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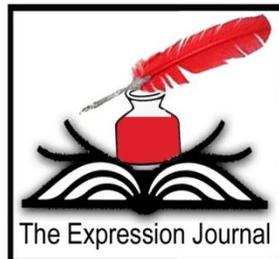
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MOHUN'S QUEST FOR SELF IN V.S. NAIPAUL'S *A HOUSE FOR MR BISWAS: AN ANALYSIS*

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Abstract

Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul is a renowned Trinidad-born writer, essayist, short-story and travelogue writer who later settled in England and found his withered roots in India also. Having his claim in three different countries, Naipaul fails to assert his anchorage in any of the three countries because he finds himself as an outsider in any country. Critics have steered him with the goads due to his controversial remarks and some of his works also have objectionable issues. Naipaul has provoked their censure because he has criticized both India and Trinidad, his ancestral land and his birthplace respectively. He became very disenchanted when he notices his economically backward and shrunken Ramachandra in Uttar Pradesh. Naipaul has written how his father, Seepersad was a source of inspiration to him and he has written his Nobel Prize winning novel *A House for Mr Biswas* on the basis of this novel in which his father, Seepersad has been narrated through the character of Mohun Biswas and his son, Anand is in the role of Vidiadhar himself. The life of Mohun Biswas, the central character of this novel oscillates between his wife, Shama's home and his own imaginary home which he builds and sheds every day in his fancy world. Mohun's development from a childhood to a responsible married man and his quest for his own self represented through his home is the central motif and objective of this paper so that his character may be analyzed from many perspectives.

Key-Words

Self, Identity, Naipaul, Mohun Biswas, Diaspora, *A House For Mr Biswas*.

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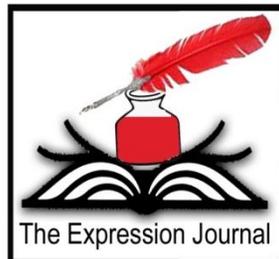
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V.S. Naipaul's well-appraised novel *A House for Mr Biswas* reflects a great narration how Naipaul describes Trinidadian society. In this novel much part is autobiographical while some incidences are quite fictitious. He has depicted the character of his father Seepersad, a journalist but in the novel as a sign-painter. The novel has its central character Mr Biswas who feels homeless, placeless and rootless as his father felt insecure, placeless and homeless in the Caribbean society when he lived in his wife's house with her joint family. This novel also traces the development of Mr Biswas and his search for his own home and identity. Mohun Biswas, the main male character of V.S. Naipaul's Nobel Prize winning novel *A House for Mr Biswas* deals with his quest for identity whose life since his birth becomes problematic. When Naipaul was born he was born with six fingers and in the wrong way. That's why his birth is considered inauspicious and ill-fated in the family and the other people are not happy with the birth of a male child. Otherwise it is a general conception that the members of the family distribute sweet at the birth of a male baby.

When the pundit is called, he warns the family that this boy is dangerous for his father and can become the cause of death of his parents and will become spendthrift or lecher. The pundit's prophecy comes true when Mohun's father, Raghu is drowned in the pond searching Mohun in the pond. In this way, Mohun is held responsible for the death of his father as Saru is held responsible for her brother's death who also gets drowned in a pond in Shashi Deshpande's novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. Raghu drowns and Mohun becomes fatherless and faces the first grim phase of identity crisis. Naipaul's father, Seepersad also dies in 1953 and by this time Naipaul was only graduated from Oxford but he was jobless. Naipaul has narrated his own story but in a different way.

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Mohun's phase of life takes a new turn when he becomes a sign painter and one day he goes to the Hanuman House. This house was called as Hanuman House because there was an idol of Lord Hanuman and Mr. Tulsi, a pundit has founded it and died later in a motor-car accident and now his wife, a strong woman named Mrs Tulsi runs the household with her brother-in-law, Seth. Mr Biswas gets a job as a sign painter in this house because of his nationality—as he was an Indian and above all a Brahmin. The house where Mohun goes as a sign painter was well-known for its aristocracy and their pious religion, “The Tulsis have some reputation among Hindus as a pious, conservative, landowning family. Other communities who knew nothing about Pundit Tulsis, had heard about pundit Tulsi, the founder of the family. He had been one of the first to be killed in a motor car accident...” (HFMB 81). It was a very conservative family and the outsiders were not allowed in it. Mr Biswas enters here just due to his nationality and his Hindu religion that coincidentally matches with them. Coincidentally, Mohun notices a sixteen-year-old girl named Shama in this house whom he starts liking and falls in love with her at the first sight. Mr Biswas turns crazy to see the girl and passes a love note to her one day seeking her love proposal, “I love you and I want to talk to you” (HFMB 85) which, as his bad luck, falls in the hand of Mrs. Tulsi. She was a very crooked, sophisticated and powerful woman in this family. She immediately calls for Mr Biswas through Seth who approaches to Mr Biswas before his relieving time. Mr Biswas was in the state of utter bewilderment and he reaches at the Hanuman House where Mrs. Tulsi was already waiting for him. Mrs Tulsi behaves much different than his expectations as he is offered tea there and she and Seth ask him whether he likes the girl. Here the conversation goes between them:

‘What is the matter? You don’t like the child?’

‘Yes’, Mr. Biswas said helplessly, ‘I like the child.’

‘That is the main thing’, Seth said, ‘We don’t want you to force you to do anything. Are we forcing you?’ (HFMB 91)

Mr Biswas has been shown like an innocent boy who does not know much about marriage and the associated tensions and responsibilities. Mohun gets convinced by Mrs Tulsi and Seth that they want to marry him with the girl he is in love. Mr Biswas gets surprised to hear such words from them and he could not say no to this marriage proposal for his own reasons. He was at fault moreover he comes under the sway of the luxurious life of the Tulsi family and he becomes greedy that he will get a good amount of property as a dowry. Biswas’ own dreams to get a good life in future by this marriage are badly shattered and his greed is explicit from his own words when he tells Aleck, “Good family, you know. Money, acres and acres of land. No more sign painting for me....Rich people you know. Big house! (HFMB 93) Mrs. Tulsi talks to him smilingly and Mr Biswas also does not want to lose this opportunity of becoming a groom of a wealthy family. In this way, Mohun Biswas becomes the slaves of his own desires. As per plan, Shama and Mohun’s marriage

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is fixed in the registrar's office and he is not given any rich dowry. He is given just free residence in the Tulsi household and free meals. But Naipaul gets dumbfounded to see that other brother-in-laws also live there and they work at Mrs. Tulsi's sugarcane estate. Dr. Amar Nath Prasad writes in this regard, "In the house men were needed for two reasons—husbands for Tulsi's daughters as well as laborers for Tulsi's estate" (Prasad 05). Mr Biswas does not tell the news of his marriage even to the members of his family and relatives and all come to know about it only after his marriage. When Naipaul comes to realize that he has been blindfolded in this marriage. It was the total loss of identity for Mr Biswas because he was cut off from his family as well he was now a married man and there was no bright future that was waiting for him. Mohun has taken this step in immaturity which becomes a cause of great failure in his life. He was in love even without knowing how to love as is clear from it, "He didn't embrace or touch her. He wouldn't have known, besides, how to begin, with someone who had not spoken a word to him" (HFMN 98). In this way his immaturity brings disaster to him. Mohun does not compromise with his own identity and he decides to work independently and clearly refuses to work at the Tulsi estate becoming a part of the Tulsis like other brother-in-laws, "Their names were forgotten; they became Tulsis" (HFMB 98).

Mr Biswas does not get any cooperation from his wife also and she also quarrels with him when he criticizes the members of her family. She also knows the financial condition of her husband well and she also passes sarcastic comments to him saying that "You come to this house with nothing but a pair of cheap khaki trousers and a dirty old shirt" (99). Mr Biswas tries to other brothers-in laws in this regard. When he talks with Govind, one of the son-in-laws of Mrs. Tulsi and Shama's brother-in-law, he tell him that he does not feel any shame to work under Mrs. Tulsi and Seth and all the members of the house are good and he does not see any fault with them. Govind suggests Mr. Biswas to give up sign painting and work under Mrs Tulsi but Mr. Biswas is never ready for it. He says "Give up sign painting? And my independence. No boy. My motto is; paddle your own canoe" (108). Mr. Biswas starts calling names for the members of Mrs Tulsi and he calls Mrs Tulsi a hen, "Ro-man Cat-o-lic! Roman Cat, the bitch" (120) and calls this family a zoo. When Shama's younger brother, Owad comes to tell Mohan that he should apologize for his demeanour. Mr Biswas tell Owad, "The whole pack of you could go to hell, I not going to apologize to one of the damn lot of you" (Naipaul 113) and he spits his food on Owad one day. Owad comes to Mrs Tulsi and complains her for Mr. Biswas has done to him. Govind was listening to it and when he came to know about this step of Mr. Biswas, he loses his temper completely and he beats Mr. Biswas very badly with kicks and blows and Mr. Biswas keeps crying but nobody comes for his rescue so seriously. Mr Biswas also gets stupefied by this beating and he also gets very frightened and cries in pain, "O God! I dead. I dead. He will kill me" (139). This incidence gives another turning point in his life as Mr.

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Biswas does not eat Mrs Tulsi's meals and Seth also knows that Mr. Biswas will create problem one by one so he sends him out of the Hanuman House from where Mohun's life takes a different turn.

After this Mohun Biswas lives at Green Vale and may other places in the search of his house but he fails in his efforts as he is neither financially stable nor gets a very good job so that he may buy a new house for him. He is not able to settle in his life any time. It is the only near his death that he is able to buy a simple house and ultimately gets his own identity.

Naipaul has projected his father's identity crisis in this novel and Cudjoe finds Naipaul's migrant identity in the "self-exile" (190) as Naipaul feels exilic in any country he belongs to. Michael Gorra observes about Mr. Biswas homelessness, "Yet the homelessness of such characters is primarily a psychic and not a physical condition. For the title figure of *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961), Naipaul's richest evocation of "unhousing," that shattering absence of home can be taken more literally. (64)

As a conclusion, it can be stated that Naipaul's this novel traces may autobiographical themes and the quest for identity through his search for an exquisite home. Fawzia Mustafa narrates about this novel, "*A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961) explores the matrilineal and matrilineal tensions within the kinship system on the cusp of change... (Mustafa 32) and the novel does not deal with the frustrations and dilemma of one character is throws light Mr. Biswas' isolated and discontented self as Kerry McSweeney also observes:

A House for Mr Biswas is the life story of an unexceptional man different from the other members of his community only in his dissatisfaction with the conditions of his life and his longing for something better. The events in his life are framed by the domiciles of others in which he has to live, and the focus of his longing is simply a house of his own. (McSweeney 166)

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