

Detrimental Patriarchal Notions: A Study of Patriarchal Influence on Men in the light of a House for Mr. Biswas by V.S. Naipaul

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Abstract

We all live in a patriarchal system where we unwittingly endorse the conservative, conventional way of life and are affected by it. Much attention has been paid on how patriarchy affects women, but less has been said about how it impacts men. This effect of patriarchy on men is beautifully shown in the novel A House for Mr. Biswas. Mr. Biswas is fighting for his liberation from a woman's dominance due to patriarchal pressure. In Indian society, men are always the family's breadwinner and caretaker, and women are always subordinate to men. Men are always seen as the family's leader. On the other hand, Mr. Biswas's life is devoid of everything. Biswas is portrayed as a victim of a patriarchal ideology. A man's lifelong battle to establish his masculinity is depicted in the novel. We can comprehend that, for Naipaul, gender refers to men, because of his focus on the conflicts and impacts of masculinity that his male protagonist's exemplar and this is all because of patriarchy.

Keywords: Identity crisis, matriarchal dominance, struggle for freedom, patriarchal pressure

“The crisis facing men is not the crisis of masculinity, it is the crisis of patriarchal masculinity. Until we make this distinction clear, men will continue to fear that any critique of patriarchy represents a threat”(1)

Introduction

Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul is one of the finest English authors of the twentieth century, his experiences as a third-generation West Indian of East Indian origin infused his writings with a sense of insecurity and rootlessness that he satirically expresses in his works. V.S. Naipaul's fourth novel, A House for Mr Biswas (1961) is his finest achievement. A mediocre small man who believes he is destined for more incredible things, his struggles to establish himself in an imitative, transient colonial society are deeply understood in this tragic-comic. His quest is symbolized by his aim

of independent home ownership, which he achieves, if imperfectly, like everything else in his life. Through the novel "A House for Mr. Biswas," V.S. Naipaul skillfully brought up the topic of patriarchy from a male perspective, highlighting how it could at times negatively impact a man's life. This novel is regarded as his best work and a classic English fiction. It is considered an epic, with the protagonist being an ordinary person. Biswas' desperate attempt to build his own house is a symbol of a person's desire for habitat of his own.

A House for Mr. Biswas is a story that explores in detail the struggles of a lowborn man to establish himself in a colonial, ephemeral, and imitative culture because he feels he is destined for more. Naipaul takes on the role of an official biographer of his protagonist Mr. Biswas and shows him as nonsensical and heroic. Biswas was born with six fingers, at midnight hour. He is destined to murder his father and live a chaotic life. His father drowns while attempting to retrieve his body from the pond, while he is at home hiding under a bed. Being young, he is left homeless and emotionally disturbed after the death of his father. He relocates to Pagotes to live with his uncle Ajodha and aunt Tara. There, he briefly attends school before beginning work as a store assistant. After being caught stealing money by the storekeeper, he begins painting signs. While painting signs at the Hanuman House, he is seen giving a love note to Shama, one of the daughters of the rich Tulsi family. As he is a brahmin, house owner Mrs. Tulsi and her brother-in-law Seth forced him to marry Shama and live with them like their other sons-in-law. Despite his dislike of their conventional and authoritarian way of life, Biswas embraces the stability that comes with being married into the Tulsi family (2).

Critical Analysis

In addition to evoking ideas that are universal in the human implications, the story of Mohun Biswas transcends regional boundaries and authentically depicts West Indian culture, including dialect, clothes, and the natural environment. The book has been regarded as an epic and its protagonist is seen as every other person. Mohun Biswas's narrative is relevant since everyone faces the pressures of patriarchy in their lives (3). In patriarchal organizations, the head of the family is a man who has authority over women's sexuality, labor, production, reproduction, and mobility. Men are in charge of the patriarchal system. According to Gerda Lerner, "family plays an important role in creating a hierarchal system which not only mirrors the order in the state and educates his children but also creates and constantly reinforces that order. Family is an important institution for socializing the next generation in patriarchal values and children are brought up in a way that the boys learn to be dominating while the girl is conditioned to be caring, loving and submissive. The stereotypes of masculinity and femininity are not only social constructs but they have been internalized by both men and women. Man was seen as breadwinner and woman was assigned the role of bread

giver for a very longtime" (4). In her book "What is Patriarchy?" Kamla Bhasin defines patriarchy. She explains: "The dominance of men in a household or in a society is referred to as patriarchy" (5). The roles that men and women play in society are made evident in these lines by Tennyson (6):

Man for the field and woman for the heart: Man for the sword and for the needle she: Man with the head and woman with the heart: Man to command and woman to obey; All else confusion

Throughout his life, Mr. Biswas has been troubled by these beliefs, as he was unable to exercise his manhood over his wife and family. He wants his own house to rule in order to show his male supremacy. Let's also think about the emotional toll that all of this has on men, who are forced to suppress their anger, mistakes, tears, and misery due to societal expectations of masculinity. It is also said that: "Be A Man! Men Don't Cry" (7), (16) means "Mard ko dard dahi hota". The patriarchal myths that portray emotional men as weaker, even feminine, and force them to repress their emotions only deepen the harm to their inner selves. Lack of emotional release in men can also make them more intolerant, hostile, and irritable. Because men are supposed to be the pillar of support for everyone around them, it is regretful that patriarchy prevents them from expressing their emotions. Except for a select few privileged men, patriarchy is ultimately beneficial. Gender equality appears to be a more naturalistic arrangement that benefits everyone. Men often find themselves at the end of the spectrum, emotionally, psychologically, and physically drained. The inability to be the ideal husband, father, friend, lover, or son looms large over men's lives, causing them to experience feelings of social, economic, and worldly failures. The primary problem with patriarchy is not that it undermines women, but rather that it promotes male dominance by defining masculinity and femininity, as well as how women should be feminine and men should be strong. There is a lot of pressure on men to fit with the image of being callous and physically tough. Patriarchy implies that it is "right" for men to have sexual authority over women. In some way, it's terrifying for men to show weakness and vulnerability. Because we've been indoctrinated by literature, media, and the society to believe that men are the macho heroes and women are the helpless damsels.

Mr. Biswas keeps endeavouring to act patriarchally toward his wife and his family, but he is unable to do so. As a result, he feels pressurized and wants to construct a home of his own. There isn't a black problem in our society; rather, there is only a white problem, no Jewish problem but a gentile problem, or, to put it another way, a dominating group problem instead of a minority group problem. Furthermore, the dominant group's issues extended beyond its views toward its own advancement. When men are the dominant group, they are wanting to admit that women are their primary problem. It is also true that little focus has been paid to the society of dominant groups and the pressures that their status places on them. The ideal man is

portrayed by society as someone of high moral character, a good provider for his family, and the ultimate authoritative person. Additionally, he should be self-assured enough to provide financial and emotional stability for his wife and children. Men have always faced difficulties in fulfilling the traditional role of breadwinner for their families. According to Shakespeare, the world is a stage on which men and women perform the drama of life, bonded by marriage (8).

There are many social and cultural traditions about acceptable conduct for men and women. The goals, purposes, and functions of marriage will only be achieved when each member of the family plays their respective role. Marital roles refer to the conduct that husbands and wives are required to display in society at a certain social moment. Roles are cultural conceptions rather than biological realities. The division of labour between men and women by roles ensures that society runs smoothly. The roles that each sex performs are based on masculinity and femininity. Both men and women are born with certain basic peculiarities. Every society has specific requirements for the roles that men and women should perform. In most of the societies, men are thought to be inherently brave and strong. They are also tough, more self-reliant, and more emotionally stable than women. Men are more prepared for roles involving social dominance and physical prowess. Men are therefore supposed to support and protect their families. As is customary, he is the breadwinner and the head of the family. He has to be persistent in finishing challenging tasks. As their leader and administrator, the father is entrusted with all family duties. First heroes for a child will be their parents, particularly the father, who is the head of the household.

Biswas refers to Hanuman House as a "Monkey-House" or "Zoo," which is run by an old queen Mrs. Tulsi and the powerful boss Seth. He referred to Shekhar and Owad; the two Tulsi sons; as "The Gods" and spit at Owad's face, much to the displeasure of the whole family. He joins the Arya Samaj movement against the wishes of the traditional Tulsi family. He criticizes them for combining the celebration of Good Friday and Christ's birthday with Hindu puja. He also refuses to work as a labourer in Tulsi State, preferring to support his family by working as a journalist and social welfare officer at Port of Spain, a shopkeeper at the Chase, a supervisor at Green Vales. He and his family still depend on the Tulsi family for support at difficult times, even if he is able to establish some independence for himself. During his hardships at the Tulsi house, Biswas becomes fascinated with the idea of being a home owner.

After constructing a home in Green Vale, he is upset when a storm destroys it. After building a second house in Shorthills, he is again forced to live with the Tulsi's, as this house is also destroyed by fire. It is not until the Tulsi family disintegrates under the pressure of westernization that Biswas is forced to borrow money from his uncle Ajodha to buy a house on Sikkim Street in Port of Spain. Even though the house was

poorly built and only partially paid for, he and his family are thrilled to have their own house at last. He dies of a heart attack at his new house at the age of 46, but before his death he has gained freedom from the clutches of the Tulsis. Tulsi's daughter, Shama, is married to Mr. Biswas, but she is not happy about being married to a poor man like him who, after marrying her, becomes totally reliant on the Tulsis. Due to strong attachment to her mother's family, she wants Mr. Biswas to give same regard to her mother, Mrs. Tulsi, and her uncle, Seth, that her sister's spouses do. Mr. Biswas rebels against the Tulsis and refers to Hanuman House as "The Monkey House" or "The Zoo," which is run by "the old queen." Mr. Biswas's masculinity causes him to act and speak in ways that he has never done before. His masculinity never allows him to be a slave under domination of a woman. Mr. Biswas is unable to cope with the torcher of Tulsi's, and his male ego wounds every day in Hanuman House. Given what he observed in society, he always desired a traditional wife. For this reason, Mr. Biswas's male ego kept refusing to put up with his wife's impolite and disrespectful behaviour. The only cause of Mr. Biswas's fights with Shama is the effects of patriarchy. When he asked to Shama, 'How the Gods'eh? 'How the big boss setting on today?', 'And the old queen', that was Mrs. Tulsi 'The old hen', 'The old cow'. Shama argues with him and said 'Well nobody didn't ask you to get married into the family, you know' (2). Mr. Biswas replied her anger "Family? Family? This blasted fowl run you calling family?" (2).

Another example of patriarchy is seen, when Shama came up with food for Mr. Biswas and said, 'Uncle want to see you', (Seth is uncle). At this Mr. Biswas replied to Shama, 'Uncle want to see me? Man, go back and tell uncle that if he wants to see one, he must come up here' (2). Shama becomes serious and replied "What you been doing and saying? You getting everybody against you. You don't mind. But what about one? You can't give me anything and you want to prevent everybody else from doing anything for me. Is all right for you to say that you going to pack up and leave. But you know that is only talk. What you got?" (2). This incident again hurts the masculinity of Mr. Biswas and this time by his wife Shama. He wants to live like a free man not under the dominance of a woman. This incident makes his desire for his own house more concrete (9). For him, a wife should always live behind her husband. She should respect her husband and lives under his dominance. He believes that women live in the shadow of a man, whether that man is her father, brother, or husband. Because of his patriarchal nature, a man always wants to be two steps ahead of the woman, not behind her. As Shashi Deshpande writes in her novel *The Dark Holds No Terror*:

A wife must always be a few feet behind her husband. If he is an M.A., you should be a B.A. If he is 5'4" tall, you should not be more than 5'3" tall. If he is earning five hundred rupees, you should never earn more than four hundred and ninety-nine rupees. That is the only rule to follow if you want a happy marriage (10)

Anita Nair in her book *Ladies Coupe* describes:

A good wife learnt to put her husband's interest before anyone else's even her father's. A good wife listened to her husband and did as he said. 'There is no such things as an equal marriage', Amma said. 'It is best to accept that the wife is inferior to the husband. That way, there can be no strife no disharmony (11)

However, this is not the case in the Tulsi family. The male members of the family are ruled by matriarchy The entire authority of the family is vested in Mrs. Tulsi. After learning the truth about Hanuman House, Mr. Biswas wants to leave instantly because it constantly damages his male ego. For example, when Seth made fun of Mr. Biswas in front of several relatives:

You come here, Penniless, a stranger. We take you in, give you one of our daughters, we feed you, we give a place to sleep in. You refuse to help in the store, you refuse to help on the estate. All right. But then to turn around and insults us (2)

Due to his nature and characteristics, Mr. Biswas is different from the other characters of the novel. Naipaul preserves Mr. Biswas' uniqueness and importance even after Hanuman House concludes that "Biswas mattered little." Throughout the story, Biswas was shown insignificant and pointless. He often demonstrates petty dissatisfaction and shows rebellion at Hanuman House; such as throwing food out of the window on Owa's head and naming Tulsi family members in a disgusting way. Biswas's wife, Shama, describes him as "a barking puppy dog". For this behaviour, Hanuman House treats Biswas as though he didn't matter. Biswas seems to be a totally useless man to everyone but himself because of his exasperating behaviour. He had idolized his uncle Ajodha and Pundit Jairam's lavish lifestyle when he was young. He had seen Jairam relaxing up with his books and glasses on the cushions in the verandah every evening. At that time, he believed that being a grown-up means achieving Jairam's level of wealth and satisfaction. Every evening, his uncle Ajodha enjoys a glass of hot milk sitting on a rocking chair. Seeing this, Mr. Biswas imagined he would be able to live a happy life like his uncle Ajodha, when he grows up. Unfortunately, after his marriage, Mr. Biswas was unable to live the same life as uncle Ajodha and Pundit Jairam. His wife Shama refuses him when he asks for something. He felt no pleasure in sitting on the cushions in the shiny drawing room of Hanuman House and ordering a glass of milk.

Go and get me a tin of Salmon. Canadian. And get some bread and peppersauce'. She said, 'Go and get it yourself. You not going to start ordering me around, you hear (2)

Mr. Biswas wants his own house and it is his only life aim. Patriarchy hurts him every day. He wants to control his wife and that she obeys her orders. In a society based on patriarchy, men dominate their families and the society. All positions of authority and power are occupied by men. The wish for a house of his home shows Mr. Biswas's mental condition (12). The experiences of Mr. Biswas's breaks down conventional barriers and raises concepts that have universal human significance. The novel has been called an epic and its protagonist, is the face of every common man. Mr. Biswas's

tremendous quest to acquire a home of his own is an allegory for the need for everybody to create their own identity in a hostile environment. Every common man desire for a house of his own. Since he finds it very challenging to survive in Tulsi's home due to patriarchy, Mr. Biswas views building a house as his only objective in life and an obsession. In Hanuman House matriarchy is supreme. After the death of Mr. Tulsi, his wife Mrs. Tulsi took control of the house's authority.

Mr. Biswas's male ego hurts considerably after getting married to Shama, and he can't tolerate Mrs. Tulsi's torcher. In Hanuman House, he is treated like a servant (13)(14). Everyone in the Tulsi house constantly reminds him of his poor background and the fact that he arrived there penniless. He always tries to free himself from the tight grip of the Tulsi's, and, for his livelihood used to work as a shopkeeper at the Chase, as a supervisor of labourers at Green Vale, and as a journalist and a social welfare officer in Port of Spain. Even though he is capable to achieve liberation by himself, but he never tries to break relations with the Tulsi's for the betterment of his wife and children. Because he is aware that Tulsi's should be helpful during difficult times and unemployment. During his stay at Hanuman House, the idea of owning a home becomes an obsession for Mr. Biswas. He sees house as a sign of stability and masculinity. He builds a house in Green Vale, but it is unfortunately destroyed in a storm, leaving him depressed. After much work, he builds another house in Shorthills, but it is destroyed in a dangerous fire, leaving Mr. Biswas homeless once again, forcing him to move into the Hanuman House. That Hanuman House, which he thinks is a house full of selfish and greedy Tulsi people who are influenced by western culture and ideas.

Naipaul depicts Hanuman House as a symbol of traditionalism, rigidity, cultural infallibility, ritual duty, hierarchy, and communal life (15)

Conclusion

After considerable efforts, Mr. Biswas purchases a house on Sikkim Street in Port of Spain with the money borrowed from his uncle Ajodha. When he finally moves into his own house, his happiness is unbounded. Although the house was poorly built, and is mortgaged, he and his masculinity are pleased with the feeling of living in his own house. Since it fulfils his patriarchal ideal, he is pleased to have at last found a piece of land of his own. He had a heart attack shortly after moving into the house and passed away, but this death was far better than the one at the Tulsi house. It is the story of a man who puts all of his hopes and aspirations in his children, feels that his career is over before the age of forty, and exhausts himself attempting to deal with a major shift in both his personal and societal expectations. Mr. Biswas himself achieves relatively very little in his life, but he is successful in establishing his patriarchy. Even though the house he eventually buys is shoddily built and only partially paid for at the time of his death, but he got his masculinity. A man prefers to be two steps ahead of a woman

rather than behind her due to his patriarchal outlook. All men are victims of this patriarchal system. Mr. Biswas's main dream is to build his own house. At the end of the day, his wife Shama had developed a newfound devotion to him and his children during his illness, and for Mr. Biswas, this was almost as important as obtaining his own house. He dies in his house at the age of 46, but he emerged victorious over Tulsis in terms of dependability. The book explores how Mr. Biswas bears the burden of masculinity. He often gets into difficulty because of his patriarchal viewpoint. He overcomes many obstacles in his life to establish his identity and demonstrate his masculinity, and at last he has done so.

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