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### Neurosis and social- schizophrenia in Naipaul's a house for Mr. Biswas

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#### Abstract

V.S. Naipaul is a Trinidadian-born Nobel Prize (2001) and Booker prize winning (1971) British writer, known as one of the most prolific writers of the Diaspora literature. His novels set in Trinidad and reflect the history and trauma of diasporic (displaced) communities in the colonial and post-colonial world. The present paper is an attempt to study diasporic peoples' life with socio-psychological perspective and explore the internal conflicts and psychic imbalance through his epic like creation *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961). For Diasporic people, the damage in conscious arises in a form of tension of an individual and society which is the outcome of various displacement and cultural diversities. Due to Inter- psychic conflict, some symptoms of neurosis and social- Schizophrenia can be visualized in the character resulted in emotional distance, bewilderment and frustration of human psyche.

**Keywords:** Conscious, haunted memories, psychic conflict, neurosis, schizophrenia

#### 1. Introduction

Vidiadhar Suraj Prasad Naipaul was born on 17 August 1932 in a family of Indian ancestry of Chaguanas in Trinidad. More than 30 books including fictions and non fictions are to his credit. His writings represent hostile conditions of a Creole society which is far away for the expatriate individual to feel any sense of belongingness. This is the situation where an individual's life is socially and culturally estranged and authentic identity becomes an unattainable task. His works also delineate constant clashes among the societies in post-colonial world to put light on the unending collision of the culture and the problems of human adjustment in the new social-milieu. *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961) describes the story of a homeless and rootless immigrant who lacks identity and security in the colonial world. It also explores various causes and result of psychological dilemma faced by diasporic people out of their native land. Social, cultural and psychological aspects of an individual and a society are major aspects of this book.

#### Discussion:

V. S. Naipaul discusses the prevalent disorder of displaced people in the new soil as "Cultural shock' and immersion in a strange culture cause a breakdown in communication, misreading of reality and inability to cope" (FS 19). This cultural shock and displacement embolden in colonized of having the experience of the traumatic part of self and psyche. According to Edward Said, it increases in the displaced people the "Crippling sorrow of estrangement" (TI 14). The process of colonization brings forth new patterns of cultural behaviour and value system which has generated tension in the society. He highlights the happening of the diasporic individuals' life and delineates the colonial ethos and the psychology of confined communities with their fear of being "Trapped" (HMB 92) (repeated in all books) in the colonial world. Naipaul refers the displaced people's condition in Trinidad:

A peasant-minded money minded community, spiritually static because cut off from its roots, its religion reduced to rites without philosophy, set in a materialist colonial society; a combination of historical accidents and national temperament has turned the Trinidad Indian into complete colonial (MP 80).

*A House for Mr. Biswas* exposes colonial conditions, individual's dilemma and protagonist's constant revolt against inimical forces within the society which makes Biswas as an aggressive rebellion persona. Thus, "Rebellion in Biswas is defined by his state as a

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cultural, psychological and social orphan” (Rohelhr 86). His revolting nature enables him to justify his harsh, inhuman and unpleasant acts that occurred in his life “‘I am going to get a job of my own. And I am going get my own House too. I am finished with this.’ He waved his aching arm about the mud walls and the low, sooty thatch” (66). Mr. Biswas’s denying nature also reflects his neurotic fear in the society due to having a detached social milieu. From the beginning of the text, a detached person’s neurotic persona and rebellious nature towards his surrounding reflects the reality of colonial atmosphere of psychic imbalance in a Creole society. After being insulted by Pundit jairam, his first teacher, he falls in a state of shock and his conversation with his mother indicates the beginning of his neurotic persona, rage, disorder and depression, “. . . his resolution is shaken. ‘I am not going to take any job at all’, he told Bipti. . . . ‘I don’t want to see Tara. I am going to kill myself. I don’t want any food.’ and in a great rage he left the hut” (68). His life at Tulsi House is shattered as he becomes an unwanted insider who soon trapped in the powerful social hierarchy of Tulsi, “Mr. Biswas had no money or position. He was expected to become a Tulsi. At one he rebelled” (99). His life begins with, “. . . silence, stares, hostility and perhaps little fears” (103). The lack of proper alliances in the family develops him as an alienated, one who rejects in order to escape from the repressive world of Tulsi to create his own independent world. He becomes a rebel because, “. . . rebellion as a necessary way to freedom, offering society a look at itself, an opportunity for self-assessment, the possibility of achievement” (Theorux 115). His neurotic persona stops him accepting Tulsis’s customs and traditional beliefs, “‘What I do? I ain’t do nothing. I just don’t believe in this idol worship that is all’” (133). The frequent encounters with diverse socio-cultures and humiliation at every place drive Mr. Biswas to become a neurotic, who engages in violent and aggressive actions. The word Neurotic refers to the disorder of one’s personality. Little Oxford English Dictionary defines Neurosis as, “. . . a mild mental illness in which a person feels depressed or anxious or behaves in an obsessive way” (464). Neurosis is an, “. . . exaggerated forms of normal reaction to stress full events. There is no evidence of any kind of organic disorder. Patients do not lose touch with external reality and although often associated with a degree of personality disorder” (Lamb 425). Mr. Biswas’s life provides certain symptoms of neurosis of his personality, “‘Trap; he accused Shama ‘Trap;’ he becomes surely, constantly in pain. He throws things in his room. He pulled down the pictures he had framed and broke down. He threw a glass of milk at Anand and cut him above the eye. He slapped Shama down stairs” (558). Naipaul has revealed Mr. Biswas’s neurotic personality with violent rage, “‘He gave a kick at a lotus on the wall. The noise startled him, his toe is hurt, and he aimed another kick at his pile of books” (141). In a fit of rage his face seems to him, “‘heavy and dead” (141). Thus, Naipaul describes a split personality of metropolitan world, where deprivation from indigenous place left an expatriate in a state of repression. In *Chase*, like a neurotic he suddenly loses self control: He. . . . lost his temper. ‘What the hell you think I look like?. . . . And what the hell for I should get Hari to come and bless this place? This place? Look for yourself.’ He pointed to the kitchen and slapped the wall of the shop. ‘Is bad enough as it is. To feed your family on top of all this is really going too damn far’” (152).

Naipaul focuses on colonial historical trauma in the form of character’s unusual outburst as in case of Mr. Biswas, whose frequent battle with the oppressive forces affects his psyche. In *Green Vale*, under anxiety, he is compelled to spend many tormented nights in closed place and surrenders himself to dark rooms to, “. . . lay down on the bed and forced himself to cry for all his lost happiness” (280). In his excessive state of fear and repression, the numerous images appear in his mind and reveal his mental trauma:

People. He could here them next door and all down the barracks. No road was without them, no House. They were in news perhaps on the wall, in the photographs, in the simple drawing in advertisements. They were in the book he was holding. They were in all books (277).

Fear and depression overtake Mr. Biswas and makes him a neurotic persona of disorderly behaviours, “‘He grew his nail to an extreme length. . . . He picked and squeezed at his face until his cheeks and forehead was like welts. When his skin became pitted by little holes, he studied these with interest and found the perfection of their shape pleasing” (190). His neurotic reaction can also be seen when his daughter’s dolls house was broken by others, “‘He ran back to the House. The edge of a wall scraped against his shoulder, tearing his shirt and tearing the skin below” (228). He loses self control and continues with loud screams, weeping and harsh words to his wife.

The text also reflects another disorder, schizophrenia, a Freudian psychological term. Although it does not apply thoroughly on the characters’ unusual mind set, yet some disorderly symptoms and characteristics of partial schizophrenia can be seen in the protagonist’s life. The word Schizophrenia derives from Greek word Schizen means ‘split’ and Phren stands for ‘mind’. In this way, Schizophrenia signifies unusual activities of an individual’s mind. “‘It is also referred for mental illness and fundamental disturbances of the personality, characterizes by disturbances of thinking, motivation, and mood together with delusions and hallucination but in which cognition is normal” (Worchel 443). Little Oxford Dictionary defines it as, “. . . a mental disorder whose symptoms include a withdrawal from reality into fantasy” (625). Schizophrenia also begins with a phase of gradual deterioration, including such symptoms as social isolation, withdrawal and severe impairment in the ability, sometime with peculiar behavior such as talking aloud to one self. Having a close reading of Naipaul’s works, one can easily understand his technique to analyses characters psycho-schizoid behavior to expose continual shock and bitter experience in the metropolitan world. His fictions reflect characters’ changing behavior, split personality and their thirst for fantasy. So, some severe symptoms like withdrawal, isolation from society, fantasy, absurd behaviors and characters’ talking habit to one self can be seen as a disorderly reaction that he projects. According to Gautam Adhikari, “‘An immigrant’s self-identity always has a touch of schizophrenia in it” (TI 10). Mr. Biswas can be seen as a schizoid persona at various stages of his life which reflect through his uncertain behaviors and reactions to himself and to the family as R.D. Laing calls, “‘ontological uncertainty” (CPSL 29) meaning a deep-seated uncertainty as to whether or not one exist. The mental disorder pushes him in a state of nervous breakdown that ultimately ends with depression, dereliction and continuous mental shock. In the *Green Vale*, Mr. Biswas, in a fit of disorder makes many dangerous and

imaginative plans to cut himself away from family and social responsibilities:

He decided he had to get rid of Anand and Savi and himself, in such a way that the children would never know who had killed them. All morning he was possessed of vision in which he cutlashed, poisoned, strangled, burned, Anand and Savi; so that even before they came his relationship with them had been perverted (284-85).

Another symptom of schizophrenia as described in the book *The Psychology Principles and Applications* is characters' withdrawal from the social life, in which Characters take shelter in the fantasy-world to placate their trauma. Fantasy is the creation of imaginative things; a way to go from reality to reject harsh realities of life as Paul Theroux calls, ". . . the hungering for the unseen . . . imagination helps a man to become whole" (VSN 36). The escapist tendency leads Mr. Biswas to go away from colonial world into to dreamy land, where he can enjoy full freedom without social interruption and imposition. He engages himself in painting and creating sceneries to feel pleasure in his self created world, away from reality, "He painted cool, ordered forest, cultivated trees ringed with friendly serpent, and the floors bright with perfect flower; not the rotting, mosquito-infested jungle he could find within an hour's walk" (189-90). *Chase, Green Vale* and *Shorthills* are the places where fear and gloomy irritation prevails over him, "Every night he bolted himself in his room. As soon as he was still he felt the stillness around him . . ." (238-39). This darkness fills his minds with the feeling of vague, silence and hostility so the every object in the room of *Green Vale* seems to him 'silent' 'crushed' and 'pressed'. He is like a paranoid, who always fears for his security that brings humiliation to him and frequently, "Fear seized him and hurt like a pain" (279). Naipaul has presented schizoid personality of Mr. Biswas and the variation of his mind. A schizoid sometime becomes a 'social-alienated', one who develops withdrawal tendency as he finds himself strange in home, "He found four children on his bed. They were not his. Thereafter he occupied his room early in the evening, bolted the door refused to answers knocks, calls, scratches and cries" (379-80). He is an expatriate whose constant failure makes him neurotic and schizoid who wants to withdraw as family, ". . . noticed Mr. Biswas's stillness, his silence, his withdrawal. He did not complain about noise; he discouraged, but gently, all effort to engage him in conversation; he went alone for long night walks" (508). In a schizophrenic mood, everything seems to him the object of hatred, "He wanted to climb mountains, to exhaust him, to walk and walk and never return to the House, to the empty tent, the dead fire-holes, the disarrayed furniture" (382). One of the symptoms of schizophrenia is an individual's unusual talking habit to himself in alone or in presence of others. There are various occasions which reflect Biswas's schizoid habits of talking to unseen person with his anger, sudden cries; weeping and violent reactions unveil his split personality:

He suddenly seemed to forget her, and she heard him muttering to himself, holding bitter repetitive argument with unseen persons. He was 'trapped' in a 'hole.' Trap,' she heard him say over and over. 'That's what you and your family do to me. Trap me in this hole.' she saw his mouth twist with anger; she heard him curse and threaten (232).

### Conclusion:

The repression and neurotic behaviour become explicit in the text. Mr. Biswas is an expatriate, whose life passes in search of identity and he remained nostalgic for his own home. His unreal aspiration towards attaining identity pushes him into various rejections and makes him a neurotic persona in the fragile world. Naipaul and his characters seem to find their final resort in solitude, where plight of past experiences become constant part of their memories. The neurotic and schizoid behaviour of the characters seems to be reflective of a diasporic like Mr. Biswas, whose life with frequent displacement failed to attain the psychological balance in a strange land.

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