House of Mr. Biswas V. S. Naupaul

1. Summarise the novel **A House of Mr. Biswas** by V. S. Naipaul?
2. Discuss house as a necessity in the novel **A House of Mr. Biswas** by V. S. Naipaul?

Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul was born in Chaguanas, Trinidad on August 17, 1932, the eldest son of Seepersad Naipaul, a locally renowned journalist. He was a Trinidadian novelist and essayist. His wriotings are mainly based on life and society in the Caribbean. He was famous for his sharp and cynical wit. He received Nobel Prize in Literature,

A House for Mr. Biswas was V. S. Naipaul’s fourth novel predominantly comic novel, which made Naipaul a major figure in world literature, was inspired by the story of his own father.The story is widely recognized as the first work by Naipaul that deserved serious recognition. In 1998, the novel got placed in *The Modern Library’s* list of the best 100 novels in the English language.

The story is based on Trinidad but the characters are all are immigrants from India, thus making their way from one British colony to another. They are not the natives.

The story begins with the time not long before the death of the protagonist, Mohun Biswas. Mr. Biswas working as a journalist in Trinidad had four children with his wife Sharma, no money, but, most importantly, a house he had built for himself on Sikkim Street. Although Mr. Biswas has no source of economic income but he is content that at least he has his own house and does not have to rely on his wife's family, the Tulsis.

The novel is countrified. Mr. Biswas was born, the fourth child in his family, in his mother Bipti's village after she went back to her family to complain about her husband Raghu and his miserliness. A pundit comes to tell the boy's fortune and instructs the family to keep the boy away from trees and water, because of the sign of bad luck he was born with: six fingers. Bissoondaye, Bipti's mother, takes care of the infant Mr. Biswas and deals with Raghu when he shows up to see his newborn son; Bipti and Raghu reconcile. As pundit's instructions, Raghu is shown Mr. Biswas in a reflection on a brass plate; the family also learns that the boy has an unlucky sneeze.

While Raghu takes Mr. Biswas' brothers, Pratap and Prasad, to a stream to swim, Mr. Biswas is kept at home because of the pundit's advice and plays with his sister Dehuti. Dhari, the Biswas family's next-door neighbour, pays Raghu to take care of a newborn calf of theirs; Mr. Biswas, who becomes very interested in the calf, takes it wandering around, during which time he discovers a stream and becomes entranced by the fishes in it. One day, however, he loses track of the calf while distracted by the fishes and then, unable to relocate it, decides to go back and hide in his house. Raghu and many villagers go looking for Mr. Biswas and the calf, and they assume that the two have fallen into the pond. Raghu goes diving for them and brings up the calf but get drown in water looking for Mr. Biswas.

Bipti's sister Tara, who lives in Pagotes, comes to officiate Raghu's funeral. Afterward, Dhari comes searching in the family's garden for the money that Raghu, a miser, must have been hiding. Eventually, the family moves away and sells Dhari their hut and land to go live with Tara.

Mr. Biswas befriends an eccentric boy named Alec inschool, with whom he does adventurous things. He discovers that he has a talent for letter design. While Pratap and Prasad, grown up, are making their own livings, Mr. Biswas does such things as reading English newspaper columns for Tara's husband, Ajodha, and doing a brief stint training to become a pundit under Pundit Jairam. He returns to Pagotes and works for Bhandat, Ajodha's brother, in Bhandat's rum shop, until he is thrown out from there too. He goes about searching for a job in vain. During this time, he runs into Ramchand, Tara's house-boy with whom Dehuti eloped, and feels estranged by his sister's married life but then Alec comes back and takes his school friend on as a sign-painter. Mr. Biswas shows much talent and begins to read magazines, novels, and scientific books earnestly. He dreams of love.

The large Tulsi family, headed by Mrs. Tulsi (Mai), is one of the most important families in the town of Arwacas and owns a conspicuous house on High Street called Hanuman House. Mr. Biswas gets a job painting signs for the Tulsi store, run by Mrs. Tulsi's brother, Seth. While he is there, he catches the eye of one of her daughters, Shama, he is pressured into marrying her; despite misgivings and a short escape to his mother, he eventually settles into Hanuman House. There, he does no work and becomes embroiled in family politics, earning the ire of many family members and a beating from Govind, one of his brothers-in-law, by ridiculing the family and making some mischiefs. He also spends time talking with Misir, an idle journalist, about different movements in Hinduism and politics. Eventually he leaves Hanuman House with pregnant Shama to live a life on their own.

After leaving Hanuman House with Shama, Mr. Biswas settles into a ramshackle house in a town called The Chase, where he ends up staying for six years, making his living running a small grocery shop he calls *The Bonne Esperance Grocery*. Away from the large Tulsi family, Mr. Biswas begins to experience married life with Shama; she has, meanwhile, changed almost instantaneously from a girl to a woman and mother. Mr. Biswas also becomes much better acquainted with the various oddities and disputes among the many parents and children of Hanuman House.

Shama goes back to her family for a time to have her and Mr. Biswas' first child delivered; when Mr. Biswas goes to see his firstborn, he finds that Mrs. Tulsi has already named the girl Savi. Meanwhile, Mr. Biswas also becomes interested in short stories from his journalist from Misir, from whom he has to borrow money to pay off a man with whom he unwisely gets into a legal dispute. He also begins to read more Hindu philosophy and Marcus Aurelius. Shama has two more children: a son named Anand and a daughter named Myna.

Mr. Biswas leaves The Chase and gets a job from Seth to work as a driver in Green Vale, where he also engages George Maclean, a carpenter, to build him the house he has always wanted. He borrows money from Ajodha to pay Maclean, his laborer, and to buy the building materials; during this time, he also pays his own family a visit and sees his nephews. As the construction of the house, which Mr. Biswas has planned meticulously, proceeds, Mr. Biswas leaves the rundown barracks house, in which he has been living as a driver, to live in the almost-completed house.

Since Shama goes back to Hanuman House very often—she still considers it her home and wherever she lives with Mr. Biswas as a kind of temporary residence—Mr. Biswas finds himself alone with a great deal of time to think about his life. He realizes both (1) that he feels that much of his past life has been wasted time and (2) that he feels a kind of innate fear and distrust of other people. At this time, he begins to raise a puppy he calls Tarzan to help guard him against the sugarcane labourers he oversees, who act hostilely towards him. At a peak of his obsession, he drives Shama out of his house but manages to keep Anand. One day, they discover that the villagers have killed Tarzan—and then a violent storm partially destroys the house.

After the storm, Mr. Biswas and Anand are brought to Hanuman House. He learns from Seth that the labourers burned down what remained of his house after the storm. Deciding that his past has been utterly wasted and filled with unhappiness, Mr. Biswas resolves to seek happiness from the present moment on; he leaves Hanuman House and goes towards Port of Spain.

 **Part II**

Leaving Hanuman House, Mr. Biswas, on a whim, gets onto a bus bound for Port of Spain. There, he goes to see his sister Dehuti with her husband Ramchand and decides to stay with them for a time. Walking into the offices of the Trinidad Sentinel, the newspaper where his friend Misir works, Mr. Biswas manages to get an interview with the editor, who agrees to give him a try at reporter work.

Stitching together sensationalistic stories from information he picks up walking around the city's police offices, prisons, and the like, Mr. Biswas establishes himself enough to earn a salaried position as the paper's shipping reporter; he also plays the role of the *Scarlet Pimpernel*, where readers of the paper who approach and accost him with a certain phrase can win a prize. He goes back to Arcawas to Hanuman House, where he reconciles with Shama and takes up Mrs. Tulsi's offer of a house in Port of Spain. He lives there for some time with his family and Owad, Mrs. Tulsi's son, until the whole Tulsi family pours into the house to see off Owad, whom Mrs. Tulsi sends to Cambridge to study medicine.

After Owad leaves, Mrs. Tulsi takes the whole large family back to Arcawas to Hanuman House, leaving the house in Port of Spain somewhat emptied. Visiting Hanuman House, Mr. Biswas and Shama are perturbed by several disputes within the family between Mrs. Tusli and Seth about Shekhar and his westernized wife, Dorothy. Back in Port of Spain at the Trinidad Sentinel, Mr. Burnett is sacked and Mr. Biswas must deal with a change in his reporting assignment and a general shift towards stultifying seriousness at the paper. As he spends more time reading, so does Anand. The family begins going to see Tara and Ajodha on the weekends. When Seth parks his Lorries in the shed by the side of the Port of Spain house, Mr. Biswas is unpleasantly reminded of the fact that, not he, but rather the Tulsi family, owns the house.

The Tulsis abruptly decide to move from their house in Arcawas to take up residence in Shorthills, near Port of Spain. Leaving behind Seth, with whom she and many of her daughters are quarreling, Mrs. Tulsi, along with Mr. Biswas and his family, moves into the house and begins to work some of the expansive fields nearby, raise livestock, and sell some of the nearby lumber. Domestically, Mr. Biswas comes into conflict with the brother-in-law living in the room directly across from his family's, whom he satirically names "W. C. Tuttle" after an author he reads.

Many incidents punctuate Mr. Biswas' stay at the Shorthills house. Seven of Mrs. Tulsi's daughters are married off; Mr. Biswas orders a bookcase made by a local blacksmith; Americans come to the village; W. C. Tuttle and Govind become infamous for selling trees and fruit from the property for their own profit; the children go to school, but because of the distance and lack of regular transportation, they end up spending most of the day out of home. In quick succession, one of the brothers-in-law named Sharma, the pundit Hari, and Mrs. Tulsi's sister, Padma, die. After family squabbles and the accusation of a theft within the house, Mr. Biswas determines to have a house built for his own family some distance away; however, one day, he and his children accidentally end up burning down the newly built when they try to make a controlled fire on the land.

Mr. Biswas is happy to move out of the Tulsi house in Shorthills, but due to a housing shortage, he must share a house in Port of Spain with W. C. Tuttle's family, Govind's family, and Basdai, a widow who rents out her rooms to other widows and their children who have come to the city to study. Mr. Biswas refers to these aspiring students sarcastically as "the readers and learners," and feels annoyed by the noise they make.

At the Sentinel, Mr. Biswas manages to hold onto his job and begins to report on so-called **Deserving Destitutes** to give the paper some sensationalistic material and distribute bits of charity. He encounters some troubles on his bike trips through poorer neighbourhoods, and some of the widows even come from Shorthills to ask him to get them status as Deserving Destitutes. He visits Bhandat, who is living with a Chinese mistress, and he makes weekly visits to Pagotes to escape the ruckus caused by the children in the house.

Meanwhile, Anand approaches college age and begins to study in a grueling cram style for an island-wide exhibition examination that would provide a scholarship to study in Britain. Mr. Biswas invests a great deal of hope in his son and promises to buy him a bicycle if he wins a spot. Right after the exam, Anand admits to having neglected some problems of the test, while Govind's son Vidiadhar boasts of having done superbly; however, when the results come out, all are surprised to learn that Anand has placed third, placing him comfortably within the top twelve who won scholarships, while Vidiadhar has only passed without winning a scholarship. Not long after, Bipti, Mr. Biswas' mother, dies; Mr. Biswas does not get the chance to properly mourn and even has to deal with the frustration of the autopsy doctor's fumbling proceedings.

As Anand begins to attend college, Mr. Biswas follows his education closely and with great enthusiasm, investing his attention in his son's life to the point that he loses ambitions for himself and feels himself falling into a "void." At this moment, he receives a great stroke of luck: Ms. Logie, the head of the newly formed Community Welfare Department, offers him a position as a Community Welfare Officer that comes with a hefty salary. He quits his job at the Sentinel without much drama, even though he had drafted many flamboyant resignation letters in the past.

Although Mr. Biswas, given his experiences with poor Indian villagers, feels highly cynical about the Welfare Department's ambitions to organize communities and economic development in the country, he is more than satisfied by the richer life that his much-increased means allow him. He begins to buy more expensive suits, choosing them with a dandified sense, and he even acquires a car, a Prefect, which brings him great pride, especially among the family. This achievement is surpassed, however, by W. C. Tuttle buying a house for his family and moving out; before he is able to rent out the rooms to gain some extra income, Mrs. Tulsi comes to occupy it. Weakened by sickness, she becomes needy for her family's attention and care.

With the news that Owad will be returning from England, much of the family flocks over from Shorthills to the Port of Spain house, crowding Mr. Biswas and his family out of their room; however, Mrs. Tulsi promises Mr. Biswas that he can move back later. Mr. Biswas continues his work as a Welfare Officer, distributing leaflets and holding meetings. He calculates the money he has accrued and how much he needs to buy his own house.

As the time of Owad's return from England approaches, the house in Port of Spain fills with expectant relatives, and Mrs. Tulsi is stirred from her illness and lethargy. Such is the jubilation at his reception at the port that even Seth, who has not spoken to the family in a long time, feels somewhat reconciled. The children and the wives all listen enthusiastically to Owad's tales of his service as a doctor in the Second World War and of the political career that followed, thanks to his distinguished education and the connections he formed with important British figures whom he treated during the war.

The other members of the Tulsi family are especially enthralled to hear about Owad's career in Parliament, where he has become an influential and outspoken figure in the Labor Party, earning the deep respect of some and forming bitter rivalries with other MPs. It seems to all that Owad, a boy from their Trinidadian family, has become a man on the world stage, casually familiar with the names of great figures—and, furthermore, a promulgator of the great hope of communist revolution. Telling tales of colorful strains of cotton and spreading seeds by plane, Owad grasps the imaginations of his relatives with the idea that the revolution is coming, and that it will bring everyone material prosperity.

However, tensions begin to emerge in the family, beginning with a petty altercation Anand has with Owad over opinions on European avant-garde art while they play a weekly Sunday game of bridge, ending with Owad slapping Anand twice. One night, Mr. Biswas, annoyed by the noise in the crowded house, gets into a shouting match with Owad and Mrs. Tulsi that ends with him giving her his notice. Now compelled to move out, Mr. Biswas happens upon a potential house to buy when he runs into a solicitor's clerk in a café who shows him the house he lives in with his mother.

Although he does not feel so enthusiastic about the look and construction of the house in St. James, Mr. Biswas thinks of ways to raise money and negotiate down the price so he can afford the house without going into too much debt. He ends up making a down payment on it. Shama takes the news of this very poorly, seeing the crippling effect that the debt will have on their lives.

With the negotiations over the house concluded with the solicitor's clerk, Mr. Biswas drives his family over in his Prefect to move to the house. Soon after, they all begin to discover various defective parts of the house: missing curtains, a poorly constructed staircase, the lack of a back door, and so forth. Tacitly agreeing to stop making mention of these problems to each other, they start spending more money to have various things, such as pipes, repaired. Mr. Biswas starts to feel dizzy when he thinks about what he has gotten himself into, but he tries not to think too much—after all, the family has at last succeeded in getting away from the Tulsi family.

Mr. Biswas is scandalized to hear from a local old man that the solicitor's clerk cobbled houses together out of various bits and pieces he would find; however, he is unable to track down the duplicitous man to exact revenge. Nevertheless, he and his whole family set down sentimental roots in the building, and the peace of mind they acquire from this final settling down allows them to go back to the Tulsi house and reconcile peaceably.

A house is perhaps the most important motif in the story. Throughout his life, Mohun lives in lots of places, some grand and some merely a room with leaking roofs. His yearning to have a house of his own is a symbol of his need to make a mark in the world. He came to the world unplanned and created a lot of trouble for everyone—even before he actually did anything, merely by being born on an unlucky hour. His life is considered unnecessary and a burden on his parents. He wishes to die in a place he can call of his own, where he wouldn't have to sacrifice his privacy or existential comfort for someone else.

Mr. Biswas' intense, lifelong desire for a house of his own is more than a literal desire for a place where he can live: it's a metaphor for the deep desire many of us feel for self-determination in a modern world that often makes people feel as if their own lives are largely out of their control. The tragic irony of this story's structure, in this regard, is that the titular character—the one around which the entire narrative should presumably pivot—is apparently doomed to be defined and determined by the other people in his life, rather than himself.

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