

## **The Creative Launcher**

An International, Open Access, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English

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### ***A House for Mr. Biswas: A Rueful Quest of Identity***

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#### **Abstract**

Needless to say, "Imperialism played a key role in bringing a sense of alienation and disorder to the countries where imperialists ruled". Homi K. Bhaba states, essentially: Colonial discourse wants the colonized to be extremely like, but by no means identical. If there were an absolute equivalence between the two, then the ideologies justifying the colonial rule would be unable to operate. This is because these ideologies assume that there is structural non- equivalence, a split between superior and inferior, which explains why anyone groups of people can dominate another at all." The paper intends to probe into the V.S Naipaul's discerning to postcolonial identity through his marvellous book " A House of Mr. Biswas " Naipaul stirred the world literature to focus the identity crisis in the set up of post colonial platform A House for Mr. Biswas about an immigrant's attempt to assert his identity and independence.

**Keywords-** *Disgust, Alienation, Immigrants, Homelessness.*

*A House for Mr. Biswas*, attempts to reveal the hardships of the postcolonial people, endure in their search for self- identity and self-esteem in Caribbean society. Also, it's intended to make an in-depth and insightful study of the existential predicaments, complications, contradictions and endeavours of the protagonist named Mr. Biswas and other major characters. It also explores those crucial circumstances in which of being alienated, Mr. Biswas deteriorates himself as homeless and rootless in Carole society The first known use of

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identity is considered in 1570. According to Marx, 'Identity is sense of self, a social, economic location.' One other source reads, 'It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being but on the contrary it is their social being that determines their conscience. Naipaul, in this novel, captures the romantic longings of the older East Indian immigrants of returning to India: 'They continually talked of going back to India, but when the opportunity came, many refused, afraid of the unknown. They didn't want to give up this ambivalence of becoming part of the landscape and yet somehow being beyond or beside it (1996: 220). In reality they 'had lost touch with their families' in India (81). Similarly, in *Finding the Centre*, Naipaul writes: 'India for these people had been a dream of home, a dream of continuity after the illusion of Trinidad' (1984; 1985: 53).

They were more comfortable maintaining this notion that their stay in Trinidad was only temporary and eventually they would go back to India. In this way, arriving in the immediate homeland was constantly deferred. The homogenous Indian community resists recognising its own hybridist and that of the other races in Trinidad. The Indian petty bourgeoisie, protects its fragmented, traditional, migrant culture in the face of growing Caribbean Creolization' (1984: 116-117 As mentioned by Dr Bijender in his paper the remark of Freud, it is very effective to know the identity as is metaphorically focused in the novel, *A House of Mr. Biswas* " Freud says, 'Identity is not stable or rational but ever conflicted tension between id and ego, conscious and subconscious mind', Id, ego and superego are the three operations defined in Sigmund Freud's structural mode of psyche. A House for Mr. Biswas "is the unique work that reveals with the theme of isolation, frustration and deprivation in a colonised platform Homesickness or the bereavement of home or keen aspiration for home become motivating factors in this rewriting. Home can only have meaning once on experience a level of displacement from it. The image of the house is an integrating metaphor around which the life of Mr. Biswas revolves. It is true that for Mr. Biswas, the house is the focal point that gives him to go for a search for emancipation from dependence. The novel depicts a vivid picture of Mr. Biswas as he struggles to preserve his

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own identity in an alien environment and tries to build up an authentic selfhood. Barring from giving a focus on his darkened world, the novel is the testament of ethnic and social history of the marginalized East Indian community in Trinidad. This novel exhibits a struggling to bridge the gulf between Mr. Biswas's inner self and the disinterested outer view. The life of Mr. Biswas resembles the life of Naipaul himself, whose series of experiences of exile and alienation while living in Trinidad seem to be portrayed through the character of his protagonist, Mr. Biswas. Even then it does not sculpt a pessimistic approach on the part of the novelist in his dealing with the problem of identity crisis, a theme found also in Naipaul's other novels. Instead, Naipaul illustrates the problem of alienation, exile and displacement with a positive approach. He transcribes Mr. Biswas' relentless struggle against the forces that try to subdue his individuality. His struggle is long and tiresome, but in the end he is successful in having a space he can call his own. Naipaul has depicted a protagonist in a society that suffers from lacking in ideas and creativity. "Pastorals," the first section of the novel, describes the birth and early childhood of Mr. Biswas. In this section, Hindu way of life with its customs, traditions, rituals, and philosophy of the people acknowledges full expression in the small Indian world created by articulated Indian labourers in an artificially created colonial society of Trinidad. But here, too, it is the superstitious beliefs and reliance on pundits which cover the initial field of the novel. Mr. Biswas has six fingers, a symbol of bad luck for his father and family, and this plays a decisive role in Mohun's life. Mohun is an alien in his own family as since childhood he is declared unlucky in his horoscope and that makes him an outsider in his own Indian world. He, being a forlorn individual, is seeking to get a new social role but fails to find it. Naipaul portrays the complexity of the relationship between a man and his origins and his inability to escape from the known surroundings. . Mr. Biswas is well known to his traumatic solitariness and thus has told his son, "I am just somebody. No-body at all" (279). Unlike his father and brothers who have been marked by the social identity of labourers, the same cannot be applied to Mr. Biswas. as he is entrusted in managing his uncle's shop. After leaving his uncle's store, he takes up a job as sign-painter

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where he meets Shama, a daughter of the Tulsis (an affluent family of the island), whom he later marries. This marriage gives him a perception that post marriage life is not for being romantic but for becoming a harsh realistic. Without money and without a dowry from the Tulsis, Mr. Biswas has no choice but to be a denizen of Hanuman House. He develops a mental complex due to the inhospitable family atmosphere. To Mr. Biswas does not find any difference between Hindu joint family culture and the pattern the British empire does implement in West Indies. Hanuman House provides shelter to Mr. Biswas but gives a complete suspension of his identity Hanuman House as he has described:

.....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 side walls were window-less and on the upper 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. (80-81)

For the purpose of his liberty from Hanuman House, Mr. Biswas joins the Aryans, a group of 'protestant' Hindu missionaries from India, and starts speaking highly for the acceptance of conversion and women's education, and on the one hand, and simultaneously he raises his voice against the abolition of the caste system, child marriage, and idol worship, knowing that his such mission will anger the Tulsis. Similarly, in order to assert his individuality and to get acknowledged, Mr. Biswas takes up comical means like giving various nicknames to the Tulsis such as "the old hen," "the old cow" for Mrs. Tulsi, "the big boss" for Seth, the "constipated holy man" for Hari, or "the two Gods" for Tulsi's sons. His attitude makes him "troublesome and disloyal and he could not be trusted" (102). Even when Mr. Biswas's daughter is born, it is Seth and Hari who chose the name Savi for his daughter, not Mr. Biswas himself. To register his protest, Mr. Biswas writes on the birth certificate "Real calling name: Lakshmi. Signed by Mohun Biswas, father. Below that was the date" (163). A House of Mr. Biswas gives another important feature of Hinduism.

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Amongst the five major castes Brahmin or priestly caste is considered the highest caste. Different types of Hindus are depicted in the novel where Mr. Biswas and his family eat vegetarian food at the time of his father's death, "The food being unsalted and the moment he has felt eating raw flesh and the nauseous saliva has filled his mouth again. On the other side, Hindu Brahmins are considered pure vegetarians and are found eating flesh is against the Hindu customs. . Being Brahmin is a sign of great status. This is seen in the novel where Mr. Biswas goes to a boy to Tara's house and is respected as a Brahmin . A House of Mr. Biswas can be re viewed as a document of sensible feelings of Naipaul Traditional Hindu dresses, sacred thread, caste or sects marks on the forehead and sometimes on the arms and other parts of the body all tell about Hinduism.( 138) Mr. Biswas's, sign-painting seems to have been taken up voluntarily, and there by it has become a part of identity. He turns down to accept a profession which is associated with the Tulsis, and he is not ready to merge himself to become merely figure of sleeping son-in-laws in Tulsi family Mr. Biswas thinks that struggling in journey of life will make him to find out his own identity, but it is the despair feeling of separation that hangs heavily on his mind to find the true identity. He also discovers that he wants to have his own identity among East Indians. Mr. Biswas now feels that despite hostility, he is recognized as dwarf personality Hanuman House. Naipaul's transparent idea of identity precisely can be revealed as a person's social identity depends on the society to which he belongs, and that the family is sustaining and stabilizing experience for marginalized individuals like Mr. Biswas. It is the accommodation in Green Vale that gives him a more dejecting experience as with the more spacious abode in Chase, the single room into which he moves with family and furniture gets him a feeling of suffocating confinement. Although Green Vale gives him a sense of freedom and importance, his activities in Green Vale are governed by excessive insecurity both physically and mentally. In fact, from this juncture his dream to build a house begins to shape into reality. It is not that he longs disparately a spacious place for himself, but what he more desires is to establish identity as father of his son. For Mr. Biswas, "Anand belonged completely to Tulsis" (216).

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Mr Biswas' initial efforts to build a house becomes futile This dream to build a house is reflected through the doll's house that has given to Savi, daughter of Mr. Biswas, on her birthday. Shama, his wife has broken the house in order to terminate the anger of the Tulsis and to satisfy their egos. However he starts building his house in Green Vale, it never turns to be his dream house as the gravity of alienation and displacement continues and here, too, he fails to gain acceptance as an individual art of Mr. Biswas, on her birthday: Port of Spain !

A new horizon has been opened up Mr. Biswas. The city gives an opportunity to establish himself professionally, something he has long waited for, something that he has long aspired. He becomes a reporter for the Trinidad Sentinel, with a salary of fifteen dollars a month, a job that helps him earn some respect from the Tulsis, too. Now he is no more a pain to Mrs. Tulsi. When she offers him two rooms in her house in Port of Spain, he readily accepts. His relations with Mrs. Tulsi gradually improve. The gulf is bridged up from either side. For the time being, he forgets his wish to have a space of his own and enjoys his success and family life. His bliss, however, is short-lived. Seth has had a falling out with the Tulsis, and life is very difficult as the house deteriorates from neglect and abuse. The children especially face unpleasant challenges, and Mr. Biswas builds another house for his family. This house is also doomed, and more bad judgment on Mr. Biswas's part causes a fire that barely avoids destroying the house. The family does not have to stay in the house long, however, since Mrs. Tulsi's house in Port of Spain becomes vacant again, and Mr. Biswas moves back, occupying two rooms, and sharing the rest of the house with other members of the Tulsi family. Conditions at the house get out of control as more and more people move into the house and it becomes a den of noise and uncleanness.

As Mr. Biswas's son Anand starts college, Mr. Biswas begins to sink again into despair. He is pulled out of it when he is offered a new job as a community Welfare Officer with better pay. The job eventually also provides him with a car, and Mr. Biswas achieves new status in the house. The status turns out to be temporary, as his family is obliged to move to a tenement in order to make improvements to the house in anticipation of the return of

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Owad, Mrs. Tulsi's son who has been studying medicine in England. The family is allowed to move back into the house after three months, but their stay is brief because of conflict between Owad and Anand, then Owad and Mr. Biswas, and finally Mr. Biswas and Mrs. Tulsi.

As Mr. Biswas looks for a place to live, he is not holding out much hope, but he is approached by a man who wants to sell his house, and circumstances arrange themselves so that Mr. Biswas agrees to make the purchase. Unfortunately, this turns out to be another incident of bad judgment, as the house has more problems than he realized, and the family is once again disheartened. They work to get the house livable and are able to enjoy some time in it, making it their own, before Mr. Biswas loses his job because the Community Welfare Department is abolished.

He goes back to his job at The Sentinel, and now his money worries are magnified since he has acquired a great deal more debt but lost a great deal of his income. He eventually has a series of heart attacks and ultimately dies.

The takeover of the Trinidad Sentinel by new authorities, Seth's break-up with Tulsis, and Mrs. Tulsi's decision to live in Short hills, all come as a terrible upsetting the family hierarchy upon which the Tulsi family has used to run., Naipaul, has tried to portrayed the typical Indian joint families where the authority of senior members are absolute. The absence of this authority means disintegration of the family. Mr. Biswas' shift to Shorthills has exhausted all his savings to build the house there. But the house is not conveniently situated. Shama has to walk a mile daily for shopping and there is also a problem of transportation. The children, too, want to return to Port of Spain. Even though the house is not the house of his dreams, it helps him realise his responsibility as a father and husband. After coming back to Port of Spain he finds people in a better economic position. Anand urges his father that "[they] must move. [He] cannot bear to live here another day" (551). Mr. Biswas, who has himself faced such humiliation innumerable times during his childhood, is deeply moved by his son's appeal. He tells Shama that he is going to vacate the house very soon. A sharp m

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change in Mr. Biswas' attitude towards having a house has been found at this point.. Earlier the house was expected to lead to a discovery of his authentic selfhood and a proclamation of his identity. This time, owning a house comes out of the humiliation inflicted on his son and Mr. Biswas's helplessness to protect his family. At that point, the house will be on a piece of land where he and his family can live with self-respect and dignity. Even his wife, Shama, agrees to leave the house although she earlier advocated living with the Tulsi family, saying, "I do not want anything bigger. This is just right for me. Something small and nice" (580).

Mr. Biswas has encountered many problems, including questioning for self identity and isolation. Humiliation and violence of a protagonist is presented as a psychological trauma of misfortunate. Naturally the world Naipaul sees, is laden with physical and social phenomena, brutally alive with the complications and contradictions of actual human strivings, So this gives us a chance to peep into "Dias phora"

The concept of Diaspora emerged in 1990 and it is as old as post colonial theory. In the domain of postcolonial literature, different ethnic groups, based on their different original cultural heritages, have their ethnic, cultural, and historical specificities; hence, the condition of the dislocated and dispossessed is especially poignant and complicated because they cannot find a "home" of their own. VS. Naipaul himself experienced, and repeatedly described in his fiction, this particular urge. Throughout his life he has desired a place to identify with. From genealogical mining, especially in his homeland (the Caribbean), through the quest for his cultural roots (India), and finally to his place of education (England) he has attempted to search for his own identity. Being an Indian by ancestry, a Trinidadian by birth, and an Englishman by education, V. S. Naipaul possesses a multicultural background. As a colonial, he has always needed to locate his place in the world through writing. Prolific and critical in both fiction and nonfiction, he presents colonial anxieties in his quest for self identity. *A House for Mr. Biswas* from the diasporas angle and the novel contains themes that run throughout his writing but it marks a distinctive period in the development of his writing and art. This novel displays a unique affection for the homeland of his birth. It deals with the

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historical period of colonialism and indenture and the experiences of migration and displacement with respect to Trinidad. The rawness of emotion present in the novel is missing in Naipaul's later texts which have become increasingly sophisticated in their treatment of imaginary homeland and identity. This diversity of literary expression provides the writers with the flexibility and freedom to utilize the most effective means to communicate their idea express their creativity and share their lives with their readers. *A House for Mr. Biswas* tells the story of its protagonist, Mr. Biswas from birth to death, each section dealing with different phases of Mr. Biswas' life. Here, *A House for Mr. Biswas* delineates the traumas of a tainted and troubled past and the attempts to find a purpose in life, beautifully analyzing the sense of alienation and the pangs of exile experienced by the characters. *A House for Mr. Biswas* is, therefore, individual attempts to overcome "homelessness". The writer sees the characters as victims of their environment. Their urgency comes from their efforts to get others to acknowledge them so as to have it validated for themselves, their human necessity. The house becomes a legacy which Mr. Biswas can bequeath to his family. Just as through his writing Naipaul attempts to salvage his own family history and the history of the Trinidadian Indian community so also the hero of his novel makes a final effort to create a new world out of nothingness. Biswas' quest for security also related with the relation she manages in the family. Shama and children's recurrent displeasure to live with him has always been a cause of deep depression Shama's constant returning habit to Hanuman House signifies her fear of identity and insecurity, at Chase, Shama shouts at Mr. Biswas, ". . . give up the shop and return to Hanuman House" (199). She always calls Hanuman House a home and happy to live with Tulsi. His two children Anand and Savi both make him feel worthlessness and insecurity as his stay in Hanuman House deprives him attaining an authentic image in children's eyes as they know Mr. Biswas, like all the fathers at Hanuman House, had come from nothing, and the only people who had a proper family were the Tulsis" (367). The wish to become a perfect father instils in Mr. Biswas to continue his search for identify that pushes him towards various displacements.

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A House for Mr. Biswas recounts a man's growth to maturity. It describes a writer's quest to find his true voice, as depicted in the experience of both Mr. Biswas and Anand. It also resembles a family romance, though not in the strict Freudian sense: The rebel is not the son, Anand—though he, too, has his rebellious moments—but the son-in-law, Mr. Biswas, who continually threatens the power hierarchy of the Tulsi family.

Naipaul would use the autobiographical elements he incorporated into A House for Mr. Biswas again and again in his later books, creating a unique genre in the process. This new mode of writing richly culminated in *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987), which was cited by the Nobel Committee when it awarded the author the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2001. Fiction forms a component in Naipaul's distinctive genre, which is largely a combination of autobiography, history, and travel writing and borders on nonfiction.

Although the Trinidad Indians seem to be an enduring source for Naipaul, his own attitude toward the island nation is ambivalent at best. In a biography of the author, Patrick French recounts Naipaul's long ordeal to rid himself of all Trinidadian "taint." French recalls Naipaul's comment upon receiving the Nobel Prize, acknowledging the...

The novel leads to its concluding with the intense desire to quest for identity and to get rid of insecurity that goes on from dynasty to dynasty from one generation to next. The search for same cause continues in Mr. Biswas' son, Anand who goes abroad and becomes the victim of same socio cultural disparities and mental depression as his fathers had in past. He does not live with Mr. Biswas in the last time, and his hard struggle reminds us the initial state of Mr Biswas struggling for identity. With the identical end of past and present, author draws readers' attention to the autobiographical aspects of his life in Trinidad and out of Trinidad. The life of Biswas and Anand also reminds us the heritage of the author that he receives from the agonising experience of his father's life; and it shapes his vision, "What Naipaul has done can be precisely be said "life not a sequence of events but a quality of experience which he has shaped in such a way as to project his own vision its significance"

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The narrative of “Biswas” and the discourse of “character” satisfy those ideological and formal demands of realist narratives ... But the driving desire of “Biswas” conceals a much graver subject: the subject of madness, illness and loss (Bhabha, 1984: 117).

The narrative of Biswas does not find its niche in the realist genre. While Naipaul is using an English literary convention, the story he is really writing spills over the boundaries exposing Biswas’ difference. Perhaps Biswas’ story cannot be only interpreted in terms of a western colonial literary form? Naipaul uses the realist form only to work against it.

Biswas’s fight for independence, indicated in his stand not to beat his family and to not allow the Tulsi family to beat his children, suggests the attempt to extricate himself from this destructive power-dominated environment

Conclusively, In this paper I have tried to explore the area of the novel which I have found more elaborately may related with areas of the Novel that readers may get an easy access to the concept of the decolonisation and its traumatic effect on the protagonist of the novel and the inner pain that has been sustaining with the passing of the days and the bigotries of Hindu religion.

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