



CONCEPT OF HOUSE IN V. S. NAIPAUL'S *A HOUSE FOR MR. BISWAS*

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ABSTRACT

A House for Mr. Biswas (1961) is the significant novel of V. S. Naipaul which achieved worldwide fame. Naipaul presents a consistent image of social reality in the Non-Western world where dispossessed people search their identity. It is the novel about a Trinidadian Hindu who greatly desires to have his own house. The protagonist Mr. Biswas struggles for accommodation, wholeness, order and roots. The novel has elements of high comedy and tragic pathos has become closely associated with Naipaul's own personal search for meaning and community despite alienating effects of colonialism. The novel can be read on different levels. Even without any special emphasis on its historical context, it still holds true as a novel about frustration and tragic vulnerability that lies at the core of all human existence. The migrant thinks to have his own house in an alien land. Home is not simply where one lives. It is one's identity- national, cultural, spiritual. Home is where one belongs. It is the soil that has nurtured one's body and spirit. Home is a security. Home is the place with which we get spiritual pleasure.

Keywords: *Expatriation, Exile, Rootlessness and Homelessness.*

INTRODUCTION

V. S. Naipaul was born in Chaguanas, Trinidad, in 1932. The descendant of indentured labourers shipped from India. He obtained the recognition as a writer with *A House for Mr. Biswas (1961)*. It is about an expatriate's attempt to assert his identity and independence in an alien world. Naipaul's writing highlights the experience of non western people who have been uprooted by historical currents. Such people find order and stability. Naipaul presents a consistent image of social reality in the non-western world, where dispossessed people search for order in their lives.

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A House for Mr. Biswas (1961) is considered the Masterpiece of V.S.Naipaul. Mr. Biswas is the protagonist of the novel. The novelist depicts the struggles of Mr. Mohun Biswas in the process of having his own house. The novel is based upon the life of his father. It records the struggles of the East Indian immigrants in Trinidad to become a part of the national community. The life story of Mr. Biswas shows a self respecting individual's rebellion against exploitation. The possession of own house is his goal in life. It leads to exile, dispossession and various disillusionments. He acquires a house after troublesome attempts and still he remains insecure in his own house. There is crowding and insecurity which make the possession of a private dwelling an ideal goal for an inhabitant of Trinidad. The various places which Mr. Biswas meets have all their drawbacks. He wants to build a house, which will be far from the chaos of the people. The Hanuman House is authoritarian and oppressive in its treatment with others. The houses of Chase and Greenvale are unbearable burdens because of uncertain surrounding in their construction. The Short hills and Port of Spain buildings are dispiriting because of their deterioration under the hands of exploitative Tulsi family.

Mr. Biswas is a modern version of everyman. He has been regarded as an everyman. He is the representative of modern man who struggles hard to purchase his own house. His struggle against a rigid social system makes him rebellious. There is a touch of a heroic quality. Naipaul is able to present a hero in all his littleness and his hero preserves a sense of man's inner dignity. Mr. Biswas symbolizes the Indian man of lower middle class ambition to have a house of his own and to die peacefully under his own roof. The novel focuses, the inherent pathos of migrant's predicament. Fortunately or unfortunately Mr. Biswas gets trapped into the racket of the house by marrying the youngest of the Tulsi daughters, Shama. Mr. Biswas is not like other sons in-law who only to fill their bellies. Mr. Biswas was the man of self identity. He does not like slavery and he revolts against Tulsidom. The life of Mr. Biswas leads to exile, dispossession and disillusionment. *A House for Mr. Biswas* is nothing but a story of exiled who tries to complete his goal of his own house in life. For F.G.Rohelehr "Biswas is everyman, wevering between identity and nonentity, and claiming his acquitance with the rest of men." (F. G. Rohelehr, "The Ironic Approach, P.137)

The quest for home is one of the themes of *A House for Mr. Biswas*. Mr. Biswas wants to create his own identity by possessing a house of his own. His life represents a sensitive man's struggle against tyranny of the Hanuman House. He doesn't want to become a slave like other sons-in-law of Mrs. Tulsi. He loved freedom and wanted to escape from the world of Tulsidom. His freedom was suppressed in Hanuman House. As a man of freedom, he rejects slavery and struggles for his own house and creates his own identity. Hanuman House stands for a symbol of authority and autocracy. Mr. Biswas symbolizes for independent man's ambition for his own house.

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The characters in the novel are part and parcels of Indian culture. While living in alien culture they try to secure their own Indian identity. Some of them are under the impact of Trinidadian culture. They have adopted dictatorship and some preferred servitude and Mrs. Tulsi House is the best example for that. Some of the characters disliked slavery and wanted to create their own separate world. Mr. Biswas as a man of Indian origin wanted to create his own identity as an Indian and he did not like to lose it.

Mr. Naipaul himself has lost his identity as an Indian and he could not obtain Trinidadian while living in West Indies or English in London. He lost his original identity and could not obtain new one. Mr. Biswas wanted to create his own identity by owing a house in an alien land. The 'house' is also symbolic. It will provide authenticity and security to Mr. Biswas.

Naipaul dealt with the themes of expatriation and exile in the novel. While presenting these themes, the novelist has used autobiographical elements for the effective presentation of life. The novelist has used the typical style of the characters that helps to develop the major themes of the novel. Both Indian and Trinidadian setting play major role in the elevation and development of the major themes.

Tulsis are the symbol of old Hindu culture imported in Trinidad by Pundit Tulsi. They represent thousands of Indians living in Trinidad. Mrs. Tulsi thinks herself as the custodian of this culture. They perform daily Puja and prayers. The family has a regular pundit to look after these performances. The western culture affects the old Indian values and beliefs. Mrs. Tulsi sends her two sons to Roman Catholic school. Both of her sons marry Christian girls. Owad goes to England for studies of medicines and surgery which is a clear cut deviation from the Hindu religious code. Other members of the family are also under the impact of the western culture. Govind breaks away from the family chord and becomes a taxi driver and lives separately. W. C. Tuttle follows his own interest and moves out of the Tulsi House. Some of the Sons-in-law and daughters also acquire their separate homes. Owad returns from England completely westernized. Seth breaks away from Mrs. Tulsi and lives separately. The characters from Tulsi house are the products of composite culture and tyranny. The characters try to find out secure and safe places. Each of the members wanted to escape from Tulsi House. It is the sense of the loss of identity that compels the characters to wander from place to place. There is a way before them either to assimilate in the new culture or to live as an exile and expatriate. Mrs. Tulsi's son's tried to assimilate in the new culture by marrying Christian girls.

The concept of a 'house' is significant in the novel. It stands for the spiritual and physical shelter. It depicts the inner condition of expatriates who were the victims of the blind incident

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of history. The novelist conveys the message that there were many Mr. Biswas who wanted to build their own houses but the desire to own house remained incomplete. These incomplete houses stand for incomplete lives, incomplete dreams, and futility. House stands for identity, peace, spiritual shelter and stability. Mr. Biswas owns a house and fulfills his ambition. It gives him no joy and peace because of the burden of the debt. Mr. Biswas's search for a house is a search for belonging. An idea of a house is metaphoric. It is the fundamental structure which Mr. Biswas fails to have his own in his life. It stands for an exile's longing for home. The expatriate, Hindu love for a home is personified in Biswas's longing for a home. According to V.S. Naipaul "The act of writing is not merely a matter of self-expression, but also an instrument of an awareness seeking to modify social reality" (1972:29)

Different faiths and cultures have been displayed in the novel *A House for Mr. Biswas*. Most of the characters are living as an expatriate in the alien land. They have changed their countries but it is very difficult to them to change the culture.

Naipaul says:

"When (my grandfather) built his house, he ignored every colonial style. He might have found in Trinidad and put up a heavy, flat roofed oddity, whose image I was to again and again in the small, ramshackle town of Uttar Pradesh."(AAD 32)

The impact of original culture is permanent and it persists forever. As a writer, Naipaul sees the confused state of West Indian people:

V. S. Naipaul has displayed the interactions and confrontations among various cultures. Naipaul himself is the victim of varied cultural confrontations. He has drawn the similar characters, facing cultural confrontations. Mr. Biswas tries to keep safe his identity and wanted to make it authentic by making his own house. We see the Caribbean, Asian and English culture interacting among each other and making a composite culture.i.e. West Indian in nature. Some characters mixed in the local culture. Some have kept themselves apart from the locals. Some are on the way to acculturation. While quarreling with Mr. Biswas, Shama taunts him about his poverty and takes her mother's side,

"Walk' Shama said. You walk until you tired. But Wait until you provide your own food before you start criticizing the food other people give you."(Mr. Biswas, P. 133)

Mr. Biswas begins to live with his wife in the Hanuman House with other sons-in-law of Mrs. Tulsi. Very soon his married life does not prove to be successful. He suffers from the

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unbearable taunts and mental complexes due to the uncongenial family atmosphere. Shama delivers a female child Savi and three years later, she bears a male child Anand. Mr. Biswas tries to adapt himself in the Hanuman House, but he felt alienated and exposed. Seth doesn't like the taunts of Mr. Biswas.

"This was a nice united family before you come. You better go away before you do any more mischief and I have to lay my hand on you." (Mr. Biswas 141)

Tulsis are from Indian origin but they are influenced by the White masters who stand for dictatorship. Tulsis represent the dictatorship of White masters on their subjects. There were two groups in the Hindu culture, the owners and labourers. Labourers wanted freedom and become the owners and for that they struggle throughout their life. Mr. Biswas married Shama, a little educated daughter of Mrs. Tulsi. The Tulsis represent narrow dogmatic beliefs, customs and rituals of Trinidad Hindu colonial society. They are pious Hindu Brahmins who stick to Hindu conventions. They belong to the Hindu aristocrat's clan in Hindu community. Mr. Biswas belongs to the labourer class as his father left no property for him after his death.

"He has no money or position. He was expected to be a Tulsi. At once he rebelled." (Mr. Biswas 97)

V. S. Naipaul presents a struggle of an individual who belongs to the labour class and desires to have his own house at least before his death. A House stands for stability, self-respect and identity. Mr. Biswas found himself marginalized at an early stage, almost an orphan who remains an outsider in the Trinidadian society and never catches up with social tone. He struggles against Tulsidom which rejects his independence. According to Frantz Fanon, the earliest decolonization theorist holds in *The Wretched of the Earth* that "Colonization is a source of destruction and trauma for colonized people who are taught to look negatively upon their people their culture and themselves." (227).

Mr. Biswas was not willing to live as a slave in Hanuman House. Mrs. Tulsi shelters only those who are docile and obedient. Mr. Biswas is more educated than her other sons-in-law. Therefore, he is not able to survive in that atmosphere.

"There were daughters who had, in the Tulsi marriage lottery drawn husbands with money and positions...." (Mr. Biswas 97)

Mr. Biswas is a man of literary aspirations but he is offered a shopkeeper's post at the Chase, due to the reasons he couldn't establish his identity. He felt himself alienated in his house.

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The villagers always referred the shop as the Tulsi shop and not the shop of Mr. Biswas. It was painful treatment to him. He compromises himself by:

"Real life was to begin for them soon, and elsewhere. The Chase was a pause, a preparation." (Mr. Biswas 147)

He tries to escape from the world of Tulsis. He thought to start new life elsewhere by making a house of his own. Mr. Biswas struggled hard to assert his identity. He openly disapproved of many Tulsi practices and policies. He gets nothing but boredom and futility. After getting painful experiences he realizes his position in Tulsi house as a parasite under the shelter of Mrs. Tulsi and Seth. He cherishes an idea of a house in his mind and he presents a doll's house to Savi. When next time he goes to Hanuman House, Savi told him that her doll's house had been shattered by her mother. Mr. Biswas felt regretted that Shama wrecked the house which was cherished long in his heart. He felt alienated once again.

In *A House for Mr. Biswas*, Naipaul focuses on the conflict between the landlord aristocrats and the working class. Mr. Biswas is away from the main cultural stream of Tulsi clan.

Mr. Biswas is aware of his rootlessness from his childhood. He lives a fragmented life from his childhood. He goes to Pundit Jairam, then to Bhandat's rum shop and once more back to his mother. Mr. Biswas is the story of a man's effort to overcome problems of Trinidad East Indian community by obtaining a physical and spiritual shelter.

"For the next thirty five years he was to be a wanderer with no place he would call his own, with no family except that which he has to attempt to create out of engulfing world of Tulsis. For with his mother's parents dead, his father dead, his brother on the estates on the Felicity, Dehuti as a servant in Tara's house, and himself rapidly growing away from Bipti who, broken, became increasingly useless and impenetrable, it seemed to him that he was really quite alone." (Mr. Biswas P.40)

Mr. Biswas expected stability and certainty from his marriage with Shama but he gets humiliation and taunts in Tulsi clan. He joins the faceless group and reluctantly plays insignificant role with them.

Naipaul has created the world of expatriates in *A House for Mr. Biswas*. Mr. Biswas wanted to create his own identity through making his own house. It was his ultimate aim in his life. Mrs. Tulsi and family had created their own identity in the multicultural society of Trinidad. Mr. Biswas, his father and grandfather are the Brahmins who are the followers of their

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original culture and wanted to keep alive their cultural flame, even in the multi-cultural society of Trinidad.

Naipaul focuses on the personal life of the protagonist which tells the ethnic and social history of a community. He tries to assimilate in Hanuman House but he is failed at every stage. He becomes completely isolated man in the crowd and the lonely fighter against the conservative system filled with rotten myths, customs and rituals. He felt himself as an unwanted and unnecessary man in Tulsi clan. Mr. Biswas is an East Indian who desires to break from his Hindu heritage but has difficulty in assimilating himself into Western culture. The poverty of Mr. Biswas brings him a lot of torture and agony in him. His suffering is that of a penniless individual struggling to possess a minimum basic requirement in the form of a house. Mr. Biswas tries to for his own house. A house approves a positive approach to the problem of expatriation.

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CONCLUSION:

Naipaul focuses on the personal life of the protagonist which tells the ethnic and social history of a community. He tries to assimilate in Hanuman House but he is failed at every stage. He becomes completely isolated man in the crowd and the lonely fighter against the conservative system filled with rotten myths, customs and rituals. He felt himself as an unwanted and unnecessary man in Tulsi clan. Mr. Biswas found himself marginalized at an early stage, almost an orphan who remains an outsider in the Trinidadian society and never catches up with social tone.

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