

# Importance of Identity and Independence in V.S. Naipaul's Novel *A House for Mr. Biswas*



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## Abstract

V. S. Naipaul's novel *A House for Mr Biswas* leads the importance of identity, existence and independence of one person that is if studies in the aspect of colonialism term, is very suitable. The protagonist of the novel Mr Biswas has always bad situations which lead his regular poor identity. He feels many times trapped in the cage of the bad situations but the author gives him hero's recognition due to his regular struggle for his an independence and for his an identity. He represents as colonised person but who is seeking his heroism. Apart from Mrs.Tulsi represents as who possess the colonial power to be dominant on the others. She gives her executive power to Seth as representative and takes his full cooperation to run the colonial power over everything. The author of the novel shows the characteristics of an Indian culture which are the roots of an Indian culture. Superstitions in the Indian rural culture are a general matter which is given in the novel as an important part of the rural life. People who live in the rural area believe very much in the predictions and superstitions which are expressed by the author in the medium of Mr Biswas life's many events. In bitter fact characteristics of these predictions and superstitions show the Indian's rural identity. Mr Biswas who is helpless and his problems come regularly due to superstitions, poor skills, poverty, and also by unemployment. He is dependent again and again on Mrs Tulsi but his heroism provokes him to be independent and to get his good identity. Apart from the childhood of Mr Biswas is blamed unlucky for the every member of the family that is the hindrance of Mr Biswas' growth.

**Keywords:** Identity, Existence, Independence, Colonialism, Recognition, Dominant, Predictions, Superstition, Heroism, Hindrance.

## Introduction

Identity and independence, both subject are related to one person or one thing for his existence because these two subjects realise one person, his limitation or his meaningful activity to concern that one subject. V. S. Naipaul's novel *A House for Mr Biswas* which shows the importance of both subjects but before this if these matters to be studied or discussed that identity is a particular image of one person or one particular thing that is recognised by its some unique features. In other words, identity is what a person possesses by his surrounding all belonging things, is known as identity. Apart from, independence also affects the identity of one person. In dependency, one person doesn't have complete self-identity and existence. In beginning everyone's identity takes place in the society by the birth time and this society which is a man made system gives the first identity as a name. A society which is the mutual need of the people and people learn what the society is, what the world is and what the differentiation is, in the different type of identities. These different identities teach the person the importance of the existence, identity and of the independence.

*A House for Mr Biswas* is a novel which comprises many aspects but if these aspects are studied then protagonist role comes first who seeks his identity and independence but has many shortcomings. He has the quest for identity and independence but he has no good skills in any profession that leads him many problems. Such as all sons-in-law's lives at Hanuman House as quite he does not want to be at Hanuman House so he quarrels many times and does not stay at Hanuman House. He believes in self-respect and human dignity so he goes to make his individual identity.

He is rebellious for his independence rather he is absurd and ridiculous also. Identity according to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary is

1. Who or what somebody/ something is.....
2. The characteristics, feeling or belief that distinguishes people from others
3. The condition of being oneself or itself, and not another

The author of the novel presents many different types of the identities such as Indian rural culture, traditions, superstitions, life styles, the hybrid of the cultures and these identities are related to Mr Biswas' life. Readers of the novel accept it that protagonist of the novel is a hero but a weak hero because he fails many times in his struggle due to his many shortcomings but he does not give up and struggles his all age. He thinks that his born identity is chained strongly with him but not for all age so he dares and seeks his identity which gives him his aim of his life. Apart from the experiences of many complicated situations and social inequalities also provoke him to seek his identity.

#### **Aim of the Study**

The study of this research paper aims to search the importance of identity and independence in regarding the term of colonialism. It explores the difference between the colonized and colonizer. And also explores the importance of independence through the difference between the colonized and protagonist of the novel. It investigates that hegemony effects existence of people. It analyzes the importance of existence when the hero revolts against the colonial power. It aims to search the heroism of protagonist however he is a very weak character. Apart from this, it explores rural characteristics in relation to the importance of identity.

#### **Review of Literature**

There are many works on identity, independence, colonialism and post-colonialism. V.S. Naipaul's novel *A House for Mr Biswas* is concerned to the importance of identity and independence which is the best novel in the context of these themes. It has many characteristics of colonialism that presents the importance of existence, identity and independence. Other scholars have investigated on these themes in the aspect of post-colonialism; however novel has many characteristics of colonialism. So, many scholars have appeared on the research of these subjects.

In the beginning of the novel, V. S. Naipaul presents the childhood of Mr Biswas and the rural India in the background of the life style in which superstitions are also fully practised. He depicts that illiteracy in the rural area generates many troubles and situations. Mr Biswas is victimised of some predictions and these victims make him odd and helpless. Due to the psychological effect of these situations, he becomes indifferent to everyone. The author gives that how Indian superstitions affect Mr. Biswas' childhood and how people torture him for being inauspicious to take the life of his father. Poverty in Mr Biswas life has a big role in resisting him to go head and his poor skills prove his failure to reduce his poverty. As colonialism term represents

power or control on the others, as quite in the novel Mrs Tulsi makes the control on the others as on the every member of the Tulsi family but Mr Biswas likes independence so he rebels to get his identity and existence.

The novel has the aspect of the identity in many ways which can be discussed in term of colonialism as an effect of colonial power. These different aspects of the identity show Naipaul's deep knowledge about Indians' traditions, superstitions and the life style. He introduces superstitions, for example, midwife states that Mr Biswas will be a reason to die to his father and mother which expresses Indians' usual superstitions based belief. It is also stated in this novel that some hour or midnight time is inauspicious according to Indians' belief.

He said, "First of all, the features of this unfortunate boy. He will have good teeth but they will be rather wide, and there will be spaces between them. I suppose you know what that means. The boy will be a lecher and a spendthrift. Possibly a liar as well. It is hard to be sure about those gaps between the teeth" (*AHFM B 12*).

Further, this astrologer also predicts that future of Mr Biswas is safe only if he keeps a distance from water and trees. He states that water is harmful to him so never bathe him and he must not be seen by his father up to twenty-one days to mitigate the evil things. Apart from the astrologer states that father must see Biswas' face in the reflection of coconut oil which is to be kept on the brass plate and suggests the boy the name which is also based on some superstitions. So these all types of traditions, superstitions and the roots of the culture are the Indian identities.

The author expresses that how rural people follow illogically superstitions based thought and tortures Mr Biswas by his early childhood. People believe that Mr Biswas will be unlucky for everyone in the family and for long life. His image is formed in this way due to many reasons, such as how his sixth finger added to his unlucky life with this how he has said that his sneezing is unlucky to everyone. Apart from he is blamed in every negative image which makes in the novel that how one particular person can be forced in particular identity to others. His images and growth everything is affected by such all matters. It is thought that Mohun knows about his concerned prediction which may be harmful to him such as to go near water because astrologer has been warned them. These identities which are portrayed in the novel, all comes to one person according to his surrounding society, social conditions, family and culture of the society. These identities are not made by one person rather by every person or by the whole society. According to the society, these identities affect everyone such as Mr Biswas' early acquire identities shows Indian culture.

Naipaul argues in the novel that the birth registration of Mr Biswas is his first official existence and identity. Apart from Mr Biswas in his teenage gets

earlier awareness about himself that he is not in good position and realises also that this life is full of bitter facts. He doesn't disclose his fear to anyone and doesn't go his friend Alec's house as well Alec also does not go to Mr Biswas' house. They keep their home as the secret to each other. Mr Biswas thinks it is painful, if anyone learns where he lives, in a mud hut. Here he learns gradually about his unhappiness for poverty stricken life and quest to overcome the poverty stricken life.

Dehauti and Mr Biswas meet after many years at Tara House but they do not speak to each other intimately as they do feel happy. There is clear identity about their conditions. Dehauti behaves indifferently to Mr Biswas because she lives at Tara's house as a maid and Mr Biswas is also treated there only as a Bharamin, not as a relative. While Tara has been promised for Dehauti's better education and nourishment before bringing her at her house but she breaks her promise and uses her as a maid. Naipaul writes lot facts of the society according to conditions which show Mr Biswas as a weak and poor protagonist of the novel. Whenever Mr Biswas goes in Tara's house, it is as a Bharamin or a reader, with a status distinct from Dehauti's and he has little opportunity to speak her. Mr Biswas, when taken out from school to take the education to be a pundit is only his helplessness and with this Tara's unsupportive response to Biswas leads him to drop his study. Apart from this, he has no choice to choose his career option due to his poverty stricken family background and mother's helplessness to growth him so when pundit Jairam teaches him Hindi, he accepts it helplessly.

Mr Biswas working as a shopkeeper used to stay in the same shop but when the shop is not opened on Sunday and on Thursday he has no place where he can stay, apart from his regular growth realises him the importance of house and existence. Sometimes he goes to see his mother where he feels his mother and his own helplessness. When Mr Biswas is blamed and beaten for theft, he asks his mother to not go there again and shows his innocence and helplessness. In reality, the dollar is not missing but it is hidden in trouser at bottom of pocket which is not searched out properly rather his dependence on other leads him to tolerate Bhandat's mistreatment. Later when he says that he is going to get a house and a job himself which shows his awareness of the importance of identity and independence. Ramchand and Dehauti invite him at their house but Mr Biswas hesitates to go there because his poor economic condition is same as it was in past. After this when he meets his sister Dehauti at her house she welcomes him cheerfully then he realises his last meeting with Dehauti at Tara's house when she did not talk him intimately. Such difference in her behaviour shows the difference of her condition, existence and identity at Tara's house with this Tara's strict behaviour as a master not as a relative of Dehauti.

A professional person acquires an identity by his profession in same way Mr Biswas acquire his identity as a sign painter, rather he works in different type of jobs and according these he acquires different

identities. But according to his earlier preference he chooses sign painting, that is his suitable work and he wonders why he has been not chosen this gift earlier in his career. As a painter with Alec's help, he works on the café sign and gets delighted and amazement to satisfy the proprietor. On the other hand, Mr. Biswas feels his trapping at Hanuman House and this trapping with him and with other sons-in-law is as colonised people are trapped by the colonial power. It is favourable for colonialism type of control in Tulsi family that every son-in-law is not having awareness and importance about independence or they have no desire to go according to their will. While Mr Biswas is very opposite to other sons-in-law so he does not endure Mrs Tulsi and Seth's dominance over him as colonialism type of control which shows his awareness about independence and existence.

As colonial power uses colonised people for its own benefit as well as Mrs Tulsi uses every member of Tulsi family for her own benefit. On the other hand, she also cares for every member but she does not give equal chances to everyone and makes her separate property for her sons. It is more clear when she tells about her past that she used to be in poor condition when her only daughter was married and had to educate her two sons, apart from his husband had been died in car accident. But she manages every girl marriage in this way that dowry is not given to anyone and marriage is incorporated without any expense and every son-in-law is used for her own benefit. After marriage, Mr Biswas learns about unexpected bitter facts and situations. There he realises how he has been trapped and feels unimportant. Such situations having similarities with colonialism when people generally have to frighten of powered people.

Mr Biswas thinks that Govind is also a fellow sufferer so he discusses with him about the issues of identity and independence. During talking Govind suggests him to leave sign painting and paddle your own canoe. But later Govind quarrels with Mr Biswas because his behaviour is very bad for every member of the Tulsi family.

Are you Govind shouted, breathing hard, his handsome face contorted. 'Is you who spit on Owad.'

Mr. Biswas was frightened.

He heard more footsteps on the stairs. The bawling drew nearer.

'Spit? Mr. Biswas said, I ain't spit on anybody. I just gargle out of the window and throw away some bad food.' (AHFMB 137)

After some days when Tulsi's family could not accept Mr Biswas' behaviour, Mrs Tulsi asked Mr. Biswas to be settled in The Chase village as a shopkeeper. But in seeking identity and independence Shama tries always that Mr Biswas should not paddle his own canoe. At The Chase village when Mr Biswas becomes shopkeeper thinks selling is an easy way of making a living, and why people bother to do anything else. Rather his identity is changed but his dependency is still on Tulsi family so he feels a stranger in his own yard. As quite his shop is called

Tulsi shop rather he has been named it by his own name which shows his dependency on Tulsi family. Rather his efforts have been appreciated by Shama as when Shama says, "well, you make me really proud of you today." (AHFMB 163)

The author of the novel expresses that position of one person realises him his identity and existence, if it is called less than of the actual position, then it becomes unacceptable. Such as when Mr Biswas looks the birth certificate of his son, gets surprised and angered because there is clearly written about the occupation of Mr Biswas as a labourer. He does not like it and says, "Why it is mentioned as labourer rather than any as a sign painter, shopkeeper or proprietor? Then he is answered, "But you can't call yourself a proprietor. The shop belongs to mai. You can't call me a labourer either."

Mr Biswas as a shopkeeper fails and again helplessly goes to take the help of Tulsi's family. So Mrs Tulsi decides to send him in Green vale as a driver and gives an end room in the barracks. He experiences barracks then decide to build his own house and thinks the house will give him his identity. One day Mr Biswas decides to build his own house because he thinks otherwise his children would stay ever at Hanuman House, and he would remain in the barrack room. And he has panic at his inaction in every night but in every morning he reaffirms to his decision. So on Saturday, he asks about the land on rent to build his house to Seth and shortly he asks George Maclean a carpenter and cabinet maker to build his house. House is made but incomplete due to insufficient money. When the labourer is not paid properly, construction work is stopped and one day this house is burnt by labourer due to not paying their salary. Mr Biswas' shortcoming, mismanagement, with this his helplessness incorporates his mind to kill Anand, Savi and himself due to his failure in getting his identity and independence. Shama sends words by Seth to bring the children at Green Vale for few days for which he dreads. But when Shama and children are not with him he has loneliness which makes him ill he thinks he has been not received anything in his life. His despairing about his failure leads him to great sorrow which becomes the result of his mental sickness. He has unnecessary fear from his present situation which gives him unique identity. When labourer informs about the sickness at Hanuman House then Tulsi family comes to help him.

Naipaul writes that Mr Biswas' bad situations lead regular troubles to others but his inner fire provokes him regularly to get his identity and independence. He writes more that Mr Biswas is brought at Hanuman House due to his bad position from Green Vale, there he feels not good and doesn't want to stay more. While he gets good treatment at Hanuman House yet he does not stay more because he likes his own identity and independence. So later soon he goes to Port of Spain rather he has not confirmed plan to go Port of Spain. He goes at Dehanti's house and thinks she can understand him, whom he likes also. He joins there a job with a newspaper called Trinidad Sentinel and gets his new identity and feels better than the Hanuman House

because now he paddles his own canoe. He has happiness because he has not Mrs Tulsi's control over him but there again he gets the problem of accommodation and this helpless situation leads him to go again dependent of Mrs Tulsi's accommodation. Again he feels the desire for independence and existence.

Mr Biswas is forced to go at Shorthill due to Mrs Tulsi's coming at Port of Spain and there again he builds a house of his own but due to bad luck this house catches fire and he gets misery. Then he again can't help to himself to join Mrs Tulsi House at Shorthill. Mrs Tulsi again sends him at Port of Spain due to her own need. Mr Biswas comply due to his dependency over Mrs Tulsi's property, house. Shortly for his own benefit, he joins as a community welfare officer in the government sector. This is his new identity and independence to join this job but he still has the dependency of accommodation on Mrs Tulsi's house, despite he buys a car by the loan.

Mrs Tulsi and Owad goes in England for Owad's medical study and when they come back at Port of Spain, then they get over a crowded house which is leading many problems to everyone. So in need, Mr Biswas borrows four thousand dollars from his uncle Ajodha and purchases a house. Mr Biswas' house leads Mr Biswas' final identity, independence and existence but shortly news comes about Mr Biswas' death in Trinidad Sentinel news paper as "JOURNALIST DIES SUDDENLY" (AHFMB 622), which is the only news paper that gives the place to this news. Radio also announces this news but it is paid for this news which gives his identity in a new way.

### **Conclusion**

So it is very right to say that one person who is not independent and has the desire to be independent that person can't be happy, else or till the getting of his independence. Independence belongs to one creature or human being who has mind and awareness. Indians were dependent when they had not awareness and unity. Colonialism was going on successfully but when they got awareness, they struggled for independence and one day they got success. V.S. Naipaul in this novel presents Mr Biswas as who has awareness, desire for independence and who has the desire for identity. Apart from he is a protagonist, a hero, despite his shortcoming but he leads his important general role in the novel. He struggles his all age but doesn't accept completely Mrs Tulsi's dominance over him as quite an other son-in-law. He doesn't give up but his helplessness leads him to be dependent on Mrs Tulsi.

Colonial aspect of the novel is characterised by the character of Mrs Tulsi and Seth because they run their power as the colonial power and sons-in-law except Mr Biswas are characterised as colonised people. In other words, the novel has a resemblance of colonialism type of system which has been reflected in the medium of contemporary situations concerned with the life of Mr Biswas, Mrs. Tulsi and others also. In last it will be right to say there is the importance of identity and independence, without this one cannot live his life in a good way.

**Abbreviation**

*A House for Mr Biswas - AHFM B*

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