin threats. It was during this time, as I have said, that I thought of writing. It was my hope to give expression to the restlessness, the deep disorder, which the great explorations, the overthrow in three continents of established social organizations, the unnatural bringing together of peoples who could achieve fulfillment only within the security of their own societies and the landscapes hymned by their ancestors, it was my hope to give partial expression to the restlessness which this great upheaval as brought about. (38)

This “unnatural bringing together of peoples” describes Naipaul’s view of Trinidad and the rest of the Caribbean. According to Ralph it is a “shipwrecked” island where the only thing the people are connected to are their ancestors and their colonizers. Thus, according to our narrator, there is little chance for this new civilization, and it represents nothing more to him than humiliation: “I belonged to a small community which in this part of the world was doomed. We were an intermediate race, the genes passive, capable of disappearing in two generations into any of the three races of men, with perhaps only a shape of eye or flexibility of slender wrist to speak of our intrusion” (68). Ralph feels that he and his community face extinction, and the only way to survive is to assimilate into something else, preferably the high society of England. But Ralph is not linked to the
city. He is divided from it, reduced to nothing but “to a succession of such meetings, so that first experience and then the personality divided bewilderingly into compartments. Each person concealed his own darkness” (32). There is nothing left but doom for him. It is inevitable that he is pushed into darkness, with no identity, no connection to his birthplace, his motherland, or to the motherland of his colonizers.

Ralph exists in a mental space of humiliation and shame that for Naipaul is impossible to avoid. Ralph is no doubt a reflection of Naipaul as they both find no solace in any place he goes and with no one that he meets. Their act of writing is their means to seek order within themselves, a means to an impossible end. Naipaul himself believes he is doomed if he were to remain as a Trinidadian. Like his character Ganesh and Ralph, Naipaul asserts the illusion that he is actually a British citizen and has no attachment to Trinidad. This is Naipaul’s ultimate failure.
Part II. Preservation Prevents Progression: Looking Forward through the
Works of Shani Mootoo

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Chapter 3: Cultural Fluidity and Identity Anxiety in Mootoo’s
“Out on Main Street,” “‘Sushila’s Bhakti,’” and
“The Upside-Downness of the World as it Unfolds”

Shani Mootoo, in her short story “Out on Main Street,” brings up a term that will help our understanding of cultural fluidity: “cultural bastardism.” This story, written in the vernacular, is a first person narrative about a Trinidadian girl who struggles with her sexual orientation as well as her feelings for her friend Janet. She also questions, and is angered by, how some immigrants from India view Indo-Trinidadians. Our narrator, who is not given a name, sees how the Hindus from India view those in Trinidad when she encounters a sweet seller from India. She and her fellow Indo-Trinidadians are seen as cultural bastards: not really Indian, but merely products of colonialism. Indians from India think highly of themselves compared to the Indians who have lived in Trinidad for generations, because their language and customs are preserved. Our narrator states, “We ain’t good grade A Indians. We skin brown, is true, but we doh even think ‘bout India unless something happen over dere and it come on de news” (Mootoo 45). She is aware of this disconnectedness, and the criticism she gets for it. She states that even though they are Hindus like their ancestors they do not perform traditional rituals. Furthermore, their language from India is mostly lost, blended into the local culture, and their traditions have transformed into something unrecognizable by most Indians. She defines Indo-Trinidadians as “kitchen Indians” because their food and cooking is the only thing that
has close roots to India. Every other aspect of their culture has grown and developed into something new.

The narrator discusses her friend Janet, whom she has intimate feelings for, but is also somewhat embarrassed by. This embarrassment the narrator feels creates anger against those who judge them, and leads her to be more protective of Janet. She sees how others view her and Janet as ignorant examples of “cultural bastardism.” For example, the narrator is bothered by the fact that Janet does not know much about Diwali, when she describes it like “a line straight out of a dictionary,” as the Hindu festival of lights (47). Similarly, when Janet goes to an Indian restaurant she asks for “parasad” for dessert the narrator becomes embarrassed for her friend. The term “parasad” actually refers to the blessed sweets from Hindu prayers. They are offerings to the Hindu gods during rituals. It does not refer to any specific sweet. Our narrator is a little embarrassed by Janet, but mostly she is angry because she realizes that she shouldn’t have to feel embarrassed. She shouldn’t have to live up to the expectations that those from a faraway country set for her.

A similar scene occurs when our narrator and Janet are in a sweet shop and they ask for meethai. The seller gets annoyed because meethai is a general term for sweets, so everything he is selling is meethai. The seller makes fun of them for this comment. Our narrator is embarrassed, not because Janet is ignorant of this term, but because others criticize them both for their “inauthenticity.” The names of the sweets, the language itself, has been transformed for the locals in Trinidad, and those from India believe that this is a “loss” and a handicap for Indo-Trinidadians. The English and the Indians see
them as cultural bastards, who are ignorant of their ancestral land, but the narrator has a different view that she expresses to Janet:

Yuh know, one time a fella from India who living up here call me a bastardized Indian because I didn’t know Hindi. And now look at dis, nah! De thing is: all a we in Trinidad is cultural bastards, Janet, all a we. *Toutes bagailles!* Chinese people, Black people, White people. Syrian. Lebanese. I looking forward to de day I find out dat place inside me where I am nothing else but Trinidadian, whatever dat could turn out to be. (52)

This statement is significant for both Naipaul and Mootoo, because it clarifies what Mootoo believes and what Naipaul believes is impossible. Naipaul, who looks back to colonialism, and Mootoo, who looks forward to Independence, see Trinidad with different potentials. Naipaul sees this integration of multiple cultures as a threat, and an impurity. He believes strongly that the Asiatic culture and the African culture cannot successfully become one, and that Trinidad is doomed to be a cultural failure. However, for Mootoo, a nation is not just what it excludes but also what it includes. She believes that one day race will no longer cause division, and instead Trinidad will become one unified entity. It is in this fact that Mootoo and Naipaul differ.

Naipaul insists that a nation cannot exist without exclusion, but Mootoo embraces inclusion. Mootoo expresses this in this particular story: though those like Naipaul see Trinidadian culture as “inauthentic” the fact remains that there is no such thing as an authentic or inauthentic culture. Mootoo thus comes to the realization that *preservation*
prohibits progression and attempting to preserve traditions will only cause strife, division, and social anxiety. The language, the meaning behind traditions, has not been lost but transformed and redeveloped. Hinduism and the Hindu language in Trinidad may not resemble what it does in India, but that does not make it any less valuable.

Mootoo’s critical analysis in her work is also deeply rooted in the development and shifting of standard gender roles. Mootoo’s short story “Sushila’s Bhakti” describes the traditional role that men women play in Hinduism, and how the Hindu faith is fluid and fluctuating in Trinidadian culture. “Bhakti” roughly translates from Hindi as “devotion.” This short story is thus about a Trinidadian Hindu girl named Sushila, who tries to recognize her devotion in Hinduism. She grows up in Trinidad and moves to Canada, where she must deal with the various stereotypes that are thrown at her. Throughout the story she tries to sort out her perceptions of the Hindu faith between what her Brahmin grandmother taught her, and what she learns from witnessing the new developments of Hinduism in Trinidad. She must also deal with the stereotypes that are automatically placed on her for simply looking Indian. Mootoo writes, “For ten years [Sushila] had been floating rootlessly in the Canadian landscape, not properly Trinidadian,” but “not Indian except in skin color…certainly not White and hardly Canadian either” (60). Sushila, in many ways, attempts to understand her roots. She wants to identify herself beyond her skin tone, and she wants to discover what makes one “authentically” Hindu, only to discover that even Hinduism, when part of a new culture, fluctuates.

Sushila sees that Hinduism has transformed since it traveled from India to the most recent generation of Indo-Trinidadians. She recognizes the fluidity of the faith, and
she realizes that she has the ability to take her grandmother’s faith and make it her own. She also realizes that there are aspects of the faith that have developed and changed for the better. For example, she notices how Hinduism in India does not allow female pundits (teachers) while Trinidadian Hinduism does. This is not to say that Sushila, and Mootoo, do not recognize the resistance that traditional Hindus cause in Trinidad. Enforcing patriarchy is still prominent in the religion in both Trinidad and India, and like most traditions there is a struggle to remain stagnant and “authentic.” Nevertheless, Mootoo recognizes this resistance to change and still sees potential in transformation.

Sushila wants to connect to the Indian heritage, and the roots that her grandmother has emphasized as so essential to her identity. Despite being born and raised in Trinidad she is exposed to Indian traditions through her grandmother, who is proud of her Hindu and Indian heritage and believes that it should be preserved. The grandmother strongly affirms to her grandchildren that to associate themselves with the locals in Trinidad means lowering their status, a status that the grandmother does not realize has no meaning outside of India. For instance, her grandmother repeats proudly how they were a Brahmin family, the highest caste in the caste system of India, and that Sushila must act the part of a good Brahmin girl, following rituals, being respectful, and not participating in local Trinidadian events such as carnival (59). The grandmother does not realize that there is no caste status in Trinidad, and to be Brahmin holds no power.

When Sushila’s father made the decision to leave his caste and status in India to live in Trinidad, her grandmother felt that her religious values were being abandoned by her family. Sushila’s grandmother cannot prevent this change however, and eventually feels that she has no choice but to “submit to national cultural chaos” in Trinidad, in
order to instill religion and faith in her grandchildren. She tries to find any means to do it, and even looks into other faiths:

Brahmin lost its religious meaning for all but the grandmother, who dug her feet in deeper to teach her grandchildren the Hindi alphabet and to read from the Bhagvad Gita. Eventually they became utterly confused, when even she, submitting to national cultural chaos, would tuck them into bed, clasp their hands in front of their chests and have them repeat after her a prayer from a little book given to her by a stranger who had come to the house to invite her household to his church. (59)

By incorporating other religions into her teachings, Sushila’s grandmother ends up cultivating a new religious mentality in her grandchildren. No longer was Sushila exposed only to Hinduism, but also to Islam, Christianity, and other faiths prevalent in Trinidad. These faiths could not be avoided, and they result in a synthesis for Sushila’s faith. They influence and enrich her thinking about Hinduism, but this diversity of faith also causes Sushila to question her place in the traditional Hindu faith. She no longer feels she has a place in the religion her grandmother taught her. When she is unable to give herself a single identity, a single faith, she begins to feel like a rootless wanderer. Societal standards, the need for labels and stable identities, resist the fluidity of her faith. She starts to internalize society’s critique of her, and begins to see herself as rootless with no identity, culture, or history to claim.
Similarly, when Sushila moves to Canada she sees it as a country of rootless people. No one’s ancestry was rooted in the country itself. In Canada she at first feels she can relate to the locals because of this detachment from their ancestry. She enjoys her rootlessness, but this peace cannot be maintained. She finds that she cannot escape her heritage, or even a heritage that technically is not her own, because of her skin color. To her disappointment she continues to be mistakenly identified as Indian, not Trinidadian:

From day to day, her skin color being her primary identifier, she is constantly reminded by certain others of her Indian past. Not by Indians born and bred in India, who insist defiantly that she is in fact not truly Indian (adding to her rootless and confused floating), but by certain others. Brown equals Indian equals India, they had carelessly assumed…She wants to know why it is that all that she has of her Indian heritage are her name, Sushila, and her skin color, both of which are like lies about her identity. She yearns for an understanding that digs deeper than the well-known facts of British Will and Empire. (61)

Sushila tries to enforce her independent identity, or at least her identity as a Trinidadian, but the people around her consistently place her as Indian because of her skin color. She is not Indian, but eventually has to succumb to their expectations and act the part of a proper Indian woman. She thus ends up trying to find her way back to her grandmother, and her Bhakti, to try and identify herself as Hindu.
However, Sushila finds it difficult to define her Bhakti when, in her attempt to reestablish her beliefs, she returns to nostalgic memories such as her experience as a religious teacher. She recalls the poojas, which are Hindu religious ceremonies, where, unlike in India, women are able to participate and lead the Hindu ceremonies. In Trinidad Sushila is considered a pundit, a religious teacher, a title she would not be able to claim in India. It is almost as if she is disobeying the structure of the faith by practicing it, so she becomes conflicted. “Priests, pundits, were men, she thought. Brahmin men, not women. But Sushila was getting wise to a time before his-story wiped out her-story, when women ruled, and were the spiritual guides, and mediums” (62). Hinduism puts a lot of value on women and motherhood, and worships them. Sushila knows that there was a time when women in the faith held a lot of influence, and yet as time went on in India it became more patriarchal. In Trinidadian Hinduism Sushila recognizes a change, a slow deterioration of the patriarchy.

Mootoo recognizes that Hinduism is a faith that cannot be pinned down by old, deteriorating traditions such as gender bias. Sushila learns that her Bhakti, her faith, cannot be pinned down to something that is specifically Hindu. Because of the many cultural influences in Trinidad, Hinduism has developed differently in her mind. Sushila recalls that when she was young she would get the religious festivals of Hosay and Phagwa mixed up, one was a Muslim holiday and the other a Hindu holiday. Both were celebrated equally and with reverence. They blur in her mind as one nostalgic religious experience, and “like so many other Trinidadian Hindus and Muslims she knows, [she] refused to eat either beef or pork because she couldn’t remember which one it is that she, as a good Brahmin woman, wasn’t supposed to eat” (66). Some may think that her
inability to distinguish between the two festivals makes her ignorant, and that her Bhakti may not be seen as “authentically” Hindu, but she is not alone in experiencing this confusion. For many in Trinidad “Religion held onto only by the thin straps of festivals” (63). Holidays and rituals are performed even though the history and reasoning behind them have been long forgotten. Mootoo sees this not as ignorance, but a change in the cultural meanings. Traditions are not lost, just transformed. Sushila is able to make her Bhakti her own, by using her own religious and spiritual experiences. Her Bhakti is fluid.

If a culture is limited to its borders, and its traditions are forced to remain stagnant, then there will be no progression. Sushila, like her grandmother who enforced Hinduism yet made her grandchildren read verses from the Bible, is unable to ignore the cultural influences that affect her faith. Though Hinduism is considered the oldest religion in the world she asks herself where the faith originated from, how it got to where it is now, and after all the changes what decides the factors that determine its “authenticity.” Ultimately she comes to terms with this transformation, and disregards this term of “authenticity”:

She played and fretted and worked and invented until she came to a junction where she could take a turn that skirted needing to be pinned down as Hindu, or as “Indian,” or as Trinidadian (in themselves difficult identities to pin down) in favor of attempting to write a story of her own, using her own tools. (67)
Sushila comes to the resolution that she and her faith cannot be pinned down and stagnant, and she decides to utilize her experience in Trinidad and Canada, her teachings from her grandmother and the other various faiths, to define herself.

Mootoo’s final short story that I will discuss, “The Upside-Downness of the World as it Unfolds,” is also a perfect example of cultural fluidity, but it also shows that Mootoo does not see cultural fluidity as a utopian concept that exists without resistance. The narrator in this story deals with similar problems as Sushila does, and encounters the sting of being categorized constantly as Indian because of her skin color. But unlike Sushila, who comes to terms with this fact of mistaken identity, and accepts that she can only be herself, our narrator shows anger and frustration against those who try to make her change. The narrator does not understand the Indian languages or traditions because she does not even see herself as Indian. She is criticized for this “ignorance” by her white friends, who practice Hinduism even though they have no ancestral connection to the Hindu traditions.

The story opens with our narrator, along with her sister, who are taught by the very uptight and properly British Mrs. Ramsey in their home of colonial Trinidad. Mrs. Ramsey teaches her students the term pagan, which she defines as, “One who is not a Christian, Moslem, or Jew; heathen, one who has no religion, a non-Christian.” They are told to write the term in a sentence: “The pagans of Indian ancestry [who] pray to images of a dancing Shiva, a blue Krishna, or the cow” (109). At an early age, then, the narrator and her sister are taught to hate their “backwards” ancestral religion and embrace the more civilized and Western faith of Christianity. As proper ladies they are also taught to change their attitudes and their habits, such as table etiquette. They are not to act like the
uncivilized locals who eat mangos with their hands, and not with a knife and fork (109). They are made to resemble the successful products of British colonization. This colonization through education becomes embedded in the girls when they are young. When their grandmother attempts to teach them Hindi at home, the sisters tell her that “we didn’t care about India and didn’t want to learn a language that only old and backward people spoke” (110). Sushila understood the value her grandmother had for India, but in this story the girls are taught to disregard it. At a young age the idea of the “third world” that their grandmother was once a part of is a failed world. This idea is successfully embedded in their minds.

In this way, children, including our narrator, are taught to become faithful and dependent on colonization. Our narrator is taught early on that the first world is superior and capable of more than the third world. Only colonization can lead to progression. The girls are even taught that not all whites are the same, and that specifically British citizens are superior to others. America, because it started as a colony, could not have existed had it not been for British colonialism. Thus the British are still considered more superior, more “white” and the world must depend on them for education and progress. Our narrator learns that “white is not all the same” (111). Americans, who come from a “history-less” background, are considered “less white” than the British. “British was Queen and American was peasant” (111). This status is not just defined by color but by ancestry, and the more distance you have from your ancestral country, the more authentic you are. I bring up this point from the story because this is also related to the distinction between “brownness” and “Indianness.” Indo-Trinidadians are not considered Indian or English because they are products of colonization. Indians see
Indo-Trinidadians as “less brown” and “less Indian” than them, but nor are they considered British because they do not share British ancestry. The narrator, as she grows older, sees that the racial division in Trinidad is not simply about color but ancestry.

The narrator learns that she cannot escape the assumptions placed on her because of her skin color, even if those assumptions are incorrect. She is forced by others, especially her White friends, to identify herself as Indian. Her skin color does not show that she is British, so she is not expected to adhere to the teachings of her childhood British instructor, but it cannot be assumed that she is Trinidian. Instead, she is expected to act the part of an authentic Indian. Later in life, when she moves to Canada, her White friends, unlike her childhood tutor, “No longer wanted to whiten [her] but rather they want to be brown and sugary like [her], so much so that two of them in particular have embarked on a mission to rub back in the brown that Mrs. Ramsey tried so hard to bleach out” (112).³ While Mrs. Ramsey expected her to be a proper colonial citizen, her white friends now expect her to be more “authentically Indian.” Even though it is obviously not either party’s place to state what she should and should not be based on what society expects of her, these expectations and teachings are enforced not only for the narrator but for everyone in her situation. Our narrator is thus the product of the contradictory expectations of both Mrs. Ramsey and her Canadian friends. She is identified clearly by her friends as the Indian one, and they assert that she must act the part she was born into. Her White friends see Indian culture as an exotic commodity. They put value on the clothing, traditions, language, and religion, just because of its exoticness, mystery, and supposed authenticity. They ask our narrator to teach them how to cook Indian food. Eventually exhausted by their constant ignorance she, instead of

³ Mootoo capitalizes the term “white” throughout the story
replying that she was not Indian, goes out and gets an Indian cookbook and teaches herself (117). To be able to cook Indian food, dress like an Indian, makes her exotic and someone her friends liked to keep around. She is then able to continue her false performance of a traditional Indian girl.

Our narrator plays the role of the Indian for her friends so that she will not be seen, and not see herself, as a “cultural bastard” of Trinidad. Her white Canadian friends ask her to join them at a Hare Krishna temple, saying, “Come learn a little about your culture!” “Feeling like a cultural orphan” she chooses to go (117). She feels she has no roots because she was taught to believe that her roots were either in England or of India, and yet at the same time it is enforced that she is neither. She believes that she is not allowed to be just Trinidadian. She envies those who are sure of their ancestry and embrace it. She grows irritated at her friends, badly wanting to say, “What the heck do you want with dressing up in saris and praying to Indian gods? What business do you have showing me what I have lost? Go check out your own ancestry!” (119). This loss of a heritage that she was never granted upsets her, and it upsets her even more that others can simply wear a sari and pray to Indian gods to call themselves Indian. Culture and heritage all of a sudden have become a hobby, an amusement.

It is crucial to see in these stories the reoccurring theme of identity anxiety because of society’s attempt to maintain stability by labeling gender, race, and culture. If Naipaul’s characters feel the need to assert their masculinity in order to gain power and status in society, Mootoo shows us how both characters resist this structure, and also the costs of such resistance. For example, in “Out on Main Street” our narrator, a woman, is in love with Janet. Janet is overtly feminine and men enjoy looking at her. The narrator is
jealous that men don’t look at her the same way because she appears more masculine:

“Walking next to Janet, who so femme dat she redundant, tend to make me look like a
gender dey forget to classify” (48). Our narrator recognizes the “redundant” standards, set
by men, about how women are supposed to look and act. According to men, our narrator
is neither masculine nor feminine. She feels that Janet’s attractiveness is generic, a classic
appearance that men look for. Janet asserts her femininity and the narrator is jealous that
she cannot do the same. But she is mostly insulted by the men, because she does not want
to feel obligated to fit their standards. The narrator is an empowering figure who defends
Janet from men in almost a masculine manner. Nevertheless, she is a woman who has
been able to utilize her strength to assert her power, masculine or not. When women do
not fit the standards that men set for them they will go on to be ignored, or even shunned
by the community. Also, men, who fail to assert their masculinity, and who fail to fit the
standards of men, will also be shunned. Mootoo sees how masculinity is coveted in
society, and her short stories show this resistance between societal stagnation and cultural
fluidity. The role of gender and marginal identity is most highlighted in Mootoo’s first
novel, *Cereus Blooms at Night*, where the roles forced by society inevitably face
resistance and break apart.
Chapter 4: Gender, Sexuality, and Racial influence on Identity
in Mootoo’s *Cereus Blooms at Night*

Shani Mootoo’s first novel, *Cereus Blooms at Night*, highlights her key ideas of the borderless identity and cultural fluidity by breaking society’s marginal ideas of gender and race. Such borders are usually physically defined by society. There is a distinct line that separates a country from another, one culture from another, and one gender from another. Mootoo breaks these borders strategically in her work, and questions society for making them. She also addresses the fact that these borders are capable of change, and must change.

Rajini Srikanth strengthens this argument, stating that:

Mootoo’s disruption of gender boundaries is a principle component in her strategy to unsettle all easily accepted categories of understanding and experience. Hers is a formulation of the world that continuously loosens foundations and questions normativity. Her adventurous navigation of the controversial domain of gender and sexuality is characteristic of the challenge issued by South Asian American writers to restrictive constructions. (101)

In this way Mootoo questions the rigid masculine foundation that we have seen Naipaul present. Unlike Mootoo, Naipaul approves of the power of the masculine standard and believes it is the only means of progress in the world. Mootoo also sees this, but as a gendered flaw because this societal structure disapproves of feminine influence and silences it. Society’s rigid structure emphasizes that women are lower than men, and to be
seen as a woman means weakness and lack of power. However, Mootoo recognizes feminine power in both private and public spheres. She recognizes its strength, and argues that, despite what society deems as appropriate now, cultural fluidity will soon break masculine traditions and perceptions.

Mootoo’s novel functions like a mystery novel. Who is Mala Ramchandin and who killed her father, Chandin Ramchandin? This question is asked and answered through the narrator Tyler, a transgendered male-to-female nurse who cares for Mala Ramchandin, and tells us her story. In the beginning of the novel Mala is an old and supposedly insane woman in a nursing home in the town of Paradise, who has been accused of killing her father. While hiding his supposed transgendered “perversion,” Tyler questions what the others in the community believe to be Mala’s “insanity.” Many saw Chandin Ramchandin as a prominent Christian figure in the community, but Tyler eventually learns that this is not true. When Chandin’s wife leaves him for the woman he actually loves, he retaliates by raping his daughters, Mala and Asha, over the course of their lives. Asha eventually escapes, leaving Mala to her fate. Years of sexual violence that follow eventually leads to Mala’s motivation to murder Chandin.

To understand this part of the story, however, we have to understand Chandin’s entire history. As a young man, Chandin is revered and envied by his local community. He leaves his parents’ home to live with the local reverend, who convinces him to abandon his Hindu faith and heritage in order to establish a new life and a better social status. For many of the locals conversion was the only way to survive, and even gain status in society. “If I had children,” one of the local woman says, “I would convert! Besides, nobody but you really know which god you praying to” (Mootoo 29). To

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4 Paradise is a town in the fictional island of Lantanacamara. The island closely reflects Trinidad.
convert was a tactical maneuver in order to succeed and go up in class, and though deep down the Hindu faith thrived, it suffered under the power of Christian influence and status.

Chandin thus becomes a charity project, a shining example of the fully capable colonized West Indian whose father, an indentured field laborer from India, was supposedly incapable of such growth and progress (26). When he is adopted by the Reverend’s family, he considers changing his name to a more Anglicized one. His name attached him to his Indian heritage, and some of his family deemed it necessary to cut such ties:

A name change for Chandin was briefly discussed by the Reverend and his wife. Mrs. Thoroughly thought that a Christian, if not Wetlandish name was more suitable for a son of theirs. Chandin was eager to have his Indian name replaced…The thoughtful Reverend, however, suggested that Chandin Ramchandin would one day be a Christian teacher, theologian and missionary whose success in the field would be due, certainly to the blessings of God, but also to the novel idea that people were most likely to be swayed by one of their own kind. Chandin and Mrs. Thoroughly gave in to the Reverend’s idea that Chandin’s own name would win his people’s trust. (30)

The Reverend believes that by not changing his name to a more anglicized one, Chandin will be able to blend in flawlessly with the locals as well as the white upper class. He is
used as a tool of conversion, and a bridge between the two classes and races. His name, kept as it is, reassures the locals that he is still tied to his Indian roots; he is just more enlightened and wiser than they are. The Reverend thus presents Chandin not as an English man, but as a successfully colonized West Indian.

Chandin is proud of his new situation, and does not hesitate to abandon his father’s Indian heritage. He strongly believes that he is better than his father ever was. He takes to mimicking the Reverend as a forcible way of rejecting his connection to his father: “He would change, he decided once and for all, what he had the power to change. Chandin took note of the Reverend’s rigid, austere posture, so unlike his own father’s propensity to bend or twist or fold his body whichever way the dictates of comfort tipped him” (34). Chandin prepared himself for his performance as a replica of the Reverend and the other colonists, but it was only a performance, a mimicry. To his disappointment, Chandin realizes much later that he will truly never be accepted by the Reverend and his family.

When we meet Chandin at the beginning of the novel, he is a blind tool of the colonists. He hopes to be the prophet of change, a symbol to inspire his people to progress and become part of the successful British Empire, even though he does not realize that he nor his people will ever be accepted into this society. A significant scene that suggests this idea concerns Chandin’s reaction to the Reverend’s household, and his reaction to a chandelier. The chandelier for Chandin represents wealth and luxury, unnecessary frivolity that only the colonizers are capable of having. He hopes to someday show the Indian laborers this chandelier, and what they could potentially have if they made the right decisions: “He desperately wanted them to see the inside of the
Reverend’s house so they could embrace not just the Reverend’s faith but his taste. In his innocence he felt that his people’s lack of these things was a result of apathy and a poverty of ambition” (31). Chandin is not only innocent, but ignorant of his place in the Reverend’s life. In this way, Chandin reflects Naipaul’s ideas. They both feel that the only way for them to succeed is to let go of their ancestral past and become proper Englishmen, even though this can never be. Both Naipaul and Chandin see their past as humiliating, and the only thing that stands between them and a successful life. Mootoo undoubtedly, with intention, reflected Naipaul through Chandin. For Chandin, Trinidadians come across as “unambitious” for not trying to leave behind their past: “He felt immense distaste for his background and the people in it. Gazing awestruck at the chandelier, he daily renews his promise to be the first brown-skinned person in Lantanacamara to own one just like it” (32). For Chandin the chandelier, and by extension English wealth and culture, is the only thing worth having and striving for.

The Reverend teaches Chandin that by being Christianized he will gain power, education, and a worldly outlook. When people from the wetlands meet Chandin they immediately take a liking to him5: “He wondered constantly whether it was because he was the Reverend’s adopted son and Lavinia’s brother, or because he was of the race that it was their mission to Christianize” (38). He is their trophy of success, and Chandin was proud to be this trophy. He thus not only mimics the Reverend, but also the Wetlanders: “He scrutinized every aspect of these men. Most were his age yet seemed more experienced and worldly. He copied their manners and dressed like them in the white shirts and trousers the Wetlanders considered the height of tropical fashion. He turns their accented phrases over and over in his mind until he was brave enough to air them” (38).

5 Wetlands is a term in the novel that the locals use to refer to North Americans.
Chandin finds them inspiring. They have traveled and, unlike him, have a real English
education. Chandin is more than willing to sacrifice his ancestry to be more like the
wetlanders.

Early in the novel, though Chandin is proud of his conversion, he deals with one
internal struggle, his love for the Reverend’s daughter Lavinia. As the Reverend’s
adopted son, Chandin is forced to consider Lavinia as a sister. Eventually the Reverend
sees how Chandin feels for his daughter, and insists to Chandin that it is inappropriate.
Ironically, a little while later Lavinia is engaged to her cousin. The Reverend tells
Chandin, “He is not a true relation. He is a marvelous gentleman by every standard, and
on maturing he is slated to inherit a rather large estate from his blood father. He is a
medical student” (45). Of course Chandin is angry by this turn of events. The Reverend
comes off as a hypocrite at first, but really he is using this supposed incest as an excuse
for Chandin to not be with Lavinia. In truth, it is Chandin’s race that bothers the
Reverend the most, as he sees that intermingling with someone of a lower class and of a
different race is worse than incest. Chandin then comes to realize that he is not, nor ever
will be, accepted by the Reverend and his family.

Immediately after finding out about Lavinia’s engagement, Chandin tells the
Reverend that he wishes to wed Sarah, Lavinia’s best friend, who is an Afro-Trinidadian
girl also adopted into Christianity like he was. He has no love for Sarah, and only uses
her to occasionally get close to Lavinia when she visits. With Sarah he has his two
daughters, Mala and Asha. When Lavinia comes to visit he feels ashamed of his family.
He was once the trophy of progression and Westernization, but now “his children’s skin
seemed suddenly too dark and their manner of talking crude. He wanted to remove
himself from his wife and his children but knew it was impossible” (51). He is ashamed of his family and feels trapped, constantly wishing that he had wed Lavinia instead and had a “whiter” family with her. He is ashamed of his family and their color, and instead of moving towards a wealthy life with grand chandeliers, he feels he is moving backwards.

When we reach this point in the novel we start to see the concerns with gender and gender identity as Mootoo reveals the homosexual relationship between Lavinia and Sarah. Behind Chandin’s back the women have a love affair, as seen through the eyes of the eldest daughter Mala. Mala fears that her father will kill Lavinia and Sarah because of their affair, and she lives in anxiety because she loves her family and does not want it to fall apart. Lavinia eventually offers Sarah an escape, and she also says that they can take her children with them. But on the day of their escape Chandin appears and a confrontation ensues, forcing Mala and Asha to stay with Chandin while Lavinia and Sarah run away together.

Homosexuality and transsexuality are concerns addressed by Mootoo as they both “threaten” the bordered standards of identity set by society. They defy the unspoken societal rules that men and women supposedly must follow, in order to maintain stability. The narrator, Tyler, cannot help but be personally involved in the story of Mala because of his desire to be a woman. He tries hard to remain objective, but he ends up relating to Mala as both of them are seen as “mad” because of their “afflictions.” No one but Tyler recognizes the truth about Mala’s predicament, and how her father was not a respectable man but a rapist. Mala also sees that Tyler is also rejected by society because he does not fit the standards that men must follow. His desire to be a woman is seen as an affliction.
because, as I have stated earlier, women are seen as weak, and to want to be a woman is
to want to be weak. Tyler, with Mala’s encouragement, tries to break this stereotype, and
this set border of gendered identity.

Over the years I pondered the gender and sex roles that
seemed available to people, and the rules that went with
them. After much reflection I have come to discern that my
desire to leave the shores of Lantanacamara had much to do
with wanting to study abroad, but far more with wanting to
be somewhere where my ‘perversion,’ which I tried
diligently as I could to shake, might be either invisible or of
no consequence to people to whom my foreignness was
what would be strange. I was preoccupied with trying to
understand what was natural and what perverse, and who
said so and why. Chandin Ramchandin played a part in
confusing me about these roles, for it was a long time
before I could differentiate between his perversion and
what others called mine. (47)

Tyler tries to understand why there are some in the world that see his transsexuality as a
perversion in a similar way to Chandin’s. He does not feel like a man but he is not
allowed to feel like a woman.

This leads us to a fundamental question: What is the difference between Tyler
trying to break his gendered borders, and Chandin trying to break his cultural ones by
being more colonized? The fact that Chandin is such a monster shows that Mootoo
makes a distinction, but how can we understand this distinction? This is Mootoo’s concern: in a progressive world, where cultural identity fluctuates, society is usually anxious and unable to be fluid about it. Society craves stability, nationality, and unity. In a society where colonization, and Westernization is approved of, Chandin’s desire to be more British, and desire to cut off his ancestral ties, is not disapproved of. In fact, it is expected. However, Tyler’s desire to be a woman is unexpected and frowned upon; since he was born a man he is expected to act like a man. In society there is always an established right and wrong, and there is always an “us” and “them.” Those who desire to break these boundaries, who cannot be limited to their biological sex, must struggle in a stagnant society. Tyler must struggle with his identity when he shouldn’t have to. Chandin’s desire to be more westernized, however, is encouraged.

Characters such as the Reverend see Chandin’s background as backwards and unprogressive, and to be released from these roots can lead to a more enlightened education. But the definition of a proper education is predetermined by societal ideals. Chandin wants to break the borders of his Trinidadian identity and stereotype by proving that he is as capable as any Englishman. Yet Tyler is punished for wanting to break through societal borders of gender. We may ask which the real “perversion” is: Is it Chandin denying his past, sacrificing his family and heritage just to gain more power, or Tyler’s desire to simply act and express how he feels? What is more appropriate: the change that occurs internally, or the change that occurs in order to conform to society’s pressures and expectations?

Mala, unlike the others, sees Tyler’s internal struggle and attempts to put his mind at ease in her own way. She steals a woman’s nurse outfit for him to wear, and though
Tyler is hesitant to wear it he is also grateful that this so-called “mad-woman”
understands him. “I reached for the dress. My body felt as if it were metamorphosing. It
was as though I had suddenly become plump and less rigid…I hugged the dress’” (76).
Here we encounter clothing again, but instead of clothing being seen as a foreign
commodity it becomes a strong symbol of personal expression.

And yet when Tyler tries on the woman’s clothing he feels uncomfortable, and
hates that he feels uncomfortable: “I felt flatfooted and clumsy. Not a man and not ever
able to be a woman, suspended nameless in the limbo state between existence and
nonexistence” (77). Societal rules force him in this state of limbo. To attempt to maintain
these societal stereotypes and margins of gender and gender roles only prevents
progression and development within a culture. People are unable to grow and are not
allowed to show themselves. Society becomes tense and anxious because of this change,
while individuals struggle and hate themselves because they do not fit in the cultural
margins.

However Tyler gains more confidence in his identity after meeting Otoh, a
transgendered man who always understood that he was a man despite being born a
woman. It can be argued that even though Otoh was born a woman, to be more masculine
was coveted in society, so Otoh had an easier time with his transition. But this is not true,
as even today it is strongly believed that you are born into the gender that you are meant
to be. Otoh’s family is accepting of his transformation, and his doctor and nurse
“marveled at their carelessness in having declared him a girl” (110). His parents “hardly
noticed that their daughter was transforming herself into their son” (109). This ease of
transformation gives Tyler hope that such rules of gender are breaking. Otoh’s parents
never feel the need to label him, and his mother never felt the need to address his transformation unless he starts dating women. Through Otoh, Tyler begins to understand that it is no “ perversion” that he is has, but merely the ignorance of his community. Like Mala, he refuses to be bothered by such rules, and refuses to allow society to determine what is right or wrong about his decision. Society deems them “crazy,” but in reality they are just representatives of change.
Conclusion

At the close of this thesis I will once again quote Bill Ashcroft’s *The Empire Writes Back*:

The appropriation of the English language is the first of a range of appropriations which establish a discourse announcing its difference from Europe...But the appropriation which has had the most profound significance in post-colonial discourse is that of writing itself. It is through an appropriation of the power invested in writing that this discourse can take hold of the marginality imposed on it and make hybridity and syncreticity the course of literary and cultural redefinition.

(78)

Naipaul and Mootoo are both interpreters of Indo-Trinidadian cultural fluidity. They appropriate the language of their colonizers and use it to critically analyze their national predicament. Ashcroft states that “one of the main features of imperial oppression is control over language” by installing a “‘standard’ version of the metropolitan language as the norm, and marginalizes all ‘variants’ and impurities” (7). Colonization is a process that uses violence to rid colonies of “impurities,” establishing the English Western standard as the norm. But the Western standard is turned against itself when interpreters such as Mootoo and Naipaul question this violence and the crisis of identity.

However, as we have seen Mootoo and Naipaul come to different conclusions from their interpretations. Naipaul asserts that he is a British writer, and that he has no
connection with Trinidad because he was raised British. He states that Trinidad has no possibility of establishing itself as a nation because of its dependency on British rule. He makes it clear in both his works that Indo-Trinidadians are failures at establishing their identities. Ultimately, as Naipaul asserts English roots, he becomes his own definition of a failure.

Shani Mootoo sees no failure in Trinidad. By appropriating what she has learned as an interpreter, she has been able to establish her nationality as Trinidadian. She sees that establishing these roots does not come without consequence. Due to race, gender, and societal norms, there are tense factors that attempt to place her, and other Trinidadians, into a set, predetermined role. We are ultimately forced to ask the question: Does Trinidad represent cultural degradation as Naipaul believes? Does this country prove that truly these various cultures cannot possibly mix and there will be constant division and turmoil? Or can there be unity? Can Trinidad be a true example of the potential for cultural hybridity and fluidity? Is there a loss during this cultural transformation, or is there a gain? Does a culture depend on preservation or progression in order to survive? We do not have to depend on Naipaul and Mootoo to determine the answers, but here we have clarified weaknesses and strengths in their interpretation, guiding us to a better understanding of nationalism, nationality, and cultural developments.


