

V. S. NAIPAUL'S *A HOUSE FOR MR. BISWAS*: A STUDY OF MOHUN'S RUDENESS AND DISLOYALTY

Bijender Singh

Village Jagsi, Tehsil Gohana
District Sonapat, Haryana,
India

Present study explores Mohun Biswas' rudeness and disloyalty to Tulsi family in V. S. Naipaul's novel *A House for Mr. Biswas*. The paper focuses on the chapter three entitled *The Tulsis* of the *Part One* of the novel. Mohun's relationships with the Tulsi family and its dire consequences have been analyzed in this paper. Mr. Biswas—a homeless, penniless, jobless wanderer—not only gets shelter and status from Tulsi family by marrying Shama but also a house to live in the by his mother-in-law, Mrs. Tulsi. This coherent and benevolent family also was in the lookout of a boy to serve as a worker and husband for its unmarried girl Shama. This rule was made in the house by Mrs. Tulsi and Seth to boost their sinking business and a suitor Brahmin boy of a poor stratum to be their slave. As soon as they find Mr. Biswas, entrapped by a love note given to Shama, they don't let the opportunity slip by and hastily marry him with Shama, one of the fourteen daughters of Tulsi family. Thus, on one side, they exploit the poor people like Mr. Biswas, to grind to grind their own axes and provide them free shelter and food but on the other side, Mr. Biswas finds this big and suffocating family unfit for him as he finds all the Tulsi daughters' husbands working like slaves on Tulsi farms. He denies working on the Tulsi estate to work as a laborer rather eats free food and keeps living in a free accommodation offered to him by Tulsi family. Notwithstanding many favors done on him, he goes to the extent of calling names especially to Mrs. Tulsi, Seth and two sons of rich Hindu Brahmin family. The paper attempts to bring forth the immaturity, rudeness, fickleness, uncertainty and disloyalty of Mr. Biswas to Tulsi family. Only *The Tulsis* chapter is under review and study and analysis shows that Mr. Biswas seems to have a loose screw of his mind when he, off and on, keeps abusing and disrespecting the elderly persons along with peripheral members of the family who have been feeding him free and thus, Mr. Biswas presents a rustic, rude and real villager like picture despite of having been trained in punditries.

Mr. Biswas' saga of disloyalty and rusticity in the hope of dowry has been delineated and analyzed in this paper. He was an innocent and immature boy when he meets Shama who coincidentally becomes his wife and he fails to cope with challenging environment of this big joint family. Dr. Amar Nath Prasad say Tulsi house a slave house, "Mr. Biswas was trapped in the clutches of Tulsidom. He has his dream of owning his house. The house was nothing but a slave house" (Amar Nath Prasad 05). The story of Mr. Biswas's journey is termed as full of ups and downs, "The book as, we shall see, also deals with...the protagonist's dry and monotonous journey full of many jerks and jolts" (Amar Nath Prasad 01) whereas Mehmet Recep thinks Tulsi family a symbol of colonial world, "*A House for Mr. Biswas*, metaphorically, is a miniature world which symbolizes the colonial world. Mr. Biswas's personal battle with the stronghold of the Tulsi household (the symbol of the colonial world) is a quest for existential freedom and the struggle for personality" (Mehmet Recep 117). This house can be compared to Emily Bronte's

Wuthering House where Heathcliff, like Mr. Biswas suffers many psychological and mental problems. Arundhati Rai's *The God of Small Things* also has a story of Ayemenem House where male characters dance at the tone of female ones and "... where outsiders are rarely adjusted in patriarchal framework" (Amar Nath Prasad 05). N. Sharada Iyer considers Mr. Biswas more complex character than Ganesh Ramsumair of Mr. Biswas' first novel *The Mystic Masseur* who wants to become a successful masseur, renowned writer and religious person, "Mr. Biswas is a more complex version of Ganesh in *The Mystic Masseur*" (N. Sharada Iyer 20).

Mohun Biswas visits the Hanuman House first time as a sign painter for the Tulsi store only after protracted interview with Seth, Pundit Tulsi's brother. Seth beats Mr. Biswas saying that Mr. Biswas was getting the job only because he was an Indian; he had beaten it down yet further and said that Mr. Biswas should count himself lucky to be a Hindu; he had beaten it down yet further and said that "signs were not really needed but were being commissioned from Mr. Biswas only because he was a Brahmin" (Naipaul 82). Tulsi residence was called Hanuman House due to an idol of monkey god Hanuman whose founder Pundit Tulsi died in a motor-car accident. He had been a man of repute to his being a great Hindu scholar. Tulsis' reputation rests on his personality, "The Tulsis have some reputation among Hindus as a pious, conservative, landowning family. Other communities who knew nothing about Pundit Tulsis, had heard about pundit Tulsi, the founder of the family. He had been one of the first to be killed in a motor car accident..." (Naipaul 81). Nobody knows why he emigrated from India as an emigrant but he has a regular correspondence with his family in India, "His family still flourished in India...letters arrive regularly and it was known that he had been of higher standing than most of the Indians who had come to Trinidad (Naipaul 82). Outsiders are rarely allowed to make their entry in Hanuman House except only certain religious ceremonies or any special work. While working he is enchanted by Shama, a girl of sixteen. After a few days later Mr. Biswas passes a love letter to her with only a few words on it, "I love you and I want to talk to you" (Naipaul 85). Mr. Biswas gave this love letter to Shama before noon and it was Seth who came to him before it was time to go to home for him. He says, "The old lady want to see you before going" (Naipaul 86). In Hindu families such kind of person is beaten badly by the girl's members of family but to great surprise, Tulsi family welcomes Mr. Biswas with tea and offer her daughter's hand in marriage while neither Mr. Biswas nor Shama know the real meaning of love. Mrs. Tulsi even does not even ask Shama whether she likes Mohun or not. When they ask Mr. Biswas he says yes for it. Their conversation shows this imbalance of relationships:

'What is the matter? You don't like the child?'

'Yes', Mr. Biswas said helplessly, 'I like the child.'

'That is the main thing', Seth said, 'We don't want you to force you to do anything. Are we forcing you? (Naipaul 91)

Mrs. Tulsi also does not talk to him harshly rather she smiles as if she was smiling of Mr. Biswas' fate. Ultimately a marriage is fixed. Mr. Biswas does not want to miss this good opportunity and he is happy to be a part of this family. He does not tire from boasting about the Tulsi family. He tells Aleck, 'Good family, you know. Money, acres and acres of land. No more sign painting for me...Rich people you know. Big house! (Naipaul 93).Very next day he is invited to lunch and it was Mrs. Tulsi, the oldest person in the house who was serving him with a hand fan. Firstly, it was respect for a would-be son-in-law and an inexplicit forgery against him. Mr. Biswas, being immature and innocent, could not know what was in the mind of Mrs. Tulsi and Seth. Dr. Amar Nath Prasad tells their purpose in these words, "In the house men were

needed for two reasons—husbands for Tulsi’s daughters as well as laborers for Tulsi’s estate” (Amar Nath Prasad 05). It all this was done in such a manner as is used a bait to entrap a beast of prey, “He was invited to lunch in the hall in the Tulsi family, off lentils, spinach, a mound of rice on a brass plate. Flies buzzed on fresh food stains all along the pitch pine table. He disliked the food and disliked eating off brass plates. Mrs. Tulsi who was not eating herself, sat next to him stared at his plate, brushed the flies away from it with one hand, and talked (Naipaul 94). Then Mrs. Tulsi goes on telling Mr. Biswas that there was no quarrel between Mr. and Mrs. Tulsi and they lived peacefully. Mr. Tulsi’s death was a blow on the family as only one daughter was married and two sons were yet to be educated. Mr. Biswas here stands disloyal to his family too. He was going to take such a big decision of his life without even telling to any of the members of his family or relatives Mr. Biswas doesn’t tell Tara, Alec or his family that he is going to get married. He tells his mother that he is going away on a job for a short period. He leaves most of his clothes at home as an assurance of his return “And telling Bipti one morning that he would be away for a short time on a job. He took some of his clothes and moved to Hanuman House...As a guarantee of that return he left most of his clothes and all of his books in the hut; it was partly, too, to guarantee this return that he lied to Bipti” (Naipaul 97). He silently marries with Shama at a registrar office and starts living as a married man with Shama in a long room at the top floor of the wooden house in the Tulsi household as a *gharjamai* (son-in-law who lives in his wife’s parental home). Mr. Biswas' marriage was a result of his immaturity and due to anti-sex attraction. After marriage he does not even touch Shama due to this immaturity and he could not muster courage to do kiss her, “He didn’t embrace or touch her. He wouldn’t have known, besides, how to begin, with someone who had not spoken a word to him” (Naipaul 98). He just comes to know that he was married to Shama because “he was of the proper caste” (p. 99). But living in his wife’s house he could not satisfy himself and refused to work as laborer. He rebelled to be a Tulsis as, “Their names were forgotten; they became Tulsis” (Naipaul 98). On it Amar Nath Prasad contends, “Very soon he finds the place just the otherwise of his taste and temperament. But his marriage life does not prove to be successful. He suffers from the unbearable taunts and mental complexes due to the uncongenial family atmosphere” (Amar Nath Prasad 04). And it passed less than a fortnight. Mr. Biswas starts packing his clothes. Then Shama, his wife, badly humiliates him saying. ‘Yes, take up your clothes and go.’ Shama said, ‘You come to this house with nothing but a pair of cheap khaki trousers and a dirty old shirt’ (Naipaul 99). Mr. Biswas was homeless and when a royal landlord Tulsi family gave him a place along with a wife, he does not like to take even his wife, Shama, with him as they were newly married but disparately she comes back to Pagotes. His mother welcomes him warmly and her heart is filled with both joy and pride. She even goes to say, “She could now die happily” (Naipaul 99). Even his uncle Ajodha calls him, “Married man”. And his dialogues prove he was happy. “Tara, Tara”, Ajodha called, “Come and look at your married nephew” (Naipaul 100). He accuses Rabidat for getting him married like that. When Tara says that Tulsi did not give him dowry because it was a love marriage. He refutes and says that it was only due to Rabidat’s taunt which made him write a love note to Shama, “Mr. Biswas looked angrily and accusingly at Rabidat. He held Rabidat more than anyone else responsible for his marriage and wanted to say it was Rabidat’s taunt which has made him write note to Shama” (Naipaul 102). When he was back to the Hanuman House he is called crab catcher by Shama and nobody notices his arrival or departure there. He begins to work as a sign painter but due to less work, as he was unknown in Arwacas, he had a tough time for him for some days. Mr. Biswas then starts

taking revenge on the Tulsis by calling two sons “little gods”, Seth “big boss” and Mrs. Tulsi “the old queen” “the old hen” the old cow” (Naipaul 106) in front of Shama. Then again they start quarrelling, “

Well, nobody didn’t ask you to get married into the family, you know”

“Family? Family? This blasted family fowl run you calling family?” (Naipaul 106).

He tries to talk to one more person, C’s (Chinta, one of Shama’s sisters) husband, Govind about Tulsi family. But Govind told him that Seth, Mrs. Tulsi and her two sons all were good and he liked to work under them. He tells Mr. Biswas to give up sign painting but he replies, “Give up sign painting? And my independence. No boy. My motto is; paddle your own canoe” (Naipaul 108). Mr. Biswas calls members of the Tulsi family bloodsuckers and to do anything else except working for them “so you say (that these people pay you enough). But these people are bloodsuckers, man. Rather than work for them, I would catch crab or sell coconut” (Naipaul 109). Then he tells that Mrs Tulsi is educating well her two sons in colleges and they are not made for fields. Then why only we work there as servants. He says, “You wouldn’t see the little gods in the fields, I bet” (Naipaul 109). Govind complains against Mr. Biswas to Tulsi family and Seth calls for Biswas. He asks him if he is living in hanuman house for two months and is being fed well, then Mr. Biswas replies positively. When it is confirmed that he had been eating well in the family and despite of it he calls the other people by bad names it was the first time there was impatience in Seth's voice, “this is gratitude, you come here penniless, a stranger, we take you in, we give you one of our daughters, we feed you, we give you a place to sleep in. You refuse to help in the store; you refuse to help on the estate. All right. But then to turn around to insult us” (Naipaul 111).

Then Seth reproaches Mrs. Tulsi that she has chosen not a right man for her daughters, “If he doesn’t want to take the job on the estate that is his business. It serve you right, Ma. You choose your son-in-laws and they treat you exactly how you deserve” (Naipaul 112). Even the younger god Owad wants Mr. Biswas to apologize Mrs. Tulsi, “Is not because my father dead that people who eating my mother food should feel that they could call she a hen. I want Biswas apologize to Ma (Naipaul 113). But Mr. Biswas gets infuriated and says, “The whole pack of you could go to hell, I not going to apologize to one of the damn lot of you” (Naipaul 113). Mr. Biswas now starts packing books, clothes and tells, “I not staying here a minute longer. Having that damn little boy talk to me like that! He does talk to all your brother-in-laws like that” (Naipaul 113). Biswas calls Seth ‘the big boss’ and ‘big bull’ in front of Shama. After some time Govind’s wife, Chinta and Seth’s wife Padma beg Mr. Biswas not to leave them for the sake of family unity and name in the temper. Both of them kept begging Mr. Biswas not to go. Ultimately he succumbed not to go. Mr. Biswas could not become a satisfied son-in-law in the Tulsi household like Govind who was satisfied with everybody or Hari. He offended no one and amused no one, “He was obsessed with his illness, his food and his religious books” (Naipaul 117). Mr. Biswas rises questions in Tulsi family and it is neither Shama nor any member of the Tulsi family says anything against Mr. Biswas or his family. Mr. Biswas is pacified by Chinta and Padma only after a strong plea for begging. Nonetheless he starts calling “Seth a leather worker, little god....road sweeper, little washer boys or barbers. And even calls Mrs. Tulsi not a Hindu but a ‘Roman Catholic’” (Naipaul 119). After hearing Pankaj Rai, a B.A .and L.L.B. it is Mohun Biswas who is solely blamed for using bad words for his elders. Mr. Biswas was a Hindu Brahmin and he has been trained by the Pundit Jairam of Hindu scriptures. He goes to the maximum extent of humiliate Mrs Tulsi when he calls her. “Ro-man Cat-o-lic! Roman Cat, the

bitch” (Naipaul 120). If taken seriously Mrs. Tulsi and her family respected him and did not say anything that was against her dignity. He, on the one side, boasts about the family before marriage, he calls it a good family, with money and acres of land but after marriage he forgets about their being landlord and owning a big house, rather he calls Shama too a roman catholic girl and he has done a favor on Tulsi family by getting married with her. He calls the whole family, “You think any good Hindu would get married to a Roman Catholic girl, if he was really a good Hindu? Shama, you know what? It look to me that your whole family is just one big low-caste bunch” (Naipaul 120). Mr. Biswas calls this house a monkey house “And what about the two gods? It ever strikes you that they look like two monkeys? So, you have one concrete monkey god outside the house and two living ones inside. They could just call this place the monkey house and finish .Eh monkey, bull, cow, hen. This place is a blasted zoo, man” (Naipaul 123). Mr. Biswas thinks that everybody in the Mrs. Tulsi’s family is jealous of him. When Mr. Biswas says this it is Owad who bursts into tears and says to Mrs. Tulsi, ‘I not going to remain sitting down in this hammock and have any-and-everybody in this house insulting me. Is your fault, Ma? Is your son-in-law...you just bring them here to eat all the food my father money buy and then to insult your sons’ (Naipaul 126). On this grave charge on Mrs. Tulsi Seth gets angry and he accused on Mohun Biswas, ‘You want to see girl children educated and choosing their own husband, eh? The same sort of thing that your sister do? (Naipaul 126). He calls that it is *Kalyug* (the Black Age) that the person whom we feed is showing not any gratitude to us, “The Black Age has come at last. We have taken in a serpent. It is my fault .You must blame me” (Naipaul 126-27). Mr. Biswas is in the hope of dowry and stays in hanuman house until he gets that was promised to him at the time of marriage proposal. But Seth does not respond to his demand of dowry here rather her changes the topic of love letter and short frock for the girls. When Mrs Tulsi faints it is the whole family who is conscious of his health. All daughters are at her service. Then Mr. Biswas says in jealousy, “Which foot you rub? You should be glad they allow you to touch a foot, you know, it does beat me why all you sisters so anxious to look after the old hen. She did look after you? She just pick you up and marry you off to any coconut seller and crab catcher. And still everybody rushing upto rub foot and squeeze head and hand smelling— salts” (Naipaul 131). Shama refutes him saying, “You know nobody hearing you talk would believe that you come too this house with no more things than you could hang up on a one inch nail” (131). When Mrs. Tulsi comes to her senses Mr. Biswas, outwardly, talks to her in a very respectful manner and Shama thinks that he is learning gratitude. He says to her, ‘You feeling better, Mai?’ (Naipaul 131). It is Mrs. Tulsi who despite of Mr. Biswas’ ingratitude and rudeness speaks to her very politely, ‘Yes son, I am feeling better’ (Naipaul 132). But there was something else that was cooking into his mind. He tells to Shama, “I was wrong about your mother. She is not a old hen at all. Nor a old cow....She is a she fox” (Naipaul 132). One day when Owad was doing morning *puja* (worshiping). After giving incense to all images of the gods in the prayer room, he goes to offer it to Mrs. Tulsi and Sushila. Both of them regard Mr. Biswas also a part of their family and plead Owad to take it to Mohun. Both of them call Mr. Biswas his brother ‘Your brother Mohun’ (Naipaul 133). Here are Sushila’s words to assimilating tone into Mrs. Tulsi’s statement, ‘Yes, owad. Take it to your brother Mohun (Naipaul 133).Owad hesitates going to Mr. Biswas but he carries orders of both of the senior members of the house. It is Mr. Biswas who again was in the chance to humiliate them. He says, “You could take that away. You know I don’t hold with this idol worship” (Naipaul 133). Despite of this humiliation Sushila pacifies little god, when Owad gets angry, saying, “You must never lose your temper when you

are doing *puja*”. But owad says “Is nice for him to insult me and Ma and everybody else the way he doing?” (Naipaul 135). Mr. Biswas’ rudeness does not end here on, one day he spits on Owad from the window while gargling after eating food. Owad says, “Marking what you doing, Mr. Biswas. But I standing right up here and if you spit on me again I going to tell Ma”.

‘Tell, you little son of a bitch’. (Mr. Biswas spits on him again)
‘Man’!

‘O God! You lucky little monkey.’ (Naipaul 136).

It was Shama who drags him from the window. She says, ‘You walk until you provide your own food other people give you’ (Naipaul 136). Shama was also responsible for Mr. Biswas’ problems. She always takes side of Tulsi family and always disgraces her husband. According to Amar Nath Prasad, “Shama always flings irony on Biswas and treats him like a prisoner and time and again retorts him” (Amar Nath Prasad 40). Owad complains to his mother, “Ma, come and see what your son-in-law do to me. He cover me down with dirty food” (Naipaul 137). It is Govind, Chinta’s husband, who beats him badly with blows and kicks. All frighten if he kill Mr. Biswas. Mr. Biswas, too, stupefied by fear, cries in pain, “O God! I dead. I dead. He will kill me” (Naipaul 139). Padma still says Shama to give food to Mohun Biswas. But Mr. Biswas says, “I not eating any of the bad food from this house”. Shama speaks angrily, “Nobody not going to beg you, you hear” (Naipaul 142). Next morning Seth banishes Mr. Biswas from the Hanuman House saying, ‘I hear is that you try to beat up Owad. I don’t think we could stand you here any longer. You want to paddle your own canoe. All right, go ahead and paddle. When you start getting your tail wet, don’t bother to come back to me or Mai, you hear. This was a nice united family before you come. You better go away before you do anymore mischief and I have to lay my hand on you” (Naipaul 144).

Mr. Biswas should have turned down marriage proposal at the very outset when Mrs. Tulsi and Seth were talking to him about it. He should have asked about the entire dowry there and then. But he hesitated and after marriage he insults everybody when he does not get dowry. He feels alienated and exiled then. Mehmet Recep justly contends, “Analyzing the sense of alienation and the agony of exile experienced by the characters, *A House for Mr. Biswas* delineates the problems of a distorted and troubled past and tries to find a purpose in life. Alienated from his folk, family and from the Tulsi’s Hanuman House, for Mr. Biswas, a house of his own symbolizes freedom and a place to strike a root. Mr. Biswas is an alien even in his own family since he was born with six fingers and feet first, signs for bad luck” (Mehmet Recep 117). Dr. Amar Nath Prasad “The story of Mr. Biswas is the general story of (a) man. Tortured by communal pressures and threatened by the unstructured society, the protagonist is in constant suspension ever ready to assert his identity but failed to do so in the long run” (Dr. Amar Nath Prasad 07). To N. Sharada Iyer, “The entry of Mr. Biswas into the Tulsi household creates a disturbance because his ideas are different. He had spent his childhood in an environment more liberal than the one which prevailed at Hanuman House” (N. Sharada Iyer 22). If Mr. Biswas was showing perfidiousness and rusticity on the grounds that Mrs. Tulsi and Seth has not given any dowry to him and that was why he behave so badly all the time to every member of the Tulsi family, then Mr. Biswas was, in totto, a mentally punctured personality.

Bibliography

Prasad, Amar Nath. *Critical Responses to V. S. Naipaul and Mulk Raj Anand*. Edited by Amar Nath Prasad. New Delhi: Sarup & Sons Publishers, 2003. Print.

Pradhan, Prakash Chandra. *V. S. Naipaul: Critical Essays, Volume III*. Edited by Mohit K. Ray. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2005. Print.

Iyer, N. Sharada. *V. S. Naipaul: Critical Essays, Volume III*. Edited by Mohit K. Ray. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2005. Print.

TAŞ, Mehmet Recep. “Alienation, Naipaul and Mr. Biswas”. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*. Vol. 1, 11. Special Issue August 2011. 115-119. Print.

Naipaul, V. S. *A House for Mr. Biswas*. London: Picador, 2011. Print.