

# Societal Influences and Individual Struggles: A Social Perspective Analysis of *A House for Mr. Biswas*

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## Abstract

*A House for Mr. Biswas* by V.S Naipaul gives a clear picture of life in post-colonial Trinidad. The novel tells the journey of Mohun Biswas a Hindu Indo-Trinidadian. He makes continuous efforts and strives for success and his identity in this society but often fails. Due to his economic issues, he faces a lot of domination over him. He faces challenges with social class, identity, and cultural background. Mohun's relationships, especially with his wife Shama Tulsi and his son Anand, show the fragility of the human condition. This article tells about social concerns like family relationships, social status, identity, and individual choice versus community standards.

**Keywords:** Social Class, Family, Relationship, Poverty, Struggles, Domination, Social Status, Culture, Identity

## Introduction

Through V.S Naipaul's house for Mr. Biswas, we can easily examine the social concerns of the Trinidadians. Through the life of Mohun Biswas Naipaul gives a clear picture of how a social structure can shape an individual and a whole community. Mohun Biswas is the protagonist of the novel. He was born into a family which suffers from poverty. He has a quench for his identity. Later He was forcefully married to Shama Tulsi. Mohun Biswas faces so many dominations in the Tulsi family. He is not treated properly and he is not given any respect. Mohun Biswas has a quest for his own home not depending on the Shama Tulsi's family. This article talks about the social concerns portrayed in the novel.

## Social Status and Poverty

In the novel *The House for Mr. Biswas*, we can see how the people use their wealth and dominate others. Mohun Biswas's family suffers a lot due to the poverty. After the death of Mohun Biswas's father, Biswas's sister is sent as a servant to work at her mother's sister's house. Biswas's brothers Pratap and Prasad are sent to work on the sugar plantation. Mohun is a Brahmin so he is sent to a pundit Jairam for education but his education is cut short as he offends the religious principles of Jairam.

Later Biswas started to work on a sign for a shop that is owned by the Tulsi family. The Tulsi family is a dominating family. One day when working at the shop Mr. Biswas sees Shama Tulsi and he mentions to their family that their daughter is attractive. The Tulsi family is impressed that a man from the Brahmin class likes their daughter Shama Tulsi. So they forcefully arrange a marriage for Shama Tulsi and Mohun Biswas without asking whether Biswas is ready to marry Tulsi or not. They show their dominance towards Mohun Biswas. He tries to back out of marriage but he fails in it. Only dominance is shown towards Biswas he is not given any proper place or respect. Shama Tulsi and Mohun Biswas's social statuses differ so the family treats Mohun Biswas differently.

### **Family Relationships**

Through the novel *A House for Mr. Biswas*, we can see the complexities in a family relationship. As Mohun Biswas is forced so he unwillingly marries Shama Tulsi. The Tulsi family is over dominating type. Mohun Biswas stays with his in-laws after marriage. Tulsi and Mohun Biswas do not have a proper house. When Owad returns home from England with a medical degree, he is treated like a hero and it turns out that Biswas and Shama Tulsi have to leave the house as Owad has arrived to stay in the house.

Mr. Biswas's relationship with his father is different and complex and his relationship with his son Anand shows the complexities of fatherhood. Through this, we can know the generational conflicts. Shama Tulsi's family gives more importance to the culture and tradition. But Mohun Biswas does not like it. Mr. Biswas's mother-in-law Mrs. Tulsi is an influential person. Mrs. Tulsi's influence has a great impact on Biswas who tries to make his own identity in the family.

Mr. Biswas and Shama's relationship is empty. They lack emotional connection. As there is an emotional gap it gives a sense of isolation. Communication is also a major issue in the relationship between Mr. Biswas and Shama. As there is a communication gap there are many misunderstandings between them. Their relationship is portrayed as a cycle of conflict from which they cannot escape.

### **Search for Identity**

The protagonist Mr. Mohun Biswas searches for his own identity as he is always dominated. Mr. Biswas is caught between two parts one is the cultural heritage of his ancestors and the other is the multicultural society. Biswas's journey reflects the struggles of many people who try to find their place in a society shaped by cultural, social, and personal factors. Mr. Biswas wants to be free from the social class and cultural background. He seeks to create his own identity. His aim for a better life is shattered due to his socioeconomic status. This novel clearly shows how the social and economic status of an individual can affect his or her aim and identity. Mr. Biswas faces a lot of economic pressure throughout the novel.

Even though there are a lot of downs and setbacks in Biswas's life his determination to build a life of his own becomes stronger. Biswas journey shows us that we are not born with identity, we should create it through our choices and the struggles we face. His experiences show the challenges of defining oneself.

### **The Quest for Own House**

Mr. Biswas longs to have his own house. After marrying Shama Tulsi Mr. Biswas stays with his in-laws. He is not given any proper and permanent place to stay. Later Mr. Biswas decides to make a new life for himself where is not bound to Shama's family. Mr. Biswas goes to the port of Spain to find a new job leaving his family behind. He finds a job as a journalist. The Shama family is highly impressed by Mr. Biswas's success. Shama invites Biswas to reunite and he meets her at a house owned by the Shama's family. Tulsi wishes that her son Owad should be sent to England to study to become a doctor. So she leaves the house to make arrangements. Mr. Biswas enjoys

his freedom. But it does not last long as his brother-in-law Seth arrives and makes changes in the house.

Tulsi's family members do not like Seth's behavior. Most of the family members move away to a larger estate named Shorthills. There also he suffers and so he decides to change his life again. So he returns to Port of Spain, where his sister-in-law Chinta and her husband Govind live. Another couple also lives in that house. Later Owad returned with his doctorate from England. So the arrival of Owad tells that Mr. Biswas should leave the house. Owad is treated like a hero. Mr. Biswas understands the importance of his own house. When he comes to know about a house for sale he decides to buy it. He thinks about the independence that the house will offer him. He does not have enough money so he borrows money from Ajodha and buys the house.

In the novel a house for Mr. Biswas the house is not only a desire but it is a journey of longing and self-discovery. It's like freedom for Biswas from his in-law's family and their dominance. After buying his own house Biswas feels like he fits into the social status in society. Biswas has faced many downs, setbacks, and societal barriers but even in all these struggles his desire for a house remained the same.

### **Individual Choice Versus Community Standards**

After marrying Shama Tulsi Mr. Biswas's life has changed. He could not make his own choice as he stayed with his in-laws. Shama Tulsi's family expects a lot from Biswas. They did not care about Biswas's desire and interest. Community standards became an important one to Shama Tulsi's family. Biswas could not handle his desires and aspirations due to family pressure. Throughout the novel, Mr. Biswas has to make many sacrifices to fulfill the family's expectations and the community's standards. Mr. Biswas could not fulfill the societal expectations he longs for freedom.

Mr. Biswas is a normal man with his own and small desires. So he could not fit into the expectations of the Shama Tulsi family. He faced a lot of struggles as he could not make his individual decisions. There is a lot of difference in his thoughts. Mr. Biswas's desire for his own house is a quest for independence and the space where he can make his own decisions

### **Conclusion**

Through the life of the protagonist Mr. Biswas, we can easily see how social expectations play a major role in an individual's life. Through his life, we can also see the economic inequalities. The balance between personal wishes aspirations and societal norms is very much important. Through this novel, we can also know the importance of identity and culture.

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