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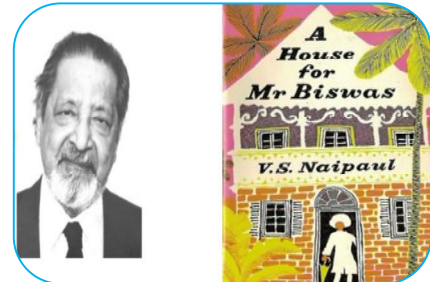
## THEME OF ALIENATION IN V.S. NAIPAUL'S "A HOUSE FOR MR. BISWAS"

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### ABSTRACT:

V.S. Naipaul's novel "A House for Mr. Biswas" explores the theme of alienation through the story of a man named Mr. Biswas, who struggles to find a sense of belonging in Trinidad and Tobago, a society that continually rejects him due to his Indian heritage and low social status. Mr. Biswas' quest for a house of his own is an attempt to establish a sense of identity and belonging, but his efforts are repeatedly thwarted, leaving him feeling isolated and disconnected. The novel also explores the alienation of women in the patriarchal society of Trinidad and Tobago, as Mr. Biswas' wife,



Shama, is trapped in a loveless marriage and denied agency and independence. Through its exploration of the theme of alienation, "A House for Mr. Biswas" reflects on the human experience of struggling to find a place in a society that is often indifferent to individual needs and desires. V.S. Naipaul is one of the most controversial postcolonial writer who is known to have generated controversy and to be the mouthpiece of Eurocentric view. He is blamed and even hate hated for "having no loyalty". In this article Taking Naipaul's A House for Mr. Biswas into consideration relying on Homi Bhabha's notion of "unhomeliness" and Melvin Seeman's highly influential five-fold Classification of the theme of alienation, and considering Hegelian, and existentialist theories as regards the notion of alienation as well.

**KEYWORDS:** V.S. Naipaul, Eurocentric view and alienation.

### INTRODUCTION:

Postcolonial literature often records racism, including slavery, dislocation, alienation, and exile experienced by the people who were formerly colonized (Masood, 2019). The chief focus of this research paper is to observe certain postcolonial issues of dislocation, and loss of identity addressed in V.S. Naipaul's novel A House for Mr. Biswas. Boehmer (1995) marked V.S. Naipaul as the founding figure of the old diaspora and Salman Rushdie as the representative of the modern diaspora. V.S. Naipaul, the Nobel Laureate of 2001, is a literary giant revered all over the world. Out of the twenty-seven fiction and nonfiction works, his fame primarily rests on A House for Mr. Biswas, a fiction with autobiographical nature. Most of Naipaul's works revolve around the theme of "displacement and exile: His choice of themes basically refers to his states of mind. The oft repeated themes of alienation and exile, in fact, reflects the nomadic feelings of V.S. Naipaul, who despite his long stay of twenty seven years at Wiltshire Cottage in London. Feels himself an alien and an outsider there even his long stay and professional success failed to motivate him to establish and emotional bond with the country of his adoption. His remark clearly reflects this : "London is my metropolitan center; it is my commercial center and yet I know that is kind of Limbo and that I am a refugee in the sense that I am always peripheral. One's concerns are not the concerns of the local people". The feeling of being and outsider makes him embittered and alienated throughout his life.

Naipaul's writings and interviews have always focused on the loneliness, sense of exile and alienation, the perpetual disturbance, the hollow in his heart. Though Indian by origin, he was born and brought up in Trinidad. He grew up in "multicultural society of Trinidad, peopled by migrants from four continents. He was part of a joint Hindu family with its rigid, clannish, and suffocating atmosphere. He was an alien in the midst of other aliens". Later he migrated to England. But he could not find himself attached to anyplace. He feels that he is "eternally an outsider-an Indian in the West Indies, a West Indian in England, and as described by men –nomadic intellectual in the non-descript third world". Thus loneliness is the feeling of being separated from others and alienation is the very process of experiencing the feeling of loneliness. All these elements are present in the life of Mohun Biswas-the chief protagonist in *A House for Mr. Biswas* who strives hard to obtain self-identity and sense of belongingness.

Constant separation from the family fills Mohun Biswas with the sense of loneliness and alienation. Social acceptance and recognition are necessary for the sense of security, but Mohun Biswas never had either of these. His marginalization started with his birth. He was born in reverse position and had six fingers in his hand and hue to these signs: Pundit Sitaram who made his horoscope predicted that he would be a spendthrift and a lecher with an unlucky sneeze. He also predicted that Mohun would be responsible for the death of his parents, that he would "eat up his father and Mother", and warned that his father should not see his life, he was often reminded of this bitterness that already pervaded his heart and made him feel more miserable, it further aggravated his sense of loneliness. While he was only a boy, his brother, Pratap and Prasad used to enjoy themselves by roaming around in the village, swimming into the ponds and rivers while he was compelled to stay at home, where the only option for him was to play with his sister Dehuti. Thus he was alienated even from his family. Often he used to crave to see the outside world, to roam freely like others. But for him "life was unpleasant only because the pundit had forbidden him to go near ponds and rivers". After the death of his father he was admitted to a school but here he was regularly flogged by his teacher Mr. Lal, who once "ordered him to write I am an ass on the blackboard". Thus the constant humiliation and physical and mental abuse casted negative impact on his personality and gradually he developed a kind of animosity towards people and became more isolated and lonely. After studying here for six years, Biswas was sent to Pundit Jairam. While expelling him from his house, Pundit Jairam spoke in a very harsh and cruel manner "You will never make a pundit. I was talking the other day to Sitaram who read your horoscope. You killed your father. I do not want you to do that to me".

### DISCUSSIONS:

Mohun Biswas' chance marriage to Shama made him a son-in-law of Tulsi. It was a large, very large joint family. Here he was expected to merge his personal identity with Tulsi's in exchange for food and shelter that he receives. But this was not an easy task for him. He felt trapped. His instant reaction "now he was married. Nothing in the world except death could change that," explains his mental state. The joint family of Tulsi, with its at least two hundred members used to live under one roof. By the virtue of his marriage with Shama, Biswas automatically became a member of this family, immediately after his marriage he realized that this marriage would not give him any happiness. Under the influence of this belief, he could not develop a healthy marital relationship with his wife Shama, even when he was a newly married groom, "following his policy of caution, he had not attempted to establish any relation with her". Later he returned to his house in Pagots. Then his aunt Tara visited Hanuman House and after her return, Biswas asked her whether she liked Shama, her reply that it was none of her business to decide that, hurt Mr. Biswas, for it "emphasized his loneliness". Later, on the same evening, as he peddled towards Hanuman House, he was so unhappy that "he wondered how many nights he would spend behind the close façade of Hanuman House but here everybody except Shama was a stranger to him and often he would feel depressed as "it was strain, living in a house full of people and talking to one person alone" Thus all these incidents made Biswas feel more and more lonely. While other Tulsi son-in-laws have accepted this situation, throughout his life Biswas made serious efforts to revolt against it. Their differences of opinion and ideology created wide gaps between them and he tried to feel

himself all alone in that large family-even Shama, his wife, would not share his problems. The indifference of Shama intensified his alienation. Once, when he was brutally beaten by Govind, in the presence of Shama, she neither tried to intervene nor consoled him after the incident, rather "she maintained her martyr's attitude throughout...." From her appearances and gestures she made him to feel guilty, as if only he was responsible for the entire episode. Had he just one person, just one person to whom he could reveal his heart, he might have felt less isolated. But he was destined to suffer in isolation.

Mr. Biswas lives in a comic position because he is unfamiliar to the familiar world (Garebian, 1984; Hayward, 2002; Kumar, 2002). *A House for Mr. Biswas* projects the struggle of the settlers through the lens of creolization, a process of settling by establishing control over the indigenous people of an area-to gain a better understanding of Biswas's characterization. Khan (1998) noted Naipaul's emphasis is on the linguistic hybridity and cultural amalgamation which is part of Trinidad identity formation. According to Tas (2011), Naipaul depicts a real fighter who is "in all his littleness, and still preserve a sense of man's inner dignity" (p.117). Levy (1995) observes the language of Naipaul in this novel and finds that his narrative technique is characterized by simplicity. In this way, critics like Khan and Tas marked simple language, rather than the ornate with the use of literary devices in the novel.

Mr. Biswas' only desire was to live according to the desire of his heart but he had neither money, nor job, so he felt enormous pressure on him "to become a Tulsi", to merge his identity into the Tulsidom. Yet with his unflinching spirit, he somehow managed his calm and even the worst circumstances could not break him down. Every effort of Mr. Biswas to become self-dependent was curbed down mercilessly. When he revealed his heart to Govind, another son-in-law that he would like to earn for himself, "to paddle his own canoe" (108), he immediately revealed it to Seth and it antagonized everybody in the family against him. Seth rebuked him in the presence of everybody:

We want somebody to work on the estate. Is once to keep these things in the family. And what you say? You want to paddle your own canoe. 'Look at him!' Seth said to the hall 'Biswas the peddler. It runs in the family.' Seth said, 'They tell me your father was great diver. But where has all these padding got you so far?

Mr. Biswas waited for them with dread. On the day they were to arrive he began to wish for some accident that would prevent their coming. But he knew there would be no accident. If anything was to happen he had to act. He decided that he had to get rid of Anand and Savi and himself, in such a way that his children would never know who had killed them. All morning he was possessed of visions in which he cutlasses, poisoned, strangled, burned, Anand and Savi; so that even before they come his relationship with them had been prevented. About Myna and Shama he didn't care; he did not wish to kill them.

Later, during his stay with Anand he tells him "I am not your father. God is your father..... I am just somebody. Nobody at all. I am just a man you know." It explains the turbulent mental condition Biswas was passing through. He found himself totally incapable to establish any emotional bond with his family member and that further intensified his alienation.

This gradually separated him from others. Even from Shama. Biswas stayed in the Tulsi house for quite a long period yet he felt himself all alone, trapped and confined in one room. Here he remained alienated throughout his stay, often his wife Shama found him muttering that he was "trapped" in a 'hole'. 'Trap', she heard him say over and over. 'That's what your family do to me. Trap me in this hole'

As he unable to confide on anybody, his inability to establish relation with other members to the family made him more isolated. The members of the Tulsi clan were dull, the Tulsidom is "founded on a system of classic slavery, food and security are bartered for independence;. Somehow Biswas could not adjust with it. At the Hanuman house his status was that of total stranger as "he was troublesome and disloyal. And could not be trusted. He was weak and therefore contemptible".

Thus all the time while he remained at Hanuman House he received only "aggrieved and aggressive stares". If he had to accommodate with the rules of Hanuman House it "would be to stoop to the state of a slave." Therefore he resists it with all his power. He struggles up to the last to "release

himself from the clutches of a stifling and suffocating world, symbolized by Hanuman House". He remained a stranger even till the end.

It was his sense of alienation that motivated him to search for a house. House was great need in his life, as it becomes a symbol of personal identity, solace, self-respect and independence, the elements he was deprived of throughout his life. Ultimately when he purchased a house at Sikkim Street, it brought an end to his constant struggle. This house, though heavily loaned, yet here he was not at the mercy of anybody, rather he was his own master. He experienced the sense of belongingness for the first time in his life. It evoked sense of security in him and strengthened his decaying relationship with the family. Here, He "found himself in his own house, on his own half lot of land, his own portion of earth". It was an end of his exile and alienation. Now he was perfectly at peace and at last died gracefully in his own house.

Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas* is tragicomic novel set in Trinidad in 1950s and was published in 1961. It deals with an East Indian's struggle for a place to strike his deracinated root afresh. It also attacks the Indian society's segregated, traditional way of life which contents to live in its shell and preserve its own special religious identity. Naipaul based *A House for Mr. Biswas* on his own experiences in Trinidad. Mr. Biswas's son for Naipaul, In his Book, *Letters Between father and Son: Family Letters* (1999), Naipaul says that the relationship between him and his father is similar to that of Anand and his father Mr. Biswas. Reading the Novel in light of Naipaul's Biography, one can clearly recognize similarities between the real and fictional father and sons. For example, both Naipaul's father and Mr. Biswas were born in a village. Both of them change many houses until they have one of their own. Living with wealthy relatives, working as sign painters, getting married with the daughters of conservative, wealthy Hindu families; holding a series of jobs are some of the other similarities. Further more, Seepersad Naipaul, too, finds work on a newspaper after moving to part of Spain, as Mohun Biswas does. The events in the life of Mr. Biswas's son Anand reflect those of Naipaul's himself. Anand like Naipaul, is instilled with the idea of reading, being incited to be one of those students who achieve to win a Being a person brought up by a culture that has been deracinated from East India to Trinidad in West India as indentured labourers who have been colonized long before, and having had a leap (due to being educated first in Trinidad by a colonial, namely, British education system and later in Oxford, England) from a culture which had no self-determination to one which was world power that initiated reason, science, and logic, (the corner stones of modernism) Naipaul seems to be in a psychological limbo, having been alienated from the culture of his people. Alienation and exile are the concepts which the writers of postcolonial literature mainly discuss and treat in their works. Because the writers or intellectuals from once colonizer has left on their culture, eventually establish discrete responses. This sense of not belonging to a significant country or culture result either in its rejection by the writer through criticism and satire, or by his physical or psychological withdrawals in the form of various kinds of alienation, as it has been the case with Naipaul at the very beginning of his adolescence and later in his matured life. Nevertheless, before the novel in question, it is of great importance to deliberate the concept of alienation on which I will try to proof my assertion.

Alienation is usually considered as a concept associated with minorities, the poor, the unemployed, and other groups of periphery who have limited power to bring about changes in society. Alienation is defined "as a feeling of separation or isolation which result problems stemmed from rapid social change such as industrialization and urbanization which has broken down traditional relationship among individuals and groups and the goods and services they produce". However, this definition does not give a comprehensive delineation of the term.

The concept of alienation has intrigued and troubled many sociologists and philosophers and consequently enjoyed a turbulent history which stretches to Hegel. Due to its widespread usage through various disciplines, there hasn't been an agreement on even its most basic aspects yet. As Iain Williamson and Cadric 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) The concept has been used widely in the contemporary literature, sociology and philosophy. Melvin Seaman underlines that "It is a central theme in the classics

of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim; and in contemporary work, the consequences that have been said to flow from the fact of alienation have been diverse, indeed" (1959:783).

Hegel uses two distinct German words *entausserung* (surrender) and *entfremdung* (a state of separation) for describing the theme of alienation. He, as Williamson and Cullingford assert, was much influenced by Schiller's theological use of the term as a state of separation, and also by Rousseau's discussion of alienation as a surrender of personal self and control. According to Williamson and Cullingford, Hegel's discussion of alienation (or *entfremdung*) can be drawn out in two major senses: alienation-as-separation, and alienation-as-surrender. The first sense echoes Schiller's writing, and the second those of the social contract philosophers (Williamson 1997:265). Hegel, as they claim, argues that "through self analysis and contemplation, the human moves from an immature sense of universality to a powerful sense of his\her own individuality. But as universality is essential to all things spiritual, this process leads to an acute sense of self-alienation from one's inner nature and the extremity of discord" (1997:265). This is alienation-as-separation. They go on saying "recognition of this leads to individual to a second alienation process where this particularity is yielded back to universality of the social substance. This sense of universality is mature and the experience is one of actualization, although Hegel remains vague on how this occurs" (1997:265). This is alienation as surrender. To sum up, the issue that must be underlined to Hegel's understanding of the theme of alienation is that for Hegel the theme of alienation has a positive nature.

### CONCLUSION:

V.S. Naipaul's "A House for Mr. Biswas" explores the theme of alienation through the protagonist's struggle to find a sense of belonging in a society that continually rejects him. Mr. Biswas is a man who is marginalized by his Indian community in Trinidad and Tobago, as well as by the British colonial system. From the beginning of the novel, Mr. Biswas is depicted as an outsider, as he is born into a family of low social status, and is subjected to ridicule and abuse from his relatives. He is also alienated from the broader society due to his Indian heritage, which is perceived as inferior by the white colonial authorities. Mr. Biswas's quest for a house of his own is an attempt to escape this sense of alienation and to establish a sense of identity and belonging. However, his efforts are repeatedly thwarted by his own limitations and the forces of society, leaving him feeling isolated and disconnected. The novel is also notable for its exploration of the alienation of women in the patriarchal society of Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Biswas's wife, Shama, is trapped in a loveless marriage and is denied agency and independence by the male-dominated culture.

Overall, the theme of alienation in "A House for Mr. Biswas" is a powerful reflection of the human experience and the struggle to find a place in a society that is often hostile and indifferent to individual needs and desires.

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