

GENDERED SUBALTERNISM AND MYTH OF MASCULINITY IN A HOUSE FOR MR. BISWAS AND HALF A LIFE

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Abstract

V. S. Naipaul is one of the finest writers of English prose over the world and famous for his dissecting tone and piquant style of narration. He is an expert writer of exploiting each moment into literature. In this paper Naipaul talks about gendered subaltern and myth of masculinity in a patriarchal society. Basically Naipaul is associated with the literature of 'Diaspora'. He has come before us as a champion of subaltern, diasporic and marginalized people in terms of caste, class and gender. His oeuvre commonly speaks of expatriation and the people who have been sidelined from the mainstream of development of the society due to caste, class, and ethnicity and therefore he has been traditionally looked at from that point of view. The issues like gender, subaltern, diaspora and ethnicity have been discussed much at length in Naipaul's chosen texts.

Keywords: *Gender, Subaltern, Ethnicity and Diaspora*

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The literature produced by male authors, indoctrinated by the ideology of patriarchy, provides a prejudiced, mutilated graph of women. Women are misrepresented either as angels, the true emblem of purity and innocence, of service and sacrifice or as the evil temptress, the demon ready to tempt and lead man to havoc. Male constructed literary texts stereotype woman either as paragon of all virtues or the demon of all vices.

The realistic portrayal of woman, who stands between these extreme cases, is conspicuous by absence in literature produced by male writers. These stereotypical images are intended as prescriptions for women dictating to them what they should be and what they should not be. The discourse of patriarchy reads women's desire for choices and liberation of women as forms of aberrations.

The women in the postcolonial society are doubly colonized. However, in the hierarchy of structural oppression, there are women who are placed further down the scale. Tribal, 'lower-caste', differently-abled, lesbian, lower class women all come in at the lower end of the hierarchy of women. Writings by such women often present a challenge even to feminists because they resist homogenizing into the larger category of 'Third World women'.

Perhaps the most important example of the genre is Rigoberta Menchu's *I, Rigoberta Menchu* (1984), a text which has attained cult status as *testimonio*. Menchu, a Quiche Mayan woman from Guatemala, documented the traumatic events of her community. Her opening paragraph states:

My name is Rigonerta Menchu. I am twenty-three years. This is testimony ... I'd like to stress that it's not only my life, it's also the testimony of my people ... the important thing is that what has happened to me has happened to many other people too My personal experience is the reality of a whole people. (1)

It becomes the document of a struggle of the entire community and race. Likewise, Bama described her *Karukku* this way:

The story told in *Karukku* was not my story alone. It was the depiction of a collective trauma-of my community-whose length cannot be measured in time. I just tried to freeze it forever in one book so that there will be something physical to remind people of the atrocities committed on a section of the society for ages. (*Karukku* 67)

Stuart Hall points out the power of discourse to create and reinforce Western dominance. The colonialist discourses describe how Europe represents differences between ‘itself’ and ‘others’ using European cultural categories, languages and ideas, and performs cultural othering. The knowledge produced by a discourse gets put into practice and then becomes reality. “By producing a discourse of difference Europe was able to maintain its dominance over ‘the other’ thereby creating a subaltern by excluding the other from the production of the discourse” (Hall 157). The scenario is the same when the subaltern, particularly the subaltern woman is being represented in mainstream discourse by elite community. It only furthers and reinforces her subalternity. Adopting mainstream discourses to subaltern female experiences only leads to further marginalization of the subalterns both as individuals and as a community.

The ideology of patriarchy tends to reinforce an already entrenched system of exploitation. Gender equations attain threatening dimensions within the framework of patriarchal dominance. Juliet Michell sees patriarchy as a dominant feature with cultural rooting and maintained through the operation of ideology. It is perpetuated through a process by which subjectivity is culturally constructed. Gendered subjectivity can be seen as “constituted ideologically, ensuring the continuous reproduction of dominant masculinity and dominated femininity” (Michell 197). Patriarchy is not merely an ideology; it is a set of organized power structures with the key positions occupied by man or his supporting mechanism.

The process of indoctrination starts right from childhood. There is even now a categorization of toys as boys’ toys which include gun, car and so on and girls’ toys predominantly represented by dolls of different types and hues. It is still possible to find playthings labeled in much the same way as in the nineteenth century verse, part of a collection for school boys, during their leisure hours at boarding school. I would like to begin this paper with the statement of V. Geetha:

...A little boy who dashes up a tree, while his sister hovers uncertainly on the ground; an older man plunges in to a life of adventure and travel while his wife or mother anxiously awaits at home hoping and praying for his safety. (Geetha 127)

The above lines are ample to show position of women in a patriarchal society. The society, in which V. S. Naipaul was born and brought, has been more or less the same. The overall literary output of Naipaul owes much to the experience of his personal life. People migrating

from India in early ages were conservative to their social, religious and cultural conduct. This paper would not only explore but analyze gendered subalternism and the myth of masculinity in Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas*, and *Half a Life*.

Naipaul has set these novels in the Indian communities of Trinidad and India. The people living in these communities had firm belief in old tradition as far as women treatment is concerned. The characters Naipaul has produced are archetypes of Indian masses and are highly prejudiced. These women characters are categorized in two major slots- dominating and dominated types although the culture of both is same, with slight difference in their overall condition. They had enough power to maintain the families and control household responsibilities. Despite having so much power they had to bear reprimanding and sometimes were severely beaten by their husbands. Discrimination with women is apparent with the fact that these women are from the rich families, yet they are not provided good higher education rather later on confined to their houses.

The women characters of Naipaul are ignorant and innocent. The personal world of women comes to an end with her family. She remains only a component in the household machinery. Her happiness lies in the happiness of the families. Her life is dedicated to the families. Her happiness shatters if the families suffer. She stays at home minding all their families' responsibilities. Men on the contrary, remain outside as he has been expected by the society. The statement made by Simone de Beauvoir in her path breaking work *The Second Sex* is quite appropriate to illustrate the role of women in the society:

She is the one who waits, submits, complains, weeps, makes scenes: an ungrateful role that in daily life leads to no apotheosis; as a victim she is looked down on; as a shrew detested; her fate seems the prototype of rapid "recurrence" life only repeats in her, without going anywhere; family set in her role as a housekeeper, she puts a stop to the expansion of existence, she becomes obstacle and negation.... (*The Second Sex* 322)

Women are unable to expose their hidden talent in the male dominant society thus they put an end all the possibilities of their shining future by confining themselves within domestic activities. They are away from the limelight and their life passed without valuable achievement. They became handicapped as they are dependent on their husbands who are the backbone of the economy. For their basic personal necessity of life they had to look at their husband's pocket. Sarojani and Shama are the example of that who had to look at the world

through the eyes of their husband and they responded accordingly. They sacrificed their own perception of judging any verdict.

Being a diasporic writer, Naipaul writes about the Indian communities especially in Caribbean and Africa where people live with outdated customs and rituals. Female oppression and exploitation, conservative thinking regarding the status of the women in the society and family, dearth of education and obstacle in their progress are the inseparable part of their customs. There are the people like Pt. Ganesh, Mohan Biswas and Willie Chandran who have stepped out of their finite worlds of orthodoxies. They desperately feel the need to change the thinking of the women of their families and want their partner to be equal. Irony lies in the fact that they never made an effort to bring about the change rather they expected the things to happen themselves. These men want educated partner who would understand them and would also accompany them in the course of life.

V.S. Naipaul's magnum opus, *A House for Mr. Biswas*, can rightly be called a work of art that deals with the problems of isolation, frustration and negation of an individual. The novel tells the story of its protagonist, Mr. Biswas from birth to death, each section dealing with different phases of Mr. Biswas's life. Here, Naipaul has a more subjective approach towards the problems of identity crisis than the objective one a reader finds in his travelogues, especially on India.

Women like Shama and her sisters have seemingly come to a pause regarding their development. They are treated as a pieces of property, therefore have become an object of possession. Shama before her marriage is governed by her mother and afterwards by her husband Mr. Biswas. Naipaul attempts to highlight his qualities for survival in a patriarchal world where indifference to women's sentiments is marked as a sign of manhood.

When I start narrating female character in *A House for Mr. Biswas* one finds Bipti, Mr. Biswas's mother, a perfect example of stereotypical Indian women. She depends on her husband when she lives with him and on her mother's family when deserted by her husband. A comparison could be drawn between Bipti, as a feeble character, her sister Tara, as an assertive one. But the society does not appreciate Tara for her authoritative nature. Naipaul brings to light the negative attitude of the society towards a powerful woman. Tara is gossiped about when she takes charge of Bipti's family after her husband's death. Bipti, too, willingly gives her children's responsibility to Tara, and sets herself free from the burden of

caring. It is evident because Bipti, “who had not been consulted” for anything after her husband’s death, feels “very grateful to Tara”; and Mr. Biswas gets “thrilled at the thought of earning money” by being nurtured by his affluent aunt. (*A House for Mr. Biswas* 59)

Bipti is a weak widow and the mother of four –three sons and a daughter. She has to hide her emotion for her children in front of other due to her dependence on her sister. She could not express her loss when her daughter Dehuti eloped with Tara’s low caste yard boy Ramchand. Instead she shares Tara’s outburst for the shame and dishonor her daughter brought to the family. Naipaul shows Bipti lamenting for the loss of her sister’s honour not for the loss of her daughter, who was not more than a maid in Tara’s house. Dehuti’s ‘shameless’ act is well contrasted with Mr. Biswas’ quest for identity as a sign of self-pride. This highlights the difference between the expectation of a society from a boy and a girl child.

If we compare Sarojini to Willie, we find Sarojini better than Willie in adjusting and equally intelligent. Her father sends Willie abroad for further studies and thinks of an ‘international marriage’ for her. Willie on the other hand as a male, ‘*exceeds power and confers privilege*’ by choosing to go abroad to study. Men have derived a great deal of advantage from ‘*the simple and irrefutable logic of categorization*’ (Geetha 46). A similar distinction is visible between Mr. Biswas and his sister Dehuti. Mr. Biswas gets an opportunity to go to the school and later on for a training to become a proper “pundit”. Whereas, his sister is given to his aunt Tara to learn some “grace” which would help her in getting a match. Bipti is caught thinking:

Bipti had been hoping that Tara would make the suggestion. In four or five years Dehuti would have to be married and it was better that she should be given to Tara. She should learn manners, acquire grace and, with a dowry from Tara, might even make a good match. (*A House for Mr. Biswas* 35)

‘Shyness’ and wearing heavy jewellery is a sign of their feminine nature. Dehuti was liked by Tara because she ‘*smiled shyly, not looking up*’ (35). In Indian society, identity of a girl is always associated with the identity of her husband. His role in her life is that of a “provider.” Caste is a matter which is applied to men only; women ethically belong to their provider’s caste regardless of their birth in any particular caste. They, as V. Geetha writes, are “feminized in a derogatory sense.” The state of women is as demeaning as a ‘shudra’, she argues:

A shudra is like a woman-a case of caste identity being feminized in a derogatory sense. Shudra much like Brahmin and upper caste women, is only fit to serve Brahmin and others, and as with women, in such service lies his salvation. In Hinduism both untouchables and women are polluting ---a menstruating woman is literally an untouchable for the days that her period lasts. Gender and class differences are likewise mutually linked....(50)

The above statement fits Dehuti's stature suitably. Dehuti by her simple act of eloping with a low caste 'chamar' boy demeans herself completely and she is ousted by her high-caste family. Naipaul presents the attitude of her family post-elopement through Mr. Biswas who visits her place by chance. He feels 'that to Dehuti marriage had brought no joy.' She was uneasy at being caught among her household possession 'which was embarrassing for both of them. (71) Dehuti's mental struggle is overpowered by Mr. Biswas's reputation. Her poor and low caste becomes a reason of shame for Mr. Biswas because he is linked with the Tulsis who are well known for their high caste status in Port of Spain. She is not a Brahmin now instead is considered a low caste person. Dehuti in her brother's view is reduced to an only without beauty or brains. He could not penetrate her mindset instead he observes her superficially:

Dehuti, never pretty, was now frankly ugly. Her Chinese eyes looked sleepy, the pupils without a light, the whites smudged. Her cheeks, red with pimples, bulged low and drooped around her mouth. Her lower lip projected, as though squashed out by the weight of her cheeks. (71)

Naipaul shows Dehuti as an unattractive girl who brings dishonor to her family. He never shows her mental struggle; instead, the repulsion of her brother overpowers the meeting. Dehuti's words and mind do not hold any value for him. It is not so with this demeaned girl only but the rest of the female characters in the text suffer from this servitude and attitude of inferiority. They are conditioned. Shama is taught servitude although she belonged to a "rich" family and lived in the big house famous as 'Hanuman House.'

Hanuman House is governed by Mrs. Tulsi, commonly known as the big boss. Naipaul shows a dichotomy by contrasting Mr. Biswas's thinking and other sons-in law of the family, who unobjectionably accept the supremacy of Mrs. Tulsi. Naipaul shows Shama's house as an overcrowded monkey house where a mother with all the daughters and son-in law, and her sister and brother-in law lives. In such a house where matriarchy seems to prevail overtly,

Mr. Biswas fears his identity and faces a hard time to save his manhood despite being a declared failure. His philosophy of paddle your own canoe gets wounded when his career as a sign painter could not provide him with bread and butter. If the text is diasporic in nature on the one hand then on the other it also brings forth psychological complexities produced by the clash between matriarchy and patriarchy.

Naipaul presents Shama as a properly trained woman by the patriarchy. She displays her discomfiture for Mr. Biswas's status as a dependent of Tulsis. She considers herself inferior to her brothers and sisters due to her husband's incompetence to provide them bread and butter. Her other brothers-in law are not independent, so they cooperate with Mr. Tulsi and contribute in family income. On the contrary, Mr. Biswas considered it below his dignity to give help to "her" family. He considered it as the trick of Tulsis for they strangled and exploited everyone. He observed and commented that sisters *"had, in the Tulsi marriage lottery, drawn husbands with money and position; these daughters followed the Hindu custom of living with their husbands's family, and formed no part of the Tulsi organization."* (97)

In this way we find that Naipaul is capturing the attention of the characters searching for a permanent foothold. The novel depicts houses as the predominant metaphor signifying the universal diasporic disorder. The hero of the novel Mohun Biswas represents the psychology of every East- Indian colonial at Trinidad. He endeavors to create something significant and substantial out of the "unimportant, uncreative, cynical Trinidad." (124)

Biswas is a more complex version of Ganesh as he also follows the same process of growing up from nothing. His sense of alienation and homelessness is perhaps derived from the character of *Miguel Street*. His life is a complex tale of an expatriate Indian's ambivalence presenting the typical expatriate sensibility. Mr. Biswas, whose life-long ambition is the ownership of a house, finds him caught in an inescapable trap. Thus, the symbol of house embodies Naipaul's personal diasporic predicament.

Biswas's individual quest for selfhood, identity and coherence in his life terminates with the ownership of a house of his own. Though the multiple defects and drawbacks of the house lessen his charm, he is excited because he has now found some meaning in his existence in the world. He exclaims: "How terrible it would have been... to have lived and died as one had been born, unnecessary and unaccommodated." (54)

Naipaul's men like Mohun, Ganesh and Willie Chandran think that women are no match to their intelligence. They are inferior by birth. This imposed inferiority gives way to men to ridicule their sentiments. Mohun does so by intention to Shama and she either has to keep silent or will receive physical torture. Here Naipaul portrays Mohun teasing Shama by ridiculing her relatives:

‘How the little gods getting on today, eh?

He would ask.

He meant her brothers

‘how the hods, eh?

Shama wouldn't reply.

‘And how the Big Boss getting on today?’ that was Seth.....

And how the old queen?’ that was Mrs. Tulsi.

‘The old hen? The old cow?’

‘Family? Family? This blasted fowl run you calling family?’¹

Shama accepts her lot as a passive listener but when Mr. Biswas becomes intolerable, she has to retaliate. His ego is hurt by Shama's words, “*you can't give me anything consequently he temporarily abandons Hanuman House*” (107). As Naipaul portrays women, they always create turbulent dramatic scenes like Shama, Chinta and Padma to draw attention. This is a characteristic which is typically associated with the powerless species that use it as their weapon against oppression. They make issues out of non-issue. Mr. Biswas soothes and nourishes his pride by abusing Shama's family as ‘a fowl run’ or ‘monkey house’ or a ‘blasted zoo’ or a ‘low caste bunch’ (120). More than Shama, Mr. Biswas created nuisance in Hanuman House for which they had to leave for ‘Chase’, a nearby town in Port of Spain. In Chase a closed house and shop awaited their arrival with ‘the smell of grease’. Shama indignantly held her husband responsible for their banishment. She disliked every action of Mr. Biswas and he never confined in her. She felt martyred at her husband's indecent behavior and the distance between them always haunted their relationship. Mr. Biswas always underestimated her emotions and Shama thought him ‘stupid, boring and shamng.’²

As a contrast to Mr. Biswas, Shama is a dull girl; even then she seems to adjust better than him in adverse condition. It was Shama who “produced a meal” (146) in that garbage house

¹ *A House for Mr. Biswas*, pp. 104-05

² *Ibid* at p. 143

in Chase and told him how to run a shop while Mr. Biswas was still fumbling. Naipaul writes:

He knew nothing about keeping books and it was Shama who had suggested that he should make notes of good given on credit on squares of brown shop papers. It was Shama who suggested that these squares should be spiked ... it was Shama who made the accounts. (147)

Naipaul's description of Shama carries the features of a typical Indian girl who handles the things with great subtlety along with the nagging habits. Mr. Biswas was amazed to see Shama nag for the first time in his life, "it has puzzled him. Living in wife-beating society, he couldn't understand why women were even allowed to nag or how nagging could have any effect." (148)

Shusila and Leela in *The Mystic Masseur* are a case in point. The society has assigned for them befitting their gender. In India, women as a wife are expected to be "patient, understanding, emotionally expressive and compassionate" (Geetha 35). The women in Hanuman house and in all these texts efficiently adopt their pre-assigned roles. They conceive their passive roles as the sign of dignity. Being a man "means that one is rational, always in control, unemotional and consistently strong" (Geetha 35). Mr. Biswas falling short of manly qualities in a predefined society "cultivates a huge sense of inferiority for not being man enough." (36)

Mr. Biswas' quest for identity and for a house of his own is a manifestation of his desire to be known as a "complete man." He knows that the definition of "man" compulsorily involves the ability to be the "owner" with authority. Biswas craved throughout his life for a permanent shelter in order to satisfy his ego; "occupy positions of power, prestige and authority" (36) his desire to control was unfulfilled at Hanuman House. He behaved remarkably in an uncivilized quarrelsome way to Tulsis because they overpowered him and tried to crush him.

Children are given toys according to their gender. It prepares them for their roles in the society in future. Mr. Biswas gifts a "doll house" to Savi, but a toy car to his son Anand. In Savi, thus, her girlhood is involved by her parents and the people around her, which is a common thing in any conventional society. V. Geetha writes that "parents dress their boy and girl children in different ways. They buy them different toys and books" (31). It was expected

from Savi to cry when “doll house” was broken by Shama whereas Anand’s timidity is hated by her father as “boys must not cry.”

In utter frustration, Mr. Biswas behaves savagely towards Shama to the extent of kicking her “on her belly” during her fourth pregnancy. Despite her will to rebel Shama can never refute rather continues to live in suffocation. Contrary to this he enjoyed her discomfiture and used it very often by offending her. When Mr. Biswas had made his wooden house ready, Shama went to live in it. He feels depressed when Shama comes to stay with him because he suffers from an inferiority complex. He thinks that Shama would ridicule his incapability in the absence of the other members of her family. In its furious reaction he tries to kill himself along with his two elder children but “he didn’t want to kill” Myna and Shama as he “didn’t care” for them. He tries to show his indifference for Shama, because Shama’s sheer presence irritates him. “He was violently angry; never before disgusted by her” (275). He was drawn to such a disgusting idea like suicide as a consequence of his incompetent manhood. She continuously reminds him of his failure as a husband and father both.

Most of these girls have never been to the boundary of the college. They were confined to the four walls of their house. Their knowledge is limited to writing and reading letters in a funny way, be that Shama or Leela or Sarojini in *Half a Life*. There is a wide difference in the level of education of Willie and Sarojini, Leela and Ganesh, and Mr. Biswas and Shama.

In *A House for Mr. Biswas* women are often left alone in their limited worlds and are never considered as companions by their men. Shama too is left alone with her tenants in Hanuman House while Mohun and his children go to visit Ajodha and Tare every weekend. Shama feels the “need of company” due to her loneliness. It is not so that his absence gives her a sense of loneliness rather she feels more alone in his presence because of Mr. Biswas’s regular habit of quarreling with her and her family members. His tendency to fight with everyone leads to his boycott from her sisters and other relatives. Here too Shama is the sufferer due to her gender as she cannot initiate any communication, whereas Mr. Biswas can do it only by virtue of being a male.

Naipaul shows a wide difference between the status of women in Indian society and other communities. Comparing the women of *A House for Mr. Biswas* and of *Half a Life*, there is a huge difference between the two. Shama, a conservative uneducated stereotype girl, is a hurdle in Mr. Biswas’s progress. Willie’s mother and his wife Ana are graduates and

understand their men to a certain limit, yet they are considered as obstacles. Willie's mother always falls short of his father's expectations. She is a "backward caste" girl whom Chandran never married. Therefore she could not achieve a respectable place in India where marriage is looked at as an important institution. Chandran could never share his emotions with his wife as he never felt associated with her. Chandran was under great influence of Mahatma Gandhi when he saw her in his college. Gandhi called the youth of India to defy the caste system by inter-caste marriages. He thought to live a "life of sacrifice" and this girl became the victim of his infirm decision (*Half a Life* 12). Naipaul writes in the novel about this girl without name from Chandran's point of view:

There was a girl at the university. I didn't know her. I hadn't spoken to her. I had merely noticed her. She was small and coarse-featured, almost tribal in appearance, noticeable black, with two big top teeth that showed very white. She wore colors that were sometime very bright and sometime very muddy, seeming to run into the blackness of her skin. She would belong to a backward cast... (*Half a Life* 11)

Chandran without taking her emotions into consideration proposed to her in a very timid manner. She becomes a victim of hatred unintentionally. Naipaul writes that Chandran felt 'repelled, ashamed, moved' and instead of love 'there came a little sympathy' (12) in his heart for her. Her too she is victimized due to her low caste status and gender. She is either speechless or stunned by his sinister decision about family matters and her own children.

Men, as it is visible in each and every society are privileged by patriarchal law and expect an unconditional servitude. As J. S. Mill observed in 19th century in his *On the Subjection of Women*, "*all men, expect the most brutish, desire to have, in the women most nearly connected with them, not a forced slave but a willing one, not a slave merely, but a favorite....*" (14)

She serves Chandran throughout her life willingly, yet she is not given a proper place in his life. She loves her son Willie beyond the fact that he was entirely different from her and never associated with her. In these texts it is distinctly visible that a "women" feels satisfied and considers her life meaningful if she can assist him in "his individualistic pursuit. She has other independent existence. She has no individual identity. She ultimately will have to return to her man at the end. So does Shama. She gives herself physically, emotionally and mentally

to her husband by making 'him' her; but in return she has no right to expect security. "Love" as a feeling is a far-fetched idea for these women.

Willie is the only hope to his mother, yet he deserts her like his father. He always had negative thoughts for his mother even during his college time in England. He associates her with everything ugly; his friend Percy's bad taste of colours reminds him of his mother's colour choice. Willie think that, "A fussiness about cloth and colour was something he associated with women (and in a now secret part of his mind he thought of the backwards on his mother's side, and their love of strong colour). (*Half a Life* 64)

All these men desert their wives at a certain point of time ... some literally and some stop talking to them. As Willie used Ana and then deserts her just because he was 'fed up living her life.' He gave words to his desire of living alone while taking the best of her life as he narrates to his sister that, "when she came back later I said to her, 'I am forty one. I am tired of living your life' (*Half a Life* 227). Willie shows his selfishness by ignoring Ana's point of view. He acknowledged her services and, felt the gratitude for her as he confessed to her at the time of departure.

I know, you did everything for me. You made it easy for me here. I couldn't have lived here without you. When I asked you in London I was frightened. I had nowhere to go. They were going to throw me out of the college at the end of the term and I didn't know what I could do keep afloat. (*Half a Life* 227)

In a few cases women's agony becomes acute by the virtue of their individual weakness. Shama is the case in point. She suffers doubly; firstly through her husband, and secondly by her families consequential response. Leela, too, has to bear the torture of her husband due to her childlessness. She suffers both as an abandoned mother and wife. Ana suffered Willie's selfishness post-marriage. Ana, in spite of belonging to non-Indian community, has to accept Willie's treachery and deception. She witnessed Willie's and Graca's increasing incestuous relations, without a sign of agitation on her face she bore all the insult including Willie's confesses to Ana: "*We made live in the house, Graca and I, as it was being built.*" (219)

Despite the despotic nature of their husbands, they do not revolt against them as they continue to live with them. They adopt a submissive role on the domestic front. Mostly they surrender to the will of their men and follow the norms laid by the society.

Willie's sister Sarojini is seen in the image of his mother as he calls her the 'little ugly Sarojini.' Her father never wished to send her abroad or to college for higher education. Due to her marriage she manages to visit England once and her brother too in his hostel. He feels 'repelled by the 'smell of the food she prepared in the little hostel room.' Sarojini stands as a symbol of Chandran's failure and thus poses a threat to his reputation. Consequently Willie feels ashamed of her presence in his hostel room in England. He disliked her Indian way of dressing. He avoids introducing her to his college friends.

After leaving Ana, Willie seeks support from his sister. She is comfortable even in adverse situation. She had no complications, no fabricated lies, and no unreal conceptions to lead in her problems like her brother Willie. She adjusts naturally and never feels awkward due to her Indian identity. She provides support to her brother in his dire need. On the contrary he still feels the same repulsion for the 'food' that "*Sarojini cooked in the small stale-smelling kitchen at the back*" (*Half a Life* 137). Willie observes a change in her dressing sense as "*She had given up the style of sari and cardigan and socks. She was in jeans and a heavy sweater and her manner was brisker and even more authoritative than Willie remembered.*" (*Half a Life* 137-138)

Willie abhors his poor adjustability in awkward situations when he sees Sarojini living a comfortable life. He is compelled to think that all her oddity "was buried in the girl" now, whom he had left behind him at home. She had come a long way as she seems "attractive." Willie also guesses about her being in love with would have probably been lost in nothingness if the women in his life, like Ana, June, and Sarojini would not have supported him. He narrates the role of Ana in his life to Sarojini:

I drew comfort from Ana, her strength and authority. And just as now, as you may have noticed, Sarojini, I lean on you, so in those days, ever since she had agreed to my being with her in Africa, I leaned on Ana. I believed in a special way in her luck, some of this had to do with the very fact that she was a women who had given herself to me. (141)

Willie had always been 'protected' and 'guided' by one or the other women "*in some essential way.*" In his childhood it was his mother, in youth June and Ana, and in his later life it is his sister who cares for him. He completely depends on Ana during his stay in Portuguese Africa in her grandfather's house. Naipaul thus comments through him that in Indian culture "men are really looking for women to lean on" (141). Naipaul here draws a

difference between two women from different communities. Both of them have difference ideas. Sarojini follows her 'firebrand' maternal uncle's radical genes and is furious in nature; whereas Ana is different in her thinking due to her racial and social difference. Willie cherished this difference in Ana and despised Sarojini. Ana was 'important' for him because he depended on her 'for his idea of being a man' in his beginning years but Sarojini becomes the need for his survival in his later life.

In medieval India 'sati system' was followed with a pure religious dedication. The society had no guilt in burning the widowed wife on her husband's pyre. Bipti, Mr. Biswas's mother who is born in modern times is not burned but she has to suffer the painful phase of widowhood. She leads the life of alienation and seclusion devoid of all the pleasures after the death of her considerably incompetent husband. Now she was to be avoided in all pious ceremonies of her family and could not perform any ritual as she is seen as the inauspicious sight in her very house. Naipaul narrates that touchy moment of proclamation of her widowhood in a series of prolonged rituals which is enough to give an idea of patriarchy prevalent in these societies:

Bipti was bathed. Her hair, still wet, was neatly parted and the parting filled with red henna. Then henna was scooped out and the paring filled with charcoal dust. She was now a widow forever. Tara gave a short scream and at the signal the other women began to wail.³

This episode is marked with irony and sarcasm as these customs are no more followed in modern times yet it remains effective among conventional people. They follow that age old system which takes pride in making a widow's life hell without feeling ashamed of its oddity. Bipti, Sarojini and Shama remain submissive throughout the novels and they could not get recognition by their husbands. In the society like that the future of girls are decided by their parents. They are very rarely given the opportunity to develop. On the other hand boys are granted more liberty and enjoy the freedom of making their own choices. Sarojini in *Half a Life* is brought up with same ideology. A letter to Willie from his father reveals his biased attitude:

I write now with news of your sister Sarojini... Well, a German came one day. He was an oldish man with a bad leg. Well, to cut a long short, he asked to marry Sarojini, and that is what precisely he had done. You will know that I always felt that Sarojini's only hope lay on

³ Ibid at p.32

an international marriage, but I must say this took me surprise. I am sure he has a wife somewhere, but, perhaps isn't good to ask too much. (*Half a Life* 112)

Thus in the novels of Naipaul gender bias is a commonplace. In the institution of marriage, it becomes evident that both live together but dwell in separate worlds. Women are left; they ramble in another sphere, which definitely co-exist with men's world but is entirely different. It goes without saying that these women play the role of auxiliary in Naipaul's novels. They do not possess multiple layers of characters; in comparison to men they are inferior and one-dimensional. They always revolve around the centre and never complain of it, and whenever they complain they do it by nagging as Shama does in *A House for Mr. Biswas*.

Male individuality crushes conjugal relationship and thus brings disaffection to the institution of marriage. The acceptance of identity of both the gender cannot always be expected from these people; subsequently clashes between them increase. As women do not develop, the only way to survive for them is to adopt the male-oriented atmosphere and remain stereotype forever.

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