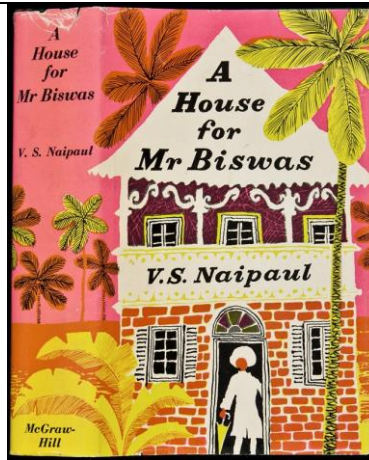


**Feminist to Female –
Emergence of Women in V. S. Naipaul’s
*A House for Mr. Biswas***

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Abstract

For the past few decades, the fictional writers have started portraying the existence of women’s experience which was formerly unnamed and unimagined. Different critical studies have been inspired, focusing the eyes of the readers, converging upon the world of women. The writers started to explore women’s struggle for liberation in their works. The term “Gender” is used to represent the social and cultural constructions of both genders, especially women now and this varies from place to place.

In this paper, the focus is on the women characters and their emerging self as a representative tool of cultural and political scenario. Further, this paper focuses on the changes encountered by them in the field of the philosophical, cultural, political and economic contexts.

It further narrows down its focus on the depiction of women in the novel *A House for Mr. Biswas*, by V. S. Naipaul and how he has narrowly dealt with the women characters. It further continues to find the position of women in his novels, as per Elaine Showalter's three phases -Feminist, Feminine and Female. It highlights the emergence of characters in Naipaul's writings from one place to another in the context of social, cultural and religious backgrounds.

Story Narrator as the Replica of Author's Life

Naipaul, an articulate critic, has made his central protagonist or the narrator as a replica of his own life. He primarily writes about society, culture, alienation, rootlessness and the scathing of the persons who undergo these various aspects of diaspora. Though he stays in England and writes for the English audience, he writes about his Indian community in the West Indian Island of Trinidad. However, the major obstacle between him and his audience is the geographical distance.

Mostly Male Protagonists

In his novels, Naipaul has not sketched portraits much on women, But they are given chances to appear. The central protagonists in his novels are generally male. Even the title has been named only after the name of his male protagonist. This is explicit in the novel, *A House for Mr. Biswas*. As Rohlehr points out: "Naipaul has been able to present a hero in all his littleness, and still preserves a sense of man's inner dignity" (Ironic 190).

Women Central Characters in the Novel

Though the name of the novel is based on the name of the protagonist Mr. Mohun Biswas, there are so many central characters who are women.

The first one is Mrs. Tulsi who acts the prime foundation for the construction of Mr. Biswas's character. She is the woman who stands in the "female phase" as stated by Elaine

Showalter and who is dead against male chauvinism. Mrs. Tulsi is the epitome of power in Hanuman House. As Rohlehr points out,

Hanuman House reveals itself, not as a coherent reconstruction of the clan, but as a slave-society, erected by Mrs. Tulsi and Seth who need workers to rebuild their empire. (87)

Mrs. Tulsi takes in charge of the whole Tulsi community and property after the death of Pundit Tulsi. She is worshipped as the goddess by the whole family. No one utters any single word against Mrs. Tulsi. She manages her house with almost all her daughters within the house. She chooses her son-in-laws in such a way that they will nod their heads at her commands. The house is built with numerous numbers of restricted families. She expects the centeredness amidst the family as well as in her daughter's consciousness letting them to admit that they are only after her existence. Rohlehr further states that:

Mrs. Tulsi is a powerful mother-figure and rules through an understanding of the psychology of slaver [...] She is constantly demanding to be loved and worshipped and is very good at staging strategic illness in order to inspire feelings of guilt in those who have failed in their worship.(88).

She makes pungent and derogatory remarks at Mr. Biswas many times. She threatens Mr. Biswas with the love-note he gave to Shama.

A Generous Colonizer

Mrs. Tulsi wants and compels Mr. Biswas to follow the orthodox Hindu family tradition to which he is highly opposed. "Mr. Biswas had no money or position. He was expected to become a Tulsi" (House 97). He makes ridicule of orthodox Hinduism and she points out that he has come to her with no more clothes than he could hang up on a nail. Though she has followed

his tricks to allow him to get inside the Tulsi family, she lets him believe that he has come out of his own free will. Mr. Biswas calls her “She fox”, “Old hen”, and “Old cow”. In this stance, Naipaul considers her to be the colonizer who colonizes others of the community with the justification of goodness. But she is generous enough to help Mr. Biswas when the necessity arises for him. She rescues him at the time of Mr. Biswas’ unemployment and illness.

Mrs. Tulsi, though considered the orthodox Hindu chief, she admits her sons to wear the crucifixes as well as she allows them to study at the Roman Catholic Church in Port of Spain. She herself succumbs to Christian practices even while retaining Hinduism and she allows Owad and Shekar to marry Christian girls. The rift between herself and Seth makes her loose hold on the Tulsi family. The dominant nature of Mrs. Tulsi makes Mr. Biswas to search for his own identity. Though Mr. Biswas whizzes around the whole novel as the central protagonist, the central pivot is Mrs. Tulsi.

Shama, the Wife – The Possible Feminist

Another character which has helped form the character of Mr. Biswas is Shama, his wife. She is not satisfied with Mr. Biswas, a poor man who becomes fully dependent on Mrs. Tulsi for his up keep. She is the woman who has the closest attachment with her mother. She humiliates Mr. Biswas, when he ridicules the orthodox Hindu community. She calls him “a barking puppy dog”, when he calls her mother the “old queen”. She even makes pungent criticism when he comments on the food served at Hanuman House. She plainly states that he gets three square meals a day after getting into the Tulsi family. She is against leaving the Tulsi family when Mr. Biswas wants to move away. But she accepts and obeys him. Here she stands in the pose of the “feminist”. She arranges a house warming ceremony and she invites each and every individual of

the Tulsidom. She does this against the will of Mr. Biswas. In this aspect her rebellious nature emerges and she manages to take the post of the “feminine”.

The Female Role

The most important incident which makes her emerge in the “female” role is the shattering of the doll’s house given by Mr. Biswas to his child. She throws it away. She does it because it must be done this way, since in the Tulsi family if one thing is brought it must be brought for every individual kid. Her arrogance is noted through this attitude. But when Mr. Biswas buys a new house, she accepts and makes herself an efficient housewife. She helps her mother to collect rents from her tenants and behaves as a “proper” woman. At last she maintains a stoic calm when Mr. Biswas dies of heart-attack at the age of forty-six. She manages herself as a highly responsible, sharp and self-confident housewife. She is liked by every reader and is admired.

Exposing the Inequality of Genders

In almost all the novels, Naipaul gives a colorful sketch of the protagonist, but has never given any importance to any women characters. It is clear that women are partially created, stereotypically projected and statistically represented in the literature of Naipaul. But in this novel *A House for Mr. Biswas*, he aims to expose the inequality of sexes and has indicated that the harmony in the growth of the male protagonist has come at the cost of the female characters. This novel triumphs on Naipaul’s setting of the female protagonist in all the three modes of Showalter – that is “Feminist, Feminine and Female”.

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