

Home, Exile and Identity: A Diasporic Reading of Naipaul's A House for Mr. Biswas

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Abstract

Questions concerning home and country are raised by diasporic writing. It affects the lives of the diasporic characters. By focusing on the challenging issues faced by immigrants, diaspora author V. S. Naipaul expands the concept of diaspora. He has given diaspora writing a creative direction and occupies a special place among diaspora writers. Immigrants living in a foreign country are depicted by Naipaul as chaotic. There are elements of tragic sadness and high comedy in A House for Mr. Biswas, which are closely tied to Naipaul's own personal search for purpose in life. The present paper is a straightforward attempt to highlight the diasporic sense of Naipaul's characters as they inhabit an unfamiliar country.

Keywords:

Diaspora, Immigrant, Chaotic, Inhabit, Colonisation

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The most controversial novelist of our time is V. S. Naipaul. The struggle of East Indians to forge a strong identity in the West Indies is portrayed in the 1961 book *A House for Mr. Biswas*. The novel tells the story of a man who aspires to own his house. It portrays East Indian Trinidadian culture both before and after colonization. The neglected East Indian community in Trinidad is the subject of the story. The characters in the book encounter many difficulties as they try to fit in in a strange setting. In this story, the house is not a symbol of homelessness but of freedom from injustice and slavery. Naipaul's writing is primarily the result of his attempts to comprehend his own position in the world. For Mr. Biswas, *A House* is a journey to fulfill his inner need for a place to call home.

A House for Mr. Biswas is the masterpiece of V.S. Naipaul. The protagonist of the book is Mr. Biswas. The difficulties Mr. Mohun Biswas faced as a homeowner are described by the author. Owning a private home is a desirable goal for a Trinidadian due to the city's instability and overcrowding. The average person in today's world, Mr. Biswas, finds it difficult to purchase a home of his own. In addition to being bold and brave, his rebellion is motivated by his fight against a repressive social order. The underlying melancholy of the migrant's circumstances is the main theme of the story. Luckily or sadly, Mr. Biswas marries Shama, the youngest of the Tulsi girls, and gets caught up in the chaos of the home. Unlike other sons-in-law who only want to fill their bellies, Mr. Biswas is different. Mr. Biswas was a self-identified individual. He rebels against Tulsidom because he detests slavery. Exile, dispossession, and disillusionment are the outcomes of Mr. Biswas' life. The story of an expatriate trying to realize his lifelong dream of home ownership is all that *A House for Mr. Biswas* is. Even after taking out a mortgage to buy the house, he still feels uneasy.

Naipaul portrays broken lives and personalities in *A House for Mr. Biswas*. They are cut off from life's natural flow. Since his early years, Mr. Biswas has led a fractured life. After stopping by Pundit Jairam and Bhandat's Rum Shop, he eventually makes his way back to his mother. A sense of rootlessness is a defining characteristic of Naipaul's writing. Mr. Biswas, the main character, endures a lot in order to bring stability into his life. The story illustrates the predicament of immigrants who merely seek housing. He had no family other than the one he would attempt to create from the consuming world of Tulsis, and he would be a nomad for the next thirty-five years. Given the deaths of his father and mother, his brother living on the Felicity estates, Dehuti working as a servant in Tara's home, and his own quick separation from Bipti—who, broken, became more and more worthless and impenetrable—he felt as though he was genuinely alone (Mr. Biswas 40). Mr. Biswas

discusses the most important issues that East Indian society in the West Indies is currently facing. Biswas is a spokesperson for people who are compelled by circumstance to live abroad and make concessions. For V. S. Naipaul, the idea of home is upsetting. He deftly portrays the 'home' problem in his writing. Naipaul portrays the loneliness and exile experience in *A House for Mr. Biswas*. He is recognized as a vagrant who has become important in our day and age. His desire to comprehend his own position in the world is the driving force behind the majority of his writing.

The diaspora community is linked to these identity issues are addressed in the works of diasporic authors. They are partial and multifaceted. The clash of civilizations affects the migrants. Their identity has always been ambiguous. Thus, they fabricate false homelands. The difficulties faced by Indian immigrants are exemplified in *A House for Mr. Biswas*. It represents the desire of the exile to establish roots and become truly themselves. Exile is a major theme in diaspora writing. The modern man, according to Alvin Toffler, is 'the new nomad' (74). He is trying to figure out who he is. In his life, Mr. Biswas learned what true home meant. "And so Mr. Biswas came to dwell in the one house to which he had some claim." (40) "He would be a nomad with no place to call home for the next 35 years." "Mimicry" is the term used to describe how immigrants engage in cultural negotiation by copying colonizers. Homelessness, rootlessness, alienation, and mimicry in hybrid communities are all topics covered in Naipaul's writings. The path of mimicry results in "double consciousness." "Although the novels and short stories have rarely been about himself, they have reflected the various stages of his disillusionment with Trinidad, his despair with India, and his concern with being a homeless ex-colonial," claims Bruce King (108). The colonial artist's realization of his own creative potential is one of Naipaul's main themes. Mr. Biswas is the epitome of the contemporary average person. He has been acknowledged as a typical individual, embodying the modern man who strives to purchase his own house.

Expatriation is the term used to describe a sense of alienation experienced by migrants. Among the aliens, they feel abandoned. Their ties to their communities, societies, religion, folklore, and other traditional arts were all preserved when they traveled to the foreign land. With every year that goes by, their passion for their own nation, family, and ethnic heritage wanes. It makes expats feel nostalgic. Since their new nation did not treat them with equality and love, all migrants feel a sense of nostalgia. They have turned away because of their race and color in the alien land. Their experience in a foreign country was challenging. They looked for their way home. A vital aspect of their lives is their home. It's not a spatial identity.

William Walsh aptly captures this image when he writes, “The substance of the novel has to do with the transformation of Mr. Biswas, a slave to place, history, and biography into a free man, the sign and realization of that emancipation being his house” (31–32). The inadequacies, lack of roots, and worthlessness of West Indian society are the subjects of Naipaul’s novels. Those who travel from one nation to another are known as expatriates. Unless they adjust to the new culture, they will not be able to live happily in their new environment. The main protagonists of the book feel dissatisfied and fragmented because they have no roots. They were trying to create a new identity after losing their old one. In the Green Vale, Mr. Biswas’ dream was not fulfilled. He feels exposed, dislocated, and inadequate because he has only ever finished one room. All he gets is a jumbled past and a disorganized future. A few characters have changed and are trying to fit in with the new society. Mrs. Tulsi and her relatives. Due to the constant attacks on her Hindu culture by Western society, Mrs. Tulsi adopted a non-Hindu Trinidadian way of life. Owad and Shekhar had entered a world where the only way to stay safe was through education (436).

In *A House for Mr. Biswas*, Naipaul explores the postcolonial struggle for identity. The house represents independence, individual freedom, and personal pleasure for him and his children. In the alien culture, he fulfills his desire to purchase a house. Naipaul admits that Indian immigrants in Trinidad had an ambiguous attitude. The diasporic people, having been displaced, sought to reclaim their original identity. Migrants unknowingly lose their collective identity when they emulate dominant cultures. They imitate the manners and lifestyles of other cultures and adapt to their surroundings. In the post-colonial state, they produce ambivalence, or an in-between state. Ambivalence plunges him into misery and estrangement. Mr. Biswas has long had a sense of incompleteness. Immigrants in foreign places feel unwelcome and segregated. They struggle to adjust to unfamiliar situations. They try to find comfort in their fantasies. Despite their presence in an unfavorable land, they lead a gloomy life. Their lives and struggles become the fundamental reality of the human condition of loneliness and powerlessness. Mr Biswas, in *A House for Mr Biswas*, is an expatriate in an alien society. Almost all of the characters in the novel have elements of Indian culture.

Indianness is evident in the attire and jewelry of Mr. Biswas and all other characters. Mr. Biswas represents the existential and stoic values of the Indian population in Trinidad. He frequently rebels and submits to events and fate, seeking ways to break free from the hegemonic powers of colonialism. Although the colonial framework takes on colorful and appealing shapes, its fundamental and intrinsic character remains constant, as Mr. Biswas has always understood it. He is constantly

searching for a secure identity of his own after being displaced after his father's death. Mr. Biswas is a worker because his father left him no property after his death.

Naipaul depicts the struggle of a working-class guy who wishes to possess his own home before dying. A House represents stability, self-respect, and individuality. Mr. Biswas was isolated from an early age, almost like an orphan, and he remains an outcast in Trinidadian society, never catching up with social trends. Naipaul addresses the modern man's challenge of retaining his personality while gaining and maintaining his integrity in the postcolonial world. A House for Mr. Biswas deals with indentured servitude, which is reflected in the lives of Naipaul's characters. He illustrates colonialism and how it influenced people's lives. People were placed into diverse tribes or races, resulting in a hybrid civilization. Every member of this hybrid civilization leads a deprived, rootless, and imitating life. A House for Mr. Biswas was written shortly following his Caribbean journey, and it illustrates the diaspora state of the East Indian population in Trinidad. This work is a comedy, but it is a gloomy comedy of life in which the protagonist depicts in existential terms the fight and survival of an individual in a world of drift. His literature is intended to communicate to the reader the experience of being expatriated and in exile. His heroes are constantly searching for a more dignified life. This search turns into a trap for them. The spirit of the author pervades his creation. It is reflected in every word he writes and every line he draws on paper.

V.S. Naipaul is a diasporic writer of mixed culture. Indian, Trinidadian, and English. He has skillfully depicted the composite figure through several characters in his work. There is a correlation between his characterization and theme network in his fiction. Throughout the story, the readers express a diaspora sensibility. In his novel A House for Mr. Biswas, Naipaul masterfully deals with the diaspora issue, including elements of expatriation and exile. In the formation of a thematic network characterization, story, place, and style all play important roles. The majority of the characters in A House for Mr. Biswas are expats from many faiths, communities, countries, and religions who live in a strange environment. Some characters, such as Shekhar and Owad, attempt to assimilate into the mixed culture. Some attempt to integrate into the new society by embracing Trinidadian ways of living. Some of them maintain their cultural identity while living in an alien society. Mrs. Tulsi exercises white despotism on her own people. In this novel, the writer thoroughly develops the diaspora theme, which includes elements of expatriation and exile.

Naipaul makes heavy use of symbols in his work A House for Mr. Biswas. Symbolism is a technique used by writers to assign special meanings to items, places, atmospheres, and actions. As a fictional construct, symbolism replaces reality.

Expatriate writers begin to construct characters that are increasingly metaphorical and symbolic as their distance from the mother nation deepens. Naipaul's characters appear to be always inclined to preserve their sense of exile. Mr. Biswas exemplifies the expatriate Hindu's desire for a home. It is the third world's rootlessness in general that drives the worldwide desire for a sense of belonging. V.S. Naipaul has three identities: Trinidadian Indian, West Indian in England, and foreigner in India. The home represents an identity for which every rootless individual strives. Even the chapter names have unique meanings and indicate different stages of the formation of such identity. Naipaul compares the psyches of East Indians and expats. They are discouraged and have lost hope while attempting to establish themselves in a strange environment. Even in the face of adversity, they strive to realize their unfulfilled aspirations. Shama was not totally satisfied after seeing her residence. She makes an adjustment to the situation. "Shama didn't complain. She didn't say anything. A House for Mr. Biswas is an attempt to realize unfulfilled dreams, which is common in third-world literature. "It seems that we will need to undertake a few repairs before moving" (573).

"Despite the solidity of their establishment the Tulsis had never considered themselves settled in Arwascas or even Trinidad" (390). Diaspora writers use symbols differently because they feel isolated and exiled as they continue to live away from their mother country. The demand to write self-consciously, with the idealization of "nostalgia," becomes very powerful and almost irritating. The expatriate novelist must recall folklore, myth, legends, and customs in order to "return home" to his racial and national worldview. The existence of folklore in Third World literature is significant because it serves as a living model for life even at the most mundane levels in extratraditional communities.

The name Hanuman House is symbolic; it is named after the monkey god, Hanuman, and serves the purpose of monkey business. It is similar to being in prison; the people who live there look dead and disturbed; it represents gloom and ruin; it is a place where ancient Hindu rituals are performed while the true spirit is disregarded; the old Hindu culture does not last long because of outside influences from other cultures; they celebrate "Christmas Day" and attract a lot of Christian tourists. "Well," said Biswas, "since I have lived in this residence." I begin to believe that in order to be a good Hindu, you must first be a good Roman Catholic" (125). The barracks also have a symbolic meaning in terms of regimentation. Mr. Biswas bought his own residence on Sikkim Street. It is a symbol of personal autonomy in which he plants flowers and trees and constructs a barrier. "His portion of the earth" (8). The novel's underlying tone is existential. He employs certain words, phrases, sentences,

and imagery. Words have significance in situations, and those situations require the ability to use language. He talks to a Negro builder, Mr. Maclean, and arranges for construction materials, but Mr. Biswas is unable to complete the project owing to a lack of funds. However, the house remains unfinished due to a lack of funds, and it will remain unfinished indefinitely, much like Mr. Biswas' unmet desire to own a home. Shashi Kamra notes in her book, "He was a society devoid of heroes." It was a multicultural immigrant, slave, colonial society with the drive 'and restlessness of immigrants'; it was a stunted society with forms of traditions and culture persisting but the core lost, submerged, destroyed, rendered meaningless and irrelevant" 5 (14). Naipaul's personal worries as a displaced man struggling for his life in a socially impoverished society serve as the basis for the setting of *A House for Mr. Biswas*.

Mr. Biswas, the main character in the book *A House for Mr. Biswas*, is a man without roots who is searching for a place to call home. The other characters in the story know they are in an alien world and know who they are. To create their own identity, they are looking for their ethnic and biological roots. Mr. Biswas portrays a dismal diasporic life throughout the story. Cultural crisis, rootlessness, fragmentation, frustration, and love for the motherland are all highlighted by the diasporic sensibility. A house is a constructive solution to the diaspora issue. Despite a protracted and upsetting battle, Mr. Biswas has succeeded in achieving his goal of home ownership. For a man with his limited and ordinary life, it is an amazing accomplishment. According to Mr. Biswas, a home is a representation of a person's national, cultural, and spiritual identity in addition to being a place to live.

V.S. Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas* revolves more than just a man's desire to have a home. It looks deeply into the themes of displacement, identity, and the quest for belonging. Mr. Biswas is a realistic portrayal of a character with diasporic features such as rootlessness, mimicry, alienation and cultural conflict. The narrative serves as a powerful metaphor for post-colonial life, set in the West Indies- a place where a small house is the representation of freedom, dignity, and self suffice. The sad and frustrating attempt of Mr. Biswas to claim his uniqueness against unchecked social control reflects the overwhelming feeling of the East Indian migrants in Trinidad who attempt to reclaim their roots in a foreign land.

Naipaul integrates individual and social stories, showing the effects of colonialism on the lives of migrants even after empires have been toppled. Naipaul's brand of literary magic, his use of symbol, existentialism, and social critique, captures the mundane struggles of finding a house as an inspiring statement on the ever-elusive hope of a diasporic facelessness and human existence. At the end of the day, Mr. Biswas' house is, in its own small and rude way, a monument to the human

spirit and determination—a sanctuary amid a chaotic world. The text stands as an everlasting testament to the unwritten memoirs of the unending journey for self-identity, belonging, and meaning amid perpetual Europe.

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