

Element of Colonialism in V S Naipaul's A House for Mr. Biswas

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Introduction

A House for Mr. Biswas, written by V.S. Naipaul in 1961, tells the story of a man who is born in Trinidad and struggles to find success in his life. It is heavily autobiographical, as Naipaul's father was born in Trinidad and also struggled to find success in his life. The novel has been praised for its portrayal of the many struggles faced by immigrants in an unfamiliar society.

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A House for Mr. Biswas begins with a very brief history of the island nation of Trinidad during the early 20th century, including an overview of the many different cultures that make up its population, from Africans to Indians to Europeans to Amerindians. It then goes on to tell the story of Mohun Biswas, a young Indian man who struggles with poverty and low social status throughout much of his adult life; at one point he even lives in a shack by the sea, and sleeps on the beach at night because it's the only place affordable enough for him to live. When he finally does marry into wealth, he can't enjoy it" instead he finds himself longing for independence, a desire that eventually leads him to emigrate from Trinidad to India, where he intends to build his own house.

An enormous amount of trouble is taken to illuminate the life of a fictional character in *A House for Mr. Biswas* by V. S. Naipaul. The novel follows the life of Mr. Biswas as he struggles to overcome financial troubles, ill health, and a marriage that breaks down over his inability to take care of his family. The first-person narrator, who is obviously very close to Mr. Biswas, takes us through every moment of Mr. Biswas' life, from his efforts at earning money as an indentured laborer when he was a child and the extraordinary lengths he goes to get himself through the University of Bombay, to his marriage and the loss of two children shortly after they were born.

A House for Mr. Biswas is one of the most celebrated books written by V.S. Naipaul, a Nobel Prize winning novelist from Trinidad and Tobago. The novel, published in 1961, follows the life of the titular character, Mohun Biswas, who is born in rural Trinidad. The book narrates Mr. Biswas' efforts to escape his status as an underclass in his own home and tells the story of his family's struggles to attain a higher social position in society. It also explores the cultural clash between East Indian Hindu traditions and the West Indian culture of Trinidad and its citizens.

V. S. Naipaul's 1961 novel *A House for Mr. Biswas* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, \$15) is a bittersweet, sometimes hilarious tale of a poor, hard-working West Indian immigrant struggling to raise his family in Trinidad. The book won Naipaul the first of his two Booker Prizes and is filled with keen observations about the clash between the West Indian culture and that of England, as well as the challenges new immigrants face when trying to settle into a new country.

The protagonist in V. S. Naipaul's novel *A House for Mr. Biswas* is a descendant of indentured servants who has come to resent his roots and the idea of returning to the "house" they were originally brought to. The novel begins with this scene:

"Mr. Biswas first saw his father's house in mid-morning when he was ten years old. It was a Monday, the weekly holiday from school, and he had been sent off to fetch his father for lunch."

This juxtaposition of Mr. Biswas' feelings about his own home with the colonial elements that make up his house are important for understanding the subtext of the book. In their article "The Vanishing House in West Indian Literature," Francine Lancelot and Colin Graham point out the significance of Mr. Biswas' house as representative of the colonial experience:

"There is a symbolic significance attached to the house in *A House for Mr. Biswas*, and it is through this symbolism that much of the conflict existing in V. S. Naipaul's novel is played out... This symbol provides Naipaul with an opportunity to explore conflicting ideologies and perceptions, using them as symbols of both conflict between individuals and cultures, and individual conflicts."

V. S. Naipaul's novel *A House for Mr. Biswas* is rife with allusions to the colonizer's cultural identity, and his life in Trinidad. Amongst this, one of the most prominent themes is that of "colonial elements." Throughout the story, Naipaul references these elements through Mr. Biswas' surroundings, as well as his observations of other people's lives and possessions. The main thrust of these references comes from Naipaul's use of naming conventions and descriptions of interior decorating from the westernized world.

Novelist V. S. Naipaul was born to Indian parents in Trinidad and Tobago, which he considered a colonial backwater. Naipaul's first book *The Mystic Masseur* (1957) is set in Trinidad, where Naipaul grew up during the 1940s and 1950s. The novel describes the life of an uneducated man who becomes a politician and marries into a wealthy Indian family in the city of Port of Spain, Trinidad. Naipaul depicts the characters impoverished city home as a house for Mr. Biswas, the title character.

In *A House for Mr. Biswas*, Naipaul uses the metaphor of a house not only to describe Mr. Biswas's relation to his family but also his social surroundings, especially to describe his wife's struggle to fit in with her upper-class relatives and neighbours. Throughout the book, Naipaul touches upon themes such as class, colonialism and postcolonialism with reference to interiors

and architecture of houses and apartments, especially with regard to how spaces function spatially within social hierarchies.

Conclusion

There are many ways that colonialism has affected modern life in a negative way, and Naipaul touches on many of them in this novel. He makes it clear that colonialism has left some people with a sense of inferiority towards those who lived their lives free from colonial rule. The characters in the novel constantly compare themselves to white people and find themselves lacking. Colonialism also caused many families to be fractured simply because of different civil beliefs or a desire for wealth among various other reasons. Naipaul also shows how colonialism took away a lot of the culture from the indigenous people when they were forced to give up their land for little compensation other than religion. While colonialism brought some good things to developing countries like education and medicine, it didn't account for the vast difference in cultural beliefs. Because most education was only available to privileged groups, most natives were powerless against their white overlords which often led to them being mistreated and even killed.

V. S. Naipaul's novel *A House for Mr. Biswas* provides insight into the ways that colonialism has altered and changed a man's life through his house. Naipaul uses his novel to explore post-colonialism by examining a man who has been colonized and is struggling with the aftermath of colonialism, as well as the people who have changed and the people who have stayed the same after the colonization.

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