

QUEST FOR IDENTITY AND FOR ROOT IN V.S. NAIPAUL'S *A HOUSE FOR MR. BISWAS*

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Identity is rooted in the identification with what one is associated with. It evolves with the time. It is the birth-right of all human-being. But there are some remote area, caste and creeds where still an average person has to strive & struggle for his existence. This social injustice & differences has been pointed out by a renowned literary personality, a novelist - Mr.V.S. Naipaul. His literary works are based on a single motive of the quest of self identity & belongingness. His all the works are the outcome of his own individual experience of chaotic world of Trinidad. There has been confluence of two cultures first from South African from where they came for their better enhancement and second from India, the sugarcane workers, his own ancestral with their Indian Culture. Even with the third generation emerged; it could not get its identity. So the third generation was extremely chaotic and thwarted.

The bitter experiences of his own life became the source of his writings. Being an international author the question of his identity crops up him due to his immigrant background. Naipaul's reluctance to come to terms with the orthodox religious atmosphere of the family stimulated him an agnostic and unbeliever. The failure to accept the inherited identity spurred him to explore its alternative even when he was a small boy:

I had never wanted to stay in Trinidad. When I was in fourth form I wrote a vow on the end paper of my Keinnedy's Revised Latin primer to leave Trinidad within five years. I left after six and for many years afterwards in England, falling asleep in bedsitters with the electric fire on, I had been awakened by the nightmare that I was back in tropical Trinidad. (*The Middle Passage* 34)

This paper analyses Naipaul's reputed novel *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961). This novel depicts the story of its protagonist, Mr. Biswas from birth to death. This Novel deals with Mr. Biswas's life. Naipaul has a subjective approach towards the jarring of identity and rootlessness. Biswas's life is a catena of minor disasters, each of which can be perceived as his resentful rebuttal of an uncongenial society. His father passed away in trying to retrieve his supposedly drowned body from the village pond while he was on infant in the mother's lap. The unexpected death of protagonist's father dashes him in the position of homeless and emotionally bewildered. He lives with his mother who hesitates to bestow her affection on him in the presence of strangers. However, Mr. Biswas is lucky to find a mother-substitute in his issueless aunt, Tara who treats him very kindly and helps him in every way. When he goes to paint signs at the store of the Tusli family of Arwacas in Hanuman House, he gets entrapped while passing a love-note to one of the daughters of Mrs. Tulsi called Shama.

Consequently, he is trapped into the bond of marriage with Shama by her Mother, Mrs. Tulsi and her uncle. "The world was too small, the Tulsi family too large. He felt trapped."

(The Tulsis, *a House for Mr. Biswas* 92) Mr. Biswas enjoys the physical security provided by his marriage into the Tulsi family but refuses to submit to his orthodox and authoritarian arrangement. But he manages to establish independent area for himself, though in the circumstances of unemployment and illness, he and his family remain tied to the Tusli household for shelter and sustenance. That is why; the idea of a house of his own becomes an obsession or a symbol of true identity for Mr. Biswas. He purchases a house for himself at Sikkim Street in Port of Spain, and finally contends to live independently with his family. He dies from heart attack at the age of forty-six, but he has left his family the independence and with a house to live in: “Mr. Biswas had no money or position. He was expected to become a Tulsi. At once he rebelled.” (The Tulsis, *A House for Mr. Biswas* 99)

Mohun's sense of impotence and deprivation of male identity must be seen in the context of the world he inhabits. It is Naipaul's conviction that to be colonised is to submit to symbolic castration. He is the descendant of indentured laborers, people little better than slaves, subjected to centuries of dispossession, crushing poverty and the trauma of displacement. If manliness is about power and affirmative action, the world that he inhabits is a castrated one, crowded by meaningless, unnecessary, unaccommodated beings. It is a world that moves between the poles of futile emasculation and vicious, ruthless, aggression that is only a parody of true heroic masculinity.

A deep study of *A House for Mr. Biswas* unfolds the various threads of multi-cultural interactions that toss the characters to and fro to finally end up confused and bruised. The urge to calibrate their identity, by sending down firm roots in a soil, however culturally alien and strange it might be, motivates them to try various alternatives traditionally associated with stasis and fixity. Drawn after its creator's father, Mr. Biswas symbolizes the typically lower middle class Indian ambition to have a house of one's own to die peacefully under one's own roofs. Naipaul's observation with this inherited value can be poignantly marked in his protagonist's endless efforts to fulfill his long cherished dream. As a strategist, Biswas is willing to compromise even with his intensely personal concerns if their sacrifice could help him realizing his dream.

The progress of narrative in *A House for Mr. Biswas* unravels the gradual attenuation of the native culture and enlists the protagonist's cultural agony and be wilderness in quest for an alternative to ascertain to but the efforts remain useless because the mimicry is the only way out. The entire text should be taken into consideration to mark the anguish of the protagonist in search of his sustenance for he finds himself misfit in either of the camps - oriental and western. It may be pointed out that one's acquisition simply ensues frustration for both are foreign to one with well-marked distinguishing features. The post birth rituals of Mr. Biswas present the orthodoxy of Hinduism to defy its fluidity even in a foreign land.

Mr. Biswas is fully rounded and exists in a world of solid characters and exhaustive details. What Naipaul indicates at in his early fiction, he renovates and expands in this sweep of three generations. The stagnant, decaying Hindu world; the poverty and chaos of the Creole society; and the painful struggle of one man to rise above both, are all rendered with the authenticity that only historical truths will allow, and the artistry that only a truly talented writer can generate. This novel is Naipaul's most profound attempt to dramatise his own history and disport his fragmented and disintegrated society. In an interview with Adrian Rowe-Evans, Naipaul states:

At first I looked for this release in humour, but as the horizon of my writing expanded I sought to reconstruct my disintegrated society to impose order on the

world, to seek patterns, to tell myself this is what happens when people are strong; this is what happens when people are weak. I had to find that degree of intellectual comfort, or I would have gone mad. (Adrian Rowe-Evans, 59)

A House for Mr. Biswas aims at presenting the character of the protagonist in tragic aspect and to show how his relentless struggle brings his otherwise strange and comical traits to the dignity and nobility of heroic stature. Apparently, Mr. Biswas's consistent striving is for a house of his own, yet embedded in; it is the quest for a name and identity independent of others' charity. Thus, the story line operates on two levels-outwardly a deep desire for habitation one's own and inwardly an intense yearning for a well defined self.

His dependence at this time is only matched by his homelessness as he moves from the back trace at Pagotes to Pundit Jairam, then to Bhandat's rum shop and once more back to Pagotes, before he even sees Shama and the Tulsis:

For the next thirty five years he was to be a wanderer with no place he could call his own, with no family except that which he was to attempt to create out of the engulfing world of the Tulsis. For with his mother's parents dead, his father dead, his brothers on the estate at felicity, Dehuti as a servant in Tara's house, and himself rapidly growing away from Bipti who broken, became increasingly useless and impenetrable, it seemed to him that he was really quite alone. (Pastoral, *A House for Mr. Biswas* 38)

So his quest for a home becomes first of all a personal search for identity and purpose and secondly, a need to reinstate himself within the warm, integrated form of a family. The house symbolically accommodates both these needs. In marrying Shama on Mrs. Tulsi's terms, Biswas renders to the deep Hindu humiliation of assuming the ritualistic female role by living with his wife's family. He joins the faceless group of "the husbands, Under Seth's supervision, worked on the Tulsi land, looked after the Tulsi animals, and served in the store. In return they were given food, shelter and a little money; their children were looked after; and they were treated with respect by people outside because they were connected with the Tulsi family. Their names were forgotten; they became Tulsis. There were daughters who had, in the Tulsi marriage lottery, drawn husbands with money and position." (The tulsis, *A House for Mr. Biswas* 98)

It is against this type of psychic emasculation and anonymity that Mr. Biswas too is expected to merge and assimilate his identity with the Tulsis. However, his self-respect comes in the way and he starts rebelling against the authority of Mrs. Tulsi and Mr. Seth, her brother –in-law, who virtually runs the household. Initially, his rebellion lacks purpose and thought. It is manifested in silly pranks as he makes up names for various members of the household or parades his floursack shorts in defiance of taunts from the Tulsi children. His triumphs are useless and puerile and soon he realizes how utterly worthless he continues to be:

Aggrieved and aggressive stares, he received in the hall reminded him of his morning triumph. All his joy at that had turned into disgust at this condition. The campaign against the Tulsis, which he had been conducting with such pleasure, now seemed pointless and degrading. Suppose, Mr. Biswas thought in the long room, suppose that at one word I could just disappear from this room, what would remain to speak of me? A few clothes, A few books. The shouts and thumps in the hall would continue; the puja would be done; in the morning the Tulsi store would open its doors. He had lived in many houses. And how easy it

was to think of those houses without him. (The Tulsis, *A House for Mr. Biswas* 135)

At forty six, his battles are over. This orphan, and history less man has achieved all the success what his limited talent and sterile environment has allowed. He must now give way to his children and await their successes: "Anand's letters grew rare again. There was nothing Mr. Biswas could do but wait. Wait for Anand. Wait for Savi. Wait for the five years to come to an end. Wait. Wait. Wait for death!" (Epilogue, *A House For Mr. Biswas* 620) It is a tragic, stunning testimony of life in a rootless, disordered society that the achievement of a single, real victory drains the life blood of the soul. Biswas dies enjoying the company of his daughter, Savi, and admiring the mystery and romance of life which he was never destined to share: "He had got a Butterfly orchid. The shade was flowering again; wasn't it strange that a tree which grew so quickly could produce flowers with such a sweet scent?" (Epilogue, *A House For Mr. Biswas* 622)

We find Mr. Biswas a reluctant victim of unfortunate circumstances. He shares his tragic vision with his children towards the final stage of his life:

It was now that he began to speak to his children of his childhood. He told them of the hut, the men digging in the garden at night; he told them of the oil that was later found on the land. What fortune might have been theirs, if only his father had not died, if only he had stuck to the land like his brother, if he had not gone to Pagotes, not become a sign –writer, not gone to Hanuman House, not married !If only so many things had not happened! (Epilogue, *A House For Mr. Biswas* 622)

Finally, it is through the characters like Mr. Biswas that we get "glimpses of ordinary people who exemplify extraordinary reality." (L. Sachs William V.S. Naipaul and the plight of the *Dispossessed: id13543*) Who says that tragedy is totally dead in the twentieth century. Throughout the book his search for a house of his own is an attempt to find both independence and a meaning for his life, and the often hilarious account of petty island life is underpinned with a deeper sense of the essential loneliness of the human state. This is vividly reflected at the center of the book. But by the end Biswas has his own house, while the Tulsis family is disintegrating.

Thus, V.S. Naipaul (Nobel laureate) is highly appreciated in the field of English literature for his works. At the age of 80 he has provided a new dimensions and new approaches to the reader to study the expatriate literature. This novel proves his intensity of searching identity by his protagonist. From the beginning of the novel it seems that the story of this novel is associated with the novelist himself. Therefore it is said that his writing is a process of his self identity. A.B. Vajpayee says "Sir Naipaul's literary sensitivity, transcending all barriers has blossomed into an all encompassing concern for humanity. His incisive treatment of contemporary realities has never been bereft of humane perspectives." (Quoted from Hindustan Time, New Delhi, 11th oct. 2001.)

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