



The Fractured Self in a Fractured World: Displacement and Identity in V.S. Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas* And *A Bend in the River*

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Abstract: Sir Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul was one of the most significant writers of the twentieth century. He has won the Nobel Prize for Literature in the year 2001. He was born in Trinidad, where his family had come from India as workers as an indentured labourers. He spent most of his life in England when he studied his university education in Oxford. Naipaul knew from his own experience because he personally caught between two different worlds. At first, he grew up in one culture and studied in another. He didn't get the feel fully at home in either. This became the central subject because he truly belonged nowhere. The two novels *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961) and *A Bend in the River* (1979) which talks about the person's sense of self only because of colonial history. In both the novels the characters undergone the identity problems but these were all not the personal fall. The reason for this fall is the colonial structure which created by societies in which people could never truly belong. The protagonists' suffers two different kinds of displacement in both the novels. In *A House for Mr. Biswas*, Mohun Biswas, the protagonist suffered and trapped by his own colonial society people, where as *A Bend in the River* pictures a man called Salim who tries to survive in a postcolonial African country but that is crumbled.

KEYWORDS: Indentured, Culture, Colonial History, Identity Problems and Displacement

FULL PAPER

A Bend in the River. Mohun Biswas, the protagonist experiences geographical and psychological displacement. He spent his whole life to search for a house to live in. He displaced repeatedly by everyone only because of societal oppression. From his birth, Biswas has been hatred due to the prophecy. As a child, he felt being alone and he himself away from the people. Only after the marriage between Biswas and Shama, the Tulsis family compelled him to involve his own personality traits with the people who are in Tulsi family, which he finds too hard and strenuous. Some days after they deteriorate him to work as a labour at the Green Vale estate. He has got a bitter experience including his own children. His ambition is to build a own place to live in which is nothing but home. But ultimately that brings aloofness and makes an effort to identify his own self.

Homi K. Bhabha, the Scholar helps us to understand why Biswas's situation feels so impossible. Bhabha talks about something he calls colonial mimicry — the way colonised people are encouraged to mimic the culture of the coloniser, but are never allowed to fully become like them. They are supposed to be, in Bhabha's famous phrase, 'almost the same, but not quite' (Bhabha 122). This is exactly what happens to Biswas. He has grown up in a society that teaches him to want the things that English middle-class life offers including, above all, a house of his own. But the colonial structure of Trinidadian society makes it extremely difficult for someone like him to actually get those things. The house he eventually owns is itself a perfect symbol of this situation: it looks like the thing he wanted, but it is crumbling and inadequate — a copy of the ideal rather than the real thing.

Biswas shows all the signs of this psychological wound: his anxiety, his depression, his sudden rages, his tendency to alternate between despair and irrational hope. All of these can be understood as the responses of a man who has absorbed his society's low opinion of him but cannot accept it — who knows, somewhere inside, that he is worth



more than the world tells him he is. The house he fights for all his life is, at this deeper level, his attempt to prove that he matters. When Mr. Biswas talks about the house he owns, he ponders,

How terrible it would have been, at this time, to be without it: to have died among the Tulsis, amid the squalor of that large, disintegrating and indifferent family; to have left Shama and the children among them, in one room; worse, to have lived without even attempting to lay claim to one's portion of the earth; to have lived and died as one had been born, unnecessary and unaccommodated.

Through Mr. Biswas one can understand 'House' is not just a place to live but it is full of emotion to feel. Shama's family members tortured him because of he has not a house of his own. For the reason he displaced so many places.

A House for Mr. Biswas shows us displacement within a colonial Caribbean society, *A Bend in the River* takes us to a very different and in many ways more extreme setting: a postcolonial African country in the 1970s. The novel is set in an unnamed country in central Africa that is clearly based on Mobutu's Zaire. The central character, Salim, is a man of Indian Muslim descent from the East African coast who has gone to a small town in the interior of the country to set up as a trader. The novel *A Bend in the River* starts like,

The world is what it is; men who are nothing, who allow themselves to become nothing have no place in it.

Salim, the protagonist from the beginning itself he feels the displacement. It openly indicates the colonial oppression.

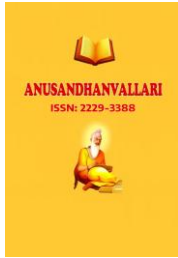
A Bend in the River is Naipaul's bleakest and most unsparing portrait of what happens when colonial rule collapses without anything stable taking its place. And Salim is a very different kind of displaced person from Biswas — not a man fighting for a home, but a man simply trying to stay alive and hold himself together in a world that seems to be disintegrating around him.

Salim's community — the East African Indians which have been displaced for generations. They have lived on the African coast for a long time, working as traders, but they were never fully part of African society and never fully Indian either. In the colonial period, they occupied a particular economic role that gave them a kind of marginal stability.

The novel has humour, warmth and a sense, however qualified, that human effort is not entirely futile. *A Bend in the River*, by contrast, offers no such comfort. Salim does not aspire to build a home; he only hopes to survive. And by the end of the novel, even that minimal hope is taken from him: he flees the disintegrating town on a boat in the darkness, with nothing and nowhere to go. There is no house, no home, no qualified victory — only loss and escape.

This difference in mood reflects the different historical moments from which the two novels were written. *A House for Mr. Biswas* was written during the period of decolonisation, when many people still believed that independence would bring real improvement to the lives of colonised people. *A Bend in the River* was written nearly two decades later, after the experiences of many newly independent African and Caribbean countries had made it much harder to maintain that hope.

Mohun Biswas in *A House for Mr. Biswas* and Salim in *A Bend in the River* which were artistically nailed by V.S. Naipaul. These two characters have gone under post colonial displacement and identity crisis. But their quest and surroundings may vary. Biswas wants to establish his roots by owning a home where as Salim wants to survive because he has no roots. As a result these two people struggle hard to fight with their own identities. In the fast changing world, Naipaul addresses the hardships of cultural displacement and the quest for identity through their personal stories. Most of the themes of Naipaul's novels are fractured self with fractured identity. Naipaul himself affected by many displacements. He was uprooted from Trinidad and he suffered the alienated feelings



while he was in London. Because of his dislocation and fractured identity makes him to picturise the characters of Biswas in *A House for Mr. Biswas* and Salim in *A Bend in the River*.

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