

**Tribhuvan University**

**Seeking Identity and Integration: Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas***

A Thesis Submitted to the Department of English, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Ratna Rajyalaxmi Campus, Tribhuvan University, in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in English.

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**Letter of Approval**

This thesis entitled “Seeking Identity and Integration: Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas*” submitted to the Department of English, Ratna Rajyalaxmi Campus, by Binisha Adhikari has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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### Abstract

The present research is an investigation into V.S. Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961). It explores the failure, futility, isolation, alienation, dislocation, displacement, valuelessness and identity crisis in the postcolonial society. Main motto to prepare thesis is to vent out disintegration and identity crisis of third world people by studying the personality and behavior of the character, Biswa's. People express their identity in the situation when it is questioned or threatened. The people who face 'other' culture(s) feel themselves insecure and an unknown fear haunts them. As a result, their psychic facet of brain makes them to stay in the state of limbo. Still in the third world people in the west face the problem of belongingness.

The thesis shows true representation of dislocation, displacement, cultural identity, mimicry, and hybridity under Indian diasporic discourse. Sense of alienation due to cultural displacement is presented in the novel. Mr. Biswas struggles to get rid of the crippling sense of dislocation and displacement as well as his psychological and physical sufferings. Therefore, there is a diasporic taste at the core of this novel. Thus, Mr. Biswas's constant repulsion and attraction with the customs and values of the West and the East is realistically presented in the novel. Mr. Biswas, sometimes remains indifferent to all customs, rituals, and traditions observed in both to the West, and the East.

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## Chapter I

### Cause of Identity Crisis and Disintegration

Identity Crisis and Disintegration give extreme effect of homelessness, feeling inferiority and dislocation. People express their identities but it is more rigorously expressed in the situation when the identity itself is in question. People often disregard the notion of identity when it is not questioned i.e. when their culture provides them their identity. The old identities, which stabilized the social world for so long, are in the ebb, giving rise to new identities and fragmenting the modern individual as unified subject. This so-called 'crisis of identity' is seen as part of a wider process of change, which is dislocating the central structures and processes of societies and undermining the frameworks, which give individuals stable anchorage in the social world. Hall claims that "modern identities are being 'de-centered'; that is, dislocated or fragmented" ("The Question" 274).

Hall sees the fragmentation of the cultural landscapes of class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race and nationality which once gave us firm locations as social individual, undermining our sense of ourselves as integrated subject. So, there is the loss of "stable sense of self" which is also called the dislocation or de-centering of the subject, creating the crisis of identity for the individuals (274). He quotes Mercer and says that "identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis; when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable, is displaced by the experience of don't and uncertainty" (275). Identity, in fact, is formed in the interaction between 'self' and society. Wherever such relation is disturbed people's cultural identity. Hall adds: "Correspondingly, the identities which composed the social landscapes 'out there', and which ensured our subjective conformity with the objective needs of the culture, are breaking us as a result of structural and institutional change"(277).

Hall, thus, posits the problems of identities in what he calls “structural and institutional change”. In such situation, contradictory identities grow within us, pulling us in different directions, so that our identification is continuously being shifted about. Hall furthers the same thus:

If we feel we have a unified identity, from birth to death, it is only because we construct a comforting story or “narrative of the self” about ourselves. The fully unified, completed, secure and coherent identity is a fantasy. Instead, as the systems of meaning and cultural representation multiply, we are confronted by a bewildering, fleeting multiplicity of possible identities-any one of which we could identify with-at least temporarily (288).

Hall, however, considers the role of globalization to be crucial to bring such crisis of identity. Globalization suggests that global culture is brought about by a variety of social and cultural development: the existence of a world satellite information system; the emergence of global patterns of consumption and consumerism; the cultivation of cosmopolitan life styles; the emergence of global sport such as the Olympic Games, World football competition, and international tennis matches; the growth of global military system; recognition of a world wide ecological crisis; the development of worldwide health problems such as AIDS; extension of the concept of human rights; complex interchange between world regions and many more.

Cultural identity is questioned and the ‘crisis’ of identity is felt when the cultures are cut across and intersect natural frontiers, and when people have been dispersed forever or for certain time from their homelands. Such people retain strong links with their places of origin and their tradition. They bear upon the poised culture

the traces of the particular culture, traditions, languages and histories by which they were shaped. Hall gives the name “culture of hybridity” to such emerging culture (“The Question” 274). They have irrevocably been translated or to quote Rushdie’s term “bearing across” (17). The feeling of alienation necessarily haunts them. The newly emergent identity never gives them the sense of unity within. The identity as such is forever questioned, and this ‘crisis’ remains at the heart of any form of expression. Most of the contemporary writers, most notably V.S.Naipaul, express the same nostalgia for the root from the junctures of cultural crisis. They think themselves as ‘culturally exiled’ and continuously try to rejoin themselves with the root especially in their writing and this afflatus can be termed as creative force.

### **Cultural Identity: Question of Belonging**

The expression of culture is inextricably bound up with the notion of identity. People express their identity: they question it if they find the difficulty of belonging; they even seek their relation to the source culture; and thereby try to establish their identity. Identity as such has been a topical issue in the study of culture, and the scholars like Kobean Mercer says that the concept of identity is in Crisis (109). Almost everywhere people say that this crisis is caused by Globalization, a concept responsible for the experience of migrancy, altering relations between Western and other cultures and the sense of identity of the individuals whose lives have taken them across the borders between so-called the first world, the second worlds, and the third worlds, or across in effect, pre-modern and postmodern societies. The globalization in its long run has caused the interfusing of identities, which can be termed as “the hybridity of cultural identities.” This notion of hybridity suggests that it has the relation to racial and ‘ethnic’ identities. Moreover, these identities are not pure but are the product of mixing, fusion, and creolization, following the mixing and movements



of cultures. Specifically from the slave trade to mass media, there lies the great shape of modern identities. The result is the fusion or hybridity of identities, which cannot be taken as the product of 'assimilation' of one culture or cultural tradition by another, but the production of something new. This new notion of identity is equated with the studies of the hybridity of cultural identity that are closely allied to accounts of Diaspora identities.

Diaspora is a term that was initially used to refer to the dispersal of Jewish people across the globe, but is now regularly used to describe black and other Diaspora. These identities are shaped by this sense of having been, in Salman Rushdie's Phrase "borne across the world"; of being in but not entirely of the west (17). A number of Anglo American critics now agree that V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie's and some prominent black writers find a unique and a fertile place from where they can write about their anguish toward the west as well as they can express a haunting search for their true cultural identity. They, therefore, seek their belonging and write about that. Their writings are full of cultural expression relying on the fact that the notion of cultural identity in fact is problematic and they struggle to adjust as well as assimilate with the new notions of identities by both aspects: failure and success. In this context Boehmer's views seem more accurate. She finds that colonial writers always lacked their concrete identity. They belonged neither to their own homes nor in their adopted homes. Boehmer adds:

In short, colonial writers, positioned between diametrically different cultural worlds, were able to borrow from several traditions, yet belonged to no one. In the face of their uneasy marginality or supplementarity, they would turn in time to what might be called their

own experience of environment, migration, or invasion, as the case might be- to find a position for self-reconstruction. (116)

It becomes clear that identities are fluid, and are both consciously and unconsciously delimited. Any numbers of factors are likely to be under negotiation in either cases; whether of religion, nation, language, political ideology or cultural expression. One example can be Islam; a religious faith that shapes the social, economic and political character of entire regimes and can reach into the detailed social and sexual lives of its adherents.

The reality should expose the fact that developments in theory have accompanied the general social processes indicated above and have played their part in underlying, and providing a vocabulary for, a changing awareness of many subtleties of identity and of the allied affirmation of a given identity in relation to its supposed binary opposite. Stuart Hall observed the scene with the people creating their new but both constructed and emergent subject. Hall believes that cultural identity exists only in representation. He argues:

Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production' which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside representation. This view problematizes the very authority and authenticity to which the terms 'cultural identity' lays claim. ("Cultural Identity" 110)

His idea is that whoever "write and speak from a particular place and time, from history and a culture which is specific", get their 'I' "enunciated" (110). He, nevertheless, aggress to the point that, cultural identity is defined in terms of one

shared culture, a sort of collective ‘one true self’, hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed selves, which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common (110-111). So, our cultural identities:

...reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as ‘one people’ with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning beneath the shifting division and vicissitudes of our actual history. (111)

This is, in fact, true to ‘Caribbeanness’ of the people whose cultural identity played a critical role in all post colonial struggle which have so profoundly reshaped their world:

It continues to be a very powerful and creative force in emergent forms of representation amongst hitherto marginalized peoples. In postcolonial societies, the rediscovery of this identity is often the object of what Frantz Fanon once called a ‘passionate research’. (111)

Stuart Hall’s idea of identity is that it has no fixed archeology but has become a “retelling of the past” (112). The retelling creates crucial images that offer a way of imposing an imaginary coherence on the experience of dispersal and fragmentation which is the history of all enforced Diaspora. The African past of Caribbean people lies in the veil as they have their “Africa as the name of the missing term”, creating a great aporia. Hall argues:

No one who looks at these textual images now, in the light of the history of transportation, slavery and migration, can fail to understand how the rift of separation, the loss of identity, which has been integral to the Caribbean experience only begins to be healed when these forgotten connections are more set in place. (112)

Since their history intervenes, the idea of ‘difference’ plays a vital role to define themselves as “what we really are” (112). This traumatic condition of identity can be understood as the “character of the colonial experience”. Hall unfurls it thus:

The inner expropriation of cultural identity cripples and deforms,... they produce without horizon, colorless, stateless, rootless a race of angles. Nevertheless, this idea of otherness as an inner compulsion changes our conception of cultural identity. (113)

Hall, after all, comes to conclude the fact that cultural identity “is not fixed essence at all, lying unchanged outside history and culture” (113). But it cannot be a mere phantasm either, as he says:

It is something- not a mere trick of the imagination. It has its histories- and histories have their real, material and symbolic effects. The past continues to speak to us. But it no longer addresses us as a simple, factual ‘past’, since our relation to it, like the child’s relation to the mother, is always already ‘after the break’. It always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth. Cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification of suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a positioning. Hence, there is always a politics of identity, a politics of position, which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental ‘law of origin’. (113)

Hall’s emphasis quoted above throws a light to the spectrum of the dynamics of cultural identity. His idea that cultural identity is “always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth” can be taken as his great contribution to the thinking that there is the relation existing between cultural identity and expression.

The representation of identities themselves is expressed through writings. V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Chinua Achebe and a number of writers come in the same concern. They identify the “Difference” (114). Hall posits the view that Caribbean people have neither their earlier identity (i.e. just an illusion) nor a new European identity (i.e. imposed upon them) but have their unique doubleness and the search for it results in “the shock of the ‘doubleness’ of similarity and difference” (114). So, Hall finds the term, cultural identity can never be settled.

### **Objective, Methodology and Limitation of the Thesis**

The present research study is an investigation, an inquiry into V.S. Naipaul’s magnum opus, *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961). Main goal is to prepare the thesis is to show identity crisis of third world people while staying in west. They often visit and revisit domination, frustration, sense of anxiety dislocation, displacement, cultural identity, and hybridity and so on in other land. To show such reality of life, the researcher has borrowed various non western tools such as hybridity, alienation, annihilation, and so on. The researcher mainly focuses the pain, and suffering held by Biswas while living in west in order to vent out third world immigrated people's reality of their life. To show such reality of third world people, researcher would take *Biswas* as a symbolic representation of colonial experiences. In the novel, the character speaks Hindi the official language of India as well as Trinidadian English. So, from various perspective, Mr. Biswas would be represent the colonized people

## Chapter II

### **Alienation and Disintegration in Existential Theory**

Alienation in the simplest understanding refers to the estrangement of individuals from one another or from a specific situation or process. Though the term, alienation gets its conceptual and teleological definition in Marxism, most notably in Karl Marx's writing, it has now been frequently applied to refer to the cultural estrangement under which the individuals feel a loss of their cultural belonging. In this sense, the term is applied psychologically to comprise the dimension of powerlessness, meaninglessness, isolation, formlessness, and self-estrangement. Why does alienation comprise all of them, then? What are its causes behind? Why cultural alienation after all? These questions naturally call our attention to the situation as discussed earlier to be identity in question. Alienation is inextricably related to its akin terms: displacement, dislocation, Diaspora and exile.

Most of the critics now readily agree that all these terms are related to 'homelessness'. Someone who has been abandoned by tradition is a "homeless" man, who is "alienated" and haunted by the same (Nixon 14-17). People often realize this fact of 'loss' when they are displaced and dislocated. This displacement is dislocation of the subjects, which give them the sense of alienation. Diaspora does the same because the Diasporic subjects also feel the loss of origins, and therefore, a loss of home or homelessness. Exile is one of the saddest things, as Said puts it, which is sometimes interchangeable with banishment (Representation 47). Said remembers the exile of intellectuals like that of Ovid, who was banished from Rome to a remote town on the Black sea, where he had got cruel punishment. It, after all, accounts for the tension involved in construction of a distant place as home, that may result to the generations of new social and cultural practices and questioning of the old traditions. It is to be noted that

exile necessarily brings the individuals to a different place and culture, thereby gives the victim a sense of cultural alienation.

In modern society, there are a number of internal ruptures and fragmentations in cultures. Dislocation as a phenomenon is the result of transportation from one country to another by slavery or imprisonment, by invasion or settlement, a consequence of willing or unwilling movement from a known to unknown location (“Dislocation”). It can also be extended to include the psychological and personal dislocations that result from the cultural denigration as that of Naipaul’s and his character’s situation in his *A House for Mr. Biswas*. As Ernesto Laclau puts in 1990 as quoted by Hall, dislocation is a structure, which is characterized by a never-ending process:

A dislocated structure is one whose center is displaced and replaced by another, but by a plurality of power centers, and the societies have no center, no single articulating or organizing principle. It is constantly being decentered or dislocated by force outside itself. (“The Question” 278)

It is customary for Hall to see the face of society with ruptures where no stable identity of individuals is possible. Withstanding the instability of the identities, the dislocation and the displacement can be created with the social structure itself where the role of representation is also vital. Similarly, Diaspora is related to the dispersion of people throughout the world. However, the term was firstly used to refer collectively to the Jews who scattered after Babylonian captivity and in the modern period to Jews living outside of Palestine and latterly Israel. It has also been extended now to include the situation of any widely spread migrant group or individual. It unfurls the view that descendants of the Diasporic movements generated by colonialism have developed their own distinctive cultures, which both preserve and often extend and develop their original cultures. The development of Diasporic cultures necessarily questions the ideology of a

unified, natural cultural norm, one that underpins the center/margin model of discourse; in general, many writers have adopted the notion of the Diasporic identity as a positive affirmation of their hybridity. The new concept of Diaspora insists the idea that it details the complexity, diversity and fluidity of migrant identities and experiences in a more realistic way than does the older concept of the term. It, therefore, relates the idea of uprooting of migrants from their societies and cultures of origin, and thereby filling into them a sense of alienation, as do displacement, dislocation and exile. The terms displacement, one displaced from the root culture; dislocation, one located in the situation s/he does not belong to; exile, one being away from the root; and Diaspora, one going away and facing new cultures, make an echo of the problems of identity.

All the problems that are related to culture and identity can be solved in relation to culture itself. Culture is the defining principle of mankind: it provides them their valuable identity. Moreover, culture is the power that is related to both repulsion and attraction. Samuel P. Huntington therefore says that the “peoples and countries with different cultures are coming apart and at the same time he insists the fact that “cultural identity is the central factor shaping a country’s association and antagonism” (125). To find their place in culture and civilization, people ask such questions: “Who are we?” “Where do we belong?” and “Who is not us” (126). Huntington names this situation as “global identity crisis” and it is to be noted that a bulk of literature can be produced on this topic (126).

People always get meaning in their respective culture. Culture therefore, is the source of their identity: it not only defines them but also provides them a “protective closure”, and thus, people can feel themselves as being secured and meaningful (Said xii). To differentiate the subject and to establish the identity, there is the role of “identification” in the modern thinking (Culler 108). So, people often seek their identification. Moreover,



identity is meaningful at the immediate face-to-face level where the debate of his or her class, ethnic group, nationality, religion, and civilization get an interface to mingle and collide. As it has already been emphasized, culture is expressed through a variety of ways, and writing is one of them.

For the writer like V.S. Naipaul, “the self is a writing self” as he tries to join himself with his origin (Kumar 61). He expresses his longing, hope and despair to his culture in his book to evoke a sense of loss that haunts him when he writes (Kapur 75). Not only Naipaul but also a number of writers express the same “anxiety over a missing past” (76). The rage and the anxiety, and the ambivalence for the past are the source of personal traumatic expression of identity, and the result alienation can be expressed and analyzed in the fictional works as well. Most of the twentieth century novelists face this problem of identity crisis, and they irrevocably try to express it in their writing. These writers including V. S. Naipaul expose the ‘self’ alienated from the mainstream cultural root, and narrates this trauma of dislocated and exiled experience. The characters in their novels involve themselves in an endless search for belonging and identity, which ends in more subtle frustration, anxiety and confusion that can aptly be illustrated in V.S. Naipaul’s *A House for Mr. Biswas*.

Alienation is the position estrangement of individuals from the society or from the culture. It is the state of being isolated in a newly located land. It is the cultural and social estrangement under which the individuals feel a loss of the cultural belonging. The situation of dislocation and displacement in the alien cultural ground gives the sense of

being alienated. It is the feeling of being far away from the origin ground of culture and feeling unsecured and lonely in the foreign culture and society. Individual feels powerlessness, meaningless in the unknown location. The dilemma occurs of what the individual should believe and why one should behave in socially unapproved fashion to achieve the purposes. Isolation is estrangement of the individual from the dominant aims and values of the society and feeling not being accepted as the member of the community.

Alienation is the negative results of migrating to the unknown territory. It is inextricably synonymous with its akin term: displacement, dislocation, diaspora and exile. Most of the critic now readily accepts that all these terms are related to homelessness. Individual who has been abandoned by original society and culture is a “homeless” man who is alienated and haunted by the root and culture. People often realize the importance of cultural loss when they are displaced, dislocated and alienated. The displacement and dislocation of the individual give the sense of alienation. Diaspora does the same because the diasporic subject also feels the same loss of culture and loss of dignity which ultimately makes the individual a ‘homeless’, ‘rootless’ creature.

The contemporary societies have the history of alienation in the full volume. Individuals, after moving to the unknown territory, their high expectation does not meet with reality. Instead have to experience being discriminated by the native people of the newly migrated land. They feel inferior and isolated which results in transforming angst for the loss one’s values and also forms frustration. The process of mimicking the cultures of foreign land makes an individual belonging to nowhere, which gives the feeling of estrangement from the individuals and societies. Individual is not fully accepted and is not given to entertain fully in the alien land and culture. Individual is only inflicted by the sense of loss in the unknown location, which paved the way for the formation of frustration in the mind of an individual. Alienation is the state whereby individual experience being

stultified in the alien culture and society. The rapidly increasing interests in globalization reflect the changing organization of worldwide social relations. However there underlies the discrimination in the very process of globalization. The situations of Third World's people or non-westerners are the very example who are pathetic in the alien land. The people from these zone face uneasy in the western culture and society. The alien culture and people does not readily accept the people from other than the western people.

Thus, alienation is the very process of being isolated from the culture and society in the alien land and also from the indigenous culture and people. Desertion and isolation surrounds individual in the unknown land and culture to which individual cannot escape. It becomes the fate of individual to live the life of solitariness and isolation in the alien culture, with the sense of alienation and discrimination among the weirdoes. The nostalgia for the past culture and roots haunts the individual in the alien land and culture along with the sense of being alienated in the unknown society and culture.

## Chapter III

### Seeking Identity and Integration in *A House for Mr. Biswas*

People express their identity in the situation when it is questioned or threatened. The people who face 'other' culture(s) feel themselves insecure and an unknown fear haunts them. This is the feeling of cultural alienation which is shown in the selected book. The characters of this book expose the complex cultural scenes, and by which Naipaul tries to describe what he sees in the world around himself. The characters live the life of hopelessness and frustration. They have the trauma of identity crisis that underlines the loss of roots which becomes universalized, and is expressed with a disquieting energy. Mr. Biswas the central character of the novel and other minor characters are dislocated and alienated in the places where they do not belong. They find themselves in a new situation; a situation that unfamiliar, alien and unwanted. Their sense of 'rootlessness' and the question of 'belonging' give them a sense of 'alienation' which is manifested in their language and activities.

In *A House for Mr. Biswas*, Naipaul has delineated the Indian immigrant's dilemma in more realistic way. The novel presents the problems and plights of a whole people. Naipaul presents a comprehensive analysis of the colonial experience of the Indian people in Trinidad. It is the character of Mohun Biswas against his background that imparts the striking success to the novel. Mr. Biswas's complex and insightful story has a direct bearing on the important modern problem of the 'crisis of identity'.

The crisis originates from the excruciating historical experience of slavery of various kinds. The novel explores the consciousness of the people who constitute a destitute culture and carry about them the mark, in their attitudes and sensibilities and convictions, of the slave, the unnecessary man. Mr. Biswas is an unnecessary man par excellence, and is pitted against the Tulsi family and its establishment. The Hanuman

House symbolizes the traditional and conventional Hindu world abounding in all sorts of ritualistic vagaries, superstitious and hypocrisies, significantly enough, it is referred to as 'an alien white fortress':

Among the tumbledown timber-and-corrugated-iron building in the High Street at Arwacas, Hanuman House stood like an alien white fortress. The concrete walls looked as thick as they were, and when the narrow doors of the Tulsi store on the ground floor were closed the House became bulky, impregnable and blank. The sidewalls were windowless and on the upper two floors the windows were mere slits in the facade. The balustrade which hedged the flat roof was crowned with a concrete statue of the benevolent monkey-god Hanuman. From the ground the white washed features could scarcely be distinguished and were, if anything, slightly sinister, for dust had settled on projection and the effect as that of a face lit up from below. (80-81)

The Hanuman House is teeming with almost innumerable slaves subjected to inhuman bondage. The condition of these men squatting on sacks on the ground and 'pulling at clay cheelums that glowed red and smelled of ganja and burnt sacking' is really pathetic. Although it was not cold, 'many had scarves over their heads and around their necks' which made them look foreign:

They could not speak English and were not interested in the land where they lived; it was a place where they had come for a short time and stayed longer than they expected. They continually talked of going back to India, but when the opportunity came, many refused, afraid of the unknown, afraid to leave the familiar temporariness. And every evening they came to

the arcade of the solid, friendly house, smoked, told stories, and continued to talk of India. (193)

The Tulsi establishment is governed by the cunning colonizer Mrs. Tulsi and her terrorizing slave master Seth, both of whom are insensitive to the creative aspects of the Hindu culture as also of the individual urges and aspirations. The hypocrisy and mercenary outlook of the Tulsis antagonizes Mr. Biswas, for to accept the Hanuman House and its rule would be to acquiesce to slavery. He struggles hard to free himself from the suffocating, disintegrating, tradition-ridden world, though his fight looks like an ordinary man's obscure struggle against overwhelming odds. He revolts against the whole system, though he cannot defy authority openly. Throughout his life he tries to seek and assert his own independent identity. Asked by Tulsis son-in-law Govind to give up sign painting, Mr Biswas replies: "Give up sign-painting? And my independence? No, boy, my motto is: Paddle your own canoe" (107). Sign painting may be a futile-looking act of no importance, but to Mr. Biswas it is a way of preserving his independence and identity. This very urge finds its complete manifestation in his keenness to acquire a house of his own.

It would be interesting to recall how passionately Mr. Biswas attends to various details of house building:

Materials came that afternoon. The trapaud pillars looked rough, they were not altogether round or altogether straight. But Mr. Biswas delighted in the new scantlings and the new nails that came in several wrappings of newspaper. He took up handful of nails and let them fall again. The sound pleased him. 'Did not know nails were so heavy', he said. 'Gallary, drawing-room, bedroom, bedroom' (254)

The process of acquiring a house 'on the face of the earth' becomes more exciting than the actual ownership of it. The house assumes a greater importance than the people:

But bigger than them all was the house, his house. How terrible it would have been at this time, to be without it: to have died among the Tulsi, amid the squalor of that large, disintegrating and indifferent family; to have left Shama and the children among them, in one room worse, to have lived without even attempting to lay claim to one's portion of the earth; to have lived and died as one had been born, unnecessary and unaccommodated. (13-14)

Even for Mr. Biswas's children the house was to provide an ordered world, which was never granted to their father:

Soon it seemed to the children that they had never lived anywhere but in the tall square house in Sikkim Street. From now their lives would be ordered, their memories coherent. The mind, while it is sound, is merciful. And rapidly the memories of Hanuman House, The Chase, Green Vale, Shorthills, the Tulsi house in Port of Spain would become jumbled, blurred; events would be telescoped, many forgotten. (581)

It was hoped that in this changed environment the children would get an opportunity to discover themselves culturally and spiritually.

The vision of the house sustains Mr. Biswas through all these years of dismal decadence. It epitomizes his inner faith (and this is what his name stands for) and all his stupendous achievements and satisfaction:

It gave Mr. Biswas some satisfaction that in the circumstances Shama did not run straight off to her mother to beg for help. Ten years before that would have been her first thought. Now she tried to comfort Mr. Biswas and devised plans of her own. (7)

The building of the house, however, was not an easy job. It consumed all his energy and resources. His several efforts at it resulted only in failure. The novelists hints at this possibility through Mr. Biswas's frustrated efforts to plant a garden: 'The rose trees grew straggly and hard' and 'The lily-pond collapsed again and the lily rose brown and shaggy out of the thick, muddy water' (376). It is nothing but irony of circumstances that Mr. Biswas's new position poses certain new challenges, which he is unable to face. He turns ultimately, to the Hanuman House for security. When the house in Greenvale gets burnt:

An immense relief had come upon Mr. Biswas. The anxiety, the fear, the anguish which had kept his mind humming and his body taut now ebbed away. He could feel it ebbing; it was a Physical sensation; it left him weak and very weary (301).

Mr. Biswas's persistent desire to understand life and to assert his identity in a chaotic world was thwarted. Persons like him cannot be allowed the luxury of stability and identity. It may be noted that he himself is not unaware of his ambivalent position. He tells his son that he is just somebody, nobody at all. He is simply a man. This is obviously, the fate of men like Mr. Biswas, who are historically displaced and have the misfortune of living in a derelict land. Society offers very little possibilities to each of them, and he has therefore no option but to balance his personal inadequacies against the contradictions of existence itself.

### **Mr. Biswas's Search for Stable Identity and Selfhood**

In *A House for Mr. Biswas*, Naipaul has portrayed the central character Mr. Biswas's story as a single individual's search for identity, his struggle to arrive at



authentic selfhood. It is by no means an easy struggle. The odds are against Mr. Biswas right from the start. Life to him has been a series of big and small disasters; each designed to underscore the fact that he was necessary to no one and dependent on everyone. His poor physique as a child and later as a boy adds to his absurdity and to the poor self-image that he has. He has “the smaller of chests, the thinnest of limbs, and soft rising belly” (22). He is nervous too. The nervousness decreases a little as he grows up but not the grotesque aspect of many of his actions. From a rudimentary education which he receives from one Mr. Lal, Biswas moves over to the house of Pundit Jairam. Here he comes across an abstract and high-minded cruelty which is as unsettling as the flogging. Next there is Ajodha’s rumshop where Biswas is a big eyesore for Bhandat, the person who runs the rumshop. He moves on to become a sign writer but work is very irregular in coming to him. While painting signs in a shop of the Tulsis family, he makes a clumsy advance to one of the Tulsis daughters- Shama. He is promptly accepted as the girl’s suitor: “Trapped! Mr. Biswas would say. ‘You and your family have got me trapped in this hole’” (377). He is married to her, already caught in the Tulsis trap.

Biswas’s relationship with the Tulsis clan goes a long way in defining his struggle for selfhood. There is matriarch Mrs. Tulsis; Mr. Seth, her brother-in-law who manages the Tulsis estate; the two sons of Mrs. Tulsis, Shekhar and Owad; Govinda and Chinta; and Later the Tutts. Tulsidom is a system that provides subsistence and shelter in return for total devotion and the abdication of one’s self. The relationship and transient alliances within this system are quite complex. The proceedings are often made lively by Mr. Biswas’s refusing to be either a suave or mild victim of this system: “Mr. Biswas had no money or position. He was expected to become a Tulsis. At once he rebelled” (97). His clowning, his querulousness and his blasphemies are all, at one level, the flutterings of a trapped self, caught in a world from which there is no easy or lasting escape for him. His clowning

especially is a defense against his being turned into a puppet of deterministic forces, and ridicule also is used by him as a defense in situations which he cannot otherwise control or dominate. His genuine inability to belong either to the original Indian culture or to the new Caribbean culture compounds his problems.

The glory of Tulsidom is its capacity to induce conformity among its members. His resistance to being totally absorbed by the Tulsis and his desire to maintain some difference between them and himself takes a variety of forms. His speaking Creole English, for example, when he is in Hanuman House is a deliberate, calculated act. Then there is the nicknaming of people which he is so good at. It comes to be at its malicious best where the Tulsis are concerned. The marriage of Tulsis daughters are termed “cat-in-bag” transaction. Mr. Biswas says to Shama: “That is all your family do for you; he said to Shama that evening. ‘Marry off the whole pack of you cat-in-bag’ (121). Mrs. Tulsis is ‘old queen’, ‘old hen’, or ‘old cow’ depending upon the intensity of his reaction. Shekhar and Owad are called “little god” and Mr. Seth is let off with just “Big Boss” (120). This kind of nicknaming and Mr. Biswas’s wry humor are his ways of hitting back at the system which reduces him almost to subhuman levels of irrelevance. These very traits later help him to find an outlet in journalism. It makes no difference that his early attempts at journalism are cliché-ridden. The important thing is that his exploitation of the potential of language as a weapon in the form of nicknames and as a means to a living through journalism is a very significant step in his journey toward authentic selfhood.

The same is true of his reading of the Meditations of Aurelius, and his brushes with the word of Samuel Smiles. This for him is another way of trying to be different. He sees that most other people around him seem to exist just to fulfill a function rather than to be a person. His reduction of the roles offered to him—the dutiful son-in-law, the resident sign-

painter, the obedient shopkeeper-means that his endeavor is always to be on his own. It is not surprising, therefore, that in his assertion of independence he decides to write.

Role-playing and self-image has a lot of to do with each other. Biswas's self-image suffers a lot as a result of his being into the grinding machine that is Tulsidom. At one stage, his crisis of identity is extremely acute and real. Looking at himself in a mirror, he says to Shama: "I don't look like anything at all. Shopkeeper, Lawyer, Doctor, Laborer, Overseer- I don't look any of them" (159). This shows the desperate condition of identity crises in Mr. Biswas.

The venture into journalism comes for Mr. Biswas at a time when his self has taken a lot of beating from all quarters. Hemmed in from all directions, moving from job and one kind of habitation to another, he has been reduced to being a passive victim of circumstances. His relationship with other are becoming intolerable, more so with his wife. A stage comes when he is on the verge of disintegrating altogether:

He had grown haggard with worry. He lived in Barataria and come up every morning by bus through the packed, narrow and dangerous Eastern Main Road. He had developed a fear that he would die in a road accident and leave his wife and baby daughter unprovided for. All travel terrified him; morning and evening he had to travel; and every day he laid out stories of accidents, with photographs of 'the twisted wreckage. He spoke continually of his fear, ridiculed it and allowed himself to be ridiculed. But as the afternoon wore on his agitation became more marked, and at the end he was quite frantic, anxious to go home, yet fearing to leave the only place where he felt safe. (376)

Objects lose their neutrality for him and become a source of menace. People and figures frighten him. His personality or whatever there is of it undergoes disorientation.

His lucidity keeps decreasing day by day. A kind of darkness envelops him. His 'self' faces total dissolution.

Journalism saves him. More than that, it is the city (Port of Spain) that saves him. In Tulsidom and in Green Vale Mr. Biswas felt smothered. The city brings about a refreshing and invigorating change in his being. There is openness and impersonality about the city which offers to Biswas's damaged inner life that measure of detachment which accelerates his return from the wall of flawless black to daylight of consciousness. Above all, the city gave him the possibility of establishing on terms very different from those available to him in Tulsidom.

Most of Naipaul's protagonists come near to the sociologist's view of the self rather than the philosopher's. 'Self' in this sense is an entity that arises and develops in the process of an individual's social experiences and activities. Port of Spain helps Biswas to evolve as a social self on terms, which are not very far from those on which he wants to relate to others:

He walked on crowded pavements beside the slow, continuous motor traffic, noted the size and number of the stores and cafes and restaurants, the trams, the high standard of the shop signs, the huge cinemas, closed after the pleasures of last night (which he had spent dully at Arwacas), but with posters, still wet with paste, promising fresh gaieties for that afternoon and evening. He comprehended the city whole; he did not isolate the individual, see the man behind the desk or counter, behind the steering-wheel of the bus; he saw only the activity, felt the call to the senses, and knew that below it all there was an excitement, which was hidden, but waiting to be grasped. (309)

The terror of disintegration which bothers Biswas so much around this time is dispelled greatly by unending succession of the city's moods, its complexity of classes, places, institutions. The wet cinema posters, the continuous traffic all help much in his recovery as he comes to be part of a sea of humanity that manages to ward off disintegration in the face of menaces and disasters both personal and financial. Port of Spain helps Biswas to bring about a recentering of the displaced impulse and the restructuring of his self in the context of the racial, and Urban pressures of Trinidadian society as a whole.

Biswas now finds himself face to face with a whole new range of possibilities of relating with others. All this comes upon him all of a sudden. He finds a job, which gives him both dignity and pleasures and helps him to further humanize the context of his whole being. The ultimate expression of such attempt is of course the search for a habitation where one can be one's own self. Biswas's semi-dependent occupation of the house in Port of Spain begins the long process of recovery for his damaged self, which culminates in his coming to have a house of his own on Sikkim Street.

As a boy, Biswas had moved from one house of strangers to another; and since his marriage he had always felt that he had lived nowhere but in the houses of the Tulsis-at Hanuman House in Arwacas, the decaying wooden house at Shorthills, in the clumsy concrete house in Port of Spain. The urge to have his own house, strengthened by his awareness of his children's emotional needs now comes upon him in a proprietary pride in his children (especially in Anand) has a lot to do with this. Going in for a house of his own is for Mr. Biswas a kind of investment in the future, in the continuity of his own self after his death. The Epilogue at one point tells us: "Living had been a preparation, a waiting. And so the years had passed; and now there was nothing to wait for" (586). These three words are extremely significant in indicating Mr. Biswas's having arrived at authentic

selfhood. His investing in the children's happiness is a sign of his having traveled a long way from the restlessness and lack of focus of the Tulsi-dominated days. How much the house in Sikkim Street means to the children, despite all its shortcomings can be seen in: "Soon it seemed to the children that they had never lived anywhere but in the tall square house in the Sikkim Street. From now on their lives would be ordered, their memories coherent" (581). Even for the children, the Hanuman House was a prison. But after having their own house they also felt free and their lives ordered and coherent.

Once in his own house, Biswas's relationship with Shama too undergoes a positive transformation:

He didn't now care to do anything against his wife's wishes. He had grown to accept her judgment and to respect her optimism. He trusted her. Since they had moved to the house Shama had learned a new loyalty to their children; away from her mother and sisters, she was able to express this without shame, and to Mr. Biswas this was a triumph almost as big as the acquiring of his own house. (8)

This above passage is from the 'The Prologue' of the novel and in Naipaul's hands 'The Prologue' is really helpful gloss on the whole novel. It is in fact the key to our understanding of the novel. It beautifully sums up Mr. Biswas's having arrived at authentic selfhood and helpfully provides a rationale for his final move. It refers to:

The wonder of being in his own house, the audacity of it; to walk into his own front gate, to bar entry to whoever he wished, to close his doors and windows every night, to hear noises except those of his family, to wander freely from room to room. (8)

And the rationale for final movement comes thus:

How terrible it would have been, at this time, to be without it: to have died among the Tulsis, amid the squalor of that large, disintegrating and indifferent family; to have left Shama and the children among them, in one room; worse, to have lived without even attempting to lay claim to one's portion of the earth; to have lived and died as one had been born, unnecessary and unaccommodated. (13-14)

From a total non-entity (first the trouble with the birth certificate, later the difficulty of making an entry in the column-profession) to 'somebody' (a journalist – tag used by 'The Sentinel' for reporting his death) (589), from a person always being shoved around to someone with a place of his own "ones portion of earth" (14) is a remarkable progress both in terms of selfhood and in terms of worldly advancement. To have done that without conforming or conforming as little as possible makes Biswas an archetypal figure.

To conclude *A House for Mr. Biswas*, then has universality as well as contemporaneity, it spares nothing in judgement, neither in representation nor reaction. And the whole matter of the novel is informed with a fullness of human sympathy. Mr. Biswas constructs the proof of his necessity of self-identity in both a comic and a most moving way. Saturated as he is with the ethos of the given place, maltreated by its peculiar deficiencies and cruelties, he is nonetheless realized with such complete conviction, so living a reality, that he becomes a model of man just as the history and situation which formed him are seen to be a metaphor of the process which constitutes any man.

### **Mr. Biswas's Dangling Position**

Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas* can be seen as a symbolic representation of colonial experiences. In the novel, the characters speak Hindi the official language of India as well as Trinidadian English which is characterized by simplified grammar and the

omission of words. At this point of view, the Tulsis represent the mother country, Great Britain which strictly controlled the colony's daily life and development. Mr. Biswas would represent the colonized people. He is economically and psychologically dependent on Mrs. Tulsi (when he calls the old queen, perhaps recalling the height of British colonialism under queen Victoria). He struggles for independence and freedom, but his progress is slow and difficult. Like many former colonists, Mr. Biswas has not had opportunity to learn the skills needed to manage in an independent society. His attempt to run the store at the Chase is a disaster, and he is ill suited to oversee the sugarcane workers. Even his self identity has been jumbled and his traditional roots obscured; he doesn't know the location of the house he lived as a boy. He can believe that Tulsi family represented colonial slaveholders and point out similarities between the Tulsi's activities and those of the slave-holders of the 1800s.

The present research study sheds light in the dangling position of Mr. Biswas arising from his acute experience of cultural displacement in the society of colonial Trinidad. Therefore, in this chapter my aim is to show the protagonist's state of inbetweenness while struggling to achieve his distinct identity in the colonial milieu. Each and every part of the novel exposes the trauma of cultural alienation and the central character's hopeless efforts to establish his belongings. Moreover, the novel highlights the pain, the plight, and the predicament of Mr. Biswas struggling to acquire a house of his own which is the potent symbol for his autonomous existence. His fluctuation from one job to another job further portrays his futile attempts to avoid the sense of displaced and dislocated psyche in the faces of colonial disaster. He tries to adopt the life style of both the West and the East but cannot assimilate himself with either side of them. Mr. Biswas works as a pundit in the East and as a sign painter in the West. Slowly and gradually, he becomes a psychopath due to his inability to identify himself either with the people of



Trinidad or with the people of India. Mr. Biswas's each heart-rending portion of this journey involves a new job, a new psychosis, an ephemeral house, and a constant push-and-pull struggle with the more perverse pursuits of his dreams. He is trying to find a homestead, trying to strike a place out on the frontier, to prove his independence by building a house of his own. Gita Hariharan inspects Naipaul's works which "did not shy away from either the oddities or the painful contradictions of these societies and people struggling to create a coherent viable narrative of their new lives often in a hit or miss fashion" (70).

From the very beginning of the novel, the problem of cultural displacement of the protagonist is very crucial. Mr. Biswas, from infancy to death, is introduced as legendary figure. His birth is inauspicious: "Six fingered and born in the wrong way" (15). The midwife prophesies that he "will eat up his own mother and father" (16). The pundit advises that the boy should be kept away from trees and water. The one cheerful note regarding his birth is the first name given for him, Mohun, which means as Pundit says "the beloved, and was the name given by the milkmaids to lord Krishna" (17). Disobeying the pundit's admonitions, he goes to forbidden stream to watch the fish, loses a calf he was caring for, hides fearing punishment, and causes the death of his father. His father's death results in the break up of the family and Bipti sells their only house to Dhari. So the innocent boy:

Came to leave the only house to which he had some right. 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 brother 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 alone.(40)

The unlucky born Mr. Biswas's loneliness is realistically narrated in the story. With the spilt of his integrated family, he almost becomes an outcast having no house, family, and society. He is all the time haunted by his own split culture and society. He is socially and culturally displaced, alienated.

Supported by an aunt in Pagotes, Bipti, and he lives not with her family but with other "dependent relations in a back trace far from the Main Road" (40). He is sent to Canadian Mission School and learns arithmetic and other branches of knowledge. Working at various jobs, living in temporary quarters, often in a room in the home of his hated in-laws, the Tulsis, Mr. Biswas never gives up his claim to his "portion of earth" (10). In this regard, a renowned critic Elleke Boehmer comments on the novel recounting the hybrid and diasporic experience:

Focused on the strivings of an insignificant and impetuous west Indian to find fulfillment as a writer and a householder, *A House for Mr. Biswas* comments on the dilemmas of colonial dispossession, the need for a, 'portion of the earth' to call one's own. As background to Mr. Biswas's struggle, the novel also recounts the experience of the acculturated Indian immigrant community in colonial Trinidad before and after the Second World War. Their history is one of transition, between languages, classes, castes, and generation. (178)

His impractical, often comic, efforts to build his own house in the face of poverty, his ignorance, and the skepticism of his family enact his struggle to get rid of the sense of dislocation and displacement. Not being able to overcome the torture given to him by Bhandat, Mr. Biswas goes to his mother. She scolds him, saying that she has no luck with

her children. At this point, Mr. Biswas shows his confidence in finding a job and making his own house and become an independent person: "I am going to get a job on my own. And I am going to get my own house too. I am finished with this" (67). He struggles to keep him afloat most of his life, define himself, acquire hood and culture, and at the same time have a job and possess that small bit of security and comfort that will make the world a less painful place for himself.

Meeting a friend named Alec, Mr. Biswas happens to enter into the world of sign painting which takes him to the Hanuman House. While painting signs in a house of Tulsi family, he makes a clumsy advance to one of the Tulsi daughters-Shama. He is promptly accepted as the girl's suitor, and caught in the Tulsi trap. The Hanuman House is teeming with almost innumerable slaves subjected to inhuman bondage. For Mr. Biswas also, "the world was too small, the Tulsi family too large. He felt trapped" (91).

The Tulsi establishment is governed by cunning colonizer Mrs. Tulsi and her terrorizing slave master Seth, both of whom are insensitive to the creative aspects of the Hindu culture and also of the individual urges and aspirations. The hypocrisy and mercenary outlook of the Tulsis antagonizes Mr. Biswas, for to accept the Hanuman House and its rule would be to acquiesce to slavery. He struggles hard to free himself from the suffocating, disintegrating, tradition ridden world, though his fight looks like an ordinary man's obscure struggle against overwhelming odds. He revolts against the whole system, though can not defy authority openly. Throughout his life, he tries to seek and assert his won independent identity. Asked by Tulsis son-in-law, Govinda, to give up sign painting, Mr. Biswas replies "Give up sign painting? And my independence? No, boy. My motto is paddle your own canoe" (107). Sign painting may be a job of little importance, but to Mr. Biswas it is a way of preserving his identity.

Previously, an unsuccessful pundit, he, now, attempts to preserve his identity through sign painting. Unfortunately, he can not prolong his job of sign painting too. Thus, Mr. Biswas's condition of wandering from puja to sign painting to searching for another job makes him caught in between these two orders of the world: Colonial Hindu and Imperialist.

The organization of Tulsi house is simple. All the sons-in-law works on Tulsi land, look after Tulsi animals, and do some work in the Tulsi store. In return, they are given food, accommodation, and little money. Mr. Biswas finds that he too is expected to merge himself with the Tulsi family and to efface his own identity because "he had no money or position" (97). Then he rebels against Tulsidom and leaves the Hanuman House. While Mr. Biswas is leaving the house, Shama expresses that he "came to this house with nothing but a pair of khaki trousers and a dirty old shirt" (98). Here, the portrait of Indian clothes draws the readers' attention back to India.

Mr. Biswas, now, resumes his sign writing and spends as much time as he can out of the house. Though Mr. Biswas wanders in the street of Arwacas in search for job, he has inextricable affiliation with Hindu culture and India which has been best expressed in the following lines:

But he was unknown in Arwacas and jobs were scarce. Time hung heavily on his hands until he met an equally underemployed man called Misir, the Arwacas correspondent of the Trinidad Sentinel. They discussed jobs, Hinduism, India and their respective families. (102)

The above mentioned discussion between Mr. Biswas and Misir dramatizes the uprootedness of the people striving for the opportunities in colonial Trinidad and at the same time looking back to their original root. Furthermore, while staying with Tulsis, "Mr. Biswas nearly always spoke English at Hanuman House, even when the other spoke

Hindi, it had become one of his principles” (119). This shows his wishes to assimilate, merge himself with western values.

Mr. Biswas is sent to Chase to take charge of Tulsi shop there because he does not have any belongings which he can call his own. On entering the shop and finding it in a dilapidated condition, Mr. Biswas says that it is a sort of place which needs to be built up. Shama starts sobbing when she sees herself in this alien environment. Sense of alienation and insecurity prevails in Mr. Biswas:

How lonely the shop was? And how frightening! He had never thought it would be like this when he found himself in an establishment of his own. It was late afternoon; Hanuman House would be warm and noisy with activity. Here he was afraid to disturb the silence, afraid to open the door of the shop, to step into the light. (145)

The description of the novel goes on to unravel the life of Mr. Mohun Biswas bit by bit. He feels very much alienated with the society in which he is living. He has no feeling of being a part of that society. During the house blessing ceremony and amidst the nagging of his wife Shama:

Mr. Biswas found himself a stranger in his own yard. But was it his own? Mrs. Tulsi and Sushila didn't appear to think so. The villagers didn't think so. They had always called the shop the Tulsi shop even after he had painted a sign and hung it above the door. (151)

Here, Mr. Biswas becomes a stranger in his own house. He does not possess any sort of enthusiasm that could make him the man of his own. He even switches himself between Hindi and broken English which suggests about the hybrid nature of Trinidadian society and its colonial history. At one point, “Mr. Biswas didn't want to talk to Mrs. Tulsi

in Hindi, but the Hindi words came out” (200). Thus, his wishes to assimilate himself with western values get shattered due to his strong inclination to his past.

Role-playing and self-image have a lot to do with each other. Biawas’s self image suffers a lot as a result of his being taken into the grinding machine that is Tulsidom. At one stage, his crisis of identity is extremely acute and real. Looking at himself in a mirror, he says to Shama, “I don’t like anything at all Shopkeeper, lawyer, doctor, labourer, and overseer- I don’t look like any of them” (159).

Nostalgia remains at the thematic core of the story of *A House for Mr. Biswas*. A real portrait of the original land is manifested in the novel. Sense of placelessness creates a diasporic situation that results into nostalgia and memory which exists in the heart of the people who are cut off from their homeland culturally as well as geographically. Culture binds the individual and also gives relief to the individual. But when individuals are far away from their culture and society they face problem of cultural confusion and feel being dislocated and displaced. One can hardly find the environment that encourages the individual in other’s land. The sense of dislocation can be observed in the given paragraph which curves their sense of being alienated:

They could not speak English and were not interested in the land where they lived; it was a place where they had come for a short time and stayed longer than they expected. They continually talked of going back to India, but when the opportunity came, many refused, afraid of the unknown, afraid to leave the familiar temporariness. And every evening they came to the arcade of the solid, friendly house, smoked, told stories, and continued to talk of India. (194)

Here, characters are cut off from their home land, India. Their continuous talk about India best expresses their emotional attachment to the root culture. Their talk of

‘India and familiar temporariness’ shows their constant repulsion and attraction with both worlds.

During his stay at The Chase for six years, Mr. Biswas undergoes many ups and downs. His babies are Christened by the Tulsis depicts his strong willingness and right. His business goes into loss. He sets first to the shop as trickily suggested by Seth for the shop was insured and they would get money.

Mr. Biswas works as an overseer at the Tulsi estate at Green Vale which gives him a feeling of power and authority. But sometimes, the labourers do not take him seriously knowing that he is not trained in the job. So, he vents his dissatisfaction upon Shama telling that she and her family have got him into difficult job. He comes back from field sweating, bitten by flies and other insects. The barrack-yard, with its mud and animal droppings, gives him a feeling of nausea. While bathing, he sings Hindi songs in order to soothe the itching on his skin. Rejecting the cold food which Shama sometimes sends to him from Hanuman House, Mr. Biswas learns to cook for himself as he buys a stove for the purpose.

A notable critic S. S. Sharma considers the role of protagonist, Mr. Mohun Biswas as difficult one. He says:

It is by no means an easy struggle. The odds are against Mr. Biswas right from the start. Life to him has been a series of big and small disasters, each designed to underscore the fact that he was necessary to no one and dependent on everyone. His poor physique as a child and later as a boy adds to his absurdity and to the poor self-image he has. (167)

People often have the sense of cultural confusion when they find themselves in Mr. Biswas’s situation. In such situation, the feeling of cultural dilemma is extremely great. As a result, he has had constant acceptance and rejection with the values and

customs of the East and the West. On the one hand, Tulsis celebrate Christmas in their store enthusiastically but “for Mr. Biswas, Christmas was a day of tedious depression. He went to Pagotes to see his mother and Tara, and Ajodha, none of whom recognized Christmas” (191). On the other hand, his visit to Hanuman House purchasing a Christmas present for his daughter, Savi, exhibits his inveterate interest towards Christianity:

A boy came out of the shop partly hidden by the large doll’s house he was carrying. The doll’s house was placed on the handle bar of Mr. Biswas’s cycle and, with Mr. Biswas on one side and the boy on the other, wheeled down the high street. (216)

Mr. Biswas, here, reflects the both sides of the coin of dislocation: one who is aware of his lost cultural roots and other who tries to impose order on his life, reconstruct his identity and get rid of the crippling sense of dislocation and displacement. Thus, for Mr. Biswas’s adoption of the mixed values clearly shows the two facets of his life.

### **Biswas's Quest for Origins**

Diasporic subjects feel the sense of alienation, loss of origins, and therefore, a loss of home or homelessness. They suffer from dislocation, displacement, fragmentation, and loss of identity. Mr. Biswas, in this novel, represents the pain, the plight, and the predicament of Indian immigrants who are conscious of being in a different culture and at the same time nostalgic for their own cultural roots. In response to a question by his son, Anand, Mr. Biswas would like to identify himself with “somebody”, and “Nobody at all”, and “Just a man” (297) whom Anand knows. Having taught his son, Anand, about how to mix colors, Mr. Biswas emblematically reveals his own hybrid identity. As we come to know that the mixture of red and yellow becomes orange, and blue and yellow becomes green, so is the condition of Mr. Biswas in the colonial milieu of Trinidad. He even teaches his son about the force of earth’s gravity, scientists like Copernicus and Galileo



who contributed a lot to the world making great discoveries. He appreciates the progress of science and technology in the West but at the same time when his son Anand gets a tough of malaria, he advises him to say, “Rama Rama Sita Rama, and nothing will happen to you” (283). Thus, Mr. Biswas attempts to recreate and reconstruct his lost identity through the reminiscences and remembrances of his past home (India). He feels difficulties of communications and relationships, and loss of identity in a new world and his obsession with Indian deities and Hinduism draws him back to India.

In the midst of his loneliness, Mr. Biswas urges his son, Anand to keep repeating the name of Rama. He tells the boy that, if he keeps saying *Rama Rama Sita Rama*, no harm will come to him. Thus, in the hour of crisis, Mr. Biswas can think only the traditional remedy in which every orthodox Hindu believes. This incident shows, basically, Mr. Biswas can obtain some relief from his misery and distress only going back to his Hindu past. He frequently uses the word *Rama Sita* that reflects India. The anxiety over a missing past is Naipaul’s grand theme. As William Walsh comments on this novel which evokes the life of a society based upon degrading fact of colonialism. He adds:

The urgency of Mr. Biswas, a character composed with a sympathetic and wholly objective still, comes from his efforts, desperate or ridiculous, to get a others to acknowledge, so as to have it validated for himself, his human necessity. It is a novel, which blends evocation and analysis, a sense of human growth and a feeling for its disintegration, and it is probably the high point of the art of the West Indian novel. (60)

Mr. Biswas’s attempt to build his own house at Green Vale remains incomplete due to the lack of proper financial management. His sense of loneliness, his dissatisfaction with the job and the shattered dream of having his own house deepen his despondency to such an extent that his very sanity is threatened and he even wishes he killed his own

children. He begins to be haunted by strange fear and questionings. The sense of futility in life, feeling of frustration and loneliness turn him into psychopath. He speaks to himself while walking along with Shama that he is "...trapped in a hole. Trap is what you and your family do to me. Trap me in this hole" (223). This condition of mental degeneration due to fear and questionings can be interpreted as his condition of inbetweenness in a sub-conscious level.

We can see the psychic division with Mr. Biswas, even during the period of his treatment. A doctor recommends his own sort of medicine, approved and prescribed by modern science. The doctor suggests him to take rest. He stands for western culture. Immediately after the doctor goes, thaumaturge comes and suggests to hang the strips of aloes in the doorway. Moreover, he suggests to have the black dolls in doorway of the hall to divert evil spirit, cautioning that prevention is better than cure. After this thaumaturge returns, we see that "they hung the aloe; it was a natural purgative that cost nothing and large quantities were always in the house. And they hung the black doll" (297-98).

Here, we see that both of the suggestions are carried out. Mr. Biswas does not object it. If he is opposed to it, why does he not speak anything against these goings on? It does not evidence that Mr. Biswas completely believes in doctor, nor does he disbelieve on thaumaturge, which leaves him in the state of confusion, uncertainty and dislocation.

Mr. Biswas's move from one job to another, one kind of habitation to another reduces his being into a passive victim of circumstances. His relationships with others are becoming intolerable, more so with his wife. A stage comes when he is on the verge of disintegrating altogether. Objects lose their neutrality for him and become a source of menace. People and figures frighten him. His 'self' faces total dissolution.

Equally important and intimately related to this visible sign of self respect is his devotion to reading and writing. With fewer than six years of elementary schooling,

without any guidance and encouragement, Mr. Biswas turns to reading for self-improvement and later to writing as a means of self-expression. In his youth, he is drawn to inspirational works of Samuel Smiles, an English writer of the nineteenth century. Identifying himself with Smiles's portraits of humble, self-taught young men, struggling to succeed, he realizes that these heroes, unlike him, lived in countries where ambitions could be pursued and had a meaning. Later in life, when discouraged, he wonders by thinking what Smiles would have thought of him. Other self-help books he owns are as varied in subject matter as *Bell's Standard Elocutionist* and the seven volumes of *Hawkin's Electrical Guide*. For consolation, he turns to the works of the stoic philosophers Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus, who teach acceptance and endurance, and to Dickens in whose ridicule of his "grotesques" he is able to displace his own fear and anger.

After the departure from Hanuman House, Mr. Biswas enters the city, Port of Spain experiencing a good deal of excitement and a sense of freedom. He thinks of looking for a job there and subsequently works as a journalist on the *Trinidad Sentinel*. The editor at first accepts the trivial and petty subject matters in Biswas's assignments. The narrator puts it as, "For the facetiousness that came to him as soon as he put pen to paper, and the fantasy he had hitherto dissipated in quarrels with Shama and in invective against the Tulsis, were just the things Mr. Burnett wanted" (323). But slowly and gradually, his articles are not accepted for publication. His job offers no more security than do any of the economic and social conditions of his life. When his sympathetic editor, Mr. Burnett, is fired and a new regime takes over the newspaper, strict rules and regulations, which Mr. Biswas regards as ridiculous, are enforced:

Apart from Mr. Biswas's failure to have achieved independence so far as his living accommodation is concerned, his efforts to establish himself as a literary writer have also

failed. Although, he has taken correspondence lessons in writing articles, none of his articles is accepted for publication. As a writer of short stories, he fails miserably because he is never able to go beyond the opening sentence. The expressions of his feelings in writing end in frustration. Among the most revealing and at the same time among the funniest is a story he begins again and again, but can never finish. And 'Escape' is the title of all the unfinished stories Mr. Biswas writes. Thus, the world of *A House for Mr. Biswas* is modeled upon a society from which he wants to escape. The story generally begins as follows. "At the age of thirty-three, when he was already the father of four children..." (344). Mr. Biswas continues to write the stories in which characters are created based on his own self. Through writing too, he does not find complete solution to his psychological problems. Hence, his writings reflect the mood of displacement and disillusionment and sadness. Alienated from his own job, he desperately longs for a house of his own to overcome his feelings of isolation but he is aware of his imminent homelessness. He expresses the "hope that living in a new house in the New Year might bring about a new state of mind" (282).

His dilemmas, alienation, rootlessness all are reflected on his characters:

Sometimes his hero had a Hindi name; then he was short and unattractive and poor, and surrounded by ugliness, which was anatomized in bitter detail. Sometimes, his hero had a western name; he was then faceless, but tall and broad shouldered; he was a reporter and moved in a world derived from the novels Mr. Biswas had read and the films he had seen. (344)

So, Mr. Biswas portrays his own dwindling self in his characters. Whether Hindu or western, his hero, like Mr. Biswas, feels trapped by his obligations to his wife and children. Seemingly, to the rescue comes a slender "young girls dressed in white. She is fresh tender, unknissed; and she is unable to bear the children" (344). At this point, he can

write no more. The details of his story are too close to his actual experience of attempting to live out the fantasy with young women who work in advertising at the *Sentinel*. Having invited a few of them to lunch, he finds that when his invitation is accepted he feels disgusted and tries to escape:

His passion at once died; he withdrew the invitation and avoided the girl; thus in time creating a legend among the girls of the advertising department, all of whom knew, though he didn't suspect, for he kept it as a heavy, shameful secret, that at the age of thirty-three Mohun Biswas was already the father of four children.(345)

His desire to escape from the tensions of life with Tulsi is obviously in conflict with his loyalty to his family and perhaps even more with his moral fastidiousness, his feeling that is something "Unclean" about his very fantasies.

After building a house at Green Vale, Mr. Biswas builds another house at Shorthills which catches fire and is partially destroyed. The destruction of this house by a fire again leaves Mr. Biswas a homeless man. He has desperately been struggling to build a house of his own, but he is thwarted in this desire for the second time by circumstances beyond his control. Mr. Biswas, now, comes to shift to Hanuman House where he can always find a refuge, a place where his children would not starve. Thus, Mr. Biswas's attitude to Hanuman House is to be regarded as an ambivalent one. He certainly detests this place because it is a symbol of tyranny and oppression but at the same time he realizes that in times of difficulty this is the only place where he can find any relief and solace.

Mr. Biswas feels distressing and irritating while listening the music of the west and the pious singing from the *Ramayana*:

To combat W.C. Tuttle's gramophone Chinta and Govinda had been giving a series of pious singings from the *Ramayana*. The study of the *Ramayana*

which Chinta had started many years before, while Mr. Biswas still lived at Green Vale, was now apparently complete; she sang very well. Govinda sang less mellifluously; he partly whined and partly grunted, from his habit of singing while lying on his belly. Caught in the crossfire of song, which sometimes lasted a whole evening, Mr. Biswas listening, listening would on a sudden rush in pants and vest to the inner room and bang on the partition of Govinda's room and bang on the partition of W. C. Tuttle's drawing room. (457)

Mr. Biswas, here, has been culturally displaced, and finds himself among the people and cultures that he does not belong. He can not find a person of his belonging. So, he feels alienated and dislocated with the feelings of fear and anxiety. So, he observes the people and their behaviors, and finds them alien to him.

Biswas's extreme sense of attachment to his past home India can be seen in his irritation with W.C. Tuttle who plays American songs recorded on gramophone. A rivalry begins between Mr. Biswas and W.C. Tuttle:

The picture war started when Mr. Biswas bought two drawings from an Indian bookshop and framed them in passépartout. He liked playing with clean cardboard and sharp knives; he liked experimenting with the colours and shapes of mounts. He could concentrate on what his hands did, forget the house, and subdue his irritations. Soon his two rooms were on hung with pictures as the barrack room in Green Vale had been with religious quotation. (460)

In the above mentioned paragraph, Mr. Biswas's emotional attachment with India is realistically portrayed. He has hung the pictures with religious quotations in his room buying them from Indian bookshop.

When Mr. Biswas is offered a government job as a Community Welfare Officer, he comes into the contact with Miss Logie who is tall and energetic woman as Mr. Biswas “had known no Indian woman of her age as alert and intelligent and inquiring” (496). His comparison of Miss Logie with the Indian woman projects an indelible impression of Indian woman on his mind and heart. Now, Mr. Biswas begins to work in the government service at the city of Port of Spain. While preparing himself for performing the duties for his new job.

He borrowed books from central library and from the department’s small collection. He began with books on sociology and immediately came to grief: he could not understand their charts or their language. He moved on to simpler paperbacked books about village construction in India. These were more amusing: they gave pictures of village drains before and after showed how the chimneys could be built at no cost, how wells could be dug. (497-98)

### **Feeling of Rootlessness and Language Problem**

At first, Mr. Biswas has language problem. His inability of comprehending western sociology books makes Mr. Biswas move to read the books about village construction in India to fulfill the motto of western civilization mission. Thus, Mr. Biswas’s dangling position can be seen in his manner and behavior while working in the office.

Mr. Biswas tries to identify himself with colonizers by adopting their mannerism and lifestyle. Since he is far away from his original homeland, his own original traditions and religions have become meaningless to him and thus, he can not identify himself with those remote rules and codes. However, as he is different from the colonizer in cultural, traditional, racial, and religious backgrounds, he can never successfully associate himself with the colonizer either. He suffers from dislocation, placelessness, fragmentation, and

loss of identity. He becomes mimic men who imitate and reflect the colonizers' life style, values, and views:

There was an inter-colonial cricket match at the Oval. He did not understand the game, but he knew that there was always a crowd at these matches that shops and schools closed for them. It was the fashion at the time for men to appear on sporting occasions with a round tin of fifty English cigarettes and a plain box of matches held in one hand, the forefinger pressing the match box to the top of the tin. Mr. Biswas had the matches: he used half days subsistence allowance to buy the cigarettes. Not wishing to derange the hang of his Jacket he cycled to the Oval with the tin in his hand. (508)

Mr. Biswas differentiates himself by speaking Creole English in Hanuman House. He ridicules Hari, the symbol of religious reverence and ceremony. His own children attend a Sunday school even though Mr. Biswas at one time speaks of Christianity as superstition. Mr. Biswas's price in suits and ties reflects his fascination towards westernization, progress, and respectability. He tempts his children to live in Port of Spain with European style food. He is very embarrassed when, Anand loudly declares in a restaurant that Coca Cola tasted like "horse pee" when Mr. Biswas acquires a car he exhibits the mannerism peculiar to the community of car owners. Food breakfasts, picnics, a seaside holiday become a part of his existence now. However, Mr. Biswas can not continue to enjoy the European lifestyle for long time.

People express their identity in the situation which is questioned and threatened. The people who face other cultures feel themselves insecure and an unknown fear haunts them. This is the feeling of cultural alienation which is shown in the novel *A House for Mr. Biswas*. The characters of this book expose the complex cultural scenes, and by



which Naipaul tries to describe what he sees in the world around himself. The characters live the life of complete homelessness and frustration. They have the trauma of identity crisis that underlines the loss of roots. Mr. Biswas the central character of novel and other minor characters are dislocated and alienated in the place where they do not belong. They find themselves in a new situation; a situation that is unfamiliar, alien, and unwanted. Their sense of 'rootlessness', and the question of belonging give them a sense of alienation' which is manifest in their language and activities.

In the present novel, *A House for Mr. Biswas*, Naipaul has delineated the Indian immigrant's dilemma in more realistic way. The novel presents the plight and the predicament of Indian immigrants experiencing colonial disaster in Trinidad. The moving story of Mohun Biswas depicts the most important modern problem of 'Crisis of Identity'. Thus, Naipaul observes the individuals who migrate to British colony do not escape dislocation and displacement, though their condition is manifested in different way. It is interesting to recall how passionately Mr. Biswas attends to various details of house building.

Materials came that afternoon. The crapaud pillars looked rough, they were not all together round or all together straight. But Mr. Biswas delighted in the new scantling and the new nails that came in several wrappings of newspaper. He took up handful of nails was so heavy', he said, 'Gallary, drawing-room, bedroom, bedroom', Mr. Biswas said, hoping over the spars. ' (254)

The above mentioned quote vividly presents Mr. Biswas's extreme sense of passion for owning his own house. His desire to be an owner of a house with gallery, bedroom, and drawing room is his attempt to find out himself, and his role in the new cultural world.

The process of acquiring a house 'on the face of earth' becomes more exciting than the actual ownership of it. The house assumes importance than the people. Even for Mr. Biswas's children, the house provides an ordered world, which is never granted to their father:

Soon it seemed to the children that they had never lived anywhere but in the tall square house in Sikkim Street. From now their lives would be ordered, their memories coherent. The mind, while it is sound, is merciful. And rapidly the memories of Hanuman House, The Chase, Green Vale, Shorthills, the Tulsi house in Port of Spain would become jumbled, blurred; events would be telescoped, many forgotten. (581)

Now, in this changed environment, his children will get an opportunity to discover themselves culturally and spiritually.

Mr. Biswas's desperate effort to build up his own house which he ultimately does in his struggle for identity, has been thwarted due to his sudden death without paying the debt borrowed from Ajodha. Thus, his persistent desire to understand life and to assert his identity in a chaotic world is not fulfilled. Persons like him can not be allowed the luxury of stability and identity. It can be noted that he himself is not unaware of his ambivalent position. He tells his son that he is just somebody, nobody at all. He is simply a man having no permanent belonging. This is obviously the fate of men like Mr. Biswas, who are culturally displaced and have the misfortune of living in a derelict land. Society offers very little possibilities to each of them, and he has, therefore, no option but to balance his personal inadequacies against the contradiction of existence itself. Moreover, his attempts for owning his own house lays bare to the painful condition of rootlessness and displacement of the people caught in the process of diaspora.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Inbetweenness, Identity Crisis and Integration**

V. S. Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas* is an exploration of the protagonist; Mr. Biswas's dangling position between his root culture and alien culture in the society of colonial Trinidad. He lives in materially prosperous land, but he is psychologically drawn towards his root culture. He can neither happily live in Trinidad nor return to India

because of his different cultural ties. He faces the problems of dislocation and displacement which ultimately results in his crisis of identity.

The effect of cultural displacement can be seen in Mr. Biswas's desperate struggle to acquire a house of his own, which is the potent symbol for his autonomous existence. His fluctuation from one job to another and his inability to hold any job permanently make him alienated and dissatisfied throughout his life. The problem of adjustment, assimilation, and belongingness is evident in Mr. Biswas's involvement in jobs like an apprentice to Pundit Jairam, a sign painter in the Tulsi store at Hanuman House, a supervisor at Green Vale, a journalist on *Trinidad Sentinel*, and a community welfare officer in the Government Department. None of these jobs can give relief and solace to Mr. Biswas. He is in the state of the lack of traditional home of fixity and physical centeredness.

Mr. Biswas's several efforts to liberate himself from the grip of cunning colonizer Tulsi's get shattered. His rebellion against the rules and regulations of the Hanuman House and his inability to glue himself with his Hindu past delineates his dwindling position inbetween colonizer and colonized. For him, Hanuman House is not only the place of his refuge and relief but also the place of tyranny and oppression. Thus, Mr. Biswas spends the entire period of his life with the constant pull and push struggle to build up his own house which would define his individuality in the colonial setting. He even identifies himself with Smile's self-taught heroes and becomes a short story-writer but all of his attempts are worthless. And at the same time, Mr. Biswas is keenly aware of the fact that he does not resemble doctor, businessman, artist, and after all he is nobody.

Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas* is a true representation of dislocation, displacement, cultural identity, mimicry, and hybridity under Indian diasporic discourse. Sense of alienation due to cultural displacement is presented in the novel. Mr. Biswas

struggles to get rid of the crippling sense of dislocation and displacement as well as his psychological and physical sufferings. Therefore, there is a diasporic taste at the core of this novel. It presents Mr. Biswas's constant repulsion and attraction with the customs and values of the West and the East .

Mr. Biswas, sometimes, remains indifferent to all customs, rituals, and traditions observed in both to the West, and the East. Sometimes, he attempts to adopt the mannerism and lifestyle of colonizers, and at the same time he is haunted by the sense of his own cultural past. All the incidents that occur in Mr. Biswas's life leave him in the state of inbetweenness. He partly follows the Eastern values and orders, and does the same to the West. He is crazy towards the notions of the West, and also cannot forget the Eastern rich cultural heritage. He is psychologically, physically, mentally, linguistically, sociologically, and geographically attached to India.

Thus, the pious singings of *The Ramayana*, comparison of Miss Logie with Indian women, acceptance of thaumaturgy in course of his treatment, using Hindi names for the heroes in his stories on the one hand, and the appreciation of western science and technology, attraction towards their lifestyles and behaviors, belief in medicine on the other hand, are striking examples of Mr. Biswas's ambivalent position. So the confusion that arises here is nothing more than that of cultural belonging. Though Mr. Biswas becomes a proud owner of a house of his own, he can not fulfill his long cherished ambition due to his sudden death. Therefore, his search for belonging appears to him an unsolvable problem where sense of alienation is created due to the cause of cultural displacement that leads him to identity crisis and ultimately a frustrated, alienated man who dies at the early age of 46.

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