
Contextualising Rootlessness and Alienation in V.S. Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas*

A'Sivasundari¹,

¹ Ph.D. Scholar (PT) Thanthai Periyar Govt. Arts and Science College
(Autonomous) Tiruchirappalli, Tamilnadu, India. (Affiliated Bharathidasan
University, Mail ID : sasisiva053@gmail.com

Dr. K. Malarmathi²

² Principal and Associate Professor of English, Govt. Arts and Science College,
Manapparai, Tamilnadu, India, (Affiliated to Bharathidasan University), Mail ID:
malarmathi2233@gmail.com

Paper Received on 17-10-2025, Accepted on 21-11-2025

Published on 23-11-25; DOI:10.36993/RJOE.2025.10.4.286

Abstract

This paper tries to pinpoint the miseries and sufferings experienced by the characters of V.S. Naipaul have intrinsic concurrence with the experiences of humans throughout the world, surviving in an alien land ruled by a colonized community in his *A House for Mr. Biswas*. The story opens with the demise of Mohun Biswas. As a descendant of East Indians who were brought to Trinidad as indentured labourers working in the sugarcane fields, Mr. Biswas has endured humiliation and bad luck. He has been homeless and without love, moving from one job to another and experiencing shame with every minor triumph. As a member of the large Tulsi clan, his wife has always been loyal to them and they have treated him with disdain. Mr. Biswas hastily buys a dilapidated home that he cannot afford, but it is his own and signifies a break from the oppressive Tulsis. His wife and children are left impoverished after his death. His home is deserted. Importantly, the work illustrates the fundamental mechanism of a man's life, which is the fusion of happiness and sadness, harsh and majestic. In Naipaul's world, impoverished wanderers are creating a path of escape from Africa or India to the West Indies, then to Britain and back. Even after three centuries, it seems as though there is still no structure or culture of values where these characters can originate. They try to cling to something to give them stability to hold the flux in their life against such a hazy and crumbling background.

Keywords: Rootlessness, Alienation, Identity, House, Westernization

V. S. Naipaul has made a substantial contribution to postcolonial writing and is regarded as one of the most renowned authors in the Commonwealth. His name conjures up countless praises and an equal number of scathing criticisms, aimed at his handling of both literary and non-fictional works from the Caribbean to India. As a multifaceted international writer, his identity crisis arises from his childhood as an immigrant and the disruption it brought about. One could argue that homelessness is a problem that has plagued him throughout his life, but it also demonstrates his strength and gives him a ruthless, solitary accuracy that demonstrates both his prose and his vision. One of his greatest achievements is that, in contrast to some of his themes, he is not constrained by moral convictions. Driven by his own lack of roots, he makes insightful assessments of several countries, particularly Third World countries. His judgements have caused distress to many people instinctively. The issues of the colonised society, their identity crisis, their sense of alienation from the landscapes, the ridiculousness of freedom, and the predicament of neo-colonialism in the former colonies are the main themes that emerge from reading his works. He can directly familiarise himself with their problems and write about them in a privileged manner because he was an Indian by birth, a Trinidadian by birth, and an Englishman by education and residence.

Even though Naipaul wrote many novels, his *A House for Mr. Biswas* is the one that has unquestionably given him notoriety and recognition. The novel talks with the hero's battle to become a bitter person by owning a property and the decline of Hindu culture because of Westernisation. To demonstrate his interest in the Eastern culture's submission to the Western, Naipaul uses sarcasm and cynicism. The novel tells the success story of its protagonist in Trinidad's constrained circumstances. The social history of Trinidad's East Indian population is portrayed in the novel. It tells Mr. Biswas's story from infancy to death and has an epic perspective.

Up to the publication of *A House for Mr. Biswas*, Naipaul had been trying to figure out who he was, where he lived, and who he was. The specifics of the situation facing the Indian settlers are depicted in Mr. Biswas' life. It demonstrates the desire of the expatriate to establish their roots and obtain an identity. The social and ethnic history of a society is also shown in the course, demonstrating how strong sociocultural influences shape societies. And he accomplishes this by taking the reader inside his inner world. Mr. Biswas is never shown by Naipaul as a stereotypical epic figure.

Many characteristics of an existential hero are shared by Mr. Biswas. One may acknowledge that he contrasts with the world around him as they accompany him

on his life's journey. He believes that there is no place for ethics in a world where everyone must struggle and suffer, much like the modern person who is undoubtedly cut off from the outside world. He endures in a persistent state of loneliness and isolation. He chooses the best option available to him, but he quickly learns that he has been living in delusion. He still tries to see reality, but it constantly eludes him. In this sense, having a home of his own gives him a sense of belonging, and his never-ending search for a place to call home foreshadows the struggles and hardships faced by the Diaspora.

Naipaul and his father were among the first exiles to experience this agonising sense of separation, uprooting, and exile. In its most thorough form, the idea foretells his own travels and his landing at random locations. The most important person in his life is his father. The strong motivation behind his writing, especially up until the creation of *A House for Mr. Biswas*, is thought to be the pain for his father's dashed dreams and the need to make amends in some way. The story, which seems to be based on Naipaul's father's life, is incredibly poignant, humorous, and heartbreaking.

The protagonist lives in a society that is impoverished, and the mansion represents what life has denied him. Since his early years, Mr. Biswas has been plagued by a persistent sense of uneasiness and anguish, as evidenced by his homelessness and frustration following the untimely death of his father, Raghu. Mr. Biswas' personality is meticulously and meticulously assessed by Naipaul. His temperament is irritable and tense, and he frequently takes the blame for his arguments with his wife Shama and her family. However, he is also courageous and persistent, and his wit creates a humorous play that throughout the entire novel. Despite being humorous throughout, the cast is distinct from that of Naipaul's early works.

Mr. Biswas committed the heinous sin of trying to be an individual. He disregards the Tulsis, his in-laws, who emphasise his need for uniqueness. It is sufficient to interpret the rapport or lapse of it within the house when he shows his daughter a dollhouse. The tranquility of the entire house seemed to have been ruined by the occurrence. He believes that he is the one who gets harmed, and this incident has left him weary beyond irony and words. This interior weariness can also be a component of insurgency, even though he seems to have eventually given up in front of his pushy in-laws. It appears to be in the style of a sudden silence that mocks the eloquence of agitation. Both speech and planned actions are destroyed by the hatred directed at his spirit. He still requires the power

to deliver the last blow from the Tulsis, and he only obtains it at the conclusion when he decides to leave Hanuman House for a justifiable reason. Gordon Rohlehr, in "The Ironic Approach: The Novels of V.S. Naipaul," avers "Tulsidom, depends for its existence on the psychic emasculation of men and on the maintenance of their sense of inferiority" (189).

Mr. Biswas supports an aggressive stance from the start and denies joining the organisation. He joins the Aryans, a group of Indian revisionist Hindu missionaries, to enrage the Tulsis. He takes advantage of the opportunity to teach in opposition to all the Tulsi doctrines. Mrs. Tulsi is particularly irritated because her younger son, Owad, wants to enrol in a Catholic college, and she fears that Mr. Biswas' friendship with the Aryans could jeopardise Owad's future. As for Mr. Biswas, it seems that his life's ambition is to thwart his mother-in-law's endeavours. Since it deprives a nonentity like him of any integrity or dignity, he views Tulsidom as the miniature representation of his community, and any attack on them is, in fact, an attack on the community.

Additionally, Mr. Biswas feels a little jealous of Owad, who is relocating to Britain to further his education. Mr. Biswas' response reveals his annoyance and hatred when Shama mentions Owad's departure for England. At this point, Mr. Biswas begins to feel the stress and apathy of his own existence. He realises he has accomplished nothing in life. The conflict between him and the Tulsi family persists to the very end and is never definitively resolved. Naipaul does a remarkable job of describing the communal life of the traditional Hindu clan and Mr. Biswas' fight against it. As the Tulsi family life is thoroughly examined, conflicts, arguments, and compromises flourish in every narrative. It is a way of life founded on rituals and feelings that have been recognised. Because taking the Hanuman House and its order would mean having the soul of a slave and endorsing enslavement, Mr. Biswas is irritated by the Tulsis' self-centredness and deceit.

The Tulsi family gradually deteriorates, and Mr. Biswas' escape becomes easier. In the latter pages of the novel, his relationship with Anand, Savi, and Shama becomes perfectly modern, while his personal family's links grow in importance as the larger family ties fade. Instead of viewing each other as spouses, parents, or members of the same culture, they regard each other as unique individuals. Though his struggle seems to be a common man's hazy battle against overwhelming circumstances, Mr. Biswas' resolute efforts to free himself from the stifling culture-stricken environment of the Tulsis have been brutal. He has spent his entire life trying to find and validate his own independent identity. Another Tulsi son-in-law, Govind,

urges Mr. Biswas to stop painting signs. He responds, "Give up sign-painting? And my self-reliance? No, boy. Paddle your own canoe is my slogan" (107).

The notion in destiny's alienation or hostility has been carried down through Mr. Biswas' family. His birth is hailed by the maternal grandfather as proof of fate's lack of interest. He squanders his life fighting these forces, surviving on his bravery and optimism and persevering both physically and emotionally. He remains in a semi-permanent state for the duration of his life, until he owns his home. Until the very end of his life, he never felt at home anywhere and had no ongoing relationships.

A House for Mr. Biswas supports a positive approach to the dislocation problem. Mr. Biswas fights ruthlessly against the forces that seek to suppress his uniqueness to overcome the limitations placed upon him. Although his struggle is long and unsettling, he is successful in negotiating for space and eventually realises his dream of owning a home of his own, which is an incredible achievement for someone from such a lowly and mediocre background. In contrast to the heroes and anti-heroes of Naipaul's novels, who ultimately reject their community, Mr. Biswas represents the multiplicity that fundamentally make it home. The constant struggle of a common person against the viciously harsh Caribbean community is evoked for the readers by Mr. Biswas. Because it exposes a father's unfulfilled goals in the Creole world and the son's helplessness and frustration at his unfulfilled desires, the story remains strongly tied to its creator.

Most Naipaul's characters are influenced by social and political issues as well as their own personal concerns. They live half-lives suggested by postcolonial and colonial interactions, remaining "unhoused" in themselves and situated on the boundaries of both temporary and permanent identities. *A House for Mr. Biswas*, Naipaul's first genuine achievement, opens with a picture of a lonely elderly man who is completely grateful for what he believes to be his lot in life:

No one paid him any attention. Fate had brought him from India to the sugar estate, aged him quickly and left him to die in a crumbling mud hut in the swamplands; yet he spoke of Fate often and affectionately, as though, merely by surviving, he had been particularly favoured. (15)

Naipaul has a kind yet sardonic approach. The old man's sole goal is to live, and he accomplishes this with passive acceptance - what Naipaul considers to be the most alluring aspect of Indian identity.

A House of Mr. Biswas cannot be evaluated in a vacuum; rather, it must be evaluated considering the social context he examines. Naipaul intentionally uses comedy to depict a deeply and emotionally painful situation while considering a societal problem. In an unusually cautious tone, he argues that his novel centres on the collective comment and criticism. Instead, focussing on creating social excitement, he sees the creative process as being truly dedicated to the goal of examining a sociological disposition. He contends that the writer strives towards outcomes of which he is frequently unaware, and that it is best that he be. Because of the narrator's dual roles as an astute observer and an impacted witness, Naipaul has unrestricted authority and ample opportunity to depict his characters with passion and skill. As the narrator infiltrates the reader's consciousness and unveils them, many of his characters become accessible to them. The characters' thoughts and perceptions and their words and actions differ sarcastically. In addition to being examined from the characters' point of view, they are also evaluated further by their opinions of one another.

Since a house is then seen as a primary limitation, it seems that Naipaul's serious examination of *A House for Mr. Biswas* is to find his past and create his home identity. Naipaul begins to see home and identity from a different perspective after becoming disillusioned with India. Nowadays, homelessness is seen as a benefit rather than a drawback since it opens a whole universe of possibilities for those who are homeless. The Caribbean experience is an elemental strand in the order of human nature, which is Naipaul's major achievement.

After creating a blueprint for his fiction, Naipaul discovered that using literature to organise his experiences helped him to define his home identity. His *A House for Mr. Biswas*, is the best example of this. The colonial humiliation and nostalgia are skilfully and plainly conveyed in the story. Since it is their sole source, his imaginative stories are, in fact, all about the defenceless lying to and about themselves. He describes in moving detail how the colonial males have come to distrust everything about themselves and emulate the role of adulthood.

For Naipaul, writing has been an effort that has pushed him to rediscover who he is at every stage of his literary career. He has stated that the most creative writers discover who they are and where they are in their work. Naipaul's quest for his identity has been so skilfully concluded that he is unaware of his identity. His experience is organised through writing, which also gives it coherence and continuity. He can adapt to his current by using a piece of art from the past. In the same way that

the mansion brings some structure to the Biswas' lives, Naipaul learns about himself while recording his heritage.

Naipaul's early writings were a way for him to write down his vows to his ancestors before severing his umbilical tie with them. Rather than being written off, Naipaul's early novels are the product of his attempts to define himself and determine his place in the world. Naipaul's complex fate is that, despite his varied upbringing, he has not yet found his metaphysical home, and his writings are the result of his dream about his own displacement and homelessness.

Naipaul thinks that fiction provides a suitable forum for social criticism. His works offer a brilliant judgement of contemporary life while combining an artistic awareness of the past in a fresh and cohesive manner. As so, it emerges as a true representation of his society's suffering, misfortune, and pride. Even though his work always follows a classic pattern, he makes it seem new by introducing it to contemporary techniques like fragmentary flashbacks, private causerie, and disjointed narration to show his characters' mental states. In addition to addressing the universal themes of cultural discrepancy, rootlessness, and identity, he uses his artistic genius to address his own problems as a long-term exile, the displaced self, homelessness, and the psychological and political conditions of alienation.

Homelessness is seen as a significant limitation in a person's life, and housing is seen as a prerequisite for identity. Therefore, establishing oneself in the homeless and displaced population is his main priority in *A House for Mr. Biswas*. Serious issues were brought about by the multiracial environment on both a personal and societal level. A colonised person was displaced in the foreign environment because of their intense sense of isolation and homelessness. This feeling of inferiority and insecurity is brought on by the mimicry, the make-believe world, and the isolation of all colonised people. Additionally, cultural colonisation leads to fractured awareness and cultural disintegration. The themes of loneliness, annoyance, stability, and the pursuit of a sense of belonging in a multicultural society are all explored in *A House for Mr. Biswas*.

References

- Evans, Adrian Rowe. "An Interview with V.S. Naipaul." *Quest* 1972, p.48.
Hamner, R.D. *Critical Perspectives on V.S. Naipaul*. Heinemann, 1979.
Jussawallah, Feroza. *Conversation with V.S. Naipaul*. UP of Mississippi 1997.
Mustafa, Fawzia. *V.S. Naipaul: Cambridge Studies in African and Caribbean*

Literature.

Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Naipaul, V.S. *A House for Mr. Biswas*. Andre Deutsch, 1961.

Nayak, Bhagabat. "A House for Mr. Biswas: An Autobiographical Study." V.S.

Naipaul: A Literary Response to the Nobel Laureate. Khosla Publishing House, 2003, pp.105-18.

Rohlehr, Gordon. "The Ironic Approach: The Novels of V.S. Naipaul." *Critical Perspectives*. Ed. Hamner. Heinemann, 1979, pp.178-93.

Singh, R.A. *V.S. Naipaul: A House for Mr. Biswas*. Prakash Book Depot, 1999.

Thorpe, Michael. *V.S. Naipaul*. British Council Longman, 1976.

Walsh, William. "V.S. Naipaul: Mr. Biswas." *Literary Criterion*, Vol.10, No.2, 1972, pp.27-37.

Warner-Lewis, Maureen. "Cultural Confrontation, Disintegration and Syncretism in *A House for Mr. Biswas*." *Critical Perspectives on V.S. Naipaul*. Ed. R.D. Hammer. Heinemann, 1979, pp.94-103.

White, Landeg. *V.S. Naipaul: A Critical Introduction*. Macmillan, 1975.