



V. S. NAIPAUL'S *THE MYSTIC MASSEUR*; THE PORTRAIT OF A TRICKSTER

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Abstract-Colonization is a long-term economic exploitation process with a wide range of consequences in many parts of the world. This process has influenced numerous literary works. Naipaul's country of birth has been colonized for ages, which is why he produced outstanding works in this genre. The colonial process had a significant impact on subjugated society members' character development. In his works, Naipaul successfully shows this character structure. One of such characters is the main character of *The Mystic Masseur*. The novel's most notable feature is that Naipaul does not openly criticize this character, instead portrays him as a hero. This is not true heroism; there is a severe critique of the character structure that the society has developed. There are specific reasons why society has regressed, deteriorated, and deprived of a strong identity. This is primarily due to the colonization process. As a result, through the Ganesh character, Naipaul criticizes both society and the colonial forces that caused the society to fall into this state. The issue of a trickster character who has emerged as a result of the system and conditions will be examined in this article.

Key Words: Colonization, Ganesh Ramsuair, Trickster, Success.

V.S. NAIPAUL'ÜN *MİSTİK MASÖR*'ÜNDE BİR ENTRİKACININ PORTRESİ

Öz-Kolonizasyon, dünyanın birçok yerinde çok çeşitli sonuçları olan uzun vadeli bir ekonomik sömürü sürecidir. Bu süreçten çok sayıda edebi eser etkilenmiştir. V. S. Naipaul, bu edebiyat türünde önemli yapıtlar ortaya koymuş bir yazardır. Naipaul'un doğduğu ülkenin de yüzyıllar boyunca sömürgeleştirilmiş bir ülke olması, bu türde seçkin yapıtlar üretmesinin nedenlerinden biridir. *Mistik Masör*, sömürgeleştirilmiş bir ada ulusunun durumuna eleştirel yaklaşan dikkate değer bir romandır. Sömürge süreci, ezilen toplum üyelerinin karakter şekillenmesi üzerinde önemli bir etkiye sahip olmuştur. Naipaul yapıtlarında bu karakter yapısını başarılı bir şekilde resmetmektedir. Bu karakterlerden biri *Mistik Masör*'ün ana karakteridir. Romanın en dikkat çekici özelliği, Naipaul'un kahramanı açıkça eleştirmemesi, bunun yerine onu bir kahraman olarak tasvir etmesidir. Bu gerçek anlamda bir kahramanlık değildir; aslında toplumun geliştirdiği karakter yapısına yönelik ciddi bir eleştirisi vardır. Toplumun gerilemesinin, bozulmasının ve güçlü bir kimlikten yoksun kalmasının bazı nedenleri vardır. Bu büyük ölçüde sömürge sürecinden kaynaklanmaktadır. Sonuç olarak Naipaul, *Ganesh* karakteri üzerinden hem toplumu hem de toplumun bu duruma düşmesine neden olan sömürgeci güçleri eleştirir. Bu makalede sömürge sürecinin ortaya çıkmasına neden olan düzenbaz bir karakter konusunu incelenecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kolonizasyon, GaneshRamsuair, Entrika, Başarı.

INTRODUCTION

Colonization is a long-term economic exploitation process that has impacted many places of the world in various ways. It is also a long-running movement that has dominated literature for a long time. It has influenced the creation of numerous literary works because it is intricately intertwined with people's lives. Even after the colonization process was over, its influence on literature continued. In this perspective, the literature that emerged from colonization is generally divided into colonial and postcolonial periods. One of the prominent figures of this type of literature is V. S. Naipaul. Naipaul is a prolific writer who contributed to colonial and postcolonial literature with several works. One of the reasons he produced successful works in this genre is that; his country of birth is also a country that has been colonized for centuries. In this regard, he is an author who has witnessed all the processes of colonization.

Trinidad and Tobago were not yet liberated when Naipaul's first novel, *The Mystic Masseur*, was published in 1957. As a result, it is a novel set during the colonial period rather than the postcolonial. The novel satirizes the plight of a colonized island nation. The colonization process has had a profound impact on the character formation of oppressed society members depending on the context of its length, density, and other parameters. As a result of the long and painful process, this type of character has emerged, and it is usually not portrayed in a favourable aspect. This is a character structure that Naipaul effectively illustrates in his novels. "He views imposture and fraud as outgrowths of a picaroon society that evolved as a result of slavery and colonialism and even finds the majority of his characters who indulge in mimicry sympathetic..." (Mann, 1984: 468). One of such characters is the main character of *The Mystic Masseur*. The remarkable fact about this novel is that Naipaul does not directly challenge the character but instead portrays him with heroic characteristics. Obviously, this heroism is not in the real sense; there is a harsh critique of the character structure that the system has produced.

The system and conditions that created the trickster character emerged due to the system and conditions will be examined in this study.

THE EARLY TIMES OF THE PROTAGONIST

The protagonist of *The Mystic Masseur* is Ganesh Ramsumair, and he is of Indian descent. Ganesh's ancestors came to Trinidad from India as indentured workers, just like Naipaul's ancestors. In addition to the African-origin population that was previously transported as slaves, the indentured servant population from India has a significant presence in the country. As it is understood from this situation, besides having a different cosmopolitan structure, the country has also been a colony of different countries, Spain and later

Britania. In such a cosmopolitan setting, Ganesh must expose his truth.

Regarding everything Ganesh has done and accomplished, Ganesh's character is worthy of consideration. In terms of shedding light on this situation, it is essential to take a closer look at Ganesh's life, starting from his early teenage years. It is observed that as a child, he had a desire to look like a European sahib. It is stated that with the clothes he wore when his father sent him to college, he looked like a European. In this regard, it is clear that his envy toward those he perceives as superior to him in terms of status dates back to his childhood. Envy will be a motivating force in his later life as he strives to gain his desired achievements.

While Ganesh is still a youngster, hints about the character he would become begin to emerge. He enjoys the attention his colourful suit attracts when he wears it in the countryside in the presence of his kin, however, his attitude shifts when he travels to the city, and he begins to lie when this vibrant garment receives a crazy reaction. He chastises his father for forcing him to wear this dress against his will (Naipaul, 2003; 20). It is observed that he is a character who will not hesitate to lie when pressured or in an unpleasant circumstance. Again, as shown by the maneuvers, he is not at peace with his own culture. He is so ashamed of his Hindi name that he invents and promotes the lie that his real name is Gareth (Naipaul, 2003; 22). Such actions in his youth are the earliest indications of his character trait of deception.

Ganesh, who is a mediocre student during his high school years, does not receive much respect from his circle. Getting a good degree in an exam before graduation, on the other hand, demonstrates that he is a capable student. After graduating from high school, Ganesh works as a teacher for a while. However, Ganesh is warned by the school principal that their job is to mold old students, not to teach them (Naipaul, 2003; 24). Knowledge is power and therefore difficult to control; however, a moulded character is simple to control. Knowledge, according to Foucault, may generate power by drawing people into a subject and then commanding them with knowledge (Olsson & Heizmann, 2015: 756). In other words, giving shape to a colonial society makes it simpler to control it. Although it is not explicitly stated in the novel, teaching is not a suitable career for Ganesh to achieve his goals. There is no situation in which he may advance in the teaching profession by manipulating others. The principal, who declares that their goal is not to deliver information, but to give shape, eventually fires Ganesh because he does not teach the pupils anything, which is one of the novel's satirical themes (Naipaul, 2003: 27). In the face of this absurdity, Ganesh has become enraged for the first time in his life. In truth, this rage stems from the knowledge that things in a colonial culture do not operate according to a set of

rules and regulations. As a result, he gets weary of teaching and quits this profession.

Meanwhile, Ganesh, whose father passes away, abandons his job quest and returns to his village. Despite the masses of people crying out for his father's condolences, Ganesh appears to have accepted his father's death with fortitude. This is one of the cases that confirms that he is a rational character far from emotionality. After the exaggerated funeral ceremony, which is typical in Eastern cultures, it is suggested that he should start a job. Minor signs and coincidences are sometimes interpreted with enormous and profound meanings by people in undeveloped societies. The time that Ganesh got into a discussion and quit his job at the school coincides with his father's death. This convergence strikes Ganesh, and he realizes for the first time that there is something greater in him beyond himself (Naipaul, 2003: 33). He declares that he must first persuade himself that he is a particular person before persuading others. This is when the phony talent that he possesses begins to sprout. He is pleased to return to the community where his father formerly resided and respected because favorable conditions allow his talents to be rewarded.

EVOLVING INTO A TRICKSTER

During his father's funeral, Ganesh encounters Ramlogan, who will play an essential role in his life. It can be stated that under the guise of a substitute father figure, Ramlogan has plans to put into practice. Ramlogan, a figure who plans everything around his interests, also arranged Ganesh's father's funeral within the confines of specific calculations. He intends to marry his daughter to Ganesh, a member of a higher caste. They act as if they have never met or spoken before, after the marriage decision (Naipaul, 2003: 52). This is because they perceive themselves to be good Hindus. This type of behaviour apparently indicates that they are not truthful to one other or themselves (Bauer, 2002: 372). They do not hesitate to trick each other depending on the situation. A trickster himself, Ramlogan uses different intrigues to try to persuade Ganesh to forego the dowry. Ganesh, who appears to be convinced at first, realises his future father-in-law's actual intentions. Therefore he deceives him into offering a large dowry to teach him a lesson. Ganesh's first victim in his career in fraud becomes his father-in-law, Ramlogan. Both characters have a hypocritical attitude. Ramlogan uses several manipulations to persuade Ganesh to give up the dowry and flatters him in various ways. As a result, Ramlogan becomes a ferocious foe of Ganesh, who has deceived him. This is the most unambiguous indication of his lack of sincerity in his shows of love and respect. The reflections of love within the family also vary according to the occasion. It is seen that domestic violence is exhibited in a very different way. Ganesh's

wrath towards Leela signifies the completion of a crucial ritual. Their marriage matures after Ganesh uses force against his wife. Thus Ganesh becomes a complete man, and Leela becomes a full housewife. As a result, their marriage has progressed, and Leela now has marriage stories to share at women's gatherings (Naipaul, 2003: 64). This is significant in terms of demonstrating how relationships are founded on false and ludicrous assumptions.

Following his father's funeral, Ganesh marries and begins a new life. Ganesh's various career plans include becoming a masseur and writing books. His primary purpose for planning to write a book is to make money; hence the content of the book is not essential. When the topics of the books he publishes afterward are examined, it can be seen that the goal is not to convey a message but to write a book. However, he prefers to begin his career as a masseur before moving on to writing. Ganesh and Leela settle to Fuente Grove, a little deserted region. Actually, in such a harsh and dreary region, there is not much business potential. Ganesh is not particularly successful in the masseuse sector because of the competition and his living in a low-potential region. Fuente Groove is a desolate, abandoned, and potentially destitute region. To turn the disadvantage caused by the environment and conditions in his favour, he makes a maneuver and buys books as much as his means allow. With the books he purchased, he begins to reclaim his reputation, which he has lost due to his failure as a masseur in the village. The subject and content of the books are not important; they serve a purpose in terms of appearance. Ganesh is a clever character who is well aware that the substance of the books is not of top priority and that only the existence of the books will get him respect and provide him a competitive advantage.

For a considerable period, Ganesh is cannot demonstrate any professional presence. That's why he tries to write a book to change his ill-fortune. The contents of Ganesh's booklet include Hinduism-related questions and answers. However, rather than the content, the book's physical features, such as its softness, thinness, font, and image, come to the fore. In addition, there are points where formalism comes to the fore, such as placing a three-inch advertisement for the book, which is not very popular, or writing a three-inch review about the book. However, as can be observed nearly everywhere, the form takes precedence over content.

On the other hand, it is observed that the book serves a variety of functions rather than serving its primary purpose. First of all, the book aids in the restoration of the family's broken relationship between husband and wife. Returning to her father's house after being offended by her husband, Leela sees the book written by Ganesh and returns home with him. The book's content is unimportant to Leela; what matters is that

there is a written book. She now has something to wield as a trump card against her sister, who makes her envious of her fortune. With this book, Ganesh becomes a source of immense pride for the family. However, it is noticeable that the book, which generated much excitement, does not have the same level of success in terms of sales. In this context, a good marketer is hired to speed up the sales process. The trick of the marketer is to persuade while selling to the customers regardless of the book's content. However, despite all the advertising and marketing efforts, the book sales business results in a great defeat.

Ganesh, constantly in search of a way out, is determined to use all of the techniques that come to his mind. He begins to realize how a well-thought-out and energetically implemented plan might lead to success (Lee, 1966: 37). He goes to a formal change in the profession of masseur when he could not obtain the success desired from the book he wrote, in addition to his failure in masseur profession. To give an exotic flavour to his job, he dresses in traditional attire that he inherited from his father. Thus, unlike the already familiar masseurs, he will be a masseur with a mystical side. Ganesh uses a variety of tactics to convince customers that he possesses mystical powers. His customers appreciate that he moves his lips discreetly as if reciting a prayer before each conversation with them (Naipaul, 2003: 136). Ganesh employs the power of formalism once more; he writes 'mystic' next to his name on the sign table, displays his books, and drapes his chamber in a mystical ambiance. With his usage of mysticism, his failing business career begins to turn around. Societies with a poor level of knowledge and culture are more receptive to emotional exploitation tactics. In many ways, Indians and Trinidadians, who have been exploited for centuries, have fallen behind culturally and educationally.

These are societies that mystical tricks can deceive in this regard. Thus, a portion of Ganesh's success depends on his trickery, while a large portion is due to the people's ignorance.

After Ganesh pretends to have mystical powers to gain personal benefit, his luck begins to shift. When the advice he gives to a child with psychological issues works out by chance, it expands his business (Naipaul, 2003: 147). As the word travelled swiftly that Ganesh has cured a sick youngster, his powers become miraculous. This case is an example of collective fraud. Although Ganesh's closest family and friends are the most direct witnesses to Ganesh's lack of mystic and holy power, they seem unconcerned with the issue.

On the contrary, they take an attitude that supports this fraud. Leela is the biggest supporter and assistant of this deception. Even though Ganesh and his best friend Beharry conflict, he restores their friendship and becomes his supporter and business partner when he witnesses Ganesh's success. In every conflict of

interest, his father-in-law Ramlogan harbors immense hostility against Ganesh, but he attempts to reconcile their relationship with Ganesh's success. Hearing rumours that Ganesh possesses mystical abilities, his aunt visits him and sobs with her head on Ganesh's shoulder. As it can be seen, family members and friends come together to execute fraud. In this cluster of interest-based relations, it is impossible to talk about truthfulness between individuals.

The number of clients grows as the news travels that Ganesh possesses mystical abilities. However, because mystics and sorcerers are esteemed in society, many people are interested in these activities. Ganesh is distinguished from other mystics by the fact that he has an educational background. Ironically, Ganesh's education prevents him from being defeated by the other rogue mages. Being educated puts him in an advantageous position against his rivals. Ganesh is a person who understands how to influence people and keeps a close eye on the pulse of society. Customers who see the profusion of books in his residence do not feel compelled to question his honesty and surrender unreservedly to Ganesh. The people around him also seem to have surrendered unconditionally. Beharry's attitude toward Ganesh has changed dramatically; he is more courteous, and he agrees with whatever Ganesh says since he, too, benefits from Ganesh's success. Ganesh's previously unsold and unloved book becomes the most successful bestseller after becoming famous (Naipaul, 2003: 155).

To a considerable measure, the process of using people's religious feelings and exploiting their ignorance to their detriment begins to succeed. Everyone around him eagerly strives to be a partner in this deception, in which Ganesh plays the leading role. One of them is Beharry, who was once a friend of Ganesh before becoming a puppet as Ganesh's power grew. Those who come to Ganesh for healing bring various food and materials as gifts. Beharry cleverly implies that those seeking healing are poor and expresses his concern that the things they bring may be impaired and filthy. For this reason, he dictates that it will be safer to buy gifts and materials in his shop, and Ganesh accepts this. A small portion of the items brought are used in the ritual, Ganesh regrets even for this part, while the remaining is used in Leela's restaurant. The novel does not overtly criticize these deceptive interest-based relationships. On the contrary, such deceptions are based on genuinely innocent and well-intentioned motives. Beharry's strategy is built on the convenience of guests and the security of supplies arriving at Ganesh, effectively thwarting the event's primary purpose of profit. The fact that the true goal of the events is kept hidden for seemingly harmless reasons is a recurring theme in the novel.

Ganesh's deceit begins to make positive contributions to the region where he lives. Fuente Groove, once an arid and barren region, begins to flourish. The government begins to recognise the existence of such a

settlement, and solutions to infrastructural issues are provided. In direct proportion to their income, the house they dwell in changes, as does their way of clothing, but most crucially, Leela's way of speaking changes. It is observed that Naipaul has completely caricatured Leela's persona in this scene. Leela has a distinct accent that softens hard voices and employs a unique grammar when speaking. "This house I are building ... I wants it to have good furnitures ... I are thinking about getting a refrigerator and a few ether things like that" (Naipaul, 2003: 167). A highly ridiculous view of a nouveau riche person is displayed. She behaves bizarrely because she lacks the inner depth and education necessary to live in a world where money is abundant. She also lacks the mental capacity to comprehend that her actions and speech patterns are unusual. One notable point here is that Leela's strange behavior and manner of speaking also infected his friend Suruj Muma. Suruj Muma, slightly more educated than Leela, used to regard Leela as inferior to herself, but when Leela's economic position improves, Suruj Muma begins to mimic her behaviours. This is an actual example in terms of showing how superficial and self-interested their relations are.

Ganesh has a more casual attitude toward writing books now that he has established a well-deserved reputation. The subject and content of the books he publishes are becoming increasingly irrelevant; what matters is that they came from Ganesh's pen. For instance, there are books about topics as ludicrous as toilet paper or excrement (Naipaul, 2003: 178). Now that he is a thinker with a voice in society, Ganesh makes a show of power by transporting two truckloads of his books to the communities he visits. What is remarkable is that such behaviour is accepted and respected by society. He enters politics as he begins to garner more and more respect in society. Ganesh is widely respected and accepted by the community, yet he does not commit to the community; his only motivation is his self-interest. He is unconcerned by his political competitor Narayan's disparaging remarks regarding Trinidadian Hindus.

Nevertheless, he cannot bear to hear mundane laudatory remarks about Narayan. Because his opponent's praise or esteem, even if of mediocre quality, is incompatible with his interests. Ganesh has reached a stage where he can manipulate society in any way he wants. While he uses numerous games to defeat his political opponent, he does not refrain from using religion in politics. In his election campaign, he utilizes the slogan "A vote for Ganesh is a vote for God" (Naipaul, 2003: 215). He succeeds in politics, as he succeeds in every deception business. Ganesh's fraud career goes from teacher to masseur, from masseur to mystic and from mystic to finally member of legislature (221). "But the cost of the change is high, too high. Ganesh, the sincere school- teacher, degenerates into a fake pundit whose lucky cure of a

paranoiac enables him to practice sham politics" (Finch, 1986: 28). The cost of change is a degenerated character. Ganesh satisfies the standards of every environment he enters for his benefit, advances quickly in politics, and changes his name from Ganesh Ramsumair to G. Ramsay Muir when he travels to England as a bureaucrat. "This name change is a fitting conclusion to Ganesh's game of fictitious identity" (Blodgett, 1974: 393). With the assignment of the British government, Ganesh does not hesitate to defend the British colonial order wherever he goes. It is also clearly seen here that Ganesh does not care much about the rest of his oppressed people under the Colony. Ganesh has left the darkness behind. This is Simpson's view on Naipaul; "He is always putting darkness behind him. As he has made his escape from disorder, first through his education, then through writing, in his novels and stories people struggle to escape" (1984: 575-76). Indeed, this is a harsh critique because it would be inaccurate to say that Naipaul has entirely abandoned his culture. As a result, he clearly and implicitly denounced the colonial process's harmful impacts on society in his writings. In order to comprehend the psychological and cultural adaptations of the colonial, we must understand the gap between the real and the ideal in the culture of the assimilated (Angrosino, 1975: 10). In his novels, Naipaul contributed to a better understanding of this issue. The thing is, Naipaul diagnoses the problem but does not suggest a solution (Goodheart, 1981: 46).

CONCLUSION

Despite being Naipaul's first novel, *The Mystic Masseur* is a significant work in terms of the portraits it depicts and the messages it conveys. At first glance, we witness a character that turns into a success story despite being in difficult conditions in a barren region. When this character is analysed in more detail, it becomes evident that he benefits from manipulating events and people. He is a trickster who takes advantage of people's weaknesses, ignorance, and religious beliefs for personal benefits. Ganesh initially attempts to do one or two jobs in a bleak place with few chances, but he fails in all of them. He realizes that he will not be successful in business by being honest. After that, he resorts to a method of defrauding others while posing as a trustworthy character. He achieves tremendous success than he anticipated by exploiting people's weaknesses. Ganesh is highly respected and accepted by society. It would be incorrect to assume that Naipaul intended to heroize such a figure. It is true that the character makes no moral judgments and exploits religious and national sentiments for his interest. However, if the novel is analyzed a little more deeply, it would be incorrect to say that Ganesh is the only one to blame in this situation. There are certain conditions for the emergence of a character like Ganesh. Societies that do not question authority and

believe that too much education is harmful contribute to this. It will also be unfair to blame the society for everything. There are specific reasons why society has regressed, deteriorated, and deprived of a strong identity. This is mainly due to the colonization process. As a result, through the Ganesh character, Naipaul criticizes both society and the colonial forces that caused the society to fall into this state.

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