

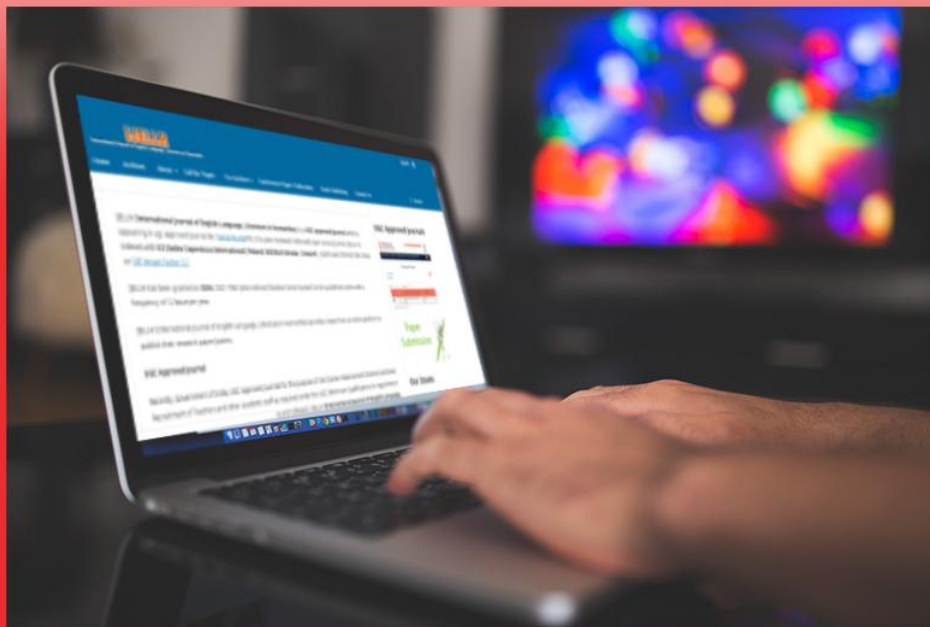
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Post-Colonial and Diaspora traits in VS Naipaul's A House for Mr.Biswas

Abstract: V.S Naipaul was a Nobel Laureate, a British writer of an Indian descent born in Trinidad when the Independence moment was at pinnacle. He is well-liked for his comic novels set in Trinidad. His published books are more than thirty, both of fiction, nonfiction. Naipaul's first significant novel through which he received world- wide popularity is 'A House for Mr. Biswas', a tragicomic novel set in Trinidad in 1950 and published in the year 1961. Naipaul focuses on East Indian's Struggle for an identity in Trinidad through a protagonist Mr.Biswas, a significant character in the novel around whom the whole story runs. As the novels proceeds, we can find different phases in Mr.Biswas life which in turn reminds reader the Post-Colonial and Diaspora characteristics in novel. This article concentrates on the two important facets 'Post Colonial and Diaspora' connecting the events in the novel 'A House for Mr.Biswas'.

Key words: East Indian's struggle, tragicomic, Post colonial, Diaspora.

Introduction: The paper explores the Post-Colonial and Diasporic elements in a novel 'A House for Mr.Biswas. The novel draws the reader's attention on cultural aspects of the place where the protagonist Mr.Biswas struggles desperately to achieve his life ambition of having his own house

and develop an authentic identity in his society. As the novel develops, the reader understands a close association of the novel with Post Colonial and Diaspora elements. Post colonialism contemplates on the issues of cultural differences, hybridity, adaptation etc in the society. It has close relation with the concept of 'Diaspora' regarding the nostalgia feelings while living abroad and searching recognition.

A Bird's eye view on a novel: A House for Mr. Biswas depicts the desperate struggle of Mr. Biswas to acquire a house of his own which is a symbolic of an individual's need to develop an authentic identity. The story of Mr. Biswas starts even before Mr. Biswas had his birth. His father and mother had a quarrel & she left to her village with her three children. There, she gave birth to Mr. Biswas with six fingers. The astrologer advised his parents to keep Mr. Biswas away from tree and water and his father was asked to see him after twenty-one days. These were the signs of bad luck to his parents and also to himself. Mr. Biswas was left with no support after the death of his father. Tara and Ajodha, his uncle and aunt, took Mr. Biswas and tried to put him in employment. He moved from one occupation to another and reached Hanuman House as a painter where he married Shama, Tulasi's daughter. From the time of his marriage, he was dependent on them. He spends the whole life time to become independent and to escape from the clutches of Tulasi's family. He moved 'To Chase', Green Vale' 'Port of Spain', 'Short Hills' and finally, 'Port of Spain' where he purchases a dilapidated house from an anonymous person and takes his family separately from Tulasi's. The story ends with his death and with no complete settlement to his children. Anand, his son went to London for higher studies on scholarship and did not respond even after writing numerous letters and his daughter Savi also reached London with scholarship but revisited Trinidad and she was the only source to Mr. Biswas and his wife and his other children at the end of the story.

Post Colonialism

Post Colonialism emerged in the year 1990. It gained momentum through the books of Gayatri Spivak 'Other Worlds', Bill Ashcroft 'The Empire Writes Back (1989), Homi Bhabha 'Nation and Narration' Edward Said, 'Culture and Imperialism''. The roots of Post Colonial can be traced to Frantz Fanon's 'The Wretched of the Earth', published in 1961. According to him the first step towards Post Colonial perspective is to reclaim the past and the second is to devalue adapting the colonist ideology. Post Colonialism focuses on this perspective. It mainly concentrates on three aspects- Adopt phase, Adapt phase, Adept phase.

Adopt Phase: its ambition is to adopt the form as it stands with the assumption that it has universal validity.

Adapt Phase: It aims to adapt the alien form to native subject matter thus assuming partial rights of intervention in the genre.

Adept phase: It denotes skilled characteristic. It is not an apprentice as in the first phase or partial rights as in the second but a fully recognized & skilful characteristic. In this phase, a native gains control on himself and skillfully motivates himself to alien culture, language, situations. This third phase leads to fourth characteristic of Post-Colonial criticism i.e cross-cultural interactions.

Hybridity in Post Colonialism: Hybridity is an issue of colonial representation in which an individual lacks the knowledge of the culture that enters upon the dominant discourse and estranges the basis of its authority – its rules of recognition. "Hybridity reverses the formal process of disavowal so that the violent dislocation of the act of colonization becomes the conditionality of colonial discourse. The presence of colonialist authority is no longer

immediately visible; its discriminatory identifications no longer have their authoritative reference to this culture's cannibalism or that people's perfidy. As an articulation of displacement and dislocation, it is now possible to identify 'the cultural' as a disposal of power, a negative transparency that comes to be agonistically constructed on the boundary between frames of reference and frame of mind." (Page 163 Bhabha). In another words, Hybridity signifies the semblance of the long-standing and authoritative symbol after the intervention/ presence of different culture. This disturbs the systematic construction of varied known systems already existing and makes them unrecognizable. "Culture, as a colonial space of intervention and agonism, as the trace of the displacement of symbol to sign, can be transformed by the unpredictable and partial desire of hybridity. Deprived of their full presence, the knowledges of cultural authority may be articulated with forms of 'native' knowledges or faced with those discriminated subjects that they must rule but can no longer represent."(Page 164). One of the best examples is the colonial representation in India. British ruled India more than 150 years. They introduced their culture, language, methods and food habits and commanded the people to work on it. Today, one cannot deny the fact that Western culture is an obscure and ubiquitous form of living. It is more complex than community, more symbolic than society, less homogeneous than hegemony; more hybrid in the articulation of cultural differences and identification.

Language in Post-colonial societies: The basic tension in settled colonies is language. A person who likes to settle in alien country face a major problem regarding language. According to Post Colonial angle there are three types of linguistic groups in post colonial societies. Monoglossic group, a single language society using English as a native language. Diglossic group is that in which two or more languages are used and English is adopted as the language of a government.

The third group is Polyglossic or 'Poly-dialectical. These groups occur mainly in the Caribbean, where multitude of languages interweave and form a comprehensible language. They try to reconstruct the language according to the convenience of the society. This reconstruction occurs in two ways- regional language speakers use words which become familiar to all English-speakers, and the other the varieties themselves produce national and regional peculiarities which distinguish from other forms of English.

'Abrogation and Appropriation' are two distinct processes that seize the language of the centre and replace it in a discourse fully adapted to the colonized place. Abrogation involves a denial of the metropolitan power over the means of communication where as Appropriation is the process of capturing and remolding the language to new usages.

Diaspora in Indian Literature: The word 'Diaspora' derived from the Greek word meaning 'to scatter'. It is defined as a community of people who do not live in their country of origin, but maintain their heritage in a new land. Most of the people related to this issue, especially in the present scenario. Their ancestral roots are from one country but reside in a different place. The point of diaspora is easily understood with the help of the term dispersion. Dispersion refers to a movement away from a particular space, like the petals of dandelion blowing in the wind. Thus we can imagine that people move from their native place and reside in different places suffering and adjusting to the new environment. In such areas, people form transitional communities in which members are committed to restoring homeland values. Different terms like transnationalism, globalization etc are meant to mark communities of people in host societies. The word 'Diaspora' is also associated with 'losses and 'exile'- two words that denote suffering and tragedy.

Few Books on Indian Diaspora:

1. Brick Lane by Monika Ali (2003): Nazeen, a teenazer was forced to marry a man considerably older than her. Fearfully, she left the sultry oppression of her Bangladeshi village. Nazeen finds herself cloistered in a small flat high-rise block in the East end of London. The novel pictures vividly the ups and downs in the life of a person who is completely unaware of the language, culture and other aspects of the place.
2. The God of Small Things by Arundhati Roy (1997): The God of Small Things is nominally the story of young twins Rahel and Estha and the rest of their family, but the book feels like a million stories spinning out indefinitely; it is the product of a genius child-mind that takes everything in and transforms it in an alchemy of poetry. The book received booker prize 1997.
3. Midnight's Children by Salmam Rushdie (1981): Salman Sinai was born at midnight, the midnight of India's independence, and found himself mysteriously 'handcuffed to history' by the coincidence. He is one of 1,001 children born at the midnight hour, each of them endowed with an extraordinary talent- and whose privilege and curse it is to be both master and victims of their times. Through Saleem's gifts- inner ear and wildly sensitive sense of smell- we are drawn into a fascinating family saga set against the vast, colourful background of India of the 20th century.

Language and Educational changes in Mr. Biswas: One of the significant issues that the colonized people at Trinidad faced was language. In the beginning of the story, Mr.Biswas, his parents and the society depended only on Hindi. Very few people were educated. Though they were educated, Hindi was the language widely used. As the story developed, we find Mr.Biswas concentrated on foreign language. He learned prayer in Hindi from the book of

King George V Hindi Reader, and he recited many English Poems from the Royal Reader. He read about the different subjects like oases, the Gulf, stream and about number of deserts. Irrespective of his background, Mr.Biswas gained interest in things which were new and colonial. Most of the time, he used to spend on books. In mathematics, he concentrated on simple interest and turn dollars and cents into pounds, shilling and pence. When Tara took out Mr.Biswas from school with the intention to make him a pundit, Mr. Biswas carried the school's copy of the Standard Elocutionist.

It was not only Mr.Biswas who used English but also Ajodha, Tara's husband. He was also interested in Colonial Language (English). Though Mr.Biswas was not comfortable with him, he used to read an American column called The Body of Yours which dealt with different dangers to the human body. Mr.Biswas improved his knowledge in English with the books that were available to him. When he worked in a shop along with Alec, on Sundays and Thursdays, he used to spend his time with the collection of books provided in the bookcase equipped in verandah.

His knowledge in English helped him to work as a journalist in sentinel. He joined his children in an English medium school and often they started using Global language at home. As the story proceeds, we understand several changes in their routine life. Even Shama, wife of Mr.Biswas and her sister used words in English in their routine. "What?" Shama said in English. 'You come back already? You tired catching crab in pagotoes?' (Page 103Naipaul). In the last part of the book, when Owad returned from abroad, his sisters were rejoiced and they were enthusiastic to listen and follow the words what he used. To understand his language, the whole family members tried to learn English and felt happy while using colloquial English.

Culture in the society of Mr. Biswas: In the beginning of the story, people in Trinidad were very particular about their Culture. Very less importance was given to fashion. They used to see the people with less veneration, if they followed the fashion different from their society. Tara, Ajodha, Mr. Biswas parents, Tulasi were some of the characters in the story belonged to the generation who followed strictly the customs and tradition of their society. Tara, Mr. Biswas aunt was furious at Biswas sister who ran away with a yard boy. She refused to accept her in her society. At Tulasi estate, we find the strict following of all rituals but at the same time we understand the changes that come due to the foreign influence. For every start, the whole family gathers and performs puja as a sign of good. Hari, Shama's brother used to take the responsibility of performing puja at home. Every member in the family had to obey and respect the words of Hari.

As the days passed, the rules of the past lost its significance and a new society with new customs came into practice. Mr. Biswas has advanced and modern views. Whenever Hari was invited to do Puja, Mr. Biswas vehemently accepts and expresses his discontent and disinterest in the pujas performed at Hanuman's estate. Mr. Biswas, though belonged to the society of native culture, he was against to the rituals and customs of past. He disliked all that was past and tried to set a new trend at his family. When he reached the Port of Spain, irrespective of the negative opinion Tara and his family had on his sister, he stayed with her until he joined as journalist. He did not see any fault in his sister and her husband. "Mr. Biswas was amused by Ramchand's city manners and allowed himself to be patronized by him. Ramchand had in any case always managed to do that, even when he had just stopped being a yardboy at Tara's. Ostracized from the community into which he was born,

he had shown the futility of its sanctions. He had acquired a loudness and heartiness which was alien and which he did not always carry of easily.”(328 page Naipaul)

Religion in the society of Mr.Biswas: Religion is one of the significant aspects in the colonial period. At the death of Mr.Biswas father, the family performed funeral pyre according to Hindu religion. The influence of foreign religion was still in the initial stage. Respect to the country and the religion continued in the society. Tara removed Mr. Biswas from school to put him with Pundit Jairam. Pundit taught him Hindi, introduced him to the more important scriptures and instructed him in various ceremonies. Mr.Biswas did Puja for the pundit’s household. Hybridity of religion was slow in the beginning. But there was a revolutionary attitude regarding some aspects of religion. Pundit Jairam was respected for his knowledge in Ramayana and Mahabharata but he also had scandalous views which brought him much popularity. He fervently believed God, but claimed it was not necessary for a Hindu to do so. He did not eat meat but he was against vegetarianism. ‘When Lord Rama went hunting, did they think it was just for the sport?’ (Page 49- A House for Mr.Biswas).

Alien religion had less effect on people in the beginning. When Mr.Biswas committed mistake in chanting, he was asked to copy Sanskrit verses on strips of cardboard. Changes in society lead changes in life. There was gradual down of nativity and raise of colonialism in the novel. Tulasi and her family celebrated Christmas at home, in their store and entertained children with gifts. “The Tulsis celebrated Christmas in their store and, with equal irreligiosity, in their home. It was purely Tulsi festival. All the sons-in-law, and even Seth, were expelled from Hanuman House and returned to their own families.” (Page 198 Naipaul)

Three generations in a novel 'A House for Mr. Biswas':

A house for Mr. Biswas covers three generations of the people who settled in Trinidad. Raghu, Bipti, Tara, Ajodha, Tulasi belonged to the first generation. Their society was different. They had different beliefs and they used to respect the customs and rituals of their native land. Hindi was the dominant language in their days. For every small issue, they used to run to the pundit to take suggestions. When Bipti gave birth to Mr. Biswas, her family members took suggestions from a pundit.

Changes in culture, language, society and religion appear in the second part or the second generation. Mr. Biswas had his independent ideas. His family members could not influence their ideas on him. He maintained his level of sense and dignity. With the intention of being independent deep in his heart, he disagreed the conditions and terms of Tulasi's or Hanuman's house. He regretted many times on the decision of his marriage and tried to escape from Hanuman's house. He thought of leading a superior life in his society but always his family constraints stopped him from it. His life dream was to build a house with no interference from Hanuman's house. He explored various ways to make his dream fulfilled. He shifted from one place to another but couldn't achieve peace. At the end, in frustration he had taken decision to buy a dilapidate house unknowingly for which he borrowed money with the bond signed for five years.

Mr. Biswas belonged to the second generation in this novel. He learned English, worked in Sentinel as a journalist & refused some of the rituals at house. His society was the society of ambivalence & mimicry. People in his society were influenced with the ideas of westernization but not completely involved. Many of the members in his time were in dilemma whether to accept the society of new changes or not. Mimicry/imitation had played

a prominent role. People welcomed changes that occurred in Trinidad. Learned English, followed its discipline and even celebrated all festivals with equal zeal and enthusiasm.

The third generation was the society of Mr. Biswas children. Ambivalence, Mimicry/imitation had taken side routes. Less importance was given to the rituals of native land. Foreign brand had become the fashion and also passion of the society. Foreign language, culture and religion replaced the native culture. Part two of the novel provides the vivid description of these changes. Mr. Biswas freed himself from Hanuman's house. He led a life of independence at Port of Spain doing job at Sentinel. At the end of the novel, Mr. Biswas children Savi & Anand received scholarship for pursuing higher studies. "Suddenly the world opened for them. Savi got a scholarship and went abroad. Two years later Anand got a scholarship and went to England." (Page 619 Naipaul). They crossed ocean. After writing several letters, Savi returned from alien place and looked after her father but Anand did not even respond to his letters. A comprehensive transformation had taken place at the end. Foreign culture dominated the native society and made the natives disappear in the shade of foreign habitation.

Conclusion; A House for Mr. Biswas is a tragicomedy novel which has the influence of Post-Colonial and diasporic aspects. The life ambition of Mr. Biswas is to build a house of his own where he can lead an independent life. At the end of the novel, he achieved it. Though the house was in repair, he could afford it. Leading life in Hanuman's House (Tulasi's) was horrible to him. He achieved his independence. His son and daughter received scholarship and reached abroad for higher studies. On the other side of the novel, we could observe the destructive side of his life. He was unable to adjust himself in Hanuman's House. He struggled and struggled and eventually bought a house from a person who sold it for high

cost and for which he borrowed amount with high interest. Even before his death, he could not repay his debt and left all his debts on his daughter Savi. This novel has rich exposure to cultural struggle. V.S.Naipaul juxtaposes foreign and native culture. The novel vividly and logically designed to show that the old Hindu Culture could not withstand the influence of the alien western culture.

Eventually, it can be concluded that the novel is a testimonial of Post-Colonial and Diasporic literature

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