

CENTENARY TRIBUTE

Remembering Andre Malraux

As we celebrate the centenary of Andre Malraux, we pay homage to someone not from a faraway land, not certainly a foreigner, but a man who strode through the world like a colossus, never ceasing to take up arms for just causes, because he believed in the best of humanity, says Arshad-uz Zaman

TWENTY-seven years ago I had the great privilege to welcome Andre Malraux as the honoured guest of the Alliance Francaise. Malraux and I delivered a short speech and as usual, he captivated the audience. I had the good fortune to welcome Malraux in my capacity as President of the Alliance Francaise.

I have a lifelong love affair with Alliance Francaise. When I had finished my university studies in Calcutta, the capital of West Bengal, I started learning French at the Alliance Francaise, which was located at the French Consulate General. My teacher was a charming friendly French lady Christine Bessence, who was from Brittany. She taught me to love French and in the process France. That love affair has lasted all my life. I discovered then that I had a special gift for learning language. During my studies in Paris, I maintained contact with Alliance Francaise and improved my French so that I could follow my classes. My next encounter with the Alliance Francaise was in Dhaka, where I was posted between the years 1970-73. Dhaka was then a tiny town, capital of East Pakistan. Alliance Francaise stood, where it stands now, although the interior has changed a little bit. It has of course become a much livelier place and frequented by the youth of Dhaka. In the years 1970-73 various cultural activities were held including musical soirees and paintings exhibition. French pianists would make an occasional visit and then as now, we had to go to the Goethe Institut for the piano.

Then something very dramatic happened. From a sleepy provincial capital, Dhaka suddenly emerged in 1971 as the capital of a sovereign, independent state called Bangladesh. This was achieved through a War of Liberation, where our Mukti Bahini were pitted against the ferociously armed Pakistan soldiers. One name that stands out in my memory is Pierre Berthelot, the French consul. He and his beautiful wife Jeannette Berthelot, so completely embraced our cause that they carried munitions for our guerillas in their diplomatic car to Tongi. During 1971 wives of virtually all foreign diplomats left Dhaka. Not Jeannette Berthelot. She loved adventure far too much to take refuge in safer places. There were many interesting incidents. On 12 November 1971, a cyclone and tidal wave struck the coastal areas of the then East Pakistan. It left half a million dead. The entire world rushed to the aid of Bangladesh, who had been rendered homeless by the hundreds of thousands. Among other notable visitors was The Pope, who reached the old Dhaka airport and offered solace to the cyclone hit people of the then East Pakistan. East Pakistan with its nearly 80 million people did not have a single helicopter. Helicopters were supplied by foreign governments. Foreign correspondents rushed to East Pakistan and for the first time in its history East Pakistan was put on the map of the world.

A Belgian team had come to Bangladesh and Jeannette Berthelot made an unsuccessful plot to steal their high frequency radio to be handed over to our militant students.

In 1971 the entire Bengalee nation had united as never before in a life and death struggle. The occupation army of Pakistan had started a genocide on 25 March 1971 and by the time the Pakistan army was finished, it had killed 3 million Bengalis and raped 200,000 women and destroyed the infrastructure of the entire country. The economy was totally ravaged.

The Bengalis took up arms and started a heroic fight. The war was joined by the entire population, each according to his or her capacity, and the enemy did not know a moment of peace. On 25 March 1971 through a massive blow the Pakistan army attempted to silence the entire Bengalee nation, who throughout the month of March had risen in a great favour of patriotism. On 25 March at Midnight tanks rolled in the streets of Dhaka and broke the silence of midnight with gunfire from automatic weapons and fired missiles which lit up the Dhaka skies. Two newspapers, with the staff working inside were blown up by fire from tanks. The famous Dhaka university, birthplace of all independence movements, was a particular target of the Pakistan army. They entered the premises of the university and pulled out professors and student leaders and killed them indiscriminately. University staff standing nearby were made to bury the dead and they too were thrown into the pit and killed. There was warfare at the main police lines at Rajarbagh and the police put up a heroic fight but were overpowered by superior fire power.

The Bangladesh war captured the imagination of the world. The world media the print and the electronic highlighted the events in Bangladesh for days and months. Foreign correspondents came clandestinely into Bangladesh for stories. Since I had the good fortune of working in important world capitals as the head of information in Pakistan Embassies, I had known many of those journalists. I used to meet them secretly at grave personal risk and brief them about the events. I was the Director of

Public Relations of the Government of East Pakistan and I had 500 employees throughout East Pakistan. They supplied me with accurate information about the war waged by our guerillas. Thanks to these vivid reports appearing in the world media, a wave of sympathy swept through the globe in favour of Bengalis, victim of brutalities by the Pakistan army.

Of the many voices that rose throughout the world in favour of the Bengalees, one voice that attracted everybody's attention was that of Andre Malraux. At the age of 71 Malraux offered seriously to fight beside our guerillas in our War of Liberation. Those who knew Malraux's past had no difficulty in understanding that it was not an empty gesture. As Malraux has written beautifully in his last great book Antimemoire "I have engaged myself in a combat for, let me say, social justice. Then there was the war in Spain and I went to fight in Spain. Then there was the WAR, the real one. Then came the defeat, and, like many others, I married France." Because she was murdered, humiliated. Because she is the motherland of unhappy courage.

Andre Malraux did not physically fight with our Mukti Bahini but succeeded in rousing world conscience like few others did. This great campaigner, this great warrior for just causes would not rest until the brutal Pakistanis were vanquished. This was the voice of a genuine Freedom fighter, who had fought, throughout his life. He campaigned throughout the world in favour of Bangladesh.

The Government of Bangladesh invited Malraux to pay a visit. It had to be a very special visit. Bangladesh had emerged as an independent, sovereign state, but totally ravaged by the war. In the midst of the ruin and destruction and big pot holes at the airport, Andre Malraux arrived in Dhaka in April 1973. As Chief of Protocol of the Government of Bangladesh I had the great privilege and honour to welcome Andre Malraux along with our Foreign Minister Dr. Kamal Hosain. He was profusely garlanded. He made a speech, which was sheer poetry laced with quotations from Greek and Roman mythology. We wanted to make a special gesture to Malraux. He was lodged at Bangabhaban, an unusual gesture by Bangladesh. In the afternoon I accompanied him to Savar to the martyrs memorial.

Indeed during the four days of Malraux's stay in Bangladesh, I became like his shadow as Chief of Protocol but more importantly as his interpreter from French to Bangla and occasionally English. At Savar Malraux admired the setting sun as the Red and Green flag of Bangladesh fluttered in the wind. A TV team was accompanying Malraux and recording all his activities. He was entertained to a big lunch at the Bangabhaban by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the Prime Minister, with whom he spent one whole morning learning from him his life long struggle for the Bengalis. He also told Malraux how he had galvanized the nation to fight for their independence. Malraux had a quiet lunch with President Abu Sayeed Chowdhury in whose residence he was lodged and spent an occasional morning. Andre Malraux travelled to Chittagong and Rajshahi, where the university honoured him with a doctorate. While flying to these two destinations, he admired the beautiful green countryside, so serene and so lush. In Chittagong the beauty of the hills attracted his special attention and he was entertained by our attractive tribal dancers. Malraux had unending curiosity and I accompanied him to the museum in Rajshahi and he told me that he was fascinated by some of the objects.

Let us return to the youth so dear to Malraux. Andre Malraux visited the Shaheed Minar, which in its simple grandeur stands within the university area. Malraux and I walked at the Shaheed Minar, bare feet and Malraux was pensive. The scene of great struggles by our valiant students, Malraux could not be oblivious to those events. Malraux literally was overjoyed when one day I took him to the Dhaka University for a programme of exchange of views with the students. Malraux was fully alive to the historical role played by the students of Dhaka University starting with the Language Movement of 1952. He asked many questions from the students and was completely in his elements during the meeting with the students. That students of a university could play such a pioneering role in the life of a nation seemed to affect him deeply. Malraux's visit to Bangladesh was rounded off by a press conference at the Bangabhaban, which was telecast live. I realised that I had become a celebrity because I was translating his press conference.

Andre Malraux has been a man of letters, man of action and statesman. Speaking from the Tribune of the Senate in France Andre Malraux declared "The words of genius belong to everybody, and our function is to let everyone know, so that everyone can possess them". As a man of letters Andre Malraux has been a prolific writer. Indeed I had the high privilege of translating into Bangla his very first



Andre Malraux: A champion of humanity

book La Tentation de l'Occident (The temptation of the West), written when he was barely 21. It is a remarkable book and he demonstrates an astonishing degree of maturity. His La Condition Humaine (The Human Condition) is another wonderful book. His last great work Antimemoire is the demonstration of an acute mind which cannot be closed into any easy definition. At the time of departure Andre Malraux gave me two gifts. He autographed for me a photo where he and I are walking side by side at the Shaheed Minar. The other gift is a copy of his Antimemoire, with a beautiful dedication.

Side by side with his great literary merit Andre Malraux was an out and out activist. During the Civil War in Spain in the late thirties he joined the fight on the side of the Republicans. He led an air squadron. In this regard he resembles the famous American author Ernest Hemingway, who also fought in Spain. Hemingway had a passionate love affair with Paris and in his charming book "Moveable Feast" he paid the ultimate tribute to Paris in these words "If you had the privilege to be young, and you had the further privilege to live in Paris, wherever you may go, you will carry Paris with you. For Paris is a moveable feast". It was very natural that Andre Malraux would join her war against Germany to end German occupation of his beloved France. He joined the resistance against Germany beside his mentor Charles de Gaulle. Thus began the extraordinary companionship, without a break, without an interruption for 25 years. Automatically Andre Malraux became a Minister in the Cabinet of de Gaulle, since his return to power in 1958. De Gaulle in his memoir entitled "Hope" wrote "On my right, I have and will always have Andre Malraux. The presence on my side of this genial friend, created for a high destiny, gives me the impression that, by it, I am totally covered."

Andre Malraux remained the Cultural Affairs Minister of De Gaulle until De Gaulle withdrew from the scene in 1969. Andre Malraux continued his fight beside De Gaulle for a full decade. His role is not only of an orator but writer as well. It is that of a Minister, already in the provisional Government, he is without a break from 1 June 1958 to 28 April 1969. Minister of Gen. De Gaulle, many prevail upon it following a small episode. Malraux was the only one to remain in all governments of De Gaulle and only in the government of De Gaulle. Malraux Minister, to start with this was the personality one always saw seated on the right of De Gaulle. It was he who was asked to speak first when he wanted to have views around the table of his government. It was he who exchanged small chits, or whispered in his ears. "The well loved disciple."

The images of these two great men are inseparable. Not only because where destiny had brought them. Their association is physical. In fact he is the "voice of silence". Very frequently Malraux listens at the Council of Ministers and remains silent.

Malraux's views on the state of the world were listened to by De Gaulle with utmost respect and attention. Thus he told of his trip to Canada. Malraux went to inaugurate an exhibition in Montreal, the French city par excellence in Canada. Malraux stated "The immense enthusiasm which surrounds this exhibition and which has welcomed me is not really natural. In Canada there is one single problem: autonomy of Quebec. The reality of autonomy thrusts a dagger to the entire political life. The state of mind of the French Canadians is of a minority which wants to cease to be one. Their anger is so great that they have now the will to become something else than angry men". While Malraux speaks the General demonstrates a total concentration, as if carried by a music whose every shade he savours and which moves him to the core of his soul. And Malraux concluded, France must not be the past of French Canada, but its future."

Minister of the General, yes, but of cultural affairs. He is for action, an concrete matters and on minds of men. His most famous victories were on virgin territories or in areas where his objectives would be attained without too many intermediaries. It was impossible to reform opera or the Comedie Francaise, but he could launch Houses of Culture. To put accent on culture, which is the heritage. And it is Paris, whitened, cleaned, reinstated in its beautiful white

stone. These are the great national monuments from Chambord to Versailles, from Reims to Vincennes, from Louvres to Fontainebleau saved repaired and placed on their pedestal of honour. It is the immense task of assembling the inventory of artistic riches of France. It is the creation of archeological excavation. But Malraux, would he be himself if he had closed himself in the national past? Cultural patrimony is without frontiers. It was necessary to show Joconde in New York, Venus de Milo in Tokyo as it was necessary to bring Tutankhamon or the golden century of Spain or the treasures of Iran. Conservator, restaurator, rouser, orator, intermediary, he used the entire palette of action to publish culture without pedantism but also without condescendence. Publish culture, it was to give the public the taste in the forefront of art. When for example he opened Bouffes the first House of Culture in 1964, he declared, "the only force which allows human being to be as powerful as the force of night, it is a collection of works which have in common a characteristic stupefying and simple, to be works which have escaped death". Malraux's arrival at the joint session of the two Houses of Parliament was an event.

Christiaan Bonnet, the Senator addressing him said, "Mr Minister, thanks to this passionate eloquence and so special, which is a characteristic of your genius, the budgetary allocations of your Ministry is right at the top". France was fortunate to see the birth of a man of the stature of Malraux, who could clearly enunciate the disorders of the century. It belongs to the twentieth century as the two precedent centuries, Victor Hugo and Emile Zola in the nineteenth, Voltaire and Rousseau in the eighteenth, the four other authors, who have found their places in the Pantheon. On the other hand this man, in this time of iron and fire, has never vacillated in his conviction that our humanity was for us a flame, which human folly would not succeed in putting out.

The last remains of Andre Malraux were transferred to its final resting place-Pantheon in Paris in 1996. A moving ceremony was held on that cold wind swept evening at the Pantheon. The entire area was beautifully lit. President Jacques Chirac delivered a very emotional address. He listed the lifetime achievements of Malraux and underlined a life full of activity in many domains including cultural and archeological. He specially underlined his role as an indefatigable fighter for just causes throughout the world. He pointed out his enormous contribution in beautifying Paris by painting the city beautifully white. Then ceremonially he accompanied the body inside the Pantheon as it was lowered in the crypt. Since Victor Hugo and Emile Zola, two great writers of France, Andre Malraux took his place next to those great sons of France. French Senator Alain Peyrefitte in a homage paid at the Senate stated, "Many great writers, many greater than him, will never reach there. Hugo reached there by his self imposed exile in Guernsey, which upheld the hope of the Republic, than by his Contemplations. Zola more so because of his I accuse (l'accuse) than for his Rougon Macquart."

Andre Malraux is the most durable bridge between Bangladesh and France. Our cultural bonds are extremely solid. If the French love their language and culture and continue to make a valiant effort to carry their culture far and wide, the people of Bangladesh by shedding blood for her Bangla, have made the ultimate sacrifice for the establishment of their mother tongue. The Bengalis have proved that like the French, their attachment to their language is deep rooted. The French are rightly proud of their literary heritage. Our Rabindranath Tagore is known throughout the world because of his Nobel Prize in the early twentieth century. Outside of Tagore Bengali language and literature is a veritable storehouse of very brilliant authors, poets and playwrights. Since the birth of Bangladesh in 1971, the language has been carried to the august General Assembly of the United Nations. Bangladesh will have to strive hard to carry her language to the far corners of the world. Like the French we love our food, which is of infinite variety. We will have to carry it to tables around the world like the French.

What binds us permanently to Andre Malraux is of course our War of Liberation. In the history of the people of Bengal this was the event of the last thousand years and more. Indeed as far back our mind can travel, there is no other event of this scope and magnitude. After more than thousand years of repression, here was a people, who rose like phoenix, and in the words of Malraux "with bare hands" wrested Freedom from the hands of the tyrant. And when the entire nation was engaged in a life and death fight, we found the face of a genial friend beside us- Andre Malraux. Years had not succeeded in taking away the youthful vigour of this life long fighter and he declared that he was ready to take up arms for our cause.

As we celebrate the centenary of Andre Malraux, we pay homage to someone not from a faraway land, not certainly a foreigner, but a man who strode through the world like a colossus, never ceasing to take up arms for just causes, because he believed in the best of humanity. Andre Malraux, the Frenchman, internationalist par excellence lives among us and will live forever.

UNESCO, the headquarters of world culture is located in Paris. Andre Malraux during his career had a lot to do with UNESCO. This organisation organised a symposium which was attended by the youth of France and foreigners, youth so close to the heart of Malraux. The presentation by great men of letters followed by question and answer session from the floor turned out to be a very special occasion. Bangladesh has woven a very special bond with UNESCO, for this organisation has declared 21 February as the Mother Language Day throughout the world. What great tribute could there be for the valiant martyrs of our Language Movement in 1952! Thus from a simple occasion, when barefeet, Bengalis of all age group and all professions troop past the Shaheed Minar before sunrise and place flowers at the feet of the Language Martyrs, the same ceremony has been transferred to all the corners of the world.

There was a lunch at the Elysee Palace hosted by President Jacques Chirac. It was an unforgettable occasion where I met Madame Madeleine Malraux, the widow of Malraux and Sophie Vilmorin, who had accompanied Malraux to Bangladesh. Among the guests as Sir Vidiadhar Suraprasad Naipaul and Lady Naipaul. At the lunch we received a paper from the French authorities where we found to our delight that my name was included along with Naipaul as among the ten Great Witnesses of Malraux. It is a matter of deep satisfaction that the great merit of Six Naipaul has been recognised by the Nobel committee and he has received the Nobel Prize for literature for the year 2001. Naipaul born in Trinidad of parents of Indian origin, has been wandering around the world in search of his roots. He has finally found his temporary home in England. There ends the comparison between Naipaul and Nirad Chowdhury, who too settled in England but had his roots firmly in India and more particularly Bangladesh.

Trinidad and the West Indies are inhabited by people of Indo-Pakistan-Bangladesh stock, blacks from Africa and Chinese. Although they have lived there for several generations, they have failed to strike roots. Thus people of Indian origin cling to the religion, habits and culture of their home background.

No wonder that Sir Naipaul finds it so difficult to discover his roots. From a lunch at the Elysee, we dined as the guest of the Foreign Minister at the elegant dining halls of the Foreign Ministry. We attended several seminars including one at the Sorbonne and had a very interesting time throughout the week long stay at the famous hotel Lutetia.

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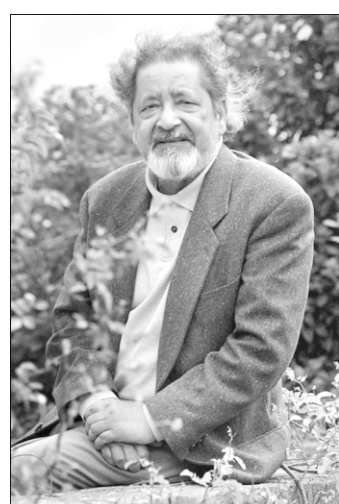
Arshad-uz Zaman is a former ambassador

ESSAY

A Tribute to the Other Parent: The Mother in V. S. Naipaul's A House For Mr. Biswas

There is a difference of more than twenty years between the creative moment of Finding the Centre and the date of publication of A House for Mr. Biswas. But, interestingly, once again in the memoir, as in the 1961 novel, Naipaul focuses primarily on the character of his father and struggles to define for himself and for us the nature of the bond that slowly but surely developed between father and son, writes Rebecca Haque

V. S. Naipaul's 1984 memoir, *Finding the Centre*, consists of two longish essays, one of which is the very illuminating "Prologue to an Autobiography." In this essay, the once reticent author-narrator takes readers into his confidence decisively, deliberately, yet with a degree of detachment. The piece is not, says Naipaul, "an autobiography, a story of a life or deeds done but an account of my literary beginnings and the imaginative promptings of my many-sided background." At times the tone of the essay is markedly anecdotal, with Naipaul sounding like a well-travelled raconteur, but there is much honesty in the personal disclosures. We can benefit from this essay in two ways: firstly, the frank appraisal by an established author of his own creative roots helps us to trace the evolving stages in the growth of an artist; secondly, and more importantly, the reminiscences about Trinidad, his childhood, his family, and particularly his father however brief and selective these reminiscences may be, help to bridge the gulf between fact and fiction. We are allowed access to the complex processes that led to the genesis of *A House for Mr. Biswas*.



Naipaul: Always at the centre of controversy

There is a difference of more than twenty years between the creative moment of *Finding the Centre* and the date of publication of *A House for Mr. Biswas*. But, interestingly, once again in the memoir, as in the 1961 novel, Naipaul focuses primarily on the character of his father and struggles to define for himself and for us the nature of the bond that slowly but surely developed between father and son. Given the somewhat chaotic and nomadic family life in the various houses owned by his mother's family (the Tulsis), and given the sometimes erratic and quixotic moods of his father, it is understandable that Naipaul should be thus haunted by a man little understood or appreciated in his lifetime. The personal essay and the semi-autobiographical novel stand as tributes to his father, and, together, these two works offer to vindicate Seepsad Naipaul.

No such vindication of the other parent is either directly offered or thought to be required. The presence of Naipaul's mother is somewhat nebulous in the "Prologue to an Autobiography," but she is feelingly portrayed and forcefully presented in *A House for Mr. Biswas*. If Mohun Biswas is modelled after the real father Seepsad, then, without doubt, the model for the character of Shama Biswas is Naipaul's own mother. The bond between Shama and her son Anand who is obviously young Naipaul himself deep and uncomplicated, and it requires little overt articulation or justification. Amidst the chaos and the disorder of the extended Tuli family, Shama is perceived by her children as the anchor which provides stability to their own single family unit. In the face of Mohun's repeated rebelliousness against the large Tuli clan, and under repeated threat of homelessness, Shama quietly sustains the idea of home and nurtures in her children a consciousness of their Hindu tradition and their connectedness to that tradition.

However, perception of this element of firmness in the characterization of the mother-figure is not to imply either that Shama herself is fully formed from the outset or totally conscious of her able to delineate the extent of her maternal, familial, and social obligations. Just as the biological and maternal impulses generate instinctive feelings of possession and protection, similarly, many of her defensive measures to ensure the shelter and survival of her husband and brood within the Tuli hierarchy have their origin in an instinctual response to threats of expulsion from habitat and clan. Nevertheless, there is a noticeable psychological growth in Shama Biswas, and this developing maturity is in turn reflected in the subtle shifting of relationships and alliances within the Tuli household as well as within her own nuclear family. The rest of this essay will therefore look closely at Shama Biswas to support the thesis that we can perceive a nascent female bildungsroman in the form and content of *A House for Mr. Biswas* voyage of the female hero, Shama Biswas, intertwined with the obvious and oft-noted voyage of the male hero, Mohun Biswas.

When Naipaul tells us "Prologue to an Autobiography" that, "At the end of 1946, when I was fourteen, my father managed to buy his own house. By that time my childhood was over..." he is not just giving us factual information to corroborate many of the events described in *A House for Mr. Biswas*.

He is marking for us the exact time and place wherein concluded the voyage of his parents; and wherein commenced his own voyage out into the great world waiting to be discovered. The matter-of-fact tone of these lines written by Naipaul in his midlife years camouflages the turbulent emotions felt by the youth in those distant days. Of course, the complex feelings associated with the year (1946), a momentous event (buying the house), and the almost archetypal rite of passage (the end of childhood), are all dramatically and piquantly described in *A House for Mr. Biswas*. The novel opens at the end of 1946 and with an extended description of Mohun Biswas's house in Sikkim Street, Port of Spain, Trinidad. This opening chapter is entitled "prologue," and it functions effectively in introducing us to the protagonists of the story to be narrated, the protagonists being not just Mohun and Shama Biswas but the long-sought and dearly-bought house itself as well.

The actual narrative content of the novel consists of a series of physical journeys undertaken first by Mohun alone, and later, after his marriage, accompanied by Shama and the children, to and from a number of houses owned by the Tulsis at various localities in Trinidad. Nothing is permanent, and life is made up of irregular patterns and make-shift arrangements, until the move to the house in Sikkim Street a few years before Mohun's death gives his family a permanent abode and a permanent address. The narrative is neatly enclosed within the opening "prologue" and closing "epilogue" sequences, thereby imparting to the readers the feeling of having undertaken a circular journey from the present into the past and back to the present. This encapsulating framework has obvious technical advantages: it gives us a superior knowledge and a vantage point akin to the authorial omniscience of the two sequences, and enables us to judge objectively or qualify information provided later in biased or unreliable points of view. In other words, the readers' responses towards the narrative and towards each and every individual within it are deftly controlled and manipulated by the author, the responses thus aroused being a complex interplay of ironic detachment and partisan involvement.

Our initial view and subsequent perspective of Shama is skillfully controlled by the writer. The first few pages of the novel contain unequivocal admiration for this woman, and in these pages Naipaul comes closest to offering a tribute to the tenacious fighting spirit which patiently put up with years of poverty and uncertainty. Naipaul chooses to show us Shama first in her best years, still not financially secure, but nevertheless proud mistress of her own house which she rules with love and authority. For her, this is the journey's end; she has arrived. The conjugal bond has never been stronger than it is now. There is a positive sense of mutual reliance and trust:

[Mr. Biswas] didn't now care to do anything against his wife's wishes. He had grown to accept her judgement and respect her optimism. He trusted her. Since they had moved to the house Shama had learned a new loyalty, to him and to their children; away from her mother and sisters, she was able to express this without shame....

The significant phrase in this passage quoted from the novel's "prologue" is *away from her mother and sisters*, for it is in the periods of residence apart from her own in-laws, the Tulsis, that Shama is able to show tangible evidence of conjugal solidarity. Until Mohun finally realizes the almost impossible dream of acquiring the house on Sikkim Street, such periods of living away from the sprawling, ramshackle, intricately organized family home Hanuman House are precious few and far between.

Significantly, it is by comparing Shama's treatment of her husband when staying with the Tulsis as their dependents at Hanuman House with her attitude towards him when they are living away and on their own that we come to the crux of Shama's dilemma of forging an identity for herself without disrupting or endangering her own social and economic status. Of course, it is to be clearly understood that Shama is neither a feminist nor has her consciousness been raised by more enlightened and liberated women, and it would be unreasonable to expect her to consciously accept or verbalize her inchoate desires. Indeed, she is hardly aware of her own actual status within the rigid and orthodox structure of the Hindu Tuli household even our use of the word "status" is ironic, insofar as it implies recognition of a person's merit and value as an individual human being, because in this context this recognition is denied to a girl-child. If Shama had been born a male, her birth would have been gloriously celebrated by the family and the community; she would have had a privileged and pampered upbringing; and she would have been cherished as a valuable asset of the family. Being a female, however, disqualifies her from receiving more than the bare minimum of education or any other social advantage. And so, while her two brothers attended college and "the best of the food was automatically set aside for them and they were given special brain-feeding meals, of fish in particular," Shama and her sisters were "expected" to live according to the "established pattern" outlined centuries ago and thousands of miles away in the Indian subcontinent.

In *The Middle Passage* trenchant critique of the societies of three Caribbean islands, Trinidad, Jamaica, and Martinique Naipaul has written that the Indians of Trinidad "were able to recreate an India in miniature [with] a complex if rapidly disintegrating caste system among the Hindus..." But "more important than religion was [the] family organization, an enclosing self-sufficient world absorbed with its quarrels and jealousies, as difficult for the outsider to penetrate as for one of its members to escape." In *A House for Mr. Biswas*, Naipaul shows us that Shama's world within the walls of Hanuman House is such an "enclosing" world, and, as the young Tuli daughter, her life and destiny are controlled by the automatic, conniving, dowager Mrs. Tuli. With the thought of her sons' welfare always uppermost in her mind, Mrs. Tuli refuses to invest more than is absolutely necessary in the upkeep of her daughters. Discrimination against the female members especially against those who are deprived of the protection of a powerful male traditional. Socio-cultural conditioning, overt as well as covert, has been so insistent and so pervasive since their infancy that Shama and her sister the victims of this discrimination accept their inferior status within the family organization, and take it to be the law of life. Like her other sisters, Shama is married off by her guardian as early as expediently as possible with a minimum of fuss and expenditure. And, of course, according to the "established pattern," without Shama's own choice or feelings ever being remotely considered as having any bearing upon the matter. She is married to the struggling and impecunious Mohun Biswas because he happens to be readily available and "simply because he was of the proper caste" (97), just as the other daughter called Chinta had been earlier married to the illiterate coconut seller because he also happened to belong to the correct caste." After her marriage Shama is absorbed into the Tuli work force, and she is expected to contribute by her labour towards the cost of maintaining herself and her husband until such time, if it should ever arrive, that the young couple are able to afford to move out of Hanuman House and live on their own. The work of the various dependents living inside this "white, concrete fortress" is strictly regulated:

The daughters and their children swept and washed and cooked and served in the [Tulis] store. The husbands... worked on the Tuli land looked after the Tuli animals and served in the store. In return they were given food shelter and a little money; their children were looked after; and they were treated with respect by people outside because they were connected with the Tuli family. Their names were forgotten; they became Tulsis.

TO BE CONCLUDED IN THE NEXT ISSUE

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