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## DIASPORIC DISILLUSIONMENT IN V. S. NAIPAUL'S *A HOUSE FOR MR. BISWAS*: A POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVE

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**Abstract:** V. S. Naipaul holds a major position among postcolonial writers. He expanded diaspora literature to the forefront by highlighting the painful problems of immigrants and presenting critical issues of dissatisfaction with one's identity. The theme, disillusionment, is introduced in his works basing on personal experiences. It was depicted in *An Area of Darkness*, where he cites his disappointment upon encountering the Indian realities and the postcolonial milieu that faced the burdens of poverty and corruption. Disillusionment is a deep psychological and philosophical state whereby people undergo the shattering of their ideals, expectations, or other beliefs that they had assumed to be true. The loss of faith in systems, societies, dreams, or even the meaning of existence generates a general feeling of disappointment and alienation. Within postcolonial literary discourse, disillusionment takes on peculiar dimensions in as much as it interfaces with colonial trauma, cultural dislocation, and identity fragmentation.

*A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961) is considered Naipaul's magnum opus, which narrates the struggle of Mohun Biswas in a world where an individual's worth is measured by personal achievement and worldly success. The most acute expression of disillusionment happens when Mr. Biswas is subjected to psychological manipulation and gaslighting by the Tulsis and sugarcane workers, leading him to challenge his existence and to go through a midlife crisis. The fulfillment of Mr. Biswas's quest, the possession of his own house on Sikkim Street, embodies both triumph and ongoing disillusionment. The novel's abiding relevance grows from its clear-sighted admission that success is tenuous and unfinished in an imperfect world, yet the pursuit of dignity and selfhood matters deeply despite the inevitability of disappointments.

**Index Terms** - Diasporic, Disillusionment, Alienation, Disappointment

### INTRODUCTION:

Disillusionment is a deep psychological and philosophical state whereby people undergo the shattering of their ideals, expectations, or other beliefs that they had assumed to be true. The loss of faith in systems, societies, dreams, or even the meaning of existence generates a general feeling of disappointment and alienation. In literature, disillusionment is usually expressed by the gradual or sudden realization of the characters that their ideals are unreachable, societies are not genuine, or identities are structurally broken. The experience goes beyond disappointment, which means a more serious break occurred between an internal vision of reality and external conditions that deny the validity of that vision.

Disillusionment was the leading literary theme in the age of Modernism, and more particularly following the First World War, when early modernist writers breached the implicit contract with the public through articulation of deep skepticism towards progress, meaning, and traditional values. American Modernist fiction, whether focused on the individual or against civilization at large, looked upon the widespread feelings of disillusionment and loss that resulted from nihilistic impulses or the flash of hope for change. Authors like Ernest Hemingway spoke of the Lost Generation's disillusionment in *The Sun Also Rises* and *A Farewell to Arms*, published in 1926 and 1929, respectively, while F. Scott Fitzgerald questioned the American Dream in *The Great Gatsby*, published in 1925.

The postmodern literary movement, after World War II, furthers to enhance the theme through the expression of post-war era disillusionment. It renounces claims of truth and comprehensive analysis for fragmentation and skepticism. Writing by postmodernists focuses on chaos and identity crises found in a world of uncertainty, bringing complicated and constructive elements into reality, perception, and knowledge through techniques such as fragmentation, deconstruction, and unreliable narrators. The post-World War II historical climate of disillusionment provided a fertile environment for the evolution of literature in challenging readers to revise assumptions and to accept inherent uncertainties.

Within postcolonial literary discourse, disillusionment takes on peculiar dimensions in as much as it interfaces with colonial trauma, cultural dislocation, and identity fragmentation. For this reason, postcolonial literature does not simply present a writing that comes after empire but rather critically considers how the colonial relationship gives rise to issues such as an inferiority complex, desires for whiteness, passivity before colonial powers, extreme self-hate, and debilitating mental states. Frantz Fanon insisted that the end of colonial rule required not only political and economic transformation but also psychological change. He also insisted that when the internal structure of identity was effectively challenged, colonialism would truly be abolished.

Homi K. Bhabha's notion of colonial ambivalence elaborates how colonized subjects are permanently torn between the opposing positions of being domesticated yet untamed, harmless yet threatening, producing a continuous shift between the polarities of similarity and difference. The individual freedom in postcolonial societies paradoxically emerged as a source of great disillusionment when characters confronted new forms of oppression despite political independence. Postcolonial fictions develop with the complex lives of individuals striving for a concrete sense of identity and space through narrating the aftermath of decolonization on politics, culture, and society, and showing how the promise of freedom fails to confer genuine belonging.

#### **V. S. NAIPAUL'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE CONCEPT OF DISILLUSIONMENT:**

V. S. Naipaul holds a major position among postcolonial writers. He expanded diaspora literature to the forefront by highlighting the painful problems of immigrants and presenting critical issues of dissatisfaction with one's identity. The theme, disillusionment, is introduced in his works basing on personal experiences. It was depicted in *An Area of Darkness*, where he cites his disappointment upon encountering the Indian realities and the postcolonial milieu that faced the burdens of poverty and corruption. The characters of Naipaul face disillusionment when they search for roots in places where their existence is threatened. Postcolonial concerns are illustrated through layers of anxiety, confusion, and the devastation of dreams.

The aspects of escapism and disillusionment, exile and alienation, displacement or migration, and the quest for a coherent sense of self are the major themes in Naipaul's works. Naipaul effectively translates dissatisfaction through characters striving to belong to a world that rejects them, thereby producing figures who are devastated and exhausted by their efforts to survive in an unjust world. His fiction embodies the postcolonial dilemma of being and belonging, with characters representing real individuals faced with exile and exclusion. Bruce King observes, "While the novels and short stories have seldom been about himself, they have reflected the various stages of his disillusionment with Trinidad, his despair with India and his concern with being a homeless ex-colonial" (108).

## EXISTENTIAL DISILLUSIONMENT:

*A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961) is considered Naipaul's magnum opus, which narrates the struggle of Mohun Biswas in a world where an individual's worth is measured by personal achievement and worldly success. The novel begins with the haunting assertion, "How terrible it would have been...to have lived and died as one had been born, unnecessary and unaccommodated" (Naipaul, *A House for Mr Biswas* 8), which thereby sets up the central conflict: Mr. Biswas's suffering due to living in other people's houses, while his ultimate aim is to own a house so that he might at least die in his own house. This existential disillusionment stems from his inauspicious birth in an obscure Trinidadian village, where many hold that his birth was not necessary, fostering the idea that if he were to disappear, others would hardly notice.

The alienation of the protagonist from childhood makes him live a life in fragments as "he was to be a wanderer with no place he could call his own, with no family except that which he has to attempt to create out of engulfing world of Tulsis... it seemed to him that he was really quite alone" (Naipaul, *A House for Mr Biswas* 38). This rootlessness characterizes his whole life as he faces significant hardship in seeking stability. Alienation is said to be referring to "an extraordinary variety of psycho-social disorders, including loss of self, anxiety, estrangement, despair, depersonalization, rootlessness, apathy, social disorganization, powerlessness, meaninglessness, isolation, pessimism, and the loss of belief" (Archana 72).

## DISILLUSIONMENT WITH FAMILY AND SOCIAL STRUCTURES:

Mr. Biswas's marriage to Shama, daughter of the wealthy Tulsi family, traps him within a rigid social system threatening to absorb his identity into its inertia. Hanuman House, named after the monkey god Hanuman, is the embodiment of a stifling dictatorship and extreme conservatism with overtones of a Dickensian prison: "Among the tumbledown timber and corrugated iron buildings in the high street at Arwacas, Hanuman House stood like an alien white fortress. The concrete walls looked as thick as they were and when the narrow doors of the Tulsis on the ground floor were closed the House became bulky, impregnable and blank" (Naipaul, *A House for Mr Biswas* 81). The interior atmosphere has a quasi-deathly quality, and the extensive insulation of its inhabitants from human freedom and progressive ideas speaks volumes on the pervasive ill health of social life.

Unlike the other Tulsi sons-in-law, who agree to play subordinate roles, Mr. Biswas engages in conscious attempts to resist and undermine his role, hence developing a significant alienation from the family. His statement, "He has no money or position. He was expected to be a Tulsi. At once he rebelled" (Naipaul, *A House for Mr Biswas* 99), epitomizes a key resistance to surrendering individual identity. The apathy from Shama, who does not even console him whenever Govind beats him mercilessly in her presence, adds to his alienation and disappointment with family life. Seth's irony to Mr. Biswas, "This house is like a Republic already" (Naipaul, *A House for Mr Biswas* 126), highlights the internal politics of the house as a functioning polity, which is full of motion and activity but devoid of any kind of belonging or emotional refuge.

## PSYCHOLOGICAL DISILLUSIONMENT:

The most acute expression of disillusionment happens when Mr. Biswas is subjected to psychological manipulation and gaslighting by the Tulsis and sugarcane workers, leading him to challenge his existence and to go through a midlife crisis. He, having three children with no wage and no house of his own, grows to despise both his work and his family, frequently involving painfully in internal arguments with himself. The novel voices his realization: "Only then, when the danger had disappeared, Mr. Biswas realized that for more than an hour he had not questioned himself" (Naipaul, *A House for Mr Biswas* 284), showing that his apprehensions are essentially psychic and may be dissipated only by sustained activity. This remark reveals how grave his mental disintegration was, where even for small intervals of time in which self-doubt dissolves, become monumental for him.

Mr. Biswas feels an emptiness in which his past, present, and future all merge into one endless tunnel which leads to nowhere, with no arrival. Images of darkness, decay, and death recur throughout the novel, serving as signs of Biswas's growing feelings of failure and his psychological entrapment. Earlier in Green Vale, "the vegetation... is damp, dark and closed. The rotting leaves choke the green gutters; on the trees, half the leaves are dead, the others a dead green. Yet the leaves never fall; dark is forever held in check" (Naipaul, *A House for Mr Biswas* 214), symbolically represents Biswas's rising despair and his unfulfilled inner life.

**CULTURAL DISILLUSIONMENT:**

The novel presents Mr. Biswas as one with double consciousness, veering between the assumption of a newly encountered culture and the inability to let go of one's native culture and religion, thus placing him in dilemmatic circumstances. The duplicity here is symbolic of the postcolonial condition, leading to an intermediary process that creates despair and dislocation. Thus, Mr. Biswas confides, "Well, since I had been in this house. I begin to get the feeling that to be a good Hindu you must be a good Roman Catholic first" (Naipaul, *A House for Mr Biswas* 128), a sentiment indicating the distortion of genuine Hindu culture by foreign influence and the burlesque at the level of religious hybridity. At Hanuman House, the old Hindu rites are continued, but the spirit behind them is elided, as Christmas and Christian visitors become routine.

The novel reveals that, "despite the solidity of their establishment the Tulsis had never considered themselves settled in Arwacas or even Trinidad" (Naipaul, *A House for Mr Biswas* 412), thus evidencing an ingrained feeling of impermanence and cultural dislocation. The immigrants suffer a complete loss of shared background in an alien environment, become homeless among aliens while slowly realizing that the love for their native land, kin, and ethnic origins is diminished with every passing year. The cultural displacement happens both in geographical and psychic terms. The diasporic community faces the fragmentation, frustration, and loss of initial identity, while trying to build new ones.

**HOUSE AS SYMBOL OF INCOMPLETE SETTLEMENT:**

The fulfillment of Mr. Biswas's quest, the possession of his own house on Sikkim Street, embodies both triumph and ongoing disillusionment. The narrative asserts, "And the house did not fall" (Naipaul, *A House for Mr Biswas* 623) to underscore the importance of securing a domicile in which one may live with dignity and without dependence on others. This seeming success is basically ambiguous. Biswas's health and life are devoured by this pursuit. The house is overpriced, badly designed, and dysfunctional; and at his death, it remains heavily mortgaged to the bank, raising questions about whether he really owned it. Shama's response captures this ambiguity: "It look as though we will have to do a few repairs before we move" (Naipaul, *A House for Mr Biswas* 606), to minimize the house's many faults while settling into a disappointing reality.

When Mr. Biswas is discussing construction materials with the Negro builder Mr. Maclean, insufficient funds mean the house will never be completed, leaving the project "incomplete forever like an unfulfilled dream to own a house in Mr. Biswas's life" (Baviskar 69). The symbolic meaning is much more far-reaching than the physical edifice. The house symbolizes stability, self-respect, and identity; yet, it is incomplete, signalling the incompleteness of Mr. Biswas's life and generation. As Karma puts it, "His was a society without heroes. It was a multiracial immigrant, slave, colonial society with the drive and restlessness of immigrants; it was a stunted society with the forms of traditions and culture surviving but the core lost, submerged, destroyed, rendered meaningless and unimportant" (14).

**SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DISILLUSIONMENT:**

Naipaul illustrates individual and social limitations through satirical examinations of frustrated energy and aspiration throughout the novel. Mr. Biswas's attempts at diverse careers such as sign painter, journalist, welfare officer, repeatedly end in failure or disappointment. It demonstrates how personal limitations meet with social frameworks that provide no real chances of gaining achievement. The society and the surroundings seem to exert no pressure or condition any possibility of transcendence above banality, making Mr. Biswas's rebellion against Hanuman House an aberration viewed by its members as deviant. His job in various places brings only temporary relief, as in each, the intrinsic restraint of the position is found, adding to the growing conviction of Mr. Biswas that true fulfillment remains impossible to achieve.

The novel reflects the deplorable state of immigrants "who have nothing more expectation but a place to live in" (Baviskar 64), depicting Mr. Biswas as part of a labourer class where his father left no property after death. His economic hardships aggravate his psychological and cultural disappointment, by reason of which he remained eternally marginalized, "almost an orphan who remains an outsider in Trinidadian society and never catches up with the social tone" (Baviskar 67). The story shows "his dreams reject them" (Kaur 3), while the integration of fact and fiction conveys faulty human characters facing negativism. Naipaul's ironic understanding of the Trinidadian environment, along with his dispassionate and sometimes deflating humour, seems to avoid sympathetic perception of human weakness for the sake of highlighting the relentless nature of social and economic compulsions.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CURRENT WORLD:

The representation of disillusionment in *A House for Mr. Biswas* transcends its explicit postcolonial frame to engage with universal contemporary issues about identity, belonging, and meaning within an increasingly shattered society. The novel's analysis states that Mr. Biswas's struggle for selfhood certainly resonates with modern individuals living within globalized environments in which the traditional anchors of identity like family, culture, and nation, have become uncertain or debated. Alvin Toffler's notion of the modern man as "the new nomad" (74) in search of identity correlates Mr. Biswas's condition, suggesting that rootlessness and the pursuit of an authentic selfhood are defining characteristics of contemporary existence. Its exploration of how individuals establish meaning in settings that provide neither stable traditions nor genuine opportunities, represents ongoing challenges the displaced, marginalized, or economically precarious populations worldwide faced.

Contemporary debates on migration, integration, and cultural hybridity within an increasingly mobile world are prefigured by Naipaul's representation of diasporic experience. The novel depicts that migrants experience complete collapse of shared backgrounds in alien environments, sensing homelessness among strangers and trying to adapt while hanging on to origins. This speaks powerfully about contemporary migration crises, refugee experiences, and debates about multiculturalism, as societies confront how to accommodate diverse populations in the face of xenophobia, discrimination, and structural inequalities. The notion of double consciousness that Mr. Biswas operates under: being torn between two cultures, never fully belonging to either, is of particular relevance to second and third generation immigrants negotiating complex identity formations.

The psychological disillusionment that pushes Mr. Biswas to challenge his existence and undergoes mental strain echoes modern day concerns about mental health, particularly as they pertain to social isolation, economic precarity, and existential anxiety. The comprehensive catalogue of conditions that the novel portrays in relation to alienation, "loss of self, anxiety, estrangement, despair, depersonalization, rootlessness, apathy, social disorganization, powerlessness, meaninglessness, isolation, pessimism, and the loss of belief" (Archana 72), are increasingly recognized as characteristics of modern life. The remark, observing that Mr. Biswas's anxieties are "psychological and that he can get better by keeping himself occupied" (GradeSaver), identifies coping mechanisms while recognizing the fundamentally social and structural origins of psychological distress.

The persistent problems of class division, limited social mobility, and the elusiveness of economic security under contemporary capitalism are illustrated through Mr. Biswas's struggles for economic independence and social recognition. The presence of a greatly mortgaged house at the time of his death raises questions about the actual home ownership, echoing current concerns about debt, precarious home ownership, and the ways in which financial systems reproduce rather than improve inequality. His professional failures and the failures of society to present him with real chances for advancement reflect current concerns over underemployment, the gig economy, and structural barriers forbidding the marginalized from reaching stability. Individual effort, however determined, cannot defeat structures, an argument with enormous implications for making sense of persistent inequalities.

The depiction of cultural and psychological damage in *A House for Mr. Biswas* serves to highlight the ongoing struggles of postcolonialism, with formerly colonized societies negotiating the legacies of colonialism amidst neocolonial economic and cultural domination. Naipaul's depiction of how colonial structures create inferiority complexes, cultural alienation, and fractured identities, remains valid to explain contemporary postcolonial societies dealing with issues related to authenticity, development, and cultural sovereignty. Similarly, the novel shows the hybrid communities where "the forms of traditions and culture survive but the core is lost, submerged, destroyed, rendered meaningless and unimportant" (Kamra 14). This hints at remaining problematic situations with respect to preservation and revival of culture in the globalization era. Though decolonization implies an extremely important political independence, it also involves deep psychological and cultural transformation, which is incomplete in many contexts.

Mr. Biswas's pursuit of a house, which stands for identity, autonomy, and dignity more than shelter, is highly echoing contemporary discourse on housing justice, homelessness, and the right to the city. As the novel illustrates, "for displaced people like the Biswas, owning a house does not just mean having shelter; it means the imposition of an order upon their chaotic and patternless existence; it signifies stability and coherence" (Surya Bahadur 108). The consequences of such a perspective go a long way in addressing current housing crises, recognizing that housing is not just a commodity but a core human need linked to psychological well-being, social belonging, and human dignity. Mr. Biswas's house, being imperfect and flawed, yet of value because he insists on its worth, shows partial solutions hold meaning even if ideal outcomes cannot be reached.

**CONCLUSION:**

The exploration of Disillusionment in V. S. Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas* is profound and multilayered, reaching out from its specific postcolonial setting to universal human issues about identity, belonging, and meaning. The novel follows Mr. Biswas from an inauspicious birth through decades of conflict, cataloguing his existential, psychological, cultural, social, and economic disillusionment while, at the same time, celebrating his persistent efforts of resistance against circumstances that would make him "unnecessary and unaccommodated" (Naipaul, *A House for Mr Biswas* 8). Naipaul reveals that disillusionment functions at various levels like individual, familial, cultural, and societal to illuminate the complex ways in which personal aspiration interacts with structural limitation through complex symbolism, rich characterization, and complete social observation.

The novel's abiding relevance grows from its clear-sighted admission that success is tenuous and unfinished in an imperfect world, yet the pursuit of dignity and selfhood matters deeply despite the inevitability of disappointments. Mr. Biswas's life and his partially fulfilled dream of possessing a house being mortgaged, incomplete, but his own, embody the essentially tragic yet heroic nature of human striving within contexts offering narrow possibilities. Naipaul's masterpiece functions not simply as a historical document of postcolonial experience but as a timeless meditation on the human condition, presenting how individuals fabricate meaning, maintain dignity, and insist on their significance in environments fundamentally indifferent or hostile to their aspirations.

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