

## The Psychological Conflicts in V S Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas*

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**Abstract:** *This article focuses on the representation of the psychological conflicts with reference to V S Naipaul's A House for Mr. Biswas. Naipaul's novel provides authentic information about the actual life conditions, social institutions and cultural organizations during the time of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It presents issues of ethics and the Psychological Conflicts that relevant even today.*

*The present paper is an attempt to study of peoples' life with socio-psychological perspective and explore the internal conflicts and psychic imbalance through his epic like creation A House for Mr. Biswas (1961). For people, the damage in conscious arises in a form of tension of an individual and society which is the outcome of various displacement and cultural diversities. Due to Inter- psychic conflict, some symptoms of socio psychological conflicts can be visualized in the character resulted in emotional distance, bewilderment and frustration of human psyche.*

**Key Words:** *Psychological conflicts, Identity crises, alienation, slavery and domination.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION:

V. S. Naipaul was born in Trinidad in 1932. Beginning in 1950 he spent four years at University College, Oxford and afterward settled in London where he began his career as a writer. Naipaul has won the Somerset Maugham Award, the Booker Prize, the David Cohen British Literature Award, and many other honors. Naipaul's writings represent hostile conditions of a Creole society which is far away for the expatriate individual to feel any sense of belongingness. This is the situation where an individual's life is socially and culturally estranged and authentic identity becomes as unattainable task.

Naipaul's works also delineate constant clashes among the societies in postcolonial world to put light on the unending collision of the culture and the problems of human adjustment in the new social-milieu. *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961) describes the story of a homeless and rootless immigrant who lacks identity and security in the colonial world. It also explores various causes and result of psychological dilemma faced by people out of their native land. Social, cultural and psychological aspects of an individual and a society are major aspects of this book. *A House for Mr. Biswas* is episodic and packed with Psychological conflicts.

After his father dies, his family moves in with his mother's sister, Tara and 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 (1961:64). Here, too, his son Anand excels in school and shows signs of talent as a writer. But Mr. Biswas's fortunes suffer several reversals and it is not until the very end of his life that he is finally able to buy a house—only to find the experience much different than he had imagined.

Each of these houses is for Mr. Biswas an attempt at solving a problem and each is a wrong answer in a different way. In the long search for this accommodation: what and why having been answered in the prologue, the novel's course is about the how – Mr. Biswas finds various lesser stratagems in which he can be temporarily housed. Mr. Biswas faces many humiliations, but is rarely shorn of the modicum of dignity the honorific guarantees. In the days that followed Mr. Biswas was treated with attention and respect.

The realism of the human interactions throughout the novel is similarly irresistible. All characters are convincingly themselves and yet all are contained in the arc of the novel, brought in to play their parts in the story of Mr. Biswas's life. His principal foes are his mother-in-law, Mrs. Tulsi, and her brother-in-law, Seth. They hold grudges against him, and he out-grudges them.

He bickers, insults, mocks. His wife, Shama, no fool, plays both sides skillfully, siding with her husband sometimes, abandoning him at other times. Some of these battles of will Mr. Biswas wins, others he loses. Pointless impasse is common. *A House for Mr. Biswas* hums along to the interweaving tunes of these several discords. *A House for Mr. Biswas* exposes colonial conditions, individual's dilemma and protagonist's constant revolt against inimical forces within the society which makes Biswas as an aggressive rebellion persona.

His revolting nature enables him to justify his harsh, inhuman and unpleasant acts that occurred in his life “‘I am going to get a job of my own. And I am going to get my own House too. I am finished with this.’ He waved his aching arm about the mud walls and the low, sooty thatch” (1961: 66). After being insulted by Pundit jairam, his first teacher, he falls in a state of shock and his conversation with his mother indicates the beginning of his neurotic persona, rage, disorder and depression, “. . . his resolution is shaken. ‘I am not going to take any job at all’, he told Bipti. . . . ‘I don’t want to see Tara. I am going to kill myself. His life at Tulsi House is shattered as he becomes an unwanted insider who soon trapped in the powerful social hierarchy of Tulsi, “Mr. Biswas had no money or position. He was expected to become a Tulsi. At one he rebelled” (1961: 99). His life begins with, “. . . silence, stares, hostility and perhaps little fears” (1961: 103).

The lack of proper alliances in the family develops him as an alienated, one who rejects in order to escape from the repressive world of Tulsi to create his own independent world. In *Chase*, like a neurotic he suddenly loses self control: He. . . . lost his temper. ‘What the hell you think I look like?. . . . And what the hell for I should get Hari to come and bless this place? This place? Look for yourself.’ He pointed to the kitchen and slapped the wall of the shop. ‘Is bad enough as it is. To feed your family on top of all this is really going too damn far (1961: 152).

He could hear them next door and all down the barracks. No road was without them, no House. They were in news perhaps on the wall, in the photographs, in the simple drawing in advertisements. They were in the book he was holding. They were in all books (1961: 277). Fear and depression overtake Mr. Biswas and makes him a neurotic persona of disorderly behaviours, “He grew his nail to an extreme length. . . . He picked and squeezed at his face until his cheeks and forehead was like welts. His neurotic reaction can also be seen when his daughter’s dolls house was broken by others, “He ran back to the House. The edge of a wall scraped against his shoulder, tearing his shirt and tearing the skin below” (1961: 228). He loses self control and continues with loud screams, weeping and harsh words to his wife.

The mental disorder pushes him in a state of nervous breakdown that ultimately ends with depression, dereliction and continuous mental shock. In the Green Vale, Mr. Biswas, in a fit of disorder makes many dangerous and imaginative plans to cut himself away from family and social responsibilities: He decided he had to get rid of Anand and Savi and himself, in such a way that the children would never know who had killed them. All morning he was possessed of vision in which he cutlasses, poisoned, strangled, burned, Anand and Savi; so that even before they came his relationship with them had been perverted (1961: 284-85)

Naipaul has presented schizoid personality of Mr. Biswas and the variation of his mind. A schizoid sometime becomes a ‘social-alienated’, one who develops withdrawal tendency as he finds himself strange in home, “He found four children on his bed. They were not his. Thereafter he occupied his room early in the evening, bolted the door refused to answers knocks, calls, scratches and cries” (379-80). He is an expatriate whose constant failure makes him neurotic and schizoid who wants to withdraw as family, “. . . noticed Mr. Biswas’s stillness, his silence, his withdrawal. He did not complain about noise; he discouraged, but gently, all effort to engage him in conversation; he went alone for long night walks” (508). In a schizophrenic mood, everything seems to him the object of hatred, “He wanted to climb mountains, to exhaust him, to walk and walk and never return to the House, to the empty tent, the dead fire-holes, the disarranged furniture” (382).

There are various occasions which reflect Biswas’s schizoid habits of talking to unseen person with his anger, sudden cries; weeping and violent reactions unveil his split personality. He was ‘trapped’ in a ‘hole.’ Trap,’ she heard him say over and over. ‘That’s what you and your family do to me. The concept of alienation has intrigued and troubled many sociologists and philosophers and consequently enjoyed a turbulent history which stretches to Hegel. As Iain Williamson and Cedric Cullingford highlight “There is disagreement about the definition, debate over whether the phenomenon is a sociological process or a psychological state, or both, and confusion over the inevitability of the experience” (1997: 263).

Thus; Naipaul became a writer and Mr. Biswas built a house struggling with the drawbacks of their society. One finally reads or rereads Mr. Biswas for this balanced totality, this fecund complexity, for the way it brings to startling fruition in 20<sup>th</sup> century Trinidad the promise of the 19<sup>th</sup> century European novel. One such account, of the burning of poui sticks for the rough village sport of stick-fighting, captures the way the scent of the sticks opens up in Mr. Biswas a sudden seam of memory.

Another, of Mr. Biswas working as a bus conductor in his youth, passing by a lone hut in the dusk, is a compressed little masterpiece of longing. He wore a vest and nothing more. The vest glowed white. So, some severe symptoms like withdrawal, isolation from society, fantasy, absurd behaviors and characters’ talking habit to one self can be seen as a disorderly reaction that he projects.

## 2. CONCLUSION:

Naipaul focuses on the personal life of the protagonist which tells the ethnic and social history of a community. He tries to assimilate in Hanuman House but he is failed at every stage. He becomes completely isolated man in the crowd and the lonely fighter against the conservative system filled with rotten myths, customs and rituals. Mr. Biswas

found himself marginalized at an early stage, almost an orphan who remains an outsider in the Trinidadian society and never catches up with social tone.

The poverty of Mr. Biswas brings him a lot of torture and agony in him. His suffering is that of a penniless individual struggling to possess a minimum basic requirement in the form of a house. Mr. Biswas tries to for his own house. A house approves a positive approach to the problem of expatriation. Naipaul focuses on the personal life of the protagonist which tells the ethnic and social history of a community. He tries to assimilate in Hanuman House but he is failed at every stage. He becomes completely isolated man in the crowd and the lonely fighter against the conservative system filled with rotten myths, customs and rituals.

Mr. Biswas is an East Indian who desires to break from his Hindu heritage but has difficulty in assimilating himself into Western culture. Mr. Biswas is an expatriate, whose life passes in search of identity and he remained nostalgic for his own home. His unreal aspiration towards attaining identity pushes him into various rejections and makes him a neurotic persona in the fragile world. Naipaul and his characters seem to find their final resort in solitude, where plight of past experiences become constant part of their memories. The neurotic and schizoid behaviour of the characters seems to be reflective of Mr. Biswas, whose life with frequent displacement failed to attain the psychological balance in a strange land.

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