



## Identity Crisis and Pangs of Rootlessness In

### “A House for Mr. Biswas”

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#### *Abstract*

Quest for identity has been a drive common to all species. Being more advanced in the process of evolution humans craves more for self actualization and recognition. Post colonial fiction gave voice to this drive, intensified due to Migration or Displacement. Migrants are often found struggling with the problem of ‘Identity crisis. As we know that writers play a major role to present the mirror of society and Indian-English diasporic writers have successfully presented the struggle and fight of migrated people. Thus this paper deals with the above subject with special reference to the work of V.S Naipaul. The term “identity crises “basically refers to ‘Human Psychology’.

V.S Naipaul is one of the prominent diaspora writers among all the writers who have accomplished their works on migration and migrated people. This paper expresses the plight and sufferings for ‘identity’ of migrants. This paper focuses on ‘A House for Mr. Biswas’ (1961). It is a master piece of V.S Naipaul and it includes autobiographical elements as well.

**Key words: Identity, Homelessness, Cross Culture, Nostalgia and Belonging.**

#### *Introduction*

Vidiya Suraj Prasad Naipaul is a prominent writer who powerfully has portrayed the pangs of separation and struggle for identity through the central character. His works like ‘Mimic Men,’ ‘A Bend In The River’, ‘In A Free State’, ‘An Area of Darkness’, ‘Among The Believers’, and his



master piece 'A House For Mr. Biswas' all catch the same tune. In all these he presented a character who fights for identity and tries to search his roots.

V.S Naipaul himself has faced migration from his native place thus he understands the plight of migrated people and fight of their existence. Homi Bhabha asserts:

'Colonial discourse wants the colonized to be alike, but by no means identical. If there were an absolute equivalence between the two, then the ideologies justifying colonial rule would be unable to operate. This is because this ideology assumes that there is structural non-equivalence, a split between superior and inferior which explains why any one group of people can dominate another at all.'(HUDDARTH).

Naipaul has a strong and close relation with India and Indians, and this relation makes a bridge to understand the struggle of Indian migrants. Therefore Naipaul's work presents three basic themes— Psychological, historical and Social displacement of diaspora people. V.S Naipaul has performed valuable and immortal role to present postcolonial writings. He presents the consequences to enter into the third world (migrated place), where the person tries hard to adopt the new-ambience but simultaneously feels isolated and displaced. The position of migrated people presents miserable conditions.

According to Tyson in *Critical Theory Today*, diaspora is a population of the colonized descendants who were separated from their native homeland. (Tyson).

Unwillingly they have to follow all the norms of an alien country including their culture. They wish to get something worthy, something fruitful from this alien land but they get only 'isolation' and crisis for their own identity.

In the words of Homi Bhabha "Cultural and political identity is constructed through a process of othering' serve history of involvement takes secondary place and minority discourse originates'

### ***Identity and Sickness of Home***

A House for Mr. Biswas (1961) mainly deals with the obstacle of isolation, frustration, identity crisis and adjustment with different culture. The protagonist of the novel named Mohun Biswas, is unfortunate since his birth and from that time itself tries to find his identity because he has been neglected in his own family and society. He gets bitter experiences in the process to find his identity. In this fiction "House" is the most significant symbol, because house gives physical and



emotional shelter to all humans. In the novel the protagonist searches his own house and his searching depicts emotional slavery.”Mr. Biswas, a boy with six fingers in palm describes the world as ‘six fingered and born in the wrong way’.

“First of all, the feature of this unfortunate boy. He will have good teeth but that will be rather wide, and there will be spaces between them. I suppose you know that means”<sup>17</sup>

(Naipaul<sup>12</sup>).

Mr. Biswas, central character of the novel does not feel secure emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually. He has his own parental family despite he being neglected and humiliated in all the aspects. His family treats him as an unlucky boy, according to his family and orthodox society he is having bad luck and he carries misfortune for his family and his family suffers drastically because of him.

Mr. Biswas feels isolated and under such cramped situation. He tells his son, “I am just somebody nobody at all” (284). Mr. Biswas’ father and brother kept their identity as labourers but Mr. Biswas could not accept the same. He was in quest of identity and individuality.

He wants to do something different to make his own identity, thus he constantly looks for a respectable job. Finally he became a sign painter. After getting married to Shama who is the daughter of Tulsi, he stays in “Hanuman House”, A house of Tulsi provides him food and shelter but he loses his identity. In this novel, “Hanuman House” is described as:

“[...] Hanuman House stood like an alien white fortress. The walls looked as thick as they were and when the narrow doors of Tulsi’s store on the ground floor were closed the House became bulky, impregnable and blank. The side walls were window less and on the upper floor the window were more slits in the facades”. (81)

Hanuman House provides accommodation and physical comfort but Mr. Biswas feels himself unwanted. He could not make himself comfortable and found himself workless in the House. He could never find warmth of relations and coziness there. Unwillingly he follows all the rules and domination as a price of his survival.

### ***Cross Culture and Rootlessness***



Culture is the most dominant theme of this novel. Mr. Biswas has adjusted with the alien culture at “Hanuman House”. Apparently Hanuman House originally believed in Hindu religion same as that of Mr. Biswas, but the people of Hanuman House follow the Christian culture because they want to enhance their status in Trinidad. Culture plays a vital role to find someone’s identity but when one culture dominates over the other one, and then unpleasant consequences like cultural clash and identity crisis followed by rootlessness take place.

People of Hanuman House speak English but actually they don’t want to speak English, They celebrate Christmas instead of Indian festivals, it’s a matter of their survival because they all live in an alien country. To survive in such an environment they have to adopt different culture. The multicultural society never offers stability to their present and no hopes for their future.

Mohan Biswas wants to get his own Indian identity, his own roots from where he belonged, therefore he decides to leave Hanuman House and get a job. Biswas wants his own house, own freedom, own culture. He announces to his mother in law: “I am going to get a job on my own and I am going to get own house too. I am finished with this”. (67)

Biswas does not want to follow Tulsidoms’ mechanical hierarchy. He wants liberty and independence. In Tulsidom felt low and faced all humiliation as a price of survival. Finally at the age of 38 when he is the father of 4 children, he pretty much succeeded to find his identity in this alien cultural world. The novel is a journey from pessimism with optimistic approach. Novel ends with a pessimistic note that at the age of 40 Biswas died with heart attack but at last he found his identity as his own house.

### **Concluding remarks:**

“A House for Mr. Biswas” truly is a masterpiece of Naipaul. His realistic approach towards the central character makes it immortal. Though the novel ends on a sad note yet it probes deep into human psychology, frustration followed by alienation and above all an unceasing optimistic struggle in search of identity.

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