Chapter –V

‘PARADIGMATIC SHIFT IN THE DOMINANT THEMES’

INTRODUCTION:-

Sir Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul had the misfortune of being born in the wrong place, a handicap he overcame by taking up residence in the right place. But he could not do much about being born at the wrong time, an injustice the world righted by stepping in his time. Today, Sir Vidia’s nomadic status is fashionably in sync with the has made the third space a privileged position for a writer to be in. yet he is out of place among other wanderers of the interstitial space, the Rushdies, the Mukherjees, the Vassanjis. Unlike those who dream of ‘imaginary Homelands’ to adjust to the trauma of displacement, he has opted for homelessness. As the paradigmatic condition of humankind in the postmodern world, homelessness might appear like a highly comfortable position to speak from. But Naipaul chose to occupy this uncertain zone before it had been so defined. His nomadic status made him a cultural oddity both among his ‘placed’ contemporaries from post-colonial homelands like Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Nayantara Sahgal and compatriots like George Lamming and Wilson Harris. As a man without a nation, choosing residence in a nation that is not his own, he seemed to defy nationness as a valorizing category. By viewing Naipaul as a nomad, a person without a fix address who chooses to belong to a universal community, this chapter aims to problematize the contested categories of home, belonging, nation and diaspora against the backdrop of an earlier phase of migration from the Indian continent. Naipaul emerges as the greatest problem, epitomizing a particular diasporic ideology and transcending it. He is the mimic man who turns his master’s tools against the master and his own people, the man without a home, the stranger, at home in a homeless universe.
As far back as 1960s, V.S. Naipaul would reject the homeland myth and denounce both his lands of origin with seeming detachment. If India was ‘an area of darkness’, ‘nothing was been created in the West Indies’. He would have no home except the one that would not have him. It is surprising that his amnesia to the West Indies’ contribution in shaping him did not extend to India in his Nobel Address considering ‘India bashing’ has been one of his favorite pastimes. But the expectation that he should acknowledge the three traditions shaping his consciousness is rooted in the originary myth of a homeland in earlier imaginings of the nation and the diaspora.

**Naipaul and Girmitya Ideology:**

Vijay Mishra names Naipaul ‘the founder of the girmitya ideology’ who “provided a new form, style and language to it.” (1991:2). ‘Girmit’ is the distorted form of ‘agreement’ that began ‘the saga of indenture’, which transported peasant workers from parts of Northern India to the sugar plantations of the West Indies among other places (Mishra 1991:1). A migrant is one who abandons home and started to reside in any other home. Girmitya is, therefore, a particular kind of migrant. Naipaul displays a painfully sharp grasp of the Girmit ideology in his early novels set in Trinidad. The Girmitya constructs what Naipaul calls ‘our island India’, which is “an over determined mini replica of the more conservative aspects of homeland life ritualized in the memory and actions of the dispossessed” (Pointon, 1993:3). The Girmitya psychology is governed by ‘the logic of fragment’ (Mishra, 1991:2). The place of origin myth that undergirds diasporic consciousness becomes a subject of investigation in Naipaul’s fiction.

Naipaul sums up the girmitya ideology with a profound sense of cultural loss calling attention to the difference between the authentic and artificial worlds. He documents the process of the progressively waning memory of the
homeland in The Mystic Masseur and A House for Mr. Biswas that culminates in the fantasy of the homeland in Trinidad’s ‘little India’.

The notion of home plays an important role for most people as it provides a sense belonging and security, and where one can decide on acceptable values and forms of behavior. Home also has an opposing territorial cannotation of making space through closure: ‘only those who belong can come in, and a house-owner can shut the door on outsiders’ (castles & Davidson, 2000:130). The notion of home is not confined to a home but may be extended to a eider social space, even a nation. The girmitya ideology may be comprehended as a form of ‘home-building’ and ‘place-making’.

**The Story of A House for Mr. Biswas:**

**Birth; Parentage; Father’s Death**

Mr. Mohun Biswas was born in a village of Trinidad. He was born of humble parents, his maternal grandfather having emigrated to Trinidad from India to work on a sugar-estate. Mr. Biswas was born at the hour of midnight which was not thought to be an auspicious hour. Besides, he was born in the wrong way and was found to have six fingers. The pundit, who was called to read the boy’s future, said that the boy would grow into a lecher, a spendthrift, and a liar. The pundit’s advice was that the boy should be kept away from trees and from water. The midwife attending upon the birth of the boy made the prediction that the boy would eat up his own mother and father. Mr. Biswas really ate up his father because the father got drowned one day in the village pond while trying to trace his son who was missing but who was actually hiding under a bed at home. Mr. Biswas does not grow up to be spendthrift, a liar, or a lecher, but he does prove to be an unlucky person in many ways. Some time after the death of Mr. Biswas’s father, the family is compelled by circumstance to spilt. Mr. Biswas’s two elder brothers are sent away to a distance place to work on a suger-estate; his sister Dehuti is sent to the house of her aunt Tara at Pagotes to work as a domestic servant; Mr. Biswas
and his mother move also to Pagotes where Tara’s husband owns a house, but they are given some accommodation by Tara in another house which also belongs to her husband.

**Schooling**

Mr. Biswas is admitted to the Canadian Mission School where he receives instruction from a teacher by the name of Lal. Lal was originally a low-caste Hindu but he had been converted to Presbyterianism, a sect of Christianity. At school Mr. Biswas finds that he has entered a new world where he has to learn arithmetic and study various other branches of knowledge. Among his fellow-students there is a Christian boy by the name of Alec with whom Mr. Biswas becomes quite friendly. In Alec’s company Mr. Biswas plays all the pranks in which boys generally indulge. In Alec’s company he lays six-inch nails on the railway track at the back of the Main Road in order to have them flattened so as to make knives and bayonets of them. Together the two boys go to the Pagotes river and smoke their first cigarettes. They tear off their shirt-buttons and exchange them for marbles. At school they sit at the same desk, talk, are flogged, and separated; but they always come together again. It is through this association that Mr. Biswas discovers his talent for lettering. His lettering proves to be so nice the teacher calls him a sign-painter, and a sign-painter Mr. Biswas actually becomes afterwards. Mr. Biswas remains at this school for nearly six years. During this time he seldom goes to Tara’s house where his sister Dehuti is working as a maid-servant. He goes to Tara’s house only when a religious ceremony is held there and when some Brahmins are needed to be fed by Tara. On such occasions Mr. Biswas is treated with much regard because he is a Brahmin; and yet as soon as the ceremony is over and he has received his hare of money and clothing, he becomes once more a labourer’s son. In the birth certificate which his mother Bipti had obtained from the Commissioner of Oaths, one of the entries shows Mr. Biswas to be son of a labourer. Tara’s husband, Ajodha, is keenly interested in a newspaper feature called “That Body of Yours.” Ajodha sometimes summons Mr. Biswas to his house and asks him to read out that column to him. This
daily column deals with a different disease of the human body everyday. Ajodha pays Mr. Biswas a penny for every reading. Thus whenever Mr. Biswas goes to Tara’s house it is either as a Brahmin to be fed at a fed at a religious ceremony or as a reader to read out a newspaper column to Tara’s husband at a penny a day.

**As an Apprentice to Pundit Jairam**

Just when Mr. Biswas has begun to learn stocks shares in arithmetic, he is taken out of school by Tara and is put under the charge of a Hindu priest in order to be groomed as a pundit. Mr. Biswas’s instructor is a man called Pundit Jairam. Pundit begins to teach the young boy Hindi, and introduces him to the more important scriptures, instructing him also in various ceremonies. Morning and evening, under Pundit Jairam’s supervision, Mr. Biswas performs the *puja* for his instructor’s whole family. Pundit Jairam also begins to take Mr. Biswas with him on his professional visits, with the result that Mr. Biswas becomes an object of considerable regard in Tara’s house. At the ceremonies which Mr. Biswas attends as Pundit Jairam’s assistant, he is given a seat next to his boss; and when Jairam has over-eaten himself, it is Mr. Biswas who mixes the bicarbonate of soda for him. Mr. Biswas has also to bring home all the gifts which Jairam receives. On one occasion Mr. Biswas carries home a large bunch of bananas which Jairam has received as a gift. This bunch is hung in the kitchen to ripen. But one day when Jairam and his wife have gone out, Mr. Biswas picks two bananas and eats them. On his return Jairam detects the theft and, to punish Mr. Biswas, he forces the young man to eat all the remaining bananas also. As a result, Mr. Biswas begins to feel sick and his stomach is upset. Subsequently, he begins habitually to suffer from constipation, and the call comes to him at unpredictable times. One night Mr. Biswas has no alternative but to relieve himself on a handkerchief which he then throws out of the window upon a tree below. This has always been regarded by Jairam as holy. On discovering what Mr. Biswas had done during the night, Jairam flies into a rage and turns him out of his house. In this way Mr. Biswas’s apprenticeship to Pundit Jairam comes to an end. When Mr. Biswas returns home to his mother Bipti at Pagotes, she
rebukes him for his misconduct which has led to his dismissal from Pundit Jairam’s house. Mr. Biswas feels very hurt by his mother’s rebuke but, thirty years later, when he writes a poem addressed to his mother, he does not make any mention of his disappointment with his mother or his grievance against her for her having rebuked him. The passing of time naturally heals his wound,

As an Assistant At A Rum-Shop

Mr. Biswas now goes to his aunt Tara to find out if she would help him in his state of unemployment and wretchedness. Tara receives him with considerable sympathy. She sends him to her husband’s rum-shop which is being run by her husband’s brother, Bhandat. Working at the rum-shop is a new experience for Mr. Biswas. He finds that Bhandat is a heavy drunkard and is in the habit of beating his wife. Bhandat is also rumoured to be keeping a mistress belonging to a different community. Furthermore, Mr. Biswas discovers that Bhandat is cheating his customers by giving them less than the full measure of the drinks ordered by them in the shop. Bhandat is living with his wife and two sons in a two-room house, and Mr. Biswas has to sleep with Bhandat’s two sons on an hard mattress on the floor. From his wages, Mr. Biswas begins to give one dollar a month to his mother Bipti whom he goes to see twice a week when the shop is closed. He visits Tara occasionally. On one of these visits, he finds twenty volumes of an encyclopedia which Ajodha had obtained from an American travelling salesman. Sometimes on these visits Mr. Biswas reads out to Ajodha the newspaper column called “That Body of Yours,” receiving a penny for his labour as he used to do previously, And thereafter he reads as much as he can from the encyclopedia for his own benefit. One day Mr. Biswas is unjustly accused by Bhandat of having stolen a dollar from his pocket and is given a beating by him. Bhandat then turns Mr. Biswas out of his house and Mr. Biswas has no alternative but to go back to Bipti again scolds him, saying that she has no luck with her children.
Out of Work. A Meeting With His Sister Dehuti

Mr. Biswas now thinks of securing a job somewhere else. He sets out to look for one. He passes many shops, including those of a tailor, a barber, an undertaker, a dry-goods seller and so on, but none of these trades seems to interest him. He returns home to the back trace where his mother has been living ever since his father’s death. Bipti suggests that he should go and make up with Tara from whose rum-shop he had been driven away, but Mr. Biswas says that he would rather kill himself. In an angry mood, Mr. Biswas goes out and keeps walking along the Main Road. Several miles away from Pagotes, he suddenly sees Ramchand, the young ex-servant of Tara. Ramchand is the boy with whom Mr. Biswas’s sister Dehuti had run away and whom she had married. Ramchand takes Mr. Biswas to his house to meet Dehuti. Dehuti has now got a child also. Ramchand gives Mr. Biswas some news about Mr. Biswas’s two brothers, Pratap and Prasad. But Mr. Biswas derives no pleasure at all from his visit to his sister’s house.

As a Signboard-Painter

Mr. Biswas now happens to meet his old school-friend, Alec. Alec has become a professional signboard-painter. Mr. Biswas enters into a working partnership with Alec. As Mr. Biswas has a very good handwriting, he too now begins to undertake casual work as a signboard-painter. Mr. Biswas’s new work is satisfying no doubt, but it comes irregularly. Alec wanders from district to district, sometimes working, sometimes not working, so that the partnership is often interrupted by periods of idleness. There are many weeks when Mr. Biswas finds himself altogether out of work, thought he gets plenty of work when Christmas comes. In the meanwhile, his love of reading develops and he goes through all the novels which he can find at the bookstalls of Pagotes. He feels particularly interested in the novels of Hall Caine and Marie Corelli. His mother now wants him to get married but he says that he would never get married as long as he has no secure job and no decent accommodation to live in. His two brothers have by now got married. Mr. Biswas now gets interested in the novels and other writings of Samuel Smiles. He also buys some elementary books on science, particularly on
electricity; but he has to give up this line of reading he cannot obtain the electrical equipment which he needs to learn some practical skill. As his sign-painting does not bring him enough money, he becomes a conductor on one of Ajodha’s buses. Then one day he goes to Hanuman House at Arwacas where he is asked to paint signs signs for the Tulsi Store, which is situated on the ground floor of Hanuman House.

Married to Shama, a Daughter of Mrs. Tulsi

While painting signs at the Tulsi Store, Mr. Biswas happens to see a sixteen-year old shop-assistant by the name of Shama. He feels attracted to this girl and writes a note to her. The note bears the following words: “I love you and I want to talk to you.” Mr. Biswas puts the note under a piece of cloth on the counter where Shama generally serves the customers. However, this note falls into the hands of Shama’s mother, Mrs. Tulsi who is the owner of Hanuman House and of the Tulsi Store. Mrs. Tulsi is a rich and orthodox widow owning a lot of property. She runs her house and her store with the active collaboration of her dead husband’s brother by the name of Seth. Mrs. Tulsi has a large number of daughters all of whom, with the exception of Shama, are already married. Most of her daughters and their husbands are living in Hanuman House under her patronage of Seth. All the daughters and his sons-in-law are maintained by Mrs. Tulsi and Seth, and they all have to do their share of work in the house, in the store, and on the estates belonging to Mrs. Tulsi. Together Mrs. Tulsi and Seth decide to give Shama in marriage to Mr. Biswas on the ground that Mr. Biswas had written a love-letter to her. Although Mr. Biswas is a poor young man, coming from a humble family, yet the fact that he is a Brahmin by caste goes strongly in his favour. Mr. Biswas had not written the love-letter with any idea of getting married to Shama. But now he is almost coerced into marrying Shama by the combined pressure of Mrs. Tulsi and Seth. Mr. Biswas feels sorely disappointed when he finds that he has been given no dowry at all. In fact, even the ceremony of marriage has not been performed in the traditional manner which would have cost Mrs. Tulsi a good deal of money. The marriage is solemnized at the
office of the registrar where only a small fee has to be paid. Mr. Biswas now joins the ranks of the other sons-in-law of Mrs. Tulsi and begins to live in Hanuman House.

**Under the Influence of Arya Samaj**

Mr. Biswas finds himself a complete misfit in Mrs. Tulsi’s household which is being managed by Mrs. Tulsi with the active assistance of Seth. Mr. Biswas resumes his sign-painting and spends as much of his time as he can away from Hanuman House. One day he meets another under-employed man like himself. This man is Misir. Misir is working as the Arwacas correspondent of a newspaper called the *Trinidad Sentinel*. With him, Mr. Biswas discusses many subjects, such as employment opportunities, Hinduism, and India. Misir introduces him to a Hindu missionary who has come from India to Trinidad to preach the views of Arya Samaj. Under the influence of that missionary, Mr. Biswas adopts the progressive and unorthodox views preached by him.

**The Disharmony Between Mr. Biswas and His Wife**

Mr. Biswas’s married life does not prove to be happy. He finds it impossible to develop any intimacy with Shama. In fact, they both begin to feel antagonistic towards each other. Mr. Biswas often taunts her on the shortcomings of her family, while an under-current of bitterness. He refers to her two brothers as “the little gods”, to Seth as “the big boss”, and to Mrs. Tulsi as “the old queen”, then as “the old hen”, and next as “the old cow”. Shama says that nobody had particularly asked him to get married into the Tulsi family. Mr. Biswas retorts that there is no reason at all for Shama to feel proud of her family because in his opinion it is not a family at all. He says that he hopes one day to spit on some of the members of this family. To this, Shama replies that no member of the Tulsi family would care even to spit on any member of his family which, she says, is far inferior to the Tulsi family. Having lost his identity to a great extent and being a man of an independent nature, Mr. Biswas finds his life in Hanuman House to be one of great stress and strain.
A Quarrel Between Mr. Biswas and the Tulsi

One day one of the Tulsi sons-in-law by the name of Govind suggests to Mr. Biswas that he should give up his sign-painting and should become a supervisor on the Tulsi estate where Eth would be his boss. Mr. Biswas replies that he cannot give up his independence and that his motto in life is; “Paddle your own canoe.” Mr. Biswas then says that the Tulsi are blood-suckers and that he would rather catch crabs or sell coconuts than work under any of the Tulsis. Mr. Biswas also speaks in mocking tones about all the principals members of the Tusli family—about Mrs. Tulsi, about her two sons and about Seth. Govind communicates to Seth all that Mr. Biswas has said. Mr. Biswas is then summoned by Seth and Mrs. Tulsi and is accused of ingratitude. Mrs. Tusli’s younger son Owad says that Mr. Biswas must apologize to his mother for having spoken disparagingly about the Tulsi family. At this Mr. Biswas loses his temper and shouts that they can all go to hell and that he is not going to apologize to anybody. Mr. Biswas then threatens to leave Hanuman House but is persuaded to stay on by Seth’s wife Padma and Govind’s wife Chinta.

Mr. Biswas, Thrashed For His Misconduct

Mr. Biswas now becomes even more critical of the Tulsi household. He makes all sorts of sarcastic remarks about the members of the Tulsi clan. He says that Shama’s two brothers look like monkeys, and that Hanuman House is a real zoo where all kinds of animals dwell. He refers to Hari, one of the Tulsi sons-in-law, as “the constipated holy man.” In retaliation Shama calls Mr. Biswas a “barking puppy dog.” Mr. Biswas then shocks the whole Tulsi household by advocating the unorthodox views and ideas of Arya Samaj. He also criticizes the two sons of Mr. Tulsi for wearing crucifixes when they profess to be orthodox Hindus. He now also describes Mrs. Tulsi as a “she-fox”, thus further offending Shama. One day Mr. Biswas goes to the length of throwing a plateful of food from the window upon the head of Mrs. Tulsi’s younger son Owad and also gargling upon Owad’s head. Not being able to tolerate this kind of gross misbehavior, Govind (one of the Tulsi sons-in-law) seizes Mr. Biswas and gives several powerful blows
in order to punish him for his misbehavior. But the matter does not end here. The next morning Mr. Biswas is summoned by Seth who tells him that the family can no longer tolerate Mr. Biswas in the house. Seth then tells him that it has been decided to send him to a village called The Chase to take charge of the Tulsi food-shop there. Shama is pregnant at this time.

**Mr. Biswas as a Shopkeeper at The Chase**

Soon after setting down at The Chase, Shama suggests that they should hold a hose-blessing ceremony. Mr. Biswas reluctantly agrees. One of the Tulsi sons-in-law, Hari, who generally functions as the family priest, is invited to come and perform the house-blessing ceremony. All the inmates of Hanuman House are invited to attend the function. The children come in large numbers to participate in it. The children do a lot of damage to the bottles in the shop, and Mr. Biswas has to bear the loss. Mr. Biswas’s hostility to the Tulsi family has not diminished one bit. The Shop at The Chase does not flourish because Mr. Biswas has to give credit to his customers who afterwards stop coming to the shop so as to evade the payment of their bills. Shama gives birth to a daughter who is given the name Savi by Seth. Mr. Biswas resents the fact of a name having been given to his daughter by Seth without any consultation with him. He also resents the fact that in the birth certificate of this daughter his occupation has been shown as that of a labourer instead of a shop-proprietor or shopkeeper. Three years later, Shama gives birth to another child, this time a boy, who is given the name Anand, again by Seth.

**A Change in His Attitude to Hanuman House**

Mr. Biswas’s attitude to Hanuman House now undergoes a certain change. He begins to realize that Hanuman House is not a chaotic place as he had thought. He finds that there is a regular hierarchy in the Tulsi household with Mrs. Tulsi and Seth at the top, followed by Padma, Chinta, Shama and others with Mr. Biswas himself at the bottom. Hanuman House now seems to him a world more real than The Chase.
Hanuman House is a place where his wife and children can always go and stay in comfort. Hanuman House is a place of refuge in times of difficulty. And so he now starts going to Hanuman House regularly. His wife Shama and the children have already been paying frequent visits to Hanuman and staying there for long or short periods.

**An End to Shopkeeping**

A serious quarrel now takes place between Mr. Biswas and Shama because Shama no longer wishes to live at The Chase. Meanwhile Shama gives birth to yet another child, this time a daughter who is given the name of Myna. Mr. Biswas, who had got entangled in some litigation with a customer who had not paid his bills, suffers a heavy financial loss because the man, on whom he had served a legal notice through a lawyer, is able to turn the tables upon Mr. Biswas. In view of this development, Seth suggests that Mr. Biswas should get the shop insured and then it in order to claim compensation from the insurance company. Mr. Biswas refuses to accept this suggestion and quits the shop. Subsequently, Seth himself gets the shop insured and has it burned down. Seth then passes on the amount of the compensation paid by the insurance company to Mr. Biswas.

**At Green Vale. A Present For Savi**

Seth and Mrs. Tulsi now Mr. Biswas to work as an overseer at a place called Green Vale where he and his family are given a room in the barracks. Mr. Biswas is to be paid a salary of twenty-five dollars a month. Every Saturday Seth comes to Green Vale to inspect the work done by the labourers under Mr. Biswas and to pay them their wages. Mr. Biswas feels very dissatisfied with his work at Green Vale and keeps blaming Shama and the Tulsi family for all his difficulties. He tells Shama that she her family have got him into this arduous job. Shama often goes to stay at Hanuman House, taking the children with her. On one occasion at Christmas time Mr. Biswas buys a doll’s house as a present for his daughter Savi. As he gives no presents to the other children in the house, all the sisters of Shama turn hostile to him for having ignored their children. Mrs. Tulsi
scolds Mr. Biswas for having violated the family convention according to which all the children are to be treated equally. Feeling upset by the taunts of her sisters, Shama breaks the doll’s house into pieces and throws it on a heap of rubbish. Mr. Biswas feels enraged by this destructive action of Shama’s. As a protest he takes Savi with him to Green Vale to live there. When Mr. Biswas goes out to work, Savi has to stay alone in his room in the barracks. In the evenings and at night he reads out to her from some novel or explains to her the views of Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus. Sometimes he begins muttering to himself that he had been trapped by the Tulsi family into marrying Shama and that he now finds himself “in a hole”. After a week, Shama comes to Green Vale with the other children and then takes away Savi with her because Savi’s school is to reopen after the holidays.

A House of His Own At Green Vale

Mr. Biswas has now to spend a lonely time at Green Vale. Every night he bolts himself in his room but he finds no peace. In fact, he is now afflicted by fears of all kinds. He develops a morbid outlook upon life and begins to harbor all kinds of apprehensions about his future. When he goes on a visit to Hanuman House, he has some unpleasantness with Chinta. On one occasion he learns that his son Anand has been punished at school for some misdemeanor. Mr. Biswas now decides to build a house of his own at Green Vale. He engages a carpenter by the name of Mr. Maclean; and the construction of the house begins. However, the house remains incomplete because Mr. Biswas does not have enough money to complete the construction. Only one room is complete, and Mr. Biswas moves into this room and begins to live there. He has a feeling that by shifting into his own house he might be able to get rid of his depression. He hopes that living in a new house might bring about a new state of mind. But this hope proves to be vain.

Illness and Recovery
Mr. Biswas’s despondency now deepens. He begins to be haunted by strange fears and questionings. He begins to have a sense of futility in life. When one night a storm to blow and there is a heavy downpour of rain, accompanied by thunder and lightning, Anand, who has been staying with his father in the incomplete house, feels greatly frightened. Mr. Biswas himself receives a mental shock and his condition becomes serious. The labourers carry a message to Hanuman House about Mr. Biswas’s critical condition. Mr. Biswas is then carried to Hanuman House by Govind. At Hanuman House he is nursed back to health and gradually his condition becomes near-normal. As his self-respect does not allow him to continue living at Hanuman House as a dependant of Mrs. Tulsi and Seth, he decides to go to Port of Spain, where his sister Dehuti and her husband Ramchand are living and where he would now like to try his luck. However, his attitude to Hanuman House now again undergoes a change and he regards this place as a kind of haven where he can get shelter in times of difficulty. Hanuman House is a place where his family can never starve.

As a Newspaper Reporter in Port of Spain

In Port of Spain Mr. Biswas gets a job as a reporter for a newspaper called the 
Trinidad Sentinel. Mr. Burnett, the editor of this newspaper, feels pleased with Mr. Biswas’s reports. Mr. Biswas now brings his family also to Port of Spain. Mrs. Tulsi offers him and family accommodation in her own house in this city where she has been living for some time past with her younger son Owad. Nr. Biswas begins to write articles for magazines, but none of his articles is accepted for publication. He fails as a writer of short stories also. He is at this time thirty-three years of age and is the father of four children, the fourth also being a daughter who has been given the name of Kamla. During the holidays, Mr. Biswas’s children go to Hanuman House for brief visits. They starts also going to meet Tara and Ajodha who continue to live at Pagotes. Owad now sails away to England for his medical studies. Mr. Biswas has begun to take a deep interest in the education of his son Anand. As the editor of the Trinidad Sentinel is changed, the new editor introduces certain changes of policy, with the result that Mr.
Biswa is adversely affected. Besides, Mr. Biswas feels greatly upset when the rose-garden which he had planted on one side of Mrs. Tulsi’s house (in Port of Spain) is destroyed under the order of Seth who, needing parking-space for his lorries, wanted the ground to be leveled. When Mr. Biswas expresses his resentment at the destruction of his rose-garden, Seth reminds him of the time when he had come to Hanuman House as a poor fellow having neither money nor property and when he had been established in life through his marriage with Shama.

**A House of His Own At Shorthills. Then Back to Port of Spain**

Mr. Biswas continues to be a dissatisfied and unhappy man. With the initiation of new policies by the newspaper management, he begins to feel miserable and would like to resign his job but is prevented from doing so only by the thought that he would not be able to find another job. The Tulsis now decide to shift from Arwacas to their estate at Shorthills to the north-east of Port of Spain, among the mountains of the northern range. Mrs. Tulsi suggests that Mr. Biswas and his family should also join them at Shorthills. Accordingly, Mr. Biswas now finds himself living in Mrs. Tulsi’s house at Shorthills from where he has to cycle daily to Port of Spain in order to attend his office. His children too have to go to Port of Spain daily in order to attend their schools. At Shorthills Mr. Biswas again builds a house of his own and moves into it with his family. But one day this house catches fire and is partially destroyed. He puts up his burnt house for sale while he and his family shift again to Mrs. Tulsi’s house in Port of Spain where they are accommodated in two rooms. Several other relations of Mrs. Tulsi also shift from Shorthills to her house in the city. The result is that the house becomes crowded, and Mr. Biswas feels miserable in the midst of a multitude of Mrs. Tulsi’s kinsfolk. To add to his troubles, the newspaper management makes a change in his duties by appointing him an investigator to study the case of destitute who apply for financial help from a new fund which has been established by this newspaper. Mr. Biswas finds his new work to be very tedious and even risky. Then news comes that Mr. Biswas’s mother Bipti has died. He and Shama go to attend the funeral which is also
attended by Mr. Biswas’s brothers, his sister, and his brother-in-law, besides other relations of the family. Mr. Biswas writes an angry letter to Dr. Rameshwar who had been very rude to Mr. Biswas’s brothers, Pratap and Prasad, when they had gone to the doctor to obtain Bipti’s death certificate.

**Mr. Bishwas’s Son, Anand, Successful in the Exhibition Examination**

Mr. Bishwas’s son Anand has been preparing for the exhibition examination in an effort to win a scholarship for higher studies. Vidiadhar, the son of Govind, has also been preparing for the same examination. When the results of the examination are declared, Vidiadhar fails, while Anand secures one of the top positions, standing third in the list of the successful candidates and winning a scholarship. Anand now joins a college for his higher studies.

**Dejection and Despair. Then a New Job**

Mr. Bishwas is now once again overcome by feeling of despondency. He begins to sink into a state of despair. He feels as if he were sinking into a void. Night after night he feels more and more dejected. He takes less and less interest in investigating the vases of the destitute. However, one day he suddenly feels revitalized when he is offered a government job as a Community Welfare Officer at a higher salary than he is getting from the *Trinidad Sentinel*. His boss at his new job is Miss Logic, very intelligent and kind-hearted woman. Mr. Bishwas is also now offered a government loan on nominal interest so that he may buy a car. He is also now in a position to buy a few new suits for himself. One day he wears one of his new suits and goes to witness an inter-colonial cricket match, carrying a tin of cigarettes and a box of matches in one hand, as is the fashion. Soon afterwards he buys a new Prefect car. However, Govind mocks at the car, calling it a match-box. Ajodha too makes fun of the car, saying that it is so light that it may be blown off the road by a strong wind.

**Temporarily Evicted From Mrs. Tulsi’s House**
Mr. Biswas and his family have now to a humble tenement because Mrs. Tulsi’s house, in which they have been living, is to be renovated to receive Owad who is returning to Trinidad after his eight-year stay in England. Mr. Biswas feels very annoyed with Mrs. Tulsi had asked him to vacate, through temporarily, the accommodation he had been occupying with his family. He even uses insulating language for her in his with Shama on this subject. The house takes three months to e renovated and, at the end of this period, Mr. Biswas again shifts to Mrs. Tulsi’s house though now he gets only one room instead of the two which he had previously occupied.

**A House For Mr. Biswas, At Last**

After Owad’s return, Mr. Biswas begins to feel even more uncomfortable than before in Mrs. Tulsi’s house because of the constant hustle and bustle and the overcrowding which he has always hated. A furious quarrel now takes place between him and Mrs. Tulsi who gives him notice to quit her house while he declares that he is sorry that he ever stepped into her house. Mr. Biswas now begins to look for suitable accommodation for himself and his family because he can no longer stay in Mrs. Tulsi’s house. He meets a solicitor’s clerk who offers to sell his house for five thousand and six hundred dollars. Mr. Biswas borrows four thousand dollars from Ajodha to make up the full amount demanded by the solicitor’s clerk, and buys the house which is situated in Sikkim Street. The house is afterwards found to have many defects and is need of extensive repairs. Some more money has to be spent on it but at least Mr. Biswas has a house of his own. He and his family now shift into this house which they have secured at a heavy cost.

**Bad Luck. Good Luck. Heart-Attacks And Death**

The debt which Mr. Biswas now owes to Ajodha becomes a heavy weight on his mind. Another misfortune overtakes Mr. Biswas when the Community welfare Department is abolished by the government and he loses his job. Mr. Biswas now goes back to his job with the *Trinidad Sentinel* where his salary is lower then it was at his
government post. However, there is a sudden burst of good luck for the family when first Savi gets a scholarship to go abroad and when, two years later, Anand gets a scholarship and goes to England. Anand’s letters from England are gloomy and full of self-pity. Mr. Biswas now begins to suffer from permanent depression. One day he gets a heart-attack and has to spend a month in the hospital. Then he gets another heart-attack and is again admitted to hospital where he remains for six weeks. Luckily Savi returns to Trinidad and gets a job at a big salary. This development brings much emotional relief to Mr. Biswas. However, he suddenly passes away one day at the age of forty-six, and is cremated on the banks of a muddy stream.

**Major themes Present in ‘A House Mr. Biswas’:**

*A House for Mr. Biswas* is the finest fruit of the early phase of the blossoming of Naipaul’s talent which deals with the story of the search for identity of an Indian Brahmin residing in Trinidad. It strikes the readers as one of the most accomplished and enduring works of Naipaul. It is a very beautiful and excellently written tragic-comedy of Naipaul. In it, Mr. Biswas, the protagonist gives an expression of alienation, rootlessness as well as having loss of identity to a large extent. The novel mainly presents the themes of the protagonist’s struggle to establish himself in a hostile environment through the ownership of a house and the declining Hindu culture under the impact of Westernization.

The title of the book points clearly to the central and dominant symbol around which it has been structured. The house represents Biswas’s search for freedom from dependence—the galling dependence that goes with living in other people’s houses. V.S. Naipaul was the second of seven children and they lived for many years with his mother’s family in a Hindu joint family set-up. He grew up surrounded by Uncles, aunts and he estimates, about fifty cousins. Naipaul comments: “The large sprawling Hindu clan life … was like a crash course in the world.
You learned about cruelty, about propaganda, about the destruction of reputations, you learned about forming allies". His journalist father felt stifled by this family life left no room for privacy “I think it’s fair to say that our father found his family environment crippling and was almost destroyed by it,” says the younger brother – Shiva Naipaul. The house also signifies Biswas’s desire to transcend the squalor and makeshift quality of life in the society in which he finds himself—a desire for beauty and order and significance. The doll’s house which he impulsively buys for Savi embodies both these meanings—by giving a present to his daughter Mr. Biswas Houts the Tulsi code and asserts his individuality; one of the reasons he is charmed into buying so expensive a present is the sheer perfection of the house: “Every room of the doll’s house was furnished. The Kitchen had a stove such as Mr. Biswas had never seen in real life, a safe and a sink”. (p.216).

In “Writing A House for Mr. Biswas” Naipaul has said that he planned at first to shape the narrative around the acquisition of simple relationships which surrounds a man at the time of his end. But while writing the mindset of the writer diverted and the book took the shape of a tale of a person who wants to gain identity and a house of his own. The first idea... wasn’t false. But it was too formal for a novel. The second idea about a house was larger, better. It also contained more of the truth”. Thematically as well as structurally, the acquisition of the other bits of personal possessions of which an ‘epic catalogue’ is given in the prologue is perfectly complementary to the central structural device of the search for a house. As M. Shenfield comments, each of the possessions catalogued in the Prologue is a “motif which will later be expanded into a complex episode in Mr. Biswas’s life. By the end of the novel; one will be aware that each of these, even pathetic acquisitions represents a momentous
effort, a whole campaign against hostile circumstances.”  The various houses through which Mr. Biswas passes as temporary resident provide a closely integrated design to the novel. In part one, two houses are of particular interest. One is the house at the chase in which he finds himself as a result of his efforts to free himself from the Tulsis. However, the independence denoted by this house is deceptive, for it too belongs to the Tulsis as he realizes during the house blessing ceremony.

Part I of the book concludes with an image that takes us back to its opening section. As be is walking down the High Street of Arwacas, the whitewashed stones and palm trees that the drive remind Biswas of “the legs of Pratap and Prasad when, as boys, they returned from the buffalo pond” (p.305) part II begins with a sentence that pointedly recalls the prologue. So at thirty one, Mr.Biswas begins life anew-almost as destitute and homeless as he was at six. But not quite. The yearning for perfection and order, as well as the desire for independence are still alive in his heart as he leaves Hanuman House and his family behind. From the bus that takes him to Port of Spain he fixes his eyes on “a house as small and neat as a doll’s house” for as long it is visible.

In this section too Mr. Biswas builds house of his own. This house is complete and built with proper materials. But having built it he “felt uneasy.” The site is not appropriate. Appearing to be violation of nature the house “stood red-raw in its unregulated green setting, not seeming to invite habitation so much as decay.” Nor does it answer the needs of the family: “..... Shame had to walk a mile to the village to do her shopping, water had to be brought up the hill from a spring in the cocoa woods ..... the children wanted to go back to Port of Spain ..... The new house imprisoned them in silence and bush.” The quest, then, continues. It is only in the house at Sikkim Street that all the separate but related meanings of the symbol find fulfillment. However, it is the four hundred dollars he gets the materials of the short hills house that make it
possible for him to buy this house. It makes him independent of the Tulsis and answer his need for order and coherence. It also symbolises his transition from visitor to dweller in the new land—at last he belongs. In this respect Mr. Biswas is representative of the immigrant community of Indians in Trinidad. The acquisition of the house denotes a break from the self-defeating hankering for the past and a realistic acknowledgement of and commitment to the present.

The Two Themes of the Novel:-

Besides giving us this account of the adventures and experiences of Mr. Biswas, the novel also describes the process by which the Tulsi family, once united, now disintegrates under the influence of the western culture and of urban life. Indeed, the dissolution of the Tulsi family is one of the leading themes of the novel. While the life-story of Mr.Biswas shows a self-respecting individual’s rebellion against tyranny, the account of what happens to the Tulsi family as a whole shows the interaction of two cultures, the old Hindu culture as represented by the Tulsi family and the alien Western culture as represented by the city of port of Spain and by such individuals as Dorothy, the Christian girl whom Shekhar marries, and Dorothy’s cousin whom Owad subsequently marries. The interaction between these two cultures is designed to show that the old Hindu culture which Indian Hindus had taken with them to Trinidad cannot long withstand the influence of the alien western culture. Of course, the old Hindu culture is not completely absorbed by the western culture, but it is certainly weakened undermined.

The Theme of Rebellion and Independence:-

The major theme of this is a sensitive man’s rebellion against tyranny and his desperate struggle to achieve independence. Although Mr. Biswas comes from a humble peasant family, yet he is a man great self-respect. He is not awed by the atmosphere of
Hanuman House or the status of the Tulsi family into which he has got married. He can
see the other sons-in-law of Tulsi family living in a state of perfect contentment with the
conditions and the terms on which they are maintained and supported Mrs. Tulsi and
seth; but he does not follow their example. On the country, he quickly rebels against the
Tulsi code of conduct which he was expected to obey, the inmates of Hanuman House
are completely under the sway of Mrs. Tulsi and Seth; and there is no voice of dissent in
the household. Mr. Biswas feels that conformity to the Tulsi code of conduct means a
complete suppression of his individuality, and he therefore revolts against the system.
At first he tries to make an ally of one or two other sons-in-law of the family but he
miserably fails in this endeavour and is even thrashed in the process. But the spirit of
rebellion in him is not quenched by the setback which he receives. He passes sarcastic
remarks about various members of the Tulsi family, showing scant respect to the two
autocrats, namely Mrs. Tulsi and Seth. His rebelliousness leads to his expulsion from
Hanuman House, and to his being sent to The Chase to look after the Tulsi food-shop.
When he fails to run the food-shop profitably, he is sent to Green Vale to supervise the
work of the labourers on the Tulsi estate, but he fails in this undertaking also and,
oppressed by his sense of loneliness and his fears the about the future, he falls gravely
ill. At the hour of crisis, it is Hanuman House which offers him protection. But, as soon
as he recovers from his illness, his spirit of revolt reasserts itself and he goes away to
Port of spain to try his luck in that metropolitan city. Here again he has to face the
vicissitudes of life and has once again to depend on the charity or generosity of Mrs.
Tulsi for residential accommodation for himself and his family. Finally, he makes a
complete break with the Tulsi family and buys a house of his own even though he has to
take a big loan from a relative in order to pay for it. At last, Mr. Biswas achieves his
independence and stands on his own feet, even though he does not live long enough to
enjoy the fruits of his freedom. Hanuman House in this novel serves as a symbol of
authoritarianism and autocracy; while Mr. Biswas symbolizes an independent man’s
urge to find his own identity and to carve out a niche for himself. Mr. Biswas is by no
means a unique person: there are thousands of people who possess the same instinct
for freedom and the same desire for a climate in which they can breathe freely and in
which they can seek the development and the fulfillment of their own potentialities.

The Theme of the Interaction of Cultures:-

An almost equally important theme in this novel is the interaction of cultures and of the dissolution of a close-knit clan through its contacts with an alien culture. The Tulsi household represents the old Hindu culture which had been imported into Trinidad by Pundit Tulsi and by thousands of other Indians who had immigrated from India to Trinidad. Mrs. Tulsi is very keen to preserve the culture of which she and Seth think themselves to be the custodians. The family performs daily puja; and the various rituals prescribed by religious orthodoxy are regularly performed. The family has acquired a pundit in one of its own sons-in-law. This man, called Hari, is well-versed in all these rituals, and he performs them with great apparent zeal. The Tulsi family maintains also a united front against all outsiders. It believes in the ideal of solidarity. Even member of the family has his or her own duties to perform; and everybody makes his or her own contribution to the works to be done, whether in the Tulsi fields, or in the Tulsi store, or in the Tulsi home. But, as the story moves forward, we find the orthodox values and beliefs crumbling. Mrs. Tulsi feels compelled to make compromises with the alien western culture. She feels compelled to send her two sons to Roman Catholic educational institutes. She has to permit her sons to wear crucifixes; she has to permit Shekhar to marry a Christian wife; she has afterwards to send her son, Owad, for medical studies to England even though some of the members of her family still remain opposed to the idea of foreign travel which they regard as a regrettable deviation from the Hindu religious code. Other members of the family also come under the influence of the western culture. For instance, in course of time, Govind completely breaks away from the family hold upon him; stops working on the Tulsi estate and becomes a taxi-
driver, earning his livelihood independently; and soon afterwards he begins to
think of buying a separate house to live in. W.C. Tuttle too follows his own
personal interests and he actually moves out of the Tulsi home into a house
which he has bought with his own earnings. The old allegiance to the Tulsi family
is now a thing of the past. Soon afterwards some of the other daughters of Mrs.
Tulsi and their husbands also acquire their own separate homes leave the
matriarchal apron-strings. When Owad returns from England, he is a complete
westernized man who too gets married to a Christian wife and who then moves
to a different city altogether in order to live separately. The joint family system
has simply disintegrated. Various family units which had together formed the
backbone of the Tulsi clan have dispersed by the time the novel comes to a close.
Each unit has succumbed to a desire for independence and to the urge to
promote its own financial interests. The concept of the oneness of the family has
received a fatal blow.

Biswas’ quest for Identity:-

True it is that the novel ‘A House for Mr. Biswas’ deals with the twin themes of
the growth & development of society, on the one hand and the theme of family
disintegration in the context of emerging new forces, on the other. Mr. Biswas is a man
of self-respect and dignity and wishes to live a life of complete freedom and self-
dependence. After having married Shama, he is made to live at Hanuman House in
Complete subjugation of the Tulsi’s – Mrs. Tulsi and Mr. Seth. The Hanuman House is a
symbol of conservatism, traditionalism and unquestioned docility. Though Mr. Biswas
has been given a job as well as a shelter to live in after marriage with Shame, he revolts
against the traditional mode of blind obedience as observed by the sons-in-law and
daughters of Mrs. Tulsi. He turns inimical to the rituals, the daily puja and other
practices that are observed by the inmates of Hanuman House and desires to possess a
house of his own, not once but thrice. This struggle and confrontation on the part of Mr.
Biswas against the Tulsi system would mean the first step to march on, a sign of upward development of his personality. His inner urge to live a life of unchecked freedom is a ladder to ensure grown of his personality and individuality.

His anger against the Tulsi family is deep rooted for the simple fact that the Tulsi code is not palatable to his temper. It is for this very reason that he is sent turn by turn to different estates, first to ‘The Chase’, then to ‘Green vale’ and finally to short-hills where he buys a house of his own and shifts to his new premises along with his family. He resents against Seth because his first born child is named by Mr. Seth without even consulting him. He also feels a sense of animosity against the Tulsi family for being described as a laborer in the birth-certificate of his daughter Savi. He has to shift to Hanuman House frequently because he is rendered shalterless too often. This too is a point towards his personality development. Even the laborers at Green vale feel the heat of his cult of independence and as a consequence burnt down his newly constructed house there.

He shifts to Hanuman House after the burning down of his house at ‘Green vale’. But after his short-stay there he goes to Port of Spain as too much dependence on the mercy of Mrs. Tulsi is irksame to his dependent nature. His frequent changeover from one job to another—first a reporter and then as community welfare officer and then as a journalist are nothing but stages of his personality development. Finally, at the short-hill estate too noisy and crowded, he moves to Port of Spain and buys the house there in the Sikkim Street. His long cherished desire of possessing a house is thus fulfilled, though he lived in that building for a short period, quite free of the Tulsi subjugation.

Development of society or social growth—A clash of two cultures:

The signs of social growth or development of society are quite perceptible in the novel. The joint Hindu family cracks under the weight of new social trends and forces. The conservation and traditionalism of Tulsi clan gets a biting when the two sons of Mrs. Tulsi named Shekhar and Owad get married to Christian girls Dorothy and her cousin. The sons-in-law of Mrs. Tulsi, Govid and Hari build their own houses and move out of
Hanuman House. Even Owed settles down independently breaking the fetters of slavery under his mother. That these persons come out of the dungeon symbolized in Hanuman House shows social development. A new way of life can be perceived in the blend of two cultures in the Hindu and the Christian culture as in that the Hindu culture and the western culture, either to alien, to each-other, are merged when Shekhar and Owad marry Christian girls, snapping old prejudices and leaving behind age old customs and beliefs.

**Social Reality and its Caveat:-**

In the novel the immediate society of the hero, Mohan Biswas, has smothered its natural sense of the larger social reality instead of providing a passage to it. This social reality, which surfaces in his fantasies, indicates its hidden presence as the need for a vision of the self. Mohun Biswas identifies his highest achievement with owning a house. So, the protagonist of the novel, alienated from his society and its social realities, is seen to move without a sense of direction.

The novel is set in rural south Trinidad, warm, humid and fertile with its life an extension of rural culture. The social reality in the novel, says of reentry into society of the outsider, is confined to the immediate society, past and present, of Mr. Biswas. Alienation because a condition of survival and is projected in the novel as the fantasy of free movement that the protagonist indulge in to relieve depression and boredom. A very restricted world, geographically and aesthetically, it is extended by a journey, literal and metaphorical, undertaken by the protagonist. This journey enables him to view his past in perspective releasing him from it and from his preformed notions of himself. His movement away from his immediate environment becomes the condition for a breakthrough into larger world and also his subsequent self-imprisonment⁴.
For the narrator, the narrative is the journey which, as Ralph Singh says, adds the fourth dimension to his personality by becoming the vehicle of understanding, order and rehabilitation. He has distanced himself from his society and is able to present it as an outsider. The irony inherent in the title of the novel acquires force when placed against the lengthy, egotistical involvements of the protagonist and the narrator. The reader sees the journey as a marginal movement away from an original position which is subjectively fulfilling but does not manifest sufficient opposition to alter the direction of society.

Mr. Biswas, with his family and furniture, accumulating both in a haphazard fashion, moves through various Tulsi houses in the areas surrounding Arwacas with Hanuman House as a frequent transfer point. His decisive journey to Port of Spain from Hanuman House after his recovery from the Green vale disaster becomes a fresh start to a more successful life. He will not allow fear of failure, fear of Tulsi mockery, to immobilize him. His aesthetic development is naturally limited by his economic and social handicaps. But though his sensitivity to his environment and his imaginative capacity to identify with heroic characters in books is a major cause of his problems, these qualities also enable him to strive for aesthetic fullness in his daily life thus helping him to overcome his fear of death and his desire for continuity through Anand.

In this account of the growth of Biswas from childhood to adulthood we see the emerging pattern of his personality in conflict with his society: his determination to be himself, shamed, yet not submitting to the ridicule and humiliations thrust on him even by Shama and his children as they view him with Tulsi eyes. Gradually becoming estranged he moves inwards, becoming aware of objective as an increasingly threatening environment.
The novel viewed as interplay of the growing social and existential awareness of the narrator and protagonist dramatizes the strangling hold of a modern society on its individual members. Biswas’s Hindu society, “driftwood” on Trinidad’s colonial shores, is doubly insecure and anchorless. Shifting between Hindu ritual and an imported brand of Western philosophy and lifestyles, its form survives only though authoritarian control which demands conformity and obedience. Continuity is its underlying urge and any desire by its individual members to create within it an area of primary and personal dignity is seen as a desire to alter it. Their yet amorphous creative and constructive urges are promptly crushed. Biswas succeeds insofar as he is able to widen his subjective and familial horizons. The narrator succeeds in presenting his dilemma as contemporary phenomena. A personal life and self-awareness as the knowledge of one’s limitations are the basic design of the social reality which forms a desirable backdrop to this drama.

The novel mimics the concepts of home, family, femininity, masculinity, chivalry, charity and marriage. The whole contemporary cultural context is sustained by a role-playing of the past. A personal victory of Biswas has no significance for a society which is creatively non-existent. He does not succeed in leaving a marks on it. Naipaul presents the personality with a literary potential entrapped in his societal reality which is presented as the most vicious single cause of alienation. An irresponsible society, as a reductive agent, is a farce for its more sensitive, inquiring members.

To conclude the whole discussion it can be said that ‘A House for Mr. Biswas’ deals with two dominant themes, one is the theme of family disintegration or dissolution in the face of new forces and trends. Primarily, this novel depicts Mr. Biswas’s development as an individual and his quest for
identity. The novel also depicts the development and growth of the individuality of certain other persons.

**Prevalent themes and form in Salman Rushdie’s ‘The Moor’s Last Singh’:—**

**Fundamentalism in ‘The Moor’s Last Singh’:—**

The novel brilliantly represents fundamentalism and hybridity as not only competing modes of expression but competing forms of historiography. In the novel, there are not one but multiple fundamentalisms, and as it turns out, all of them are contemporary, manufactured phenomena. In ‘The Moor’s Last Singh’, Rushdie employs metaphor and association rather than allegory, thus, taking his study of Islam in a more interesting and useful direction and breaking the simple equivalence between Islam and fundamentalism. Therefore, we can enter the novel through its conspicuous of Islam.

A year after Khomeini’s fatwa, Rushdie effectively if obliquely forswore Islam as a literary subject. In a 1990 review of Philip Roth’s memoir ‘The facts’, Rushdie retells the story of Roth’s experience following the publication of Goodbye, Columbus. Vilified by Jewish readers, whom he had previously identified as his constituency, Roth responded, in Rushdie’s ‘I will never write about Jews again!’

On that score, Rushdie declares portentously, “he seems to speak directly, profoundly, not to, but for, me”—the implication, of course, being that Rushdie would never write about Muslims again. However, Rushdie’s foresight and ambition would not allow him to limit himself so categorically. Announcing that Roth “speaks for” him even as he himself speaks for Roth is a careful and unusual maneuver. As he both swears and not swears a parallel vow to Roth’s, he both obeys and does not obey it in The Moor’s Last Sigh.

For while the novel travels as far south as one can go in India in order to shake off the presence of Islam, and while its cast of hundreds includes almost no Muslim characters, it still address reductive, fundamentalist Islam its portrayal of many other types of fundamentalist. Islam lingers in two ways: on a literal level through the
protagonist’s hidden ancestor, and on a symbolic level through the other faiths that separately dramatize its minority and majoritarian incarnations. As Aamir Mufti and others have pointed out, “fundamentalism” is a shifty and unreliable term, subject to abuse as an all purpose pejorative or more perniciously as a synonym for Islam. Writing on The Satanic verses and its fallout, Mufti sets out to “use the term .... in a very specify sense,” usefully historicizing and contextualizing a particular public discourse of Islamism. In *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, Rushdie responds to the same problem, but through an entirely different tactic.

Rushdie than narrowing the term, he widens it to show that fundamentalist mindsets infect not only Islam but also Hinduism, Christianity, Marxism, modern art and for that matter even the doctrine of hybridity that so many of us would prefer to view as redemptively flexible. Within his novel, Islam is only one of many rigid, totalizing visions that claim to rely on an eternal truth. Rushdie places all of these totalizing visions in the same category; hence, the novel portrays Islam not as synonymous with fundamentalism but rather as two utterly separate phenomena in its minority and majoritarian version.

Overtly, the story is practically devoid of Muslim characters. The only two Muslim are Scar, the invisible and pseudonymous crime boss, and the malinged cricketer Abbas Ali Baig—or three if we recognize the Islamic Bomb as a character. But we need not mourn the lack of other contemporary Muslims; for on an equally literal level Islam pervades the novel in the form of the hidden, illegitimate ancestor, one namesake of the doubly referential little. The Moor’s Last-Singh shares the basic structure of Rushdie’s immensely successful Midnight’s Children. But where that earlier novel’s first person narrator quite simply represents India (having been born at the exact moment of independence), the titular Moor embodies all the nation’s minorities. Moreas Zogoiby, nicknamed Moor, is the son of a catholic and a Jew.
As in *Midnight’s Children*, the narrator must go back three generations to begin his story, first chronicling the dissipation of his mother Aurora’s Portuguese-Indian spice-baron clan, and only after six chapters allowing Aurora, then a young and insouciant heiress, to fall in love with her penniless employee-Abraham Zogoiby—at which point Rushdie must race through a quick-detour on the several millennia of Jewish immigration to India. As through the mix were not historically and literarily rich enough, Abraham Zogoiby soon confronts his mother Flory with the possibility that his family descends from Boabdil, the last Arab to rule in Spain. From this early on, Flory’s Abraham’s, and thus Moor’s questionable descent reverberates throughout the text as Rushdie continuously equates Jews and Muslims. One similarity that Rushdie exploits is that the two minority groups share the same Indian genesis narrative: their simultaneous moment of expulsion from Spain in 1492 Coincides with their originary moment of Indian-ness.

Hillel Halkin, reviewing *The Moor’s Last Sigh* for Commentary, characterizes Rushdie’s use of Jewish characters as a gesture of “cowardice” and “surrender.” Here he is supported by Norman Rush in The New York Times Book Review, who finds Abraham’s identity “offputting.” Yet Halkin himself notes that Abraham’s Jewishness serves a literary purpose, since “Abraham, the original Jew and the original monotheist, is in Islamic tradition the first believing Muslim.” While hinting that Rushdie has used Judaism as a figure for Islam, Halkin stops short of considering how bold and productive that association could be. In fact, the history of Jews in India serves Rushdie’s purpose well. His own justification for the apparent marginality of his subject us that Indian Jews represent the ultimate test of the category of “Indianness” to absorb diverse subjects. Jews are important both in their own right, and also as symbolic of a more generalized minority existence in India. By exploring a religious minority in detail, and asserting that minority’s place in a national consciousness, Rushdie calls into question the construction of a majority religion as state-identified.

In order to test the capacity of Indian identity to absorb difference, Rushdie has carefully chosen the smallest religious minority in India, as well as one of the oldest. The
first Jewish settlement in India around 72 AD predates the birth of both Islam and Sikhism. After centuries of untroubled dual identity, with the utter absence of anti-Semitism, two modern developments endowed the deeply Indian community with a new sense of difference. The first was the arrival of British colonialism, with its classifying tendencies and obsession with race. Along with the newly created ethnic minority of Anglo-Indians, the historically Indian Jews oscillated in census, civil service, and army classifications between the general categories of Indians and European. No arbitrary titles, such classes determined colonial government pay scales and employment quotas, giving Jews an economic motivation in encouraging English census-takers to classify them as European.” Second, Zionism during its height in the 1930s brought Indian Jews for the first time into an international religiously-based political movement, highlighting their difference from Indians organizing for independence.  

Thus Indian Jews mirroring Rushdie’s relationship to both India and Islam, found themselves in a position simultaneously inside and outside India. Without referring directly to these two historical factors, Rushdie create a sense of the dual pressures of insularity and assimilation bearing down on the small Cochin Community. The choice of Judaism as a subject was a challenging and fruitful one, not, as Halkin claims, cowardly.

As he turns his novelist eye on Indian Judaism and Hinduism, Rushdie’s interest is in how majority and minority faiths function differently, and how in shifting contexts they often come to resemble each-other. Within Flory’s tiny Cochin Enclave, Judaism is a majority religion, and accordingly has established its own set of lies and hypocrisies—example, denying the illegitimate ancestor. Hinduism, on the other hand, while technically a majority religion, splinters into castes and regional deities. Appearing by turns rigid and fluid, minority Judaism and majority Hinduism take on each-other’s characteristics. The history of minorities in India bears out Rushdie’s artistic assertions: for example, Jewish Community in India have come to conform to Hindu social structuring, as one analysis of the division of Cochin and Bombay Jews into hierarchized, ancestral,
as if to remind the reader that Islam lurks between the lines of his text, Rushdie shifts inter-religious influence in an unlikely direction.

Rushdie’s exploration of the various forms of religious faith finds parallels in his portrayal of competing philosophies of art. In *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, art is another kind of faith: it is a vehicle for organizing and expressing experience, and it is a discipline with internal orthodoxies and schisms. In treating art as a secular expression of faith, Rushdie revisits Aadam Aziz’s “got shaped hole” from *Midnight’s children*, Struck by an agnostic epiphany, Aadam finds his new irreligion has left him with “a vacancy in a vital inner chamber.” Sara Maitland and others have observed that Rushdie shares such a vacancy, and fills his “got-shaped hole” with writing. In that sense Rushdie proxy within this novel is not Moor but the protagonist’s mother Aurora, who conveys both the power and also the possible shortcoming of an aesthetic that celebrates hybridity.

Diametrically opposed philosophies of art find their expression in the novel’s two artists who are also the two women who complete for Moor’s love and loyalty: his cruel but straightforward mother Aurora, and his deceptive, Chameleon-like lover Uma. Aurora’s painting and Uma’s sculpture function as artistic representations of the two opposing modes of expression. Uma’s art, Raman fielding’s monotheism, and the late Ayatollah’s fundamentalist Islam find their kin among the various species fundamentalisms explored in the novel’s central opposition. Rushdie sets up his dialectic as early as the pun that Moor recalls on the very first page, in which Uma and Aurora lay out the two possibilities for literary expression. Uma’s contribution, “in fondness, ‘oh you Moor, you strange black man, always so full theses, never a church door to nail them to” brings Aurora’s retribution “quick as snakebite, ‘so full, you mean, of faeces”(3). Given this opening opposition, we may define theses as pure, transcendent truths; this category reappears throughout the book in the guise of various constructs from founding myths of nations and religious, to the world as brought by the Prophet, in the Judeo-Christian milieu of the book, to the figure of Ram in the over layered Hindu
The opening paragraphs of *The Moor’s Last Sigh* pretend to assert that the book will be organized according to the simple duality represented by the characters of Uma and Aurora. We are given a string of simple oppositions: godly/ungodly, Christian/unchristian, “Amrika’ and Moskva; the two great super-powers,” and “here I stand”/“here I sit”(3). Yet throughout the book the two overarching opposing categories of these and feces, or the definitive and the provisional, implicate each other in innumerable ways. In the most obvious and intellectually appealing sense, Rushdie shows that the category of feces more accurately reflects reality, and thus implicates the category of theses as false constructions.

Berating Uma for her false self-construction, Moor articulates the distinction between provisional expression, which contains truth, and definitive expression, which necessarily obfuscates. “It wasn’t a metaphor, Uma”, he responds to her falsified family-narrative. “It was a lie. What’s scary is, you don’t know the difference” (270). Rushdie allies multiplicities, polytheistic Hinduism and “its many-headed beauty” with the now ascendant category of the provisional, using Zeenat Vakil to point out the inappropriateness of Hindu nationalism’s construction of a singular, quasi-monotheistic cult of Ram. It is Zeenat who articulates the view of fundamentalism as a human construction that manufactures its own history. In her succinct and ironic expression, “This fando stuff is really something new” (338). This may be Rushdie’s most important observation on fundamentalism in *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, and it is one that other novelists have joined social historians in bearing out.

**Hybridities:**

With fundamentalisms undermined, hybrid art, the art of the breath, the shit, and the bastard, apparently must triumph. Here is a simple and pleasant inversion, often thought of as Rushdie’s political and aesthetic program: pure corruption overthrows corrupt purity. The idea of purity is a corrupt and false notion; and only the idea of corruption has integrity. Within the structure of this inversion, Aurora’s art (and
by extension, Rushdie’s writing) triumphs as the only possible art for India or indeed for
the world. Aurora’s painting dispels the notion that modernity cannot survive in India, a
notion that haunts the novel’s early chapters. Riffing on Le Corbusier’s visits to
Ahmedabad in the 1950’s, Rushdie rewrites history to bring the yet unknown architect
to India even earlier, commissioned by Francisco da Gama to build experimental
structures on his ancestral property. But India cannot absorb the likes of Calder, Picasso,
and Pollock, and Le Corbusier’s “follies” eventually go down in flames. A generation
later, Francisco’s equally visionary son Camoens experiments with another modernist
import-Leninism-with as little success. Granted special permission by the Moscow
authorities, Camoens trains a troupe of actors to impersonate the top comrade and
declaim his great words. After months of toil, a “genuine” Lenin visits Cochin to inspect
Camoen’s effort towards the propagation of radicalism, but finds the actors totally
abnormal and departs with the pronouncement that “this country of yours ----- gives to
him the shits”. Camoén must conclude reluctantly that Communism “was not Indian
style” (30-31). Those aesthetic and political modernities may fail, but after
independence Aurora creates an alternative modernity. Several chapters and one
generation later, her art emerges to reclaim the shifts as a proud characteristic of Indian
national life.

Just as fundamentalism does, hybridity appears in many guises, including
what the mythical land whose loss the original Moor sighed for. Rushdie, and
Aurora after him, based the novel’s title (which is also the title of series of
Aurora’s paintings) on the legend that Arab Andalusia’s last sultan, the weak and
quixotic Boabdil, wept upon being forced from Granada, where as Rushdie put it
elsewhere, a “composite culture” thrived with “Christians and Jews and Muslims
living side by side for hundreds of years.”5 As his namesake cried for Andalusia,
our Moor and his creator both mourn the loss of a tolerant, multi-cultural India
whose demise Rushdie dates at the rise of the Hindu right in the 1990s.
Elsewhere, the same ideal becomes Moor’s vision of love. What begins as an
apparent prescription for art and culture metamorphoses into a comprehensive philosophy of every aspect of life? For Rushdie, a proper art must not only embrace elements of divergent traditions, but it must do so outside the law. “I am a bastard child of history”, he gleefully declared in a 1990 essay. Throughout the novel, he explicitly connects the bastard with the work of fevesart. With the gloss of Rushdie’s bilingual pseudo-derivation, the single epithet neatly encapsulates linguistic mongrelization, both in itself and as a figure for racial and religious miscegenation, along with illegitimacy: in other words, the three elements essential to literary expression,

Through his (provisional) Valorization of legal, artistic, linguistic, and philosophical hybridity, Rushdie suggests a utopia of universal illegitimacy. An indirect etymological connection supports his privileging of the bastard. Moor describes Vasco Miranda’s parody ‘pieta’ as having “stigmatized hands”, reminding us of the link between stigma and stigmata and thus equating chosen people and outcasts (415). Moor is both; so, of course, was Jesus, the world’s most famous bastard. If both Moor and Rushdie fears for Abraham’s world of the miscegenation, where no one can claim legitimacy, Bombay is an urban exemplar.

Rushdie’s artistic project demands that Moor and his miscegenated siblings be illegitimate. He concocts a thematic justification; but mere historical record would have sufficed. In the novel, Abraham and Aurora never marry, since neither bishop nor rabbi will marry them. In fact, colonial India operated under three distinct law codes; English civil, Hindu, and Mohammedau.

Rushdie initially appears to endorse a hybrid art—the art of the feces—through the linked sets of associations enumerated above: illegitimacy, miscegenation, pluralism, linguistic play. In all its many forms, bastardization causes a breaking down of legal fundamentalism that is in keeping with the Moor’s tentative, poignant, self-affirming vision of love. According to any textbook of Rushdie, feces must of course
triumph over theses. We have come to view Rushdie as the champion per excellence of a hybrid art. *The Moor’s last Sigh* enacts Rushdie’s difficult relationship with readers. As authors’ and readers’ roles in the novel demonstrate, Rushdie both fears and depends upon interpretation. Finally, Rushdie documents the possibility of the institutionalization of hybridity-art, a possibility which surfaces in his novel in figures of state galleries and retrospective shows.

So, it can be said that, throughout the novel, Salman Rushdie explores the uncertainty, depiction, and illusion which indwells this teeming nation: the conflicting as well as intermingling of many languages, cultures and religions—although he constantly downplays the latter’s significance and positive impact. Fiction and historical events are intertwined with each-other, offering opportunities for reflection. As it is observed by Salman Rushdie himself that his two major novels Midnight’s children and Shame are having political touch. But he thinks that The Satanic Verses is not a highly political novel. Subsequently, in a discussion regarding *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, he responded to an interviewer’s suggestion that the central theme of the novel is love by agreeing: “Yes, love. The love of nation, love of parents, love of child, erotic love, romantic love.”

**Conclusion:-**

As it is a thematic study, the novels under discussion in this chapter are *A House for Mr. Biswas* and *The Moor’s Last Sigh*. The novel ‘*A House for Mr. Biswas*’ is considered to be Naipaul’s masterpiece which describes the story of the search of identity of an Indian Brahmin residing in Trinidad. It is a beautiful and excellently written tragic-comedy. In it the protagonist gives an expression of rootlessness, alienation and having loss of identity to a great extent. This novel primarily deals with two themes, the one being the protagonist’s struggle to establish himself in a hostile environment through the ownership of a house and the other being the decline Hindu culture under the impact of westernization. Another novel *The Moor’s Last Sigh* brilliantly represents fundamentalism and hybridity as not only competing modes of expression but
competing forms of historiography. In the novel, there are not one but multiple fundamentalisms, and as it turns out, all of them are contemporary, manufactured phenomena. In 'The Moor’s Last Sigh', Rushdie employs metaphor and association rather than allegory, thus, taking his study of Islam in a more interesting and useful direction and breaking the simple equivalence between Islam and fundamentalism. Therefore, we can enter the novel through its conspicuous of Islam. So, it can be said that, throughout the novel, Salman Rushdie explores the uncertainty, depiction, and illusion which indwells this teeming nation: the conflicting as well as intermingling of many languages, cultures and religions—although he constantly downplays the latter’s significance and positive impact. Fiction and historical events are interwined with each-other, offering opportunities for reflection.

References

- Time, 21 May 1979, p.90.


• *Cf. Ibid.*, pp238-43.


• *Ibid.*, especially Chapter 5, “Intracommunal Struggles and Zionism,”
