



Alienation In V.S. Naipaul's A House For Mr. Biswas

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Abstract

Alienation is the most important factor which a person encounters in life at one time or the other. It causes diverse effects on the individuals who have been affected by it. Culture, social institution and social ethos make a deep impact in several ways on the lives of the individuals. There is always liberation with truth. False ideals disclose their natural chaotic results. They seem to be helpful and resolving. Its true nature is bringing ruin in a large scale. The act of resilience takes place gradually. This paper probes the power of alienation which brings on the life of Mr. Biswas.

Key Words: Alienation, customs, cultural beliefs, social system, struggles.

INTRODUCTION

Life is full of battles. There is no life without battles. Some people emerge as winners and some of them lose the ground. Winners gain strength enormously in the midst of adverse circumstances. Losers shrink themselves and being weakened. Emergence of success depends upon how a person handles the issues of life. Issues of life are inevitable. It differs from one person to the other. Some issues weigh down the individuals heavily. Mr. Biswas is the protagonist of the novel. He has a battle and struggles to fight with. The birth of a child in a family is a glad tiding that makes the members of the family, the neighborhood and the relatives with jubilation. Social ethos which has been strongly ingrained in the society impels people to take heed to the elders and the pundits. Though the prediction and the verdict of the elders are baseless and fluid in nature, members in the family act with obligation. Social institutions have been structured that the predictions of the elders and the pundits are authoritative and articulation of the divine. It is expected that the entire family is bound to keep by all means. It is made mandatory among the Indian community that there is no life apart from the guidance of the priests and pundits.

The cultural and social ethos of the host country does not affect the first generation immigrants. The grandparents of Mr. Biswas are particular about keeping the religious customs, beliefs and practices of their home country. As per the customs of their religious faith, they expect the midwife to predict the future of the child. It is well known that the midwife has witnessed the births of many children. The Indian customs consider the birth of a child to be a great blessing. Barrenness is a sign of the curse for the woman. A barren woman is unwanted and her very presence is a sign of infertility wherever she goes. The more children one bears, the more blessed she is. The society and the family are curious about the newly born child. Their curiosity increases to know what the future unfolds for the child. So the members of the family consult whoever they come into contact with, especially elders who are advanced in age. So the midwife falls into the line of consultation.

The last and the most important person to consult with is the Pundit. The predictions of the pundit are authentic and final. Moreover, they are accurate to the core, according to the people. If the complications exist with the child, he gives the means to resolve. As a result, the child is saved from whatsoever complications he is entangled with. So the people revere him with high honor and treat him as a messenger of God. The Pundit who is at hand is Pundit Sitram. He probes the future of the child and comes up with undue complications. He assures them of resolving and mitigating the complications. He does his best to alleviate. To the dismay of the family, the success is partial. The members of the family are pacified with the note that they need to take some precautionary measures. But they are not given permanent solutions. They are left with a battle to fight.

“At last he said, ‘First of all, the features of this unfortunate boy. He will have good teeth but they will be rather wide, and there will be spaces between them. I suppose you know what that means. The boy will be a lecher and a spendthrift. Possibly a liar as well. It is hard to be sure about those gaps between the teeth.’” (P12)

“He will have an unlucky sneeze” (P13)

These negative predictions keep the entire family in despair, destitution and perpetual anxiety. Normally, negative opinions and rumors spread like a wild fire. Though he is considered as a member of the family, members in the family treat him with alienation. The Bible succinctly agrees with fact.

“And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.”
(1 Corinthians 12:26)

Mr. Biswas is pointed out for every unfortunate event in the family and the neighborhood. The idea of isolation, rejection and harsh treatment at a young age embeds in him diffidence and despondence. He finds no one to understand him. The prediction of the pundit about him is strongly rooted in the minds of the people. As a result he suffers from perpetual alienation. The formative period is to be strongly laid if a person is to be successful. He gets no word of encouragement from his teacher Lal. He is taken out of school to become a pundit under the training of Pundit Jairam. Pundit Jairam does not give proper training to Mr. Biswas. He uses him for his own means and ends. He is treated with subservience.

“You will never make a pundit,’ Jairam said, ‘I was talking the other day to Sitaram, who read your horoscope. You killed your father. I am not going to let you destroy me. Sitaram particularly warned me to keep you away from trees. Go on, pack your bundle.’”(P55)

The prediction about Mr. Biswas is baseless to the core. It is disproved. His pursuit of finding life continues in terms of getting the job. He is given the job of working at the rum shop which is owned by Ajodha. Bhandat has been in charge of the rum shop. It is Bhandat who is a liar, lecher and a spendthrift. The Horoscope of a person seems to be true. But the contradiction is evident in reality. Mr. Biswas is not a person of the sort as per the predictions.

Mr. Biswas suffers from cultural alienation. Contradiction largely exists between the prediction and the reality of life. Pundits who are supposed to be guides to the people turn out to be mere professionals. They consider their professions to be a source of living. They choose this profession to be merely for living. They do not mind how much impact their propositions make on the lives of the individuals. Every profession has its own ethics and morality embedded with it. They dare to give the sweeping statements which make them in constant demand. As long as people are ignorant of their lifestyle, they come across individuals to dupe them. Seers realized the needs of the society and worked accordingly. They acted as messengers of God bringing solace to the people.

Mr. Biswas, being vexed with his life looks for the other avenues of life. He comes to know that he has a gift for sign writing. This gift seems to help him in solving the issues of alienation. It certainly has done a little bit. It makes him go to Hanuman house. He meets Shama and falls in love with her. He thinks that marriage has the power to eliminate isolation and alienation from his life. He feels too ashamed to share with Tara, Ajodha and Alec. The very idea of marriage makes him feel lost and threatened. The Hanuman house has different sets of organization. Daughters have to help at the store. Sons-in-law have to look after the estates and the fields. Thus, colonial psychosis is prevalent at the Hanuman house. The thrill of marriage is nowhere to be found in his life. The Hanuman house has no place for independent thinking. It wants all the inmates to be a thorough Tulsi. Mrs. Tulsi and Seth act with superiority complex. Mr. Biswas is treated with utmost alienation wherever he goes and is. Mrs. Tulsi selects her sons in law to meet the needs of the family and the education of her sons. The treatment of subservient attitude enrages Mr. Biswas to revolt against the institution of Dulsidom. Culture normally varies from one community to the other. Though the very society is founded on a particular culture as a whole, many sects within the society have a culture on their own. The family of Mrs. Tulsi has a strange culture with the justification that the sons in law should be laborers. They manipulate in such a way that the sons in law demand no dowry from them. They were forced to be conformed to the system of Hanuman house. Resistance to the system involves aggressive dealing. The sons of Mrs. Tulsi are called gods who are held high esteem. Gender bias is predominant in the house.

Mr. Biswas has been selected to be the son in law on the basis demanding no rights and dowries. Daughters are not encouraged to pursue their education while her two sons are motivated to study. Daughters were encouraged to bear children. Education brings a dramatic change in the lives of the person. Mr. Biswas is highly demotivated when he tries to think and act uniquely. Whenever Mrs. Tulsi happens to be with a failure, she pretends to be ill. She creates self-pity among the daughters and sons in law. Even though Mr. Biswas does a wonderful business at the Chase, he gets no recognition and approval. The alienation from the family persists. At the funeral of his mother he is treated as a stranger. The prediction which has been marked at his birth makes an indelible mark at his mother's death. Moreover, he is the last child of the family. They think that he deserves no attention.

Alienation is the subject matter which affects badly the individuals in the name of religion, caste, gender, social background and cultural discrimination. This issue has been almost in existence in all the countries, race, communities and groups of people. Man has been described as a social animal. People cannot live all alone. Man is a dependent beings. God, the Almighty created mankind to be unique among all the other creations and creatures. Life is possible when people are interrelated with one another. Many a critics is of the view that Man has to build bridges and not walls. "United we stand, divided we fall" is the universal dogma which human race cannot depart from it. Differences and divisions can be at man's disposal. The result of them can be loneliness, isolation, hatred, separation and alienation of the individuals. The unique dictum is that 'Man is a social animal'. There must be support from one another. One must uphold the other for living. The life of Mr. Biswas is highly miserable and pathetic. A person never lives at the expense of the other finding fault, negating the self-esteem of the other. Cultural differences and social stigmas do not benefit the common soul. Rousseau is right when he says that 'Man is born free but everywhere is in chains'. Whether a man is in high level, intermediate or low level in education, social status, and economy one should not at any cost demean the other by any names and means. Mr. Biswas is highly disheartened and dispirited from his birth to his death. The insults, verbal abuse and demeaning of the spirit make him go to the extent of committing suicide. Culture, dogmas and creed which people teach must be for the enhancement of the other. They must be based upon truth which must strengthen the individuals. If they are the source of agony, torment and heartache, they mutilate the souls of the people beyond the measure. He laments over the struggles of life silently.

Works cited

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