

Theme And The Image Of House In Naipaul's *A House For Mr. Biswas*

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Abstract:

Imagery refers to the use of figurative language to represent objects, actions and ideas in such a way that it appeals to our senses. Imagery makes use of particular words that create visual representation of ideas. In short, Imagery is associated with mental pictures or images. All great writers-be it poets, novelists and dramatists or essayist make use of imagery in their works of art. Great writers like Shakespeare, John Keats, W.B.Yeats, Charles Dickens, T.S.Eliot etc have made use of it in their literary master pieces. The function of imagery in literature is to generate a vibrant and graphic representation of a scene that appeal to our imagination and senses using figures of speech such as simile, metaphor, personification, onomatopoeia etc. This paper examines Naipaul's use of house imagery and how far he succeeds in fitting it well with the theme of the novel.

V.S.Naipaul is a distinguished novelist par excellence in Indian writing in English. He is a Caribbean writer of Indian ancestry. He is one of the most celebrated common wealth writers who has a universal appeal. His father and his brother were writers. Even at an early age he found a profound alienation both from the close knit family life of his Brahmin ancestors and from social and political life of his native Trinidad. Search for identity, rootlessness, displacement and theme of isolation are profound in his novels. The alienation of his life is etched on the characters of his works. In his early novels *The Mystic Masseur*, *The suffrage of Elvira* and *Miguel street*, Naipaul handles the theme of displacement of individuals in colonial and post-colonial contexts. Search for identity forms the major theme of his famous novel "A House for Mr.Biswas". This paper examines the theme of this novel and Naipaul's use of house imagery which becomes an integral part of the novel that forms a perfect narrative technique in which he excels.

"A House for Mr. Biswas" is a long book that consists of two parts. Naipaul has made use of third person narrative to convey the simple but striking story of Mr.Biswas who yearns to have a house of his own. His aspiration to own a house of his own is actually there within him that it drives him out of his mother's house only to be trapped in the household of the Tulsis and marry Shama just to fulfil his wish to build a house. But he revolts against the dark and bleak circumstances that prevail in the Hanuman House, where he lives only to see his dream becoming a reality at the end of the novel, though he doesn't live to see its completion, at least we can say that his battle paid him dividends-a house at last for his children. The novel excellently and movingly captures the mental pain and agonies of the lonely man who is caught in the web of life and who fights a lonely battle against his own fate to triumph at last by building a house of his own.

The central theme of the novel is alienation and quest for identity which is revealed through the hero Mr.Biswas who is alienated, rejected and frustrated and leads a life of complete discontentment in the household of the Tulsis who seem to dominate him and hence he finds this own freedom at stake. In every phase of the novel, Mr. Biswas is a victim of circumstances which overrules his entire fate. Through his marriage to Shama, Biswas has written his own destiny to live and undergo a death-in-life experience in the house of the Tulsis.

Naipaul has abundantly made use of the image of the house as the central motif of the novel. Of all the images, the house, middle passage and vegetation image are central to the understanding of the novel and they buttress the main theme of social frustration and personal dejection. We first see the house in the prologue, long

before it has acquired metaphorical significance. At first, it is no more than a building in a suburb, fulfilling an ordinary middle class dream:

"Ten weeks before he died, Mr. Mohan Biswas, a journalist of Sikkim Street, St. Thomas, Port of Spain was sacked. He had been ill for some time. In less than a year, he had spent more than nine weeks in the colonial hospital and convalesced at home for even longer... Mr. Biswas forty six and had four children. He had no money. His wife Shama had no money. On the house in Sikkim Street, Mr. Biswas owed, and had been owing for years, three thousand dollars..."

For the children the house brings security, distancing all that has been painful in their past. The house brings order giving wherence to their memories. It is movingly appropriate that its final significance to a grown-up Anand should be that the house becomes the pivot of the novel in which he explores his father's life, a central image giving wherence and significance to the multitude of details and ideas. What Naipaul has done, in other words, has been to abstract from his father's life not a sequence of events but a quality of experience which he has shaped in such a way to project his own vision of its significance. We could find something of Mr. Biswas in the writings of Naipaul. It is clear from the biography that the broad outlines of Mr. Biswas career are taken from life. The family did live in places corresponding to those mentioned in the novel-chagunas becomes Arwaras, Tunapuna becomes pagotes, Verdant vile becomes The chase, Petit valley in Digo Martin becomes short hills. The various houses in the book are fictionalized only in their addresses-The Lion House where Naipaul was born becomes The Hanuman House, the lions on the balustrade changed to images of Hanuman, the monkey God.

The house stands at the centre, and everything that Mr. Biswas experience signifies is contained in the various meanings the metaphor accumulated in the course of the novel. The house as the metaphor is the core of the novel. The novel presents a world which is shot through with contradictions. The first succession of the house is that it stands for a successful transition. Mr. Biswas "is born significantly away from his father's house", and it seems as if the house in which Mr. Biswas was born is associated with a curse rather than a blessing, that it only leads to the fulfilment of the predicaments-that his father would die. The house is also used synonymously with fate. The house seems to be ascertain the fate of Mr. Biswas as well as the other inhabitants. The first words spoken in chapter I are Fate. There is nothing we can see about it". Born with six fingers and unlucky sneeze, and a curse upon him that he should avert trees and water, Mr. Biswas could go nowhere. At the age of sixty, he was expelled from "the only home to which he had some right" and his family is dispersed.

The house in the novel seems to denote "houselessness of the survivors. Tara, who talks about values is busy establishing herself in an elaborate house where she can hang the photo of Raghu's funeral among the prints of Indian History side. When Biswas realizes that he has been trapped into marrying a Tulsi daughter simply because of his caste, his rebellion against Hanuman House grows into a rebellion against all things traditional. When profits fall he blames the failure on Hari's blessing, the joke becoming serious when he begins to lose faith in his house at Greenvale - 'Hari blessed it'-he keeps muttering the words standing in his discarded mind for the curse of orthodoxy on his efforts to establish himself in the new world. The house image slowly mingles with darkness, only to show that his fate is doomed "in the low sooty thatch of the hut at Pagotes, the perpetual dark room at Bhandat's, the windowless gloom of the Hanuman House, the sooty kitchen at The chase, the wall of flawless black trees at Greenvale-only reveal that the darkness of the new world is its ugliness and disorder.

Whenever Biswas goes into the new world which condemns him to nonentity because it offers him no foothold, he is surrounded as before by darkness. At The chase where his first attempt to paddle his own canoe has left him stranded, the image of glowing hut at dusk returns in an extended form-the image of a lonely boy leaning against the hut with his hands behind him staring at the road in darkness troubles him too much when Mr. Biswas visits Hanuman House once again to claim his son Anand. He sees Anand standing under the pillars' staring like the 'the other boy' Mr. Biswas had seen outside a hut at dusk. This time he is brought to a resolution to rescue himself and the children from the void by building his own house. The house is a failure. Mr. Biswas collapse is described in terms of his surrender to darkness. The image occurs on virtually every page of his break down, under the climax. Surrender and return to Hanuman House bring temporary peace, the darkness, the silence, the absence of the world enveloped and confronted him. But surrender is no solution. He lives in the brink of slums with their dark concrete caverns and their 'gaping black windows'. The years stretch 'ahead, dark'. Night after night, he 'sinks in to void'. When at last he succumbs to his final illness, the darkness seems to come from within".

When at last he achieves his own house, all his impulses towards aesthetic order find fulfilment in the rose bushes, the orchids on the coconut stumps, the anthurium lilies, the sweet smelling laburnum tree. Returning from hospital, after his first illness, he steps into a readymade world of his own creation, with a tidied garden and a new distempered walls, the perfect waiting in the garage and all his possessions ranged round him, justifying his claims to this Portion of earth.

Thus the house becomes the central image of the novel and it is also the underlying metaphor in the novel. The novel begins with the description of a house which is in chaos immediately after Mr.Biswas ungraceful exit from his office, and it ends with the entry of Anand, his son and daughter Savi into it at last, after the death of Mr.Biswas.

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