



INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
INDIA

2395-2636 (Print);2321-3108 (online)

## THE PROTAGONIST'S HUNT FOR EXISTENCE IN V.S. NAIPAUL'S - A HOUSE FOR MR. BISWAS

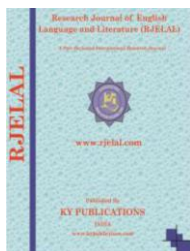
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doi: [doi.org/10.33329/rjelal.7219.456](https://doi.org/10.33329/rjelal.7219.456)



### ABSTRACT

The present paper highlights the views of V.S.Naipaul regarding the search of Existence in the place of protagonist, Mohun Biswas the protagonist moves from place to place in searching his identity. His struggle for Existence in different places is projected here. The problems of isolation and negation of an individual are clearly proved in this paper. In search of Existence, the move of Mr. Biswas from village to town and from joint family to nuclear family is identified here. The failure of the protagonist in proving his identity is also spoken in the following paper.

Vidiadhar Suraj Prasad Naipaul is one of the best – known Writers in English today. He is a product of post – imperialist society. The common team associated with post – colonial literature is fragmentation, alienation and Exile. He is better known for his travelogues than for his novels. Being an exile from Trinidad, his first business as a novelist is to picturize the fate of individual carefully in a cross – cultural society. Whether it is a travelogue or a novel, he ends up with the searching of identity of an individual.

Naipaul, in his novels and short stories, transforms actual societies into fictional communities that general narrators and his Protagonists are linked to one another to prosecute further about themselves and their worlds.

*A House for Mr. Biswas* is a great comic work. The novel introduces the social history of the marginalized East Indian community in Trinidad. The novel speaks about the struggle for identity for an Indian in Trinidad. He moves to city and is challenged by western cultural influences. The novel begins with Mohun Biswas constant move to

identity his place in Trinidad. The story portrays about a man's tight from the web of family, custom and religion.

V.S. Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas* is an art that deals mainly with the problems of isolation, translation and negation of an individual. The novel circulates around Mr. Biswas the protagonist from his birth to death and different stages of Mr. Biswas's life is highlighted here.

*A House for Mr. Biswas* is partly autobiographical. The novel defines the pain of past problems and efforts to find an aim in life. The sense of alienation and the pangs of expatriate are experienced by the characters. Boyce Davis identifies the inspiration among migratory writer particularly writers like V.S. Naipaul:

Migration creates desire for home, which in true produces the rewriting of home. Homesickness or homelessness, the rejection of home or longing for home becomes motivating factors in this rewriting. Home can only have meaning

once on experience a level of displacement from it. (113).

The life of Mr. Biswas revolves around the image of the house. The house represents a search for freedom from dependence. The novel is based on the struggle of Mr. Biswas to safeguard his own identity in an alien Environment. The social history of the marginalized East Indian community in Trinidad is introduced in the novel first. Equilibrium is maintained between Mr. Biswas's inner self and the outer view.

Mr. Biswas faces a lot of issues like questioning himself about manhood and his rejection of community. Naipaul's like and alienation in Trinidad is resembled in the life of Mr. Biswas. Naipaul's experiences are represented through the character of his protagonist, Mr. Biswas. The theme of existence is also found in other novels of Naipaul. He approaches the problems of alienation, exile and displacement in a positive manner. He focuses on Biswas's struggle as long and tiresome, but he is successful at the end in having a space due to his persistent struggle.

Naipaul describes *A House for Mr. Biswas* in his non-fiction book, "Finding the centre" saying that it was "very much my father's book. It was written out of his journalism and stories, out of his knowledge he had got from the way of looking MacGowan had trained him in. It was written out of his writing" ( Naipaul, *A House for Mr. Biswas* xiii) Similarly, in his novel Award Ceremony acceptance speech, Naipaul alludes to a house for Mr. Biswas, Saying that " intuition led me to a large book about our family life.'

The novel *A House for Mr. Biswas* cannot be seen as a family biography though Naipaul brings his past life throughout the novel. He keeps a sensible distance to the protagonist. From the beginning, the novel speaks about an individual by name Mohun Biswas who frequently moves to identify his place in Trinidad. Mr. Biswas gets an experience of alienation in which he tries to find his roots in the socio-cultural Environment around him. Due to his search for identity, Mr. Biswas shifts from village to town and from joint family to nuclear family but fails to find his identity and existence.

The birth and early childhood of Mr. Biswas is described in "Pastorals" the first section of the novel. The customs, Traditions, Rituals and philosophy of the people in Hindu way of life receives full aspect in the world created by indentured Indian laborers is an artificially created colonial society of Trinidad, The beginning pages of the novel focuses on the superstitious beliefs and the faith on pundits.

The critical role which plays in Mohun's life is about his six fingers which is a representation of bad luck for his father and family. Mohun is declared unlucky in his horoscope. He is a stranger even in his own family and that makes him an outsider in his own Indian world. He tries to get a new social role but he fails. Mr. Biswas does the job of taking the calf of Dhari to water and a penny was paid a week. Mr. Biswas loved the calf and takes it to water and also takes for walk near the stream. Even though, he knew that water is dangerous to him; he used to play with the fishes in the water.

His life throughout is haunted by poverty. After the death of his father, his family moves to his mother's sister, Tara's house. Mr. Biswas goes to school and does some odd jobs. Mr. Biswas gets insulted in many places. Being an assistant to pundit Jayaram, he was punished for eating two bananas. He was accused wrongly while working in a rum shop. Tara's brother-in-law Bhandat humiliates and beats Mr. Biswas.

Mr. Biswas vows, "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." (66)

A deep sense of depression is found in readers by the difficulties encountered at a very early age. The major part of the novel includes about his marriage and his relation with Shama, his wife. Mr. Biswas is taking care of his uncle's shop while his brother is working as a laborer. He takes up a job as sign-painter after leaving his uncle's store. There he meets Shama, a daughter of the Tulsis whom he marries later. He begins a long unhappy marriage. He realizes about life after his marriage. He understands that after a love-marriage, even life is not romance, but an act of

responsibility. Later on gets four children a struggle for money and lot of quarrels arise.

Mr. Biswas didn't get any money or dowry from the Tulsis so he is forced to move in at Hanuman House. In Hanuman house, Biswas gets shelter but he expects identity in return.

*A House for Mr. Biswas* thickens Naipaul, engagement with the communities of his childhood in a way that confers novelistic dignity and pathos to the cultural and geographical dislocations of individual and families and to the story of their difficult transitions away from the near – feudal social and economic relations fostered by colonialism. Naipaul has acknowledged that a great deal of the novel's intensity comes from the fact that its title character is modeled upon his father seepersad Naipaul who wished to be writer, and whose thwarted literary ambitions might be thought to find fulfillment in the work of V.S Naipaul.

In this novel, Naipaul bases many events and people on childhood memories. As Mr. Biswas tries to break from the claustrophobic hold of the extended Tulsi family into which he has married; his life becomes an allegory of the coming of bourgeois modernity and its values. The building of such a new 'home' is a costly and even destructive process, and Mr. Biswas is repeatedly scarred by the attempt. His partial way out is his job as a journalist, which provides him some of the professional and personal authority that his early life has looked and which encourages him to write and to share in a world of English books with his own children.

Writing and literary provide a window into a wider realm, and even though Mr. Biswas own life continues to be dogged by failure and disappointment, his children- Anand and savi benefit from his efforts and go abroad to study on scholarships'. (*Indian writing in English* 234)

The narrator reflects Mr. Biswas's life in Tulsi family as:...how often in the years to come, at Hanuman house or in the house at short hills or in the house in Port of Spain, living in one room, with some of his children sleeping on the next bed... how often did Mr. Biswas regret his weakness his in articulateness that evening. (92). Mr. Biswas can't

truly love Shama and this attitude continues towards her family. As he neglects the Tulsis, he cannot accept Shama's connection to them. It can be seen that Shama "loved" Biswas more than Biswas "loved" Shama. "Mr. Biswas feels severely repressed and cowed down before the matriarchal sway of Mrs. Tulsi and his agent Seth. His predicament in hanuman house is the microcosm of a slave society. (Nandan 61)

Hanuman house is described as follows:

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 windowless 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 status of the benevolent Monday god hanuman. (80-81)

According to Mr. Biswas, men are non-existent in the Tulsi family because they are just needed as husbands and laborers. He finds himself isolated in hanuman house "he was treated with indifference rather than hostility" 188. He tries to hold place in the family he 'held his tongue and tried to win favor" 188. Through this line we cannot tell that he voluntarily loses his freedom and independence.

When Govind, son-in-law of Tulsi suggest him to leave sign painting and become a driver for the Tulsi estate Mr. Biswas immediate disagreement is shown in the lines "give up sign-painting? And my independence no, boy my motto is: paddle your own canoe? 107

Mr. Biswas takes up sign painting voluntarily which become a part of his identity. He doesn't accept a profession which is attached with the Tulsis. He is not ready to mingle himself like other son-in-laws in the Tulsi family in which the names of some are forgotten in the Tulsi family.

In order to maintain his freedom in hanuman house and to anger the Tulsis, Mr. Biswas joins a group of 'protestant' Hindu missionaries from

India who are built keys up sign painting voluntarily which become a part of his identity. He doesn't accept a profession which is attached with the Tulsis. He is not ready to mingle himself like other son-in-laws in the Tulsi family in which the names of some are forgotten in the Tulsi family. In order to maintain his freedom in hanuman house and to anger the Tulsis, Mr. Biswas joins a group of 'protestant' Hindu missionaries from India who are called as Aryans and he starts urging the acceptance of conversion and women's education on the one hand and the abolition of the caste system, child marriage and idol worship on the other side he very well knew that these things may anger Tulsis.

Mr. Biswas takes comic revenge like giving various nicknames to the Tulsi such as 'the old queen' 'the old hen' 'the old cow' for Mrs. Tulsi. For Hari he gives the names like 'constipated holy man' and "holy ghost" "the big boss' for Seth and "the two gods" for Tulsi's sons. His attitude makes him 'troublesome and disloyal and he could not be trusted' (102)

Seth and Hari choose the name Savi for Mr. Biswas's daughter and even that was not done by Mr. Biswas himself to show his disapproval, Mr. Biswas writes on the birth certificate: 'real calling name: Lakshmi signed by Mohun Biswas father below that was the date'163

Mr. Biswas begins his independent life with Shama in the section entitled "the chase". In chase Mr. Biswas is an unnecessary and unwanted man and 'real life was to begin for them soon and elsewhere' (147). To Mr. Biswas "chase was a pause a preparation. The desire of Mr. Biswas is highlighted by Naipaul here. Mr. Biswas desires to have an own house and also recognizes the problem of isolation among displaced people. Mr. Biswas's attitude towards hanuman house changes after coming to chase. He discovers that "the house was the world more real than the chase, and less exposed; everything beyond its gates was foreign and unimportant"188.

Mr. Biswas thinks that life in chase will find his own existence and identity but his alienation fails to find his selfhood. He also finds that he should have his own identity among east Indians. He feels

isolated at chase. Naipaul conveys that, "i think that 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.

The valued things are not owned by Mr. Biswas. He gains something that he never had before by owning a house. He feels he is important through that. He became an able person by his own rules, supporting his family and doing things for his benefit. Mr. Biswas is now able to truly live by his motto: "paddle your own canoe" Naipaul- 111

Mr. Biswas feels proud of himself to live a fulfilling life. As he is the master of himself, he no needs to take orders from anyone. Mr. Biswas's dream of owning a house comes through Doll House's episode. Mr. Biswas buys a doll house for his daughter Savi which demonstrates his true feelings and desires. He wants to give the best for his family. The doll house is the image of his dream house. He is able to find his own identity by owning a house and capture all the obstacles that are placed in front of him. "The place when right at the end despite the debt and Anand's absence he can rejoice in Shama's attention in Savi's cleverness in the butterfly orchard and the sweet scented shade tree" (622).

Mr. Biswas visits to hanuman house more frequently as life is meaningless for Mr. Biswas without Shama, his children and even the Tulsis. After the spacious living in chase, he gets a pitiful experience at green vale in which he moves along with his family to a single room and feels more uncomfortable. Even though he gets freedom and importance at green vale specifically on Saturdays when wages were given, he feels insecure in green vale both physically and mentally. He brings his dream to build a house in reality.

His intention is to recognize as a father to his children but not of a spacious place especially for his son Anand. For Mr. Biswas, 'Anand belonged completely to Tulsis' (216)

Mr. Biswas fails in his first attempt to claim a portion of the earth. His dream to build a house meets the same result as Savi's doll's house given by

Mr. Biswas on her birthday. Shama his wife breaks the house to suppress the anger of the Tulsis and to satisfy their egos. He starts to build his house in green vale but it is different to his dreams. Mr. Biswas thinks that the house brings a changed state of mind but the isolation and displacement continues even there and he fails to gain his identity as an individual. He is unbelievable that he is in a house which belongs to him. He gets a hold in his life.

A place that opens new avenues in the second part of the novel is Port of Spain. The thing which he reached for a long time is gained in the city. He gets opportunities to withstand himself professionally. He gets some respect from the Tulsis when he joins as a reporter for the Trinidad sentinel'. He gets a pay of fifteen dollars a month a job that helps him gain respect from the Tulsis. He comes closer to happiness. His son Anand shines in school and he shows and displays his talent as a writer. Biswas's fate suffers several states and at last he is able to buy a house. His quest for his continuous struggle to attain 'accommodation necessity' is the central movements of the novel (Deodat, 1979) "The darkness the silence the absence of the world enveloped and comforted him" comments Naipaul (312).

Mr. Biswas joins as a reporter and he tries to live on his own. Mr. Biswas comes to live in a house at a reduced rent which belongs to Tulsi. He once again allows himself to be caught in the hands of Tulsis for the third time when he settles into his own house. Mr. Biswas suffered a lot of mental pressure during a storm when he lived in a house which was built earlier. The house was shoddy framed and not completed because of his poverty. But then to he doesn't give up his ambition of owning a house. He builds another house during the stay in Port of Spain. The first two houses were built of Tulsi materials and on Tulsi land which have been abandoned. The third one is completely created by Mr. Biswas.

Mr. Biswas shifts to Shorthills arises his intention to have a house. He used all his savings in building the house. The house was not convenient to Mr. Biswas and his family members. It was

because the house is not handily situated. There is a great difficulty in transportation. Shama used to walk a mile daily for shopping. Mr. Biswas, Shama including their children want to return to Port of Spain. As a gather and husband, his house helps him realize his responsibility even though the house is not the house of his dreams. His house became a jail for Mr. Biswas as it is located far from the city. For Mr. Biswas "could not simply leave the house in Shorthills. He had to be released from it" (432).

His relation with Mrs. Tulsi did not lead to aggression instead it gradually improved the relation between them. Naipaul gives his views regarding the family hierarchy of the Tulsis. He picturises the authority of senior members as perfect in the typical Indian joint families. The disturbance of these hierarchy leads to disunity in the Tulsi family. A competition is created between Mr. Biswas's son, Anand, and Govind's son, Vidiyadhar which never lead them to co-operation.

A fight between Owad and Anand breaks out after the return of Owad. Anand tells his father that "they must move. [he] cannot bear to live here another day" 551. In his childhood, Mr. Biswas has faced such abasement many times. He tells Shama of vacating the house very soon. One who read the life of Mr. Biswas can find a change in it. He thought of building a house to recognize his self hood and identity but later on his attitude changed he thought of owning a house due to his son. To live with self-respect and dignity, Mr. Biswas made he and his family to live in an own house. His wife Shama who feel very satisfied in living with the Tulsi family agrees to leave the house and move to her own house saying, "I do not want anything bigger. This is just right for me something small and nice" (580).

Mr. Biswas gets a loan from Ajodha and buys a house in Port of Spain. He describes his house as "the sun came through the open window on the ground floor and struck the kitchen wall. Wood work and frosted glass were hot to the touch. The inside brick wall was warm. The sun went through the home and laid dazzling strips on the exposed staircase"572. Mr. Biswas finds many faults in the house, but the only satisfaction he gets is the house belongs to him.



Throughout his life, Mr. Biswas suffered a lot. He gets a release from Tulsis. He is often isolated from his wife and family. Shama, Mr. Biswas's wife return to her parental house, hanuman house often. His house, particularly it is a vision which serves as a centre of light. He takes an attempt to escape from the old world and creating into a new one. He takes a journey as a creature of fate to a world in which he becomes a victim of circumstance. The house which he builds rescues him from all these frustrations. The thing which is extracted from Mr. Biswas experience is that his house picturises many things in his life.

According to the indication of V.S. Naipaul owning a house for dislocated people like Mr. Biswas is not just a thing of getting a protection from heat, cold or rain, it is an infliction of order and a designing of his selfhood within the disunited society of Trinidad. The novel depicts Mr. Biswas's continuous struggle against the unfriendly environment instead of running from it.

The theme of '*A House for Mr. Biswas*' focuses on cultural annihilation. The three generations of East Indians is described in the novel. Naipaul's novel highlights the self of an individual by focusing on the issue of alienation. The earlier novels of v. s. Naipaul concentrates on empty headed subjects but the hero on the novel '*A House for Mr. Biswas*' is involved in a serious fight against the forces of suppression. As Biswas's struggle with the Tulsis becomes more and more complicated, the novel even grows depressive. The novel never ends with a tragic note nor with a loss of hope. But atleast Mr. Biswas gets success in his life. In the end of the novel Mr. Biswas finally has a house of his own.

Mohun Biswas is inspired by his love for natural human liberty and individuality which make him to fight against the lifeless rituals, myths and customs of Brahmin culture made by the Tulsis in the novel. In the case of Mr. Biswas owning a house is the symbol of rehabilitation. A search for freedom and the conflict for personality is brought in Mr. Biswas's struggle with the fastness of the Tuls household. *A House for Mr. Biswas* symbolizes the colonial world as it is a miniature world according to Mr. Biswas.

V.S. Naipaul's search in selecting the name of the protagonist in '*A House for Mr. Biswas*' is also very interesting. It seems that Naipaul has attentively chosen this name. His name not only portrays the Hindu background but also it is connected to his circumstances in which he is living. For example the protagonist's first name in Mohun, which means 'beloved' (according to the novel), even though he is an individual termed as unlucky and who experiences aggression and abasement from society.

Similarly his surname Biswas means trust. While involved in the novel, Naipaul might have decided to give a happy ending to the novel. That is why an ambitious protagonist is created. He experiences more failures in the beginning stages but atleast he finds a piece of space which he can call as his own. This has been taken as the main reason for why Naipaul addresses the protagonist as "Mr. Biswas" instead of Mohun. Adding Mr. To the surname makes the character more dignified. Through his novel, "*A House for Mr. Biswas*" V.S. Naipaul as a novelist, searches for his own identity to prove his own existence so that he can recognize his own place in the world.

According to Gordon Rohlehr, Naipaul is able to present a hero who is "in all his littleness and still preserve a sense of man's inner dignity" (Rohlehr 190). In Naipaul's own words, "most imaginative writers discover themselves, and their word, through their work" Naipaul, return (211).

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