



## CRISIS IN RELATIONSHIP IN A HOUSE FOR

MR.BISWAS

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### Abstract

“A House for Mr. Biswas”(1961) is one of the most notable texts of Diaspora literature in which Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul (1932-),deals with society, alienation, identity crisis, relationship crisis of people of Indo-Caribbean community. Though Naipaul, the Nobel laureate is a pioneer of English literature but his chief concern was the Indian people who were migrated to Caribbean-West Indies island, their problem, crisis, lifestyle, struggle as he also belonged to same category. In his almost all novels specially in “A House for Mr. Biswas” and “The Mimic Man” he depicted the struggle for permanent identity of those community in which often they failed. But a serious issue is that in spite of having the lack of stable social, financial stability there was also rootless condition in human or specially male-female relationship of this Diaspora community. Socio-political background, gender inequality is responsible for this relational discord that often becomes the obstacle in the way of identity. So male-female relationship is very important as per the point of gender studies and the disharmony of this relationship breaks the family bonding that is the minimum unit of a state. The aim of the article is to find the causes of disharmony in those migrated people and how it hampers their personal life.

**Keywords:** Crisis, Female, Male, Marital, Relationship.

Some critics consider Naipaul a misogynist that he generally don't choose women as the protagonist of his texts. However in the first three novels of Naipaul like “The Mystic Masseur”, “The Suffrage of Elivia” and “Miguel Street” his women characters are not too independent but are presented in somewhat oppressive ways. Critics consider “A house for Mr.Biswas” as a novel of male ego that is the story of Mohun Biswas. But it is to be said that in the delineation of characters in this novel Naipaul is not totally misogynist or feminist. He adopted here a complex strategy where both the men and women are victimized somewhere and somewhere oppressor. Though Mr.Biswas is the protagonist of the text but his mother-in-law Mrs.Tulsi is the pivot of the plot. After her husband Pundit Tulsi's death she is the mistress of the whole family as well as their apartment “Hanuman House”. She is the epitome of power who is called respectably ‘mie’ by her daughters and son-in-lawas who are

living in her house under her supervision. She is worshipped by all and no one can raise a question on her. She stands in the 'female phrase' as stated by Elaine Showalter and who is dead against male chauvinism. Basically "Hanuman House" is a miniature of slave society and Mrs. Tulsi and Seth needed such people who would help to continue their 'empire' as their 'slave'. This kind of attitude was the chief obstacle in making harmony in the the relationship of Mrs. Tulsi's daughters and son in laws. So she selected such men as her son in laws who would be totally loyal to her feet. Here authoritarianism wins and tradition 'maleness' loses. Mrs. Tulsi created the situation just like the slavery time when human relationship was depended upon the whim of master or mistress. Mr. Biswas revolted against the system for which he had to face so many hurdles in course of his life so he called her 'she fox', 'old hen', 'old cow'.

There was no conjugality in the relationship between Raghu and Bipti, parent of Mr.Biswas. Bipti was an incompetent woman. She used to quarrel with husband for his miserable condition and for several time she returned to paternal house. Even in paternal house she raised question against husband. She was a type of hypocritical woman. But Raghu should not be blamed for this marital discoed. Here another point is that Dehuti and Ramchand are minor characters in the novel. Dehuti, sister of Mohun married Ramchand, a lower caste caretaker of Tara's family. So the entire family discarded all connection with them. Though there is no strong reference of their quarrel in the text but later Mr.Biswas realized that this marriage did not bring any sort of happiness to his sister. Though Dehuti was never petty she looks more ugly after marriage. He realized financial insufficiency is responsible for that. But for that Dehuti never created turmoil like the daughters of Hanuman House, but stayed beside her husband. It proved that though Dehuti-Ramchand relationship was not pleasurable but peaceful.

If we turn to a bitter relationship then Bhandat, brother of Ajodya is the epitome of oppression against women. In spite of being a married man he had a girlfriend of different caste. So their relationship was not conjugal. there was too much quarrel between them and he had beaten his wife several time with detested language. Sometime threw at her what was available nearby. But is the typical Indo-Caribbean women attitude that Bhandat's wife remained silent before all oppression against her. Later leaving all of his responsibility for wife and son he lived with her girl friend in Ports of Spain. But there he was not affectionate but harsh against his lover. It shows the male ego of Bhandat that attempted to conquer lover or wife by force and domination not by love.

Mr Biswas mockingly called Shekhar and Ovid two sons of Mrs.Tulsi as the 'god'. There was no male ego in Shekhar but he lacked the minimum strength and self-prestige of a human being. He married Dorothy, the modern, Christian, educated ,beautiful girl of Presbyterian family ignoring the family suggestions. Actually he was attracted towards the petrol pump ,lorry, cinema hall of her paternal house. After

marriage Dorothy did not live in her in-laws house but Sekhar lived in her paternal home working as their manager. So no doubt Dorothy is the controller of this relationship. Sekhar is the 'puppet' in the hand of wife and in-laws family. He never protested against the western life style of his wife. In her relationship with husband Dorothy was totally independent and never faced any oppression.

In the text the marital life of Seth, brother in law of Mrs. Tulsi and his wife Padma is also notable. After the death of Padma the Tulshis suspected that her death was not natural and Seth must be accused for poisoning her. The suspicion was strengthening when in Short hill Tulsi women saw the ghost of Padma in dream where she asserted the name of her husband as her murderer. We may quote from the text, "Seth had driven her to take death and bribed the doctor not to have a post-mortem". However there is no reality in this ghostly believe. But as the psychological and humanistic condition of Seth was degraded then so there is much possibility of his murdering the wife and then it will be the most scandalous event of male-female relationship. In this regard the issue of Chinta and Govind, daughter and son-in-law of Mrs Tulsi should be mentioned. Gobind was a rascal type of man who was a terror to all of the family including his wife. Sometimes he criticized Shama. However this callous man beat wife inside the Hanuman House. We are surprised that even after beatings Chinta took it as a sort of prestige! She was highly gratified in it. So she stayed beside her husband even in so many misdeeds. We may quote from the text, "Her beating gave Chinta a matriarchal dignity and curiously gained her a respect she had never before".

However, the marital relationship between Shama and Mohun is the most notable issue of the novel "A House for Mr. Biswas". Their starting of marital life was not so well as by tricks Mrs. Tulsi deprived him from all dowry. This couple was cynical at each other. So after marriage when Mr. Biswas arrived in Hanuman House Shama asked him if he is tired of catching crabs. Biswas sarcastically replied that he wished to help the Tulshis in catching crabs as it's their appropriate job. He called Mrs. Biswas 'she-fox', Sekhar as 'Little God', their home as Hanuman house in front of Shama. Then Shama disrespected him calling 'barking puppy dog'. Even Mohun was beaten by Shama she compelled him to leave for The Chase. Shama was not satisfied with the minimum income of husband as she says: "Yes, take up your clothes and go. You came to this house with nothing but a pair of cheap khaki trousers and a dirty old shirt". In the Chase Mohun was compelled to arrange the house inauguration festival by the pressure of Shama in spite of having financial instability. Then Shama was in charge of their shop and the record keeper of goods. After the birth of his sons and daughter Mohun became angry towards Shama and Tulshis as they decided their names without his permission. Mohun had keen agitation against Hanuman House when he said, "Eh, monkey, bull, cow, hen. The place is like a blasted zoo, man.... "Family, Family? This blasted fowlrun, you calling family?"

In course of the events of the novel, Mohun had to work as the supervisor of Green Vale of Tulshis and was allotted a room and then it was the habit of Shama to go to

paternal home. Mohun was highly shocked to learn that Shama had broken the doll house as he could not offer the same toy to the other children of Hanuman House. Then the condition of Mohun was wretched as with an agitated soul he said, "That is what you and your family do to me. Trap me in the hole". But he had beaten his pregnant wife that is the wretched side of his character. Then during living in Ports of Spain Shama-Mohun relationship was slightly developed. But once Shama thought that if there was no children of them she would leave him. We may discuss the situation with reference to the text, "She was stronger than he. Her silence and her refusal to retaliate made his humiliation complete". However in that time Biswas earned some money by which they spent together sometimes in the sea beach that is the sweet memory of their relationship. Sikkim Street episode is the last chapter of Shama-Mohun marital life. Now Shama is developed from her earlier Hanuman House centered life and was partly sympathetic towards husband. She did not attempt to resist Biswas from buying the abandoned house for he might be shocked. Shama was very happy in that broken house. Actually then she was confined within her husband ignoring her obligation for mother. The fact is that at the ending of Biswas's life they were mutually respectful and only at this point their relationship was harmonious. But it was too late as Mr. Biswas was not too fortunate to enjoy the prestige of his own home or the love of wife for a long time. A main problem of Mr. Biswas is that throughout his life he was dependant on mother in law, wife and daughter.

If we discuss the problem of those relationships, Gender studies is very relevant in this regard. It is notable that the men of Caribbean land came in to contact with western education earlier than the women. This education or culture was aided by the authoritarian value of Queen Victoria. So a tendency of supremacy is felt in some Caribbean males but not in all. To discuss the male-female relationship we should go back to the slavery time of Caribbean land. There was a system of wretched punishment for both men and women. Sometimes for punishment slaves were separated from their children of a couple was separated and forced to marry other. So male slaves were well acknowledged that to be loyal, faithful to the masters or mistresses was more important than to be faithful, lovable to wife, children, brother. So from the very beginning there is a tendency of breaking the family conjugality and authoritarianism holds the button of human relationship, not love. Slave marriages were not acknowledged in the eyes of the masters, for them it was a game. Intention of marriage was for domestic assistance or affair not love affair. So this type of marriage was not enough to hold two hearts together for a long time. We can find the tendency in the attitude of Mrs. Tulsi who wanted to dominate all relationships and the choosing of son-in-laws are purposeful. Here gender problem is also related as sometimes the male slaves were not interested in having a harmonious affair with wives. There are two reasons for that, on the one hand they believed in the traditional male supremacy over women and on the other hand they feared on the actual capability of women. So they beat or torture them to establish their gendered authority.

They were irresponsible about their family future. It may be said about Gobind or Bhandat. Even also in the Post colonial period, in some cases they become furious on their wives because they are more educated and earn more than them. This types of husband feel a serious problem, sometimes they can't tolerate the development of their wives and can't respect them, on the other hand some lose their so called 'aggressiveness' and become the puppet in the wife's hand just like Shekhar in the text. Moreover, relationship suffers highly in this process. Men or women's incapability to accept the changing gender roles is the chief fact of this disorder. So both of two genders satisfies himself or herself with the cost of other. So the space of both male and female is collapsed. This is the real picture of migrated families and it is the personal observation of Naipaul as he said, "Of all my books, this is the one that is closest to me. It is the most personal, created out of what I saw and felt as a child."

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