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Quest for Identity and Survival in V S Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas*

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Introduction:

Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul was born on 17th August 1932 at Chaguanas, Trinidad. He is known for his comic novels set in Trinidad. Naipaul has published more than 30 books both of fiction and nonfiction. His best known works are *A House for Mr. Biswas*, *In a Free State* and *A Bend in The River*. He was awarded the Booker prize in 1971 and Nobel Prize in 2001. *A House for Mr. Biswas* tells the story of its protagonist; he experienced a new life at every step of his life. *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961), Naipaul took inspiration from childhood memories of his father. Mr. Biswas seemed fated from his birth to be a victim of circumstances and misfortune. Poverty and despondence hang out his life throughout. But he refuses to give up his ambition of owning a house and so build another during the Port of Spain phase of his life. *A House* as a metaphor works throughout the novel. He is known as a cosmopolitan writer. He is unhappy about the cultural and spiritual life of Trinidad, he feels disgruntle from India and in England.

In the interview with Roland Bryden in 1973, Naipaul remarked, "*all my works are really one I am really writing one big book. I come to the conclusion that, considering the nature of the society I came from, considering the nature of the world, I have stepped in and the world, I have to look at, I could not be a professional novelist in the old sense.*"

One of the best-known writers of post imperialism society are Naipaul, the accomplished novelist from the English speaking Caribbean, once commented on the contents of his literary works, "*I feel that any statement that I make about my own work would be misleading. The work is there: the reader must see what meaning, if any the work has for him. All I would like to say is that I consider my non-fiction as integral part of my work*"

In stories and novels, Naipaul depicted the actual societies and its rituals and taboos. This novel presented a different look of Biswas's life – sign painting, journalism and literary attempts to describe the alienation of Biswas. Besides humor the novel portrays the dark glimpses of social and ethical life of Trinidad. At the initial of the novel Mohun Biswas has depicted as a marginalized individual in an isolated world of Trinidad. The protagonist wants to free himself from the complicated custom and religion.

Accordingly, Peter Nazareth (1977:148) in his study, "The Mimic Men as a study of corruption" acquiesces that: Such a society understandably has no inner values. It merely copies its way of life from western consumer society... it is dazzled by the glitter of luxuries. It admires only success. Biswas tells the story of its protagonist, from birth to death, each section dealing with different circumstances of Mr. Biswas's life.

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 any one groups of people can dominate another at all.

Mr. Biswas faced lot of problems, including questioning for self identity and isolation. Humiliation and violence of a protagonist is presented as a psychological truma of misfortunate : “ *the world Naipaul sees is of course no void at all”: it’s a world dense with physical and social phenomena, brutally alive with the complications and contradictions of actual human endeavours This world of Naipaul is in fact incharged with what can only be described as a romantic view of reality, an almost unbearable tension between the idea and the physical fact” .*

Poverty and desperation haunted his life throughout. After his father dies, his family moves in with his mother's sister, Tara. The family is disintegrated and Mr.Biswas was introduced to schooling and successive odd jobs. He was an assistant to Pundit Jayaram whose cruel treatment was without any match. Mr.Biswas was punished for eating two bananas. He was to eat all the remaining bananas. Later, while working in a rum shop,' he was wrongly accused of stealing one dollar and was mercilessly beaten. He is humiliated and beaten by Tara's brother-in-law Bhandat. 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."

So his quest for a home becomes first of all a personal search for identity and purpose and secondly, a need to reinstate himself within the warm, integrated form of a family. The house symbolically accommodates both these needs. In marrying Shama on Mrs. Tulsi's terms, Biswas renders to the deep Hindu humiliation of assuming the ritualistic female role by living with his wife's family. He joins the faceless group of "the husbands, Under Seth's supervision, worked on the Tulsi land, looked after the Tulsi animals, and served in the store.

Naipaul’s cool, cumulative ironies make clear, success bought at the expenses of spirit and through an evasion that means fraudulence and betrayal must count paradoxically as the grandest of failures of isolation is farmore damaging than the insulation of those who fail.”

In return, they were given food, shelter and a little money; their children were looked after; and they were treated with respect by people outside because they were connected with the Tulsi family. Their names were forgotten; they became Tulsis. Materially Shekhar has gained much; culturally and psychologically, he has lost just as much. On the other hand, a clearer demonstration of Owad’s petty, self-centered mind, his heartless and cruel belittling of Anand before the entire family; his agony condemnation of what he terms Anand’s conceited “selfishness and egocentricity” is pure irony. It takes him very little time to find his

“right place” in society. He becomes part of the new elite” released from both the Hindu and Creole world of Trinidad.

Conclusion:

In the nutshell we can say that Naipual’s protagonist belongs to a simple background and faces many problems as he enters in the world of reality. Mr. Biswas knows the reality of life when he suffered with the harsh treatment of society. Mr. Biawas is a universal character with full of emotion and depicted in the novel. Through this memory and experiences he presented the true picture of Trinidad society. Mohan Biswas’s love for natural human liberty and individuality inspire him to fight against the lifeless rotten rituals, myths and customs of degenerated Brahmin cultural systems represented by the Tulsis in the novel.

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