

# A Postcolonial Survey of “A House for Mr. Biswas” by V. S. Naipaul

Bahareh Shojaan

Faculty of Foreign Languages, Department of English Literature  
Central Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Iran  
E-mail: baharehshojaan@yahoo.com

Doi:10.7575/aiac.all.v.6n.4p.72

Received: 19/03/2015

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7575/aiac.all.v.6n.4p.72>

Accepted: 28/05/2015

## Abstract

The present study tries to apply the postcolonial approach to V.S. Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas*. It has been tried to investigate what happens to the people of other nations immigrating to a creole society. In this novel by Naipaul, the writer draws our attention to the characters who are immigrant Indian people spending their lives in the creole society of Trinidad under the dominance of colonial power. By studying the three generations of Indian in this novel we can observe how the characters of the novel change their identity, religion, education, customs, etc. as a result of living in the creole society. It is seen that as the generation changes the belief of the characters on their original culture fades away and they merge into the colonial power. The characters in the novel, when encountering the colonizer's culture, change their identity and become who they want them to be. Moreover, during the course of the novel, the characters find ambivalent personality as a result of experiencing unhomeliness in the society of mixed cultures. This ambivalence makes them have a double consciousness, to be attracted toward the colonizer's culture and at the same time repulsed from it.

**Keywords:** Ambivalence, Creolization, identity, language

## 1. Introduction

Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas* is a tragicomic novel set in Trinidad in 1950s, and was published in 1961. It deals with an East Indian's struggle for a place to settle his identity. "The novel takes its subject matter from the excluded peoples who have been alienated from societies to which they apparently belong, and who are in search of an identity" (Receptas 2). It also explains about the Indian society's segregated, traditional way of life which "contents to live in its shell and preserve its own special religious identity" (3). More importantly, the novel is considered as a dedication to Naipaul's father, depicting his father's misfortunes in the creole society of Trinidad. As Rob Nixon explains: "nothing since has equaled the inventiveness and emotional generosity of that homage to his father's misfortunes in the straitened circumstances of colonial Trinidad" (14). The story tells us how as the generation changes, the cultural identity of the Indian people living in the creole society of Trinidad changes too as a result of the interaction they have with one another or with the colonizer's culture. These changes mainly occur in the religious, educational, and cultural systems. Moreover, this is the story of Mr. Biswas for whom "to be housed permanently means that one's "privacy and dignity is safeguarded" and his identity recognized (Barnouw 51).

## 2. Creolisation

Creolisation is a cultural process during which the colonized in order to attain identity undergo serious psychological, spiritual, and educational changes when entering the colonial destination, where various races are already inhabiting; a mixed population. This process to a large extent depends on how an individual or a culture responds to that Creole society. If they are absorbed to the dominant culture's norms in which diverse races are embracing, this process is called acculturation. However, if they interact with the dominant culture as a reciprocal activity, it is called interculturalism. *A House for Mr. Biswas* is the story and history of three generations of Indian people living in the Creole society of Trinidad. The three generations in the novel are viewed through the eyes of Mr. Biswas who is the protagonist and the focus of the novel. During this encounter, as the generations are passing before our eyes, we, as readers of the novel, become aware of the cultural changes in the rituals of the Indian people of the novel as a result of which their identity and beliefs undergo drastic changes. As Rosmary Pitt argues "the main changes which are recorded are the decline of the Hindu culture and rituals as they undergo the process of creolisation and the accompanying changes in attitude" (8). These cultural changes, which form their identity during their encounter with the colonizer and the other people of their race, are psychological, spiritual, religious and educational. What is of great importance in the novel is that these changes occur along with the changes in the Creole society in which different cultures are clashing with one another and they all are to adopt themselves to the norms and values assigned to them by the dominant culture.

### 3. Language and Identity

One of the significant issues that the colonized may face in the creole society of Trinidad is the matter of language among the Indian people, immigrating there. As the story goes on and we are confronted with changing generation of India, we see how the native language of the people changes and is supplanted by the language of the colonizer. However, the interesting thing even among the characters occupying the space of the novel is that they use Indian or English language in different situation and according to their needs. Language marks one's identity and losing the original language means losing one's origin. This is what happens in these three generations in the novel.

The culture Mr. Biswas was born to speaks Hindi but as the time goes on because they are living in a creole society of mixed cultures, they begin to use English instead of Hindi in public. Tara, Mr. Biswas's aunt, speaks in English with the photographer in his father's funeral as English is becoming the prevalent English in Trinidad: "Leave them, the photographer said in English. Is a nice little touch. Flowers on the ground" ... Five people all together," the photographer said to Tara. Hard to know just how to arrange them. It look to me that it would have to be two one side and three the other side. You sure you want all five?" (A House for Mr. House 13). It shows how the dominant culture is influential in shaping one's identity and culture that they begin to use the colonizer's language in public. Another instance that shows how English has become their public language is when the widows use Hindi as a secret language while visiting Mrs. Tulsi's house: "the women ... heedless of stares, they stared; and made comments in Hindi, unusually loud, unusually ribald, because in the city Hindi was a secret language, and they were in holiday mood"( H B 172)<sup>1</sup>. Hindi has become a secret language, which is their native language. As we will see, as their language changes their identity will also change in the generations to come.

Mr. Biswas himself uses English at Hanuman House as an act of rebellion against the other members in the house "even when they spoke to him Hindi". He uses "English as a gesture of rebellion and independence" (Pitt 10).

### 4. Language as Intimacy and Rejection

As said before, native language is used in different situationxs implying various meanings for the characters. For example, when they feel comfortable with each other they use Hindi. "Ghany could follow their conversation. He disliked the way Indian women had of using Hindi as a secret language in public places, and asked impatiently, "Date of both?"(H B18). Here as they are speaking to Ghany on how to get certificate for Mr. Biswas they speak Hindi. Both Bipti and Tara use Hindi as they do not feel comfortable using English in front of a foreigner, which makes Ghany angry. As Ludic Caribbean argues:"in the novel *A House for MrBiswas*, the use of Hindi is a sign of intimacy and tenderness, whereas the use of English shows distance and rejection" (125). Here, Hindi language is used a sign of friendship and relation.

When Mr. Biswas after a period of absence from the family and Hanuman House, comes back and talks to Mrs. Tulsi, he spontaneously talks in a friendly Hindi language as he now feels at ease with her and calls her Mai meaning mother: "Mr. Biswas didn't want to talk to Mrs. Tulsi in Hindi, but the Hindi words came out. "How are you, Mai? I couldn't come to see you last night because it was too late and I didn't want to disturb you" (HB 94). In another occasion, when Mr. Biswas has thrown a letter to Shama to express his love to her\_ the letter falls into the hand of her mother, Mrs. Tulsi. Seth, who while not being related to, is working for the family and a part of it, tells Mr. Biswas that Mrs. Tulsi wants to see him. Seth speaks in English instead of Hindi, which makes Mr. Biswas distraught as he knows that speaking in English here is not a sign of good news for him: "The old lady want to see you before you go". "Mr. Biswas resented the tone, and was disturbed that Seth had spoken to him in English" (HB38). The same Seth speaks in Hindi when he wants to show his dissatisfaction about Mr. Biswas behavior as he feels that in this way he could make himself understood better: "Eh?" For the first time there was impatience in Seth's voice, and, to show his displeasure, he began talking Hindi. "This is gratitude. You come here, penniless, a stranger. We take you in, we give you one of our daughters, we feed you, we give you 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 insult us!"(HB 49).Seth is very upset with Biswas' behavior as Biswas is not working and instead eating the readymade food at Hanuman House and insulting the members of Tusli's family.

Even when Mr. Biswas wants Tara's opinion about Shama since Tara has seen her, he speaks in English, as he sees that Hindi is not smooth enough for the situation he is not at ease with: "He paid no attention to Ajodha and asked Tara in English,"You like she?" Hindi was too intimate and tender" (HB 46). The striking thing is that he even talks with his wife, Shama, in English as he sees no friendship between them: "But there was yet little friendliness between them. They spoke in English" (HB 47).

### 5. Cultural change

Another important thing, which alters during the generation's change, is the culture affecting the identity of people living in the creole society. The cultural change can be observed in Tara's speech as she says: "Tara said, "fashions are changing all the time these days. I am just old fashioned, that is all." She stroked her gold nose-flower. "It is expensive to be old fashioned" (BH15). She is the representative of the first generation and talks about the changes that occurs in fashion.The first generation of Indianan is strictly following the rules and customs of their culture but as we gradually come to the following generations, they change. The culture and customs are dealt with, differently from the first generation born in India and the next ones that were born in Trinidad. The first generation of these migrants with representatives such as Mrs. Tulsi, Seth, Mr. Biswas's aunt- Tara- and her husband- Ajodha- strictly follow the rules and

<sup>1</sup>HB Stands for *A House for Mr. Biswas*

customs, never allowing diversion. Rules that inhibit mixing with other races, or even with Indians from an improper caste. As a case in point, when Ajodha's brother, Bhandat who has a mistress of another race is deprived of his helps and banished to loneliness as Tara has sworn not to mention his name again: "Bhandat had left his sons and gone to live with his mistress in Port of Spain. The boys were taken in by Tara, who added Bhandat's name to those never mentioned by her again" (HB 34). It shows how the first generation is strict on following the customs in which getting wife of another race is a disgrace. Even when Mr Biswas' sister has escaped with Tara's worker, Tara swears not to mention her name forever since she has caused disgrace for the family, escaping with a yard boy and when Mr. Biswas is expected to get angry, "he felt no anger or shame. His sister, Dehuti that runs with a yard boy, disgraces Tara since "the yard boy is the lowest of the low" (25). It shows that how the first generation is scrupulous about their customs and their caste while the second and third generations, Biswas and Dehuti are indifferent to the custom. Unlike their parents, the second generation does not believe in these rules, as it happens for Ajodha's nephews and Mr. Biswas's sister that neglect them.

Shekhar or to put her name in M. Biswas words, the big idol is against the traditional way of choosing him his wife and does not accept the old rules:

efforts were being made to find him a wife from among the handful of eligible families. He expressed his disapproval by random angry outbursts, tears and threats of suicide. This was construed as a conventional shyness and, as such, was a source of amusement to sisters and brothers-in-law. But the children were frightened when he talked of leaving the house and buying rope and soft candle; they were not sure what he wanted the soft candle for; and they stayed out of his way. (BH100)

As we see he threatens to commit suicide if they force him to marry as he is against their conventional way of choosing him wife. The second generation is against the conventional way of selecting them their wives according to the traditional way. And even when Shekhar marries, he goes to live in his bride's house, instead of bringing his wife to the Hanuman House which was a long held belief and custom to the family: "The elder god, contrary to Hindu custom and the traditions of his family, did not bring his bride home, but left Hanuman House for good, no longer talking of suicide, to look after the lorries, cinema, land and filling station of his wife's family" (HB 109). From the beginning, his wife sets the rule for the family and Shekhar's sister. She boasts about her education and wears clothes, which are in sharp contrast with Tulsi's tradition.

Relations between the sisters and Shekhar's wife had never been easy. Despite the untraditional organization of Hanuman House, where married daughters lived with their mother, the sisters were alert to certain of the conventions of Hindu family relationships: mothers-in-law, for example, were expected to be hard on daughters-in-law, sisters-in-law were to be despised. But Shekhar's wife had from the first met Tulsi patronage with arrogant Presbyterian modernity. She flaunted her education. She called herself Dorothy, without shame or apology ... Added to all this she sometimes sold the tickets at her cinema; which was disgraceful, besides being immoral ... Dorothy's daughters were of exceptional beauty and the sisters could complain only that the Hindi names Dorothy had chosen—Mira, Leela, Lena—were meant to pass as Western ones. (BH 175)

Even as we see, she (Shekhar's wife) refuses to put Indian names for her children and instead uses western ones as an act of resistance against family's rules. Shekhar's wife as the representative of the second generation does not follow the custom and traditional culture of her ancestors and turns against all of them. In the old generation, it was an honor for a wife to be beaten by the husband. Even they talk about the way they have been beaten proudly: "most of the women he knew were like Sushila, the widowed Tulsi daughter. She talked proudly of the beatings she had received from her short-lived husband. She regarded them as a necessary part of her training and often attributed the decay of Hindu society in Trinidad to the rise of the timorous, weak, non-beating class of husband" (HB 69). This is the traditional way of thinking of Hindu people in which being beaten by the husband is necessary and they are proud of it. However, as we see and as the time passes in the later generations we have a woman, Miss Logie, who is the head of the department of Community Welfare Officer.

## 6. Colonizer's Influence

One also should not forget the influence that the other cultures and especially the dominant ones have on people's customs and way of behavior in the creole society. In one part of the novel, while the influence of American culture is quiet vivid on the behavior of people, the students at school are asked about the way they call their father and mother. While Anand tells that he calls them Bap and Mai, in the traditional way of calling their names which of course he lies about, Vidiadhar says that he calls them Mummy and Daddy, which shows the influence of the American people among them, and which causes them to take English language serious as well, as a way of communication with this new culture:

When a new quiz was going round the school—what did the boys call their parents?—Anand, wishing only to debase himself, lied and said, "Bap and Mai," and was duly derided; while Vidiadhar, shrewd despite his short stay at the school, unhesitatingly said, "Mummy and Daddy." For these boys, who called their parents Ma and Pa, who all came from homes where the sudden flow of American dollars had unleashed ambition, push and uncertainty, these boys had begun to take their English compositions very seriously. (HB 210)

The presence of American has positive impact on the culture and economy of the people living there. As Pitt argues: the reader is made to sense the "inevitability of progress", and this is demonstrated as having some constructive aspects. The "flow of American dollars in to the island, with the growing American presence there during the Second World War, bringing prosperity, as well as growing spirit of competition" (9). Of course, the arrival of Americans, while bringing prosperity and progress for the people as providing them more jobs and foods, has side effects to the people too. As Miss Blackie believes that the reason the labors do not work as before is that they have become more greedy compared to the past and it is due to American's arrival which has made them greedy as they do not work even when the laborers do not have enough money and food.

Miss Blackie blamed the Americans and said that rapaciousness was one of her people's faults. Even after wages had been agreed Mrs. Tulsi was never willing to pay fully. Once, after he had worked for a fortnight, a burly mason, insulted by the two women, left the house in tears, threatening to go to the police. "My people, mum," Miss Blackie said apologetically.(HB 253)

As it is clear, the presence of Americans has both the positive and negative influence on the culture of people living in Trinidad.

## 7. Educational Changes

Along with the cultural changes that happen in the island, we see drastic changes in the education of the people in the three generations of the Indian people living in Trinidad. We see how these changes in the encounter each generation has with education makes people's identity change too. During the course of the novel, we see how from the first generation to the third, their views towards the education change. As mentioned, the first generation believes more on superstitions and even when Biswas goes to school, he does not believe in the lessons he should learn. He thinks they are useless. At school, he learns both English and Hindi but in the next generation, it is the English language that is dominant and they forget even how to speak Hindi as the native language of their ancestors. However, the system of education is a progressive force in educating people as in the case of Mr. Biswas who is a literate person in contrast to his older brothers, which makes him question some unreasonable rules and traditions of his clan. It is also, as mentioned, "responsible for the decay of Hindu tradition"(Pitt 10). The system of education according to the colonizer's topics is remote from the Hindu's tradition. Mr. Biswas is taught about oases and igloos on his entry to the new world at school in Pagotes, topics as removed from his experience which makes him ignore them and do not pay attention to them:

At Lai's[ his teacher] dictation he made copious notes, which he never seriously believed, about geysers, rift valleys, watersheds, currents, the Gulf Stream, and a number of deserts. He learned about oases, which Lai taught him to pronounce "osis", and ever afterwards an oasis meant for him nothing more than four or five date trees around a narrow pool of fresh water, surrounded for unending miles by white sand and hot sun. He learned about igloos. The history Lai taught he regarded as simply a school subject, a discipline, as unreal as the geography. (HB 20)

"In this extract, we also find that there is a huge gap between what was taught in school and the students' reality"(Bolfarine 2) and what happens in their real life in Trinidad.

The same occurs when he is asked to write some essays as an assignment on the seasons in England of which he has no experience. However, as it seems, by the generation moving forward, they dissolve the problem and the third generation has no problem with this issue and they easily relate to the new topic. When he goes to Ramchan's house and meets his daughter studying new lessons, he says: "I didn't know that at his age," or as it is said "Mr. Biswas didn't know anything about arithmetic either" (HB 148). As we see, Mr. Biswas as the second generation has problems with these topics but his sister's child has no problem with it.

In another occasion when Mrs. Tulsi has decided to send Owad abroad to study medicine, some of her friends turn their back on her as she is ignoring their caste and custom by sending her son abroad. Here we see the difference in view of different generations to education. "Forgetting that they were in Trinidad, that they had crossed the black water from India and had thereby lost all caste, they said they could have nothing more to do with a woman who was proposing to send her son across the black water" (HB 167). Even though Mr. Biswas is from the second generation and his view is somehow traditional he lets his children, Anand and Savi, go abroad on scholarship, since he is afraid of their future. He does not want them to become a person as himself, a wanderer; therefore, he sends them on scholarship to go to England: As Pitt elucidates "Mr. Biswas fears for his son's future if the boy does not get some kind of education, but his fears are transformed into hope and optimism when his son goes abroad on a scholarship. This education system is viewed in an ambivalent way"(9). We see how three generations treat education differently and how education changes their culture and identity during the time.

## 8. Changing in Religious View

Hindu people living in Trinidad are very religious people sticking hard to their religious views. Similar to the other cultural changes that take place in the various generations, we face, during the course of the novel that religious view also changes as the generation changes. The first generation being Mrs. Tulsi, Bipti, and Tara hold strong outlooks toward religion and follow the customs and rules of their caste. As an example, the daily puja is done at Hanuman

House as a tribute to the gods and everything, even the name of the house is a reminiscence of old India. However, this religious view fades as each generation emerges with their new mode of thought regarding religion. The view of each generation becomes more modernized and therefore we see the difference between the traditional Indian and the modern ones, declaring reformation of religion in their beliefs. As Imraan Coovadia asserts: "The novel sketches divisions between traditionalists and adherents of Reform Hinduism". In *Biswas*, each of the religious generation has become "more modern and more internally divided" (110).

Mr. Biswas as being from a high caste is treated respectfully at the beginning of the novel whenever he goes to Tara's house. It shows how caste is important in their custom. "He became a different person ... In Tara's house he was respected as a Brahmin and pampered; yet as soon as the ceremony was over, he became once more only a laborer's child" (HB 21). Even one of the reasons that Mrs. Tulsi agrees with Mr. Biswas's marriage to her daughter, Shama, is the fact that he is from a respected Brahman caste. As a child when he is a student, Tara does not want him to pursue education; therefore, she sends him to become a pundit, which he does not like very much. As a child, he is expected to become a pundit but he feels no compassion towards the religion and leaves, disgracing the holly tree. Later on, when he is married to the Tulsi family, he resents their idol worship and mocks them while they pray to the monkey god. To find a new way of teasing the family and also in search of a new community with which he would be able to construct a relationship, he turns to Aryanism, which was against caste, pundits, animistic ritual, parentally arranged and child marriage, and for the education of girls:

He was speaking of the protestant Hindu missionaries who had come from India and were preaching that caste was unimportant, that Hinduism should accept converts, that idols should be abolished, that women should be educated, preaching against all the doctrines the orthodox Tulsis held dear ... after thousands of years of religion idols were an insult to the human intelligence and to God; birth was unimportant; a man's caste should be determined only by his actions. (HB 52-53)

He is the first one to rebel against the long held religious views of Tulsis. We see how in the creole society of Trinidad even the staunch perspectives will be supplanted by new ideas. However, we should not forget that Mr. Biswas is not against all their customs. As he does not sell pig's oil, Lard, "Mr. Biswas's Hindu instincts didn't permit him to stock lard" (HB 80). Similarly, Anand comes to see the sacred thread ceremony merely as an excuse for absenting himself from school, for he and his father know that he could not go to school with a shaved head, inviting ridicule from the other children and his teachers. Mr. Biswas encourages him to spend his retreat learning school notes, and his performance of the puja at Shorthills is a mockery. The only thing Anand can do is sticking flower stem under god's chin, and cannot treat the rituals seriously. Anand as the third generation does not believe in the religious rituals and he takes the rituals just for fun and cannot accept to go to school with his head shaved. He does not take the ceremony serious in the developing society of Trinidad. The view toward their cast is changing. As Samuel Selvon argues: "Hindu society has traditionally been divided into groups called castes, based on heredity, which determine a person's occupation and status. However, the influence of caste has been weakening, and discrimination based on caste is now frowned upon in democratic India" (12). Even Anand turns to reading Bible and its verses, which makes Mrs. Tulsi loses her temper: "At home one day Anand began singing, "Jesus loves me, yes I know." Mrs. Tulsi was offended. "How do you know that Jesus loves you?" (HB 163). This changing in view is more obvious when Shekhar, called by Mr. Biswas the big god, is wearing stuff related to Christian and drinking wine as a mark of religious view of Christianity. This is when Mr. Biswas turns against him and Mrs. Tulsi, saying that this is against Hindu religion:

The elder god did wear a crucifix . It was regarded in the house as an exotic and desirable charm. The elder god wore many charms and it was thought fitting that someone so valuable should be well protected. On the Sunday before examination week he was bathed by Mrs. Tulsi in water consecrated by Hari; the soles of his feet were soaked in lavender water; he was made to drink a glass of Guinness stout; and he left Hanuman House, a figure of awe, laden with crucifix, sacred thread and beads, a mysterious sachet, a number of curious armlets, consecrated coins, and a lime in each trouser pocket. "You call yourself Hindus?" Mr. Biswas said. (HB 57)

We see how Shekhar as the third generation is changing his religion to Christianity mixing his Hindu customs with that of Christianity.

## 9. House as Identity

Mr. Biswas is in exile living in the country of Trinidad in which the other members of his folk are spending their lives in the creole society of Trinidad. The first thing, which comes of prior importance regarding living in a colonized country, is having a house of your own. Having a house which belongs to you signifies the fact that you have identity. Possessing a house equals identity in a colonized country. Mr. Biswas as a person living in a colonized country spends his whole life probing a house of his own. At the beginning of the novel, when Mr. Biswas after spending a period of time in the hospital returns home, he feels as if he has everything since, in his whole life he has been a wanderer looking for a place to accommodate. This extract taken from the prologue of the novel explains what a house means to him:

He thought of the house as his own, though for years it had been irretrievably mortgaged. And during these months of illness and despair he was struck again and again by the wonder of being in his own house, the audacity of it: to walk in through his own front gate, to bar entry to whoever he wished, to close his doors and windows every night, to hear no noises except those of his family, to wander freely from room to room and about his yard ... As a boy he had moved from one house of strangers to another; and since his marriage he felt he had lived nowhere but in the houses of the Tulsis, at Hanuman House in Arwacas, in the decaying wooden house at Shorthills, in the clumsy concrete house in Port of Spain. And now at the end he found himself in his own house, on his own half-lot of land, his own portion of the earth. That he should have been responsible for this seemed to him, in these last months, stupendous.

(HB 2)

He is free now. He can claim that he has identity. As Mehmet RecepTas asserts: Mr. Biswas is in search of a home by which he will be able to find his identity (3). Again when at the beginning the narrator is giving us an account of his life we see how precious the house is, compared to all the other stuff he has in the house: "but bigger than them all was the house, his house" (HB 5). This is the house, which gives the colonized an identity when living in a colonized country. He has left his family to live on his own without having money and a house to live. He also hates living with Tushi's family, which he leaves them several times to declare his freedom and now that he has alienated" from his folk, family and from the Tulsi's Hanuman House, for Mr. Biswas, a house of his own symbolizes freedom and a place to strike a root" (Ghosh 3). Mr. Biswas is an alien even in his own family since he was born with six fingers and feet first, signs for bad luck. Being considered as an unlucky baby, he stays as an outsider, a lonely individual in his own family. "His desire is to belong to house of his own in which he is no longer consider a stranger and he wants to be a part of the town not a wanderer looking everywhere for a place to stay, something which will give him an identity and selfhood "(Ghosh 2). He was no longer content to walk about the city. He wanted to be part of it, to be one of "those who stood at black and yellow bus-stops in the morning, one of those he saw behind the windows of offices, one of those to whom the evenings and week-ends brought relaxation"(HB 149). This image of "dispossession and rootlessness, of being homeless,becomes the recurrent metaphor in *A House for Mr. Biswas*– the search of a manwho is historically displaced, "floundering in a derelict land"(Ghosh 5). It seems he is not only displaced in his own culture in Trinidad, but also is a displaced in the colonizer's culture. His identity is floating and displaced. As Madhu Benoit in his "Cultural Representations : Stranger or Stranger ? Displaced identities in V. S. Naipul" says:

This problem of a displaced and non-replaced cultural identity is poignantly depicted in *A House for Mr. Biswas*. Mr. Biswas is a man caught up in three cultures, and in the process, dispossessed of all three. Unable to integrate culturally in Trinidad where he lives, rejecting Hindu culture which he dislikes. (2)

The house in factbecomes a substitute for the unconscious search for a lost identity, which haunts Mr. Biswas, a search which is hidden in the depths of his unconscious. Biswas is in search of a lost cultural identity as he is living in the creole society of Trinidad. As OindrilaGhosh believes: "The novel highlights the image of the house all through and embodies the protagonist's ardent desire for a house of his own which actually translates into his attempt to acquire his unique social identity in a transitional society"(6). The focus on this aspect of the house acts as the "symbol and metaphor of an individual's search for anchorage in a world of flux as well as expresses a rootless, exiled writer's need for creating a tradition and culture devoid of the dregs of the receding tide of a colonial past" (Ghosh 5). Through Mr. Biswas's journey from one kind of house to another, until he finds himself in the house of his own, Naipaul "charts the unsatisfactory and difficult quest of a writer for anchorage and creation of a cultural identity"(Ghosh 5). Changing of different houses during which Mr. Biswas suffers a lot represent the different stages in the creation of an identity. For Mr. Biswas, the search for a house becomes a search for himself, a search for what he really wants out of life, a quest for individuality and a search for a place in the flow of seamless history he has endured. For him, to build a house of his own means freedom and recognition. And by the end of the novel, "in spite of all its deficiencies, he manages to buy this house which eventually brings him his wife's respect, and saves him from his sense of being rootless and alienated" (Mehmet RecepTas 3). We see how the cultural identity of a colonized is to a great extent dependent on claiming a house of his own which will bring him freedom and recognition by the others, even the members of his folk.

### 10. Identity: Reality VS. Appearance

Mr. Biswas is a person who has no actual home. He is changing his house subsequently so as to feel at home somewhere, finally finding himself alone and wandered. As he is being crashed by the situation, he makes himself preoccupied by reading fiction as to be away from the reality he is in. He wants to be like the heroes of Samuel Smiles living in romantic world; however, waking up, he sees that he has lost a life behind and should start again. His identity gets fragmented and this is what mostly happens for the colonized living in a colonial country.

From looking at magazines for their letters he began to read them for their stories, and during his long weeks of leisure he read such novels as he could find in the stalls of Pagotes. He read the novels of Hall Caine and Marie Corelli. They introduced him to intoxicating worlds. Descriptions of landscape and weather in particular excited him; they made him despair of finding romance in his own dull green land which the sun scorched every day; he never had much taste for westerns.

(HB 34-35)

As we see here, he is drowned in the world of fantasies to escape, as a result of reading these fictional books, he forgets the reality of life. As Ludic Caribbean says: the intoxicating world of these fictional books makes him despair (182). He is talking to himself as he is talking to one of the characters of the stories he has read or written. As we know, he writes a story, *Escape*, which was never published, explaining his situation. As Helen Hayward explains: "Biswas's stories remain unfinished, unpublished and unread, except by Shama, and are confined to fantasies of romantic escape" (9). The feeling of homelessness has given him an unstable identity and has caused him to be after the fictional world to calm himself down. Nevertheless, when he is made aware of his situation with a family and children around and no money in the pocket, he goes mad and gets depression.

His fingers were dusted with guilt from the pall-like cover of the book. As he studied them the clearing became overgrown again and the black cloud billowed in. How heavy! How dark! He put his feet down and sat still, staring at the lamp, seeing nothing. The darkness filled his head. All his life had been good until now. And he had never known. He had spoiled it all by worry and fear. About a rotting house, the threats of illiterate labourers. (HB 127)

For him, stability and serenity which he seeks in life has been perished. We can see the effect reading books has had on his life, separating him from the real world where there are laborers working. However, this is through these illusory worlds of the books that he can experience the other places, transferring him to the other worlds in which he can experience happy moments. As Ludic Caribbean explains: To Mr. Biswas, book "is an inspiring vision of the larger world, which is denied to the protagonist. However, literature remains the basic stimulus; in its imaginary realm, Biswas is able to dream that he leaves his native island" (184).

### 11. Mr. Biswas's Ambivalence

Ambivalence is referred to an idea when two opposing feelings and actions happen simultaneously. This feeling is that of attraction and repulsion to an object, action or a person at the same time. What is meant by this is that the colonized is at the same time attracted toward the colonizer and repulsed from them. It also refers to a "simultaneous attraction toward and repulsion from an object, person or action" (Ashcroft 12). Moreover, ambivalence denotes that in the interaction between the colonizer and the colonized complicity and resistance accompany each other. Simply put, when you hate something and at the same time, you like it, this is ambivalence in postcolonial term. This way of behavior is seen in Mr. Biswas' reaction to various events around. Although he at times claims to reject religious views: "Sooner or later someone was bound to surprise him, in dhoti, top-knot, sacred thread and caste-marks, reading *The Manxman* or *The Atom*" (HB 145), and the rigid caste system as illustrated when he enjoys the Aryans, he enjoys Brahmin customs, mostly when he is respected greatly by Tara and Ramchand during the time he is in their houses. In another part, he refuses to stock salt beef and lamb in his shop at the Chase. Moreover, in the moment of fear and stress he chants Hindu phrases to help him relax.

### 12. Conclusion

This paper, which is the outcome of my thesis, submitted on Jan. 2013, illustrates the changes that occur in the three generations of immigrant Indians living in the creole society of Trinidad. The first generation that comes to this mixed society still holds their customs and rituals in different cultural conventions being educational, religious, etc. However, as the generation passes, their beliefs on their customs and religious issues fade away and in the case of the third generation, they lose their own original language and forget to speak Hindi and absorb the dominant cultures. Their educational system is based on the British conventions and they even lose their Hindu religion and some of them become Christians. Mr. Biswas as the protagonist of the story is one of these characters who suffers from unhomeliness which results in finding an ambivalent character in Trinidad. To him, house means identity in the colonial environment. All his life, he is trying to find a house in which he can rest his floating identity which he finally succeeds to obtain.

### References

- Akai, J. (1997). Creole... English: West Indian Writing as Translation. *TTR :traduction, terminologie, redaction*, 10, 165-195.
- Ashcroft, B., Gareth, G., and Helen, T (2000). *Post colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*. London: Routledge.
- Bansal, Sh. (2011). Naipaul's quest for roots, identity and order in the novels with the Third World setting; A House for Mr. Biswas and The Mystic Masseur. *International Journal of Research in Social Sciences & Humanities*, 1, 1-7
- Benoit, M. (2007). Cultural Representations: Strange or Stranger? Displaced Identities in V.S. Naipaul. *Représentation*, 3, 40-46.
- Barnouw, D. (2003). *Naipaul's Strangers*. Bloomington: Indian University Press.
- Bhabha, H. K. (2004). Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse. *Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Bolfarine, M. (2010). Literacy and Imagination in *A House for Mr. Biswas*. *Celli- Coloquio de Estudos Linguísticos e Literário*, 11.

- Caribbean, L. (2006). Cultural Representations of Trinidad in V. S. Naipaul's Fiction".Diss. Julius-Maximilians-Universität Würzburg.
- Christian, R. (2002). Coolie Come Lately: the making of *The Suffrage of Elvira*". *Abstracts for the conference: A world in tension: the work of V. S. Naipaul*, 15,1-48.
- Coovadia, I. (2009). *Authority and Authorship in V. S. Naipaul*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Dooley, G. (2006). *Naipaul's 'Fraudulent' London Novel: Mr. Stone and the Knights Companion*. Flinders University: Carolina Press.
- Dooley, G. (2005). Naipaul's Women. *South Asian Review*, 26(1).
- Ghosh, O. (2011). To Lay Claim to One's Portion of the Earth: Leaving a Mark on History in *A House for Mr. Biswas*". *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, 3(4)578-585.
- Heyward, H. (2002). *The Enigma of V. S. Naipaul: Sources and Contexts*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Khoja, H.I. (2007). Community and Customs in V.S. Naipaul's *The Mystic Masseur*".Diss. Effat College Jeddah.
- King, B. V. S. (2003). *Naipaul*. Second Edition. New York: Plgrave Macmillan.
- Mohan, Ch. (2004). *Postcolonial Situation in the Novels of V. S. Naipaul*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors.
- Mustafa, F. (1995). *V.S. Naipaul*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Naipaul, V.S. (1971). *The Mystic Masseur*. Oxford: Heinemann.
- Nixon, R. (1992). *London Calling: V. S. Naipaul, Postcolonial Mandarin*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Pitt, R. (2001). *York Notes: V.S. Naipaul's A House for Mr. Biswas*. London: Longman.
- Qasim, A. M. (2012). A Study of the Autobiographical Elements in V. S. Naipaul's *The Mystic Masseur*". *Lapis Lazuli – An International Literary Journal*, II(1), 1-12
- RecepTas, M. (2011). Alienation, Naipaul and Mr. Biswas. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*. I(11), 115-119.
- Selvon, S. (---). *Study Guide: A House for Mr. Biswas*. New York McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc, Nd.
- Singh, B. (2011). Naipaul's *Mystic Masseur*: A Quest for Identity amidst Deracination". *Ajrsh: Asian Journal of Research in Social Science and Humanities*, I(3).