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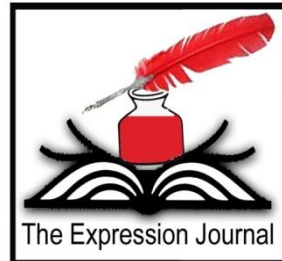
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**ALIENATED AND DISPLACED SELF IN V.S. NAIPAUL'S  
*A HOUSE FOR MR. BISWAS***

**Sarikhada Pradip  
Ph.D. English Scholar  
Rai University, Ahmedabad**

**Abstract**

V.S. Naipaul is the mouthpiece of the diasporic identity and the Eurocentric views. He is considered disloyal as he denies affiliating himself with any country in which he is considered to have his roots. He shows no sympathy for the poor rather he has a glance on them with a feeling of contempt. His novel *A House for Mr. Biswas* is a tragic-comic novel that explicitly deals with the internal turmoil of its central character, Mr. Mohun Biswas who finds himself entrapped after getting married with a girl named Shama whom he passes a love note under the sway of his whims. Soon, he is abreast of the stark reality that this family is a large joint family consisting around fifty members and it has a strange rule that the sons-in-law are kept in the house so that they may work on their estate as labourers. Mr. Biswas fails to compromise with his respect in this family and he is not at back and call of the Tulsis. He keeps quarreling with one or the other members of the family. He tries to build his own separate identity and he tries to own his house. After many unsuccessful efforts, he is able to have a house which he can call his own. V.S. Naipaul's search for his identity and his alienated self has been analyzed in this paper.

**Key-Words**

Naipaul, Diaspora, Mr. Biswas, Identity, Tulsis Family, Traditionalism, Alienation.



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V.S. Naipaul, the Nobel Laureate 2001, needs no introduction who has enriched English literature with many of his fictions, non-fictions and short-stories, in all more than thirty books over some fifty years of his writing career. His full name is a Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul. He was born on 17 August in Chaguanas, Trinidad and Tobago. Naipaul's grandfather belonged to Benares (Varanasi), Uttar Pradesh and they migrated to Trinidad to work as indentured labourers on the sugar estate. Naipaul's famous novels are *The Mystic Masseur* (1957), *The Suffrage of Elvira* (1958), *Miguel Street* (1959), *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961), *The Mimic Men* (1967), *A Bend in the River* (1979), *Half a Life* (2001), and its sequel *Magic Seeds* (2004). He has written two short-story collections and a few travelogues and history books. His latest published work is *The Masque of Africa* (2010).

Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas* is a novel about its central character Mohun Biswas who strives for his identity since his childhood. When the novel opens, there is a quarrel between his father, Raghu and mother, Bipti. She heads towards her mother Bissoondaye's home with her three children where she gives birth to Mr. Biswas. Thus, since the birth of Mr. Biswas the environment was not good for him. He was born in a wrong way with six fingers. Even the midwife speaks about him, "But what sort of boy? Six-fingered and born in a wrong way." (11) Neither Bipti's father nor her mother is happy on the birth of Mohun. Bissoondaye says, "I knew it. There is no luck for me. (12) When Pundit Sitaram was called to tell about his future, he told that the boy won't be good for his parents. He says, "the boy

will be a lecher and a spendthrift. Possibly a liar as well. (12) Pundit says about his six fingers that he should be kept away from trees and water as it is not a good sign, "That's a shocking sign, of course. The only thing I can advise is to keep him away from trees and water, particularly water. He is called an unlucky sneeze for them, "They never forgot that he was an unlucky child and that his sneeze was particularly unlucky." (16) Everybody thinks negative about him and his father Raghu curses him saying, "This boy will make us paupers." (17) When he grows young, he is given the duty to graze Dhari's cow. One day he misses it somewhere and hides himself in fear. His father thinks that he may be in pond and in the rescue effort, Raghu himself drowned. After the death of his father, Bipti has to sell her hut and the land to Dhari. Thus, Mr. Biswas and his family have no place to live in. the only hut has been sold. Mr. Biswas' luck was not in his favour. He became a homeless wanderer:

And so Mr. Biswas came to leave the only house to which he has some right. For the next thirty-five years he was to be a wanderer with no place he could call his own. (38)

Mr. Biswas proves more unlucky when his land is sold to Dhari at a cheaper rate but later this place was found rich with oil. It was a big loss to the family. Now the family is divided as his sister, Dehuti starts living as a servant in Tara's home and Mr. Biswas lives with his mother in a hut and admits in Lal's school. Mr. Biswas is sent to Pundit Jairam so that he may become a pundit. He teaches Mr. Biswas Hindi and gives him knowledge of scriptures. But one day when he had a nature call at night, he fears from the darkness as the latrine was far from the house and he defiles Jairam's the cherished oleander tree. To see this Jairam loses his control and says:

I was talking the other day to Sitaram, who had read your horoscope. You killed your father. I'm not going to let you destroy me. Sitaram particularly warned me to keep you away from trees. Go on, pack your bundle. (55)

Thereafter, he tries to become a sign painter. One day he goes to Hanuman House in Arwacas to paint signs for the Tulsi store. While working, he notices a sixteen year old girl named Shama. She had medium height but had fine features. He falls in love with her by her smile, "... he was enchanted by her smile." (82). One day, he passes a love letter to her. It wrote, "*I love you and I want to talk to you*" (85) but unfortunately, this letter falls in the hands of Mrs. Tulsi who calls him in her home. Then, she and her brother-in-law, Sethe ask him if he likes the girl and Mr. Biswas, under pressure, replies affirmatively. When he says yes, Mrs. Tulsi also says: "That's the main thing. Are we forcing you?" (91)

Mrs. Tulsi finds Mr. Biswas' Brahmin caste suitable for marriage as they were also Brahmin. And this way their marriage is fixed. Mr. Biswas thinks that it is a very rich family and he

expects a high dowry from Tulsis. He even thinks to give up the idea of sign painting, “Good family, you know. Money. Acres and Acres of land. No more sign painting for me.” (93) But to his great dismay, Mrs. Tulsi doesn’t spend any money on the marriage as the marriage is done in the court and he is not given any penny for his sign painting for Tulsi store.

Mr. Biswas’ dreams are shattered when circumstances force him to stay in the Tulsis’ home as a labourer. It was a very large family and he finds that all the sons-in-law live in this big house. He is given a big room in the Tulsi family and he starts living there. He doesn’t do any work and eats from Mrs. Tulsi’s house absolutely free. He finds many faults in the eating habits and living-style of the Tulsi. Mr. Biswas is unable to stay in the house and he starts quarrelling with Shama and leaves Tulsi house without Shama.

Mr. Biswas doesn’t tell anybody in his home that he has married secretly. He has just told to her mother that he is going outside for some work and will be back after some days. From Hanuman House, Mr. Biswas goes to her Aunt Tara’s house and returns to Tulsi family again at the advice of his aunt Tara. After returning, he finds that there seems no difference of his presence or absence in Tulsi family as nobody pays any attention to him. Even his wife, Shama also passed comments to him that he has returned just because he must have tired from catching crabs. Here, he feels his real worth that life is not so easy for him without own home. He thinks to make his own home as Ghosh postulates, “The protagonist’s feeling for his own house is similar to that of a soldier who has won a long and difficult war.” (Ghosh 584) Mr. Biswas becomes a rejected member in the Tulsi family. He doesn’t prove a good husband as he proves stubborn, fickle-minded and gullible. He has married Shama for his bright future but here he finds a shocking environment as Cudjoe observes:

Mr. Biswas entered the world of Tulsis unaware that his romantic ego would be crushed by a hierarchical order that did not allow for the expression of the individuality.” (Cudjoe 54)

Mr. Biswas is a man who holds his esteem very high and he does not succumb to the Tulsi family. He doesn’t want to live life at the mercy of Tulsi family. He even does not obey them as he thinks that obeying them would be like being their servant. When Shama tells him that Uncle Sethe wants to see him he replies, “I ain’t got a damned thing. But I not going down to see Uncle. I not at his beck and call, like everybody else in the house.” (109) Mr. Biswas doesn’t behave decently with the members of the Tulsi family. He calls Mrs. Tulsi ‘an old hen’, Mr. Seth ‘a bull’ and Shama’s younger brothers ‘two little monkeys and he calls that Hanuman House is not an ordinary house, it is a zoo which has many animals, “Eh, monkey, bull, cow, hen. The place is a like a blasted zoo, man” (123) He questions if it is a family: “Family, Family? This blasted fowlrun, you calling family?” (106)

Mr. Biswas tries to take other brothers-in-law in his confidence. Mr. Biswas thinks it very bad that Tulsi family is a Brahmin family and then why his children also are given non-vegetarian food in such a sacred caste. He doesn't like this being a Brahmin. One day he gargles, and deliberately throws water of his mouth on Shama's brother, Owad but luckily he misses the mark: "O God! You luck little monkey" (136). When another son-in-law, Govind comes to know about this, he beats him very savagely and Mr. Sethe banishes him from his Hanuman House:

I don't think we could stand you here any longer. You want to paddle your own canoe. All right, go ahead and paddle...This was a nice united family before you come. You better go away before you do any more mischief and I have to lay my hand on you. (Naipaul 144)

Mr. Biswas shifts to 'The Chase' with his wife but his wife is not satisfied with him. Biswas and Shama both keep quarrelling because Shama always favours the Tulsis and Mr. Biswas has special hatred for the Tulsis. He has known the philosophy of her family members very well. He says, "I tell you what your philosophy is. Catch him. Marry him. Throw him in a coal barrel. That is the philosophy of your family. Catch him and throw him in a coal barrel." (546)

Thus, Mr. Biswas' life becomes a struggle for him. He keeps changing his homes at pelts until he builds his own house. Mr. Biswas feels a change in the attitude of Shama when Mr. Biswas buys his own home. She starts cooperating with him as she finds them not the only pebble at the beach. In this way, they have a sigh of relief after owning their home till the death of Mr. Biswas. Throughout the novel, Mr. Biswas proves an alienated self who lives aloof and segregated throughout his life and ultimately succeeds to fulfill the dream of owning his house.

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