3.0 OBJECTIVES

In the previous unit we analyzed the first part of the novel, noted certain autobiographical parallels and commented on Naipaul's narratorial skill. In this unit we shall examine the second part of the novel, chapter by chapter. You are advised to read the text along with these notes so as to comprehend the fine nuances of the novel. Farukh Dhondy, the well known novelist and playwright based in UK who is associated with BBC channel IV, is making a telefilm based on the novel. If you manage to see the film, the visual impact will add to your appreciation of the novel.

3.1 'AMAZING SCENES'

The first part of the novel ended with Mr Biswas leaving the Hanuman House, determined to find his way in the world and make a living for himself and his family, so as not to be dependent on his in-laws. He had not decided where to go but his unbiten nails and the absence of spasms in his stomach, suggest that the uncertainty about the future did not make him nervous.

The question that you would naturally ask, at this point is, why did Mr Biswas choose to visit Dehuti and Ramchand rather than his brothers or Ajodha and Tara? Before answering this question you must remind yourself exactly why he left Hanuman House. Once you do that, finding an answer to that question becomes easier. It was no use visiting his brothers; they worked on plantations as labourers and would not be able to help him to find work in keeping with his aspirations. Ajodha and Tara did have money and position but their unhelpful attitude on an earlier occasion had been evident. Mr. Biswas had visited them intending to borrow money to build a house for himself but had came away without voicing the request.

Ramchand was a successful man in Mr. Biswas' opinion; he had risen from humble beginnings, had a regular job and had defied social norms to marry a brahmin girl though he came from the lowest social strata. Though Mr Biswas did not say
anything directly, one can safely deduce that such considerations guided the choice of Ramchand. When he actually turned up at Dehuti’s place, the squalor of the imagined comforts surprised him, and he stayed on because there was nowhere else to go. Predicatably, the symptoms of his hysteria came back, the spasms, the bitten nails, an external manifestation of his frustration at not being able to find work.

Finally, he got a job with the *Trinidad Sentinel*, first on a trial and then on a regular basis, at a salary of fifteen dollars a fortnight. Naipaul has based Mr Biswas’ journalistic forays on his own father’s experiences as a reporter of the *Trinidad Guardian*. For instance in *Finding the Centre*, he refers to the time when for some reason his father had to spend the night on a tree, something that is fictionally recreated in the novel. In *Finding the Centre* Naipaul questions his father’s account. He says, “My father had his own adventures. Once, on a rainy night and far from home, his motorcycle skidded off the road and for some reason he had to spend the night up a tree … I understood that the story was exaggerated,” (p.38) The situation is reconstructed more meaningfully in the novel. The friendly editor of the *Trinidad Sentinel*, Mr Burnett whose help launched Mr Biswas’ journalistic career, is based on Mr. MacGowan, the editor of *Trinidad Guardian*, whose guidance turned Seepersad Naipaul into a good journalist. You should read “Prologue to an Autobiography” for Naipaul’s account, albeit sketchy, of the father’s years as a journalist.

Now that he had a steady job, Mr Biswas acquired a status in his family which he did not enjoy earlier. The children at the Hanumant House gave him a magnificent reception when he went there, clamouring for the *Sentinel* dollar tokens which might get them a prize. Shama’s new found respect for him, particularly his position, can be discerned in her admonishment to the children as they clambered on to his lap. “Anand you will get your father’s suit dirty.” (p.329) You should read this section of the chapter along with chapters in the first part in which Shama had adopted a martyred attitude or openly expressed her exasperation at his inability to establish himself financially. This chapter also records the start of a relationship, at times verging on awkwardness, between Mr Biswas and his son Anand. When one reads this along with Naipaul’s references to his father in “Prologue to an Autobiography” one feels that he would have liked the relationship with his father to have developed similarly.

You should note the semi-festive occasion, almost like a family wedding that preceded Mrs Tulsi’s son Owad’s departure to study abroad. The women in their bright clothes and best jewellery came with their children and brought musical instruments with them, which they played till late at night. You can read this as a conscious attempt to blot the racial memory of the squalor and apprehension and tears which would have preceded occasions when their ancestors sailed out of India in very different circumstances. Since the chapter ends with a reference to Mr Biswas’s ill health, it is possible that Naipaul drew upon his own memory of the time he left Trinidad for England. A lifting of the bleakness, a promise of better things to come, are some of the indications in this chapter.

### 3.2 THE NEW REGIME

Naipaul’s father had worked contentedly at *Trinidad Guardian* as long as MacGowan edited it. Recollecting the rapport between the two men, Naipaul says:

… a relationship was established between the two men. And my father— at a starting salary of four dollars a week — began to do reporting. There the voice was his own, the knowledge of Trinidadian life was his own; and the zest — for news, for the drama of everyday life, for human oddity — the zest for looking with which MacGowan infected him became real. He developed fast. (*Finding the Centre*, p. 69-70)
MacGowan increased the circulation of the paper but ran into trouble with its management. Some of the directors who had local business interests felt that he was harming those. Naipaul recollects, “MacGowan, fresh from the depression in England, wanted to run a ‘Buy British’ campaign; the Chairman of the Guardian Directors owned a trading company which dealt in American goods.” (Finding the Centre, p.71) To put it in a nutshell, MacGowan’s priorities were journalistic and at times they clashed with the business interests of the management of the paper.

Things came to a head when MacGowan ran stories in the Guardian about “mad bats” that flew about in the day light and he sent cables to the The Times and New York Times about vampire bats rampant in Trinidad and responsible for paralytic rabies. The story was based on facts. A local doctor had established the link between bats and paralytic rabies and was experimenting with a vaccine for the same. His work was soon to be acknowledged in textbooks of tropical medicine. But some of the directors had invested in tourist ventures which suffered because of this exposure and the Guardian Chairman who said he had never heard of anyone in Trinidad dying from a bat bite, decided that MacGowan must go. Since MacGowan had a contractual job and could not be sacked, he was harrassed into leaving. This went on for some time and had an impact on the Guardian and its employees, especially those close to MacGowan like Naipaul’s father. Finally MacGowan had to leave and predictably Naipaul’s father lost his job after some time.

Years later, Naipaul could talk about it objectively and say, “MacGowan left. My father stayed behind. He became disturbed, fell ill, lost his job, and was idle and dependent for four years … in his clipping book, an old estate wages ledger, I came upon his relics of his heroic and hopeful time with MacGowan.” (Finding the Centre, p. 72)

“This was two years after he had written about Bogart and the life of the street in Trinidad in his first three works and was looking for fresh material. It occurred to Naipaul that he could reconstruct the life of someone like his own father on a fictional level. This was the genesis of A House for Mr Biswas which took three years to write and Naipaul considered it very much his father’s book.

The purpose of this digression from the novel is to establish the strong autobiographical parallels in this chapter which you should not miss when you read about the relationship between Mr Biswas and Mr Burnett which came to an abrupt end when Mr Burnett left Trinidad. Mr Burnett was possibly the only person whom Mr Biswas could relate to and share his thoughts and aspirations with, knowing there would be understanding and the right kind of advice. Also Mr Burnett was Mr Biswas’ only link with the world outside Trinidad, a world that he longed to visit and explore but could not.

This chapter also traces the growth of a new bond between Mr Biswas and his son Anand as “each saw the other as weak and vulnerable, and each felt a responsibility for the other, a responsibility which … was disguised by exaggerated authority on the one side, exaggerated respect on the other.” (A House for Mr Biswas p.374). Anyone familiar with Naipaul’s style would deduce that it is part truth and part fiction, highlighting the closeness to his father that Naipaul was denied as an adolescent, something that was not possible because of Seepersad’s nervous ailments. You should be able to make out the contempt in Naipaul’s tone as he details the futility of the mechanical system of education that Anand was subjected to and which Naipaul must have been caught in, himself.

Last but not the least, the way in which Seth forcibly parks his lorries in the shed at the side of the house, uprooting the rose plants, can be read as trampling on Mr Biswas’ finer feelings by Seth who stands for insensitivity and callousness that Naipaul associated with Trinidad.
Indentured immigrants generally dreamt of coming back to India after completing the bond period. The idea of settling down in an alien country across the *kala pani* did not appeal to them. Most of them wanted to go back to their village and lead a comfortable life now that they had some money. This posed various practical problems. The money saved was inadequate for the return passage of the entire family; links with the village had snapped, land and house had been taken over by others who were not willing to vacate. This desire to go back to India diminished with the coming generations. So, with the death of Pandit Tulsi in the novel, the chances of the family returning to India diminished. In Naipaul’s own family, after his grandfather’s death, his mother was almost sent back to India with her children. The plans had to be abandoned when Naipaul’s father could not be found at the time of departure.

An extended family runs smoothly as long as it has an effective head to supervise everything. When the head is old or ill, generally losing a grip over the family, disintegration sets in. You would notice this in the chaotic situation in the Tulsi family with Mrs Tulsi confined to the bed. Seth, who had been her right hand man previously, was now living separately with his family, the disagreement between them having already turned to open war. Naipaul tells the reader, “The cause of the quarrel remained obscure, each side accusing the other of ingratitude and treachery.” (p. 391) and you realize that the cause did not matter, it was the growing rift between the two sides which was inevitable in the given circumstances. However all this did not weaken the bond between Seth’s wife and the Tulsis.

Without a manager, the Tulsi household drifted like a rudderless ship. Very skilfully Naipaul conveys the prevailing chaos and dereliction. He refers to the lack of authority in the sugarcane fields with the crop season at hand and the acute shortage of provisions. He mentions economising measures like using maize flour from the crop grown on the estate, making coconut oil instead of buying it and looking for all kinds of food substitutes, some of them desperate like Mrs Tulsi’s order to the widows to experiment with cooking meals with birds’ nests.

The move to the Shorthills was doomed from the beginning. Even as the grandiose plans of becoming rich quickly by dairy farming, rearing sheep etc. are unfolded you know that nothing will come out of them. One could side with Mr Biswas for making fun of such visions. Nothing that the Tulsi widows tried their hands at, worked, not even the shack which was set up to sell coca cola, cakes, oranges, and avocado pears and later rum to American soldiers. There is no evidence in Naipaul’s autobiographical writings that his mother’s family went through this phase of destitution, so one can safely deduce that this was imaginary, possibly Naipaul’s way of getting back at his mother’s family for dominating his father. He refers to his father’s resentment of his in-laws in *Finding the Centre*. To quote, “My father, when I got to know him, was full of rage against his mother’s family.” (p. 75)

Life at Shorthills was bleak and Naipaul’s description of it has traces of black humour of the kind later perfected by Salman Rushdie. Let us look at a passage describing an occasion when the car meant to transport the children to school broke down and the driver, who knew nothing about cars, enlisted their help.

Like ants around a dead cockroach the children surrounded the car (the dark girls in their dark blue uniforms) and pushed and pulled. Sometimes they pushed for more than a mile. Sometimes they pushed the car to the top of a hill, jumped aside as it rolled down, heard it start, raced after it, the driver...
urging them to hurry, sprang inside three at a time ... Sometimes the car got
into Port of Spain with one side of the bonnet up and a child on the wing,
operating a pump of some sort. Sometimes the car didn't go to Port of Spain
at all. This pleased the children more than the driver: he had not packed
lunch.

The atmosphere at Shorthills was not particularly cordial and Mr Biswas hardly saw
his own children. He noticed that there was no affection between them and Anand
was ashamed of his sisters as he considered them weak. Mr Biswas decided it was
time for him to move and kept his eyes open for a suitable site. You might have
noticed that the trope of travel recurs in Naipaul’s fiction and non-fiction. In the latter
he likes to project himself as the perennial wanderer without a fixed home. In A
House for Mr Biswas moving from one house to another serves a dual purpose. On a
general level it suggests the homeless status of the indentured immigrant and a
yearning for a home of one’s own in the literal as well as metaphorical sense.
Interpreted autobiographically, it seems to have originated from Naipaul’s early
memories when he had to move along with his family as his father changed jobs.

Finally Mr Biswas found the site he wanted and had a house constructed. The
process is described in great detail along with the furniture that he acquired for the
new house. But an attempt to have a hill on fire close to their own backyard set the
house on fire and once again Mr Biswas was left homeless.

In this chapter one notices that Anand is growing up. His ransacking of Shama’s
dressing table drawers can be compared to Naipaul’s reference to the contents of the
drawers of his own father’s desk. One can discern a growing sense of detachment in
Anand, an unwillingness to conform, traits that Naipaul often associates with himself.

3.4 AMONG THE READERS AND LEARNERS

“Among the Readers and Learner” opens with another move by Mr Biswas, this time
to Port of Spain. Mrs Tulsi’s house there had fallen vacant and he was offered two
rooms in it. He had to share the house with the Tuttes, Govind’s family and Basdai,
a widow. Two items of furniture had been acquired – the Slumberking bed and
Théophile’s bookcase, symbols of material possessions, but Mr Biswas was still
without a house of his own, and by implication, far from settled in life.

The lack of privacy, the clutter, the impermanence about their life in the house in
general did not deter Shama from trying to make it a home. The glass cabinet
ordered by her suggests a pathetic yearning for elegance which was doomed from the
beginning. Life in this overcrowded house was far from smooth. Without Mrs
Tulsi’s harmonizing presence, there were squabbles and petty jealousies among the
sisters. In this hostile atmosphere, Mr Biswas’ indigestion started bothering him
again and the children were afflicted by various nervous ailments. Mr Biswas
managed to establish some rapport with his children as he spoke to them of his own
childhood. He was disgruntled with everything, as Naipaul’s father would have been
with his creativity thwarted and no appreciation or encouragement from his
colleagues or family.

The chapter hints at a changing social order in which some people managed to make
a lot of money while others became poorer. The means was not always honest.
Govind made a lot of money driving a taxi and his son Vidiadhar said at school that
his father worked for the Americans. The value system was changing and those who
had recently acquired money were reluctant to reveal their methods in an attempt to
appear more respectable. Mr Biswas did not join the rat race but slowly he acquired
power and status in the Sentinel. He became the paper's special investigator and his recommendations entitled persons to be treated as "Deserving Destitutes" to benefit from a fund set up by the Sentinel management. You will notice in this a record of the growing power of the English language press in a developing country. Quite evidently the written word was treated with high respect.

You should also note in this chapter a complex relationship developing between the two cousins Anand and Vidiadhar. Since Naipaul won the Trinidad government scholarship to study abroad, one can deduce that there was envy and heartburn in the family, feelings of rivalry among cousins of the same age. Anand was the more sensitive of the two and it is easy to see the young Naipaul in him, keen to succeed and get out of Trinidad. However, one need not stretch the similarities between the two; Anand is also the stereotypical second generation young immigrant who has no attachment to the country of his parents' origin or the country they migrated to under some pressure, but dreams of affluence in another country. The exhibition examination in the novel brings out the desperation of such dreams, not just among the young but their parents as well.

The mention of the death of Bipti, Mr Biswas' mother, in this chapter, brings to one's mind the death of Raghu his father, earlier in the novel. There is no personal grief, only dutiful mourning and mechanical observance of funeral rites. Note the key sentence: "He (Mr Biswas) might have been attending the funeral of a stranger ... He longed to feel grief. He was surprised only by jealousy." (p.480) One is reminded of Meursault, the protagonist of Albert Camus' The Outsider (1942) whose sense of alienation makes him react to his mother's death in much the same way. What hurt Mr. Biswas deeply was the disrespect shown by the doctor to Bipti's body before issuing the death certificate. One can visualize a similar scene in an Indian village or small town, sometimes even big hospitals in metropolitan cities when relatives of the dead are not assertive or affluent.

As has been said before, Mr Biswas's literary aspirations like those of Seepersad Naipaul, remained unfulfilled, something that he possibly mentioned to his son. As Mr Biswas tried to create a story from his present circumstances, Naipaul churned his Caribbean memory in his first three books of fiction, falling back on Hat and Bogart who were his neighbours in Port of Spain. The chapter marks the end of a phase in Anand's life as he joins college, something that his parents had always dreamed of.

3.5 THE VOID

As you start reading this chapter entitled "The Void", you gradually become aware of Mr Biswas's unconsciously restrictive presence in Anand's life, not allowing him to enjoy the freedom that comes with admission in college.

The metaphor of the house with its elusive promise of security and stability continues, though Mr Biswas's conscious distancing of himself from houses ["he had grown to look upon houses as things that concerned other people" (p.494)] indicated a recognition that he could never own a house. The loss of such a personal vision took away something vital from his life. "He sank into despair as into the void which, in his imagining, had always stood for the life he had yet to live." (p.495) In short without a house or hope of acquiring one, life did not seem worth living.

His "revivification" to borrow a word from the text, came with a job as the Community Welfare Officer that gave him a high salary and fair amount of power. The mood continued as Mr Biswas went for a holiday to the seaside at Sans Souci with his family in his colleague Miss Logie's car. He had a nice time there despite Miss Logie's condescending attitude, and the holiday acquired a dreamlike quality
when recalled later in their present congested and unfriendly environs. Mr Biswas was slowly getting to be a gentleman and had a suit made in keeping with his newly acquired status. They bought a new car, much to the chagrin of the other Tulsi daughters and their families. As Naipaul describes the trip to Balandra undertaken by Mr Biswas and his family in their own car, he conveys the idea that the landscape did not interest the family as much as the ownership of a car and the novelty of travelling in it.

Disruptive forces had become a part of Mr Biswas' life and they overtook him again when his preoccupations with new acquisitions had made him almost forget them. Owad, Mrs Tulsi's younger son was returning from England and room had to be made for him. The house had to be renovated as well. So, Mr Biswas was shunted off to a room in a tenement, a dislocation he resented and blamed Mrs Tulsi for.

The alternative accommodation with its unpainted, grey-black, rotting wooden walls and the "naked galvanized roof" without a proper ceiling was like the barracks which provided shelter to indentured immigrants when they first came to work on the plantations. To add insult to injury there was no electricity. Mr Biswas fell into confusion and dismay. "Where would the furniture go? Where would they sleep, cook, wash? Where would the children study?" The answers did not matter; there was no choice. The immigrant status of the protagonist reflects the irony of the situation. As in the case of the other houses in the novel, the room in the tenement is described in detail, emphasizing the demeaning nature of the accommodation offered. Mr Biswas had saved some money in anticipation of a crisis but six hundred and twenty dollars would not help him buy a house.

Ultimately they were allowed to move back to the old house after the renovations were over and more importantly, Owad had come. However, Mr Biswas was given only one room for himself, his family and furniture. This action makes Mrs Tulsi the prototype of the colonizer/planter who could shift dependents when and where convenient.

Towards the end of the chapter changes in the social set up of Trinidad are hinted at. The description of the Tulsi store suggests degeneration and after talking about Seth's wildness and the punishment, Naipaul states clearly, "neither Seth nor the Tulsis were as important in Arwacas as they had been." (p.530) The Sindhis who had taken over the shop next door, were definitely not indentured immigrants. They were petty traders who might have migrated recently from India, something that is hinted at by the way they played "mournful Indian film songs" (p. 530) as if to remind themselves of the mother country. Mr Biswas had survived another move though the prospect of having his own house now seemed even more remote.

3.6 THE REVOLUTION

This chapter "The Revolution" starts with a festive mood pervading the house where Mrs Tulsi was living, in anticipation of Owad's homecoming. "It was like an old Hanuman house festival." (p.533) Naipaul tells the reader that there had been nothing like it since Owad's departure for England. One way of reading the effusive welcome is treating it as a tribute to colonial education, specially a professional one, in the former colonies. Over the years the adulation has waned but in the fifties and sixties it was at its peak. Also, to be noted is the boost that it gave to the status of the Tulsi family which had been steadily going down as other families made more money and asserted themselves like the Sindhi family next door.
To come back to Owad, his homecoming was as dramatic as anticipated. With his Robert Taylor moustache which was possibly the fashion in England at that time and partly an attempt to appear grown up, as well as his hefty appearance, Owad made his presence felt in his family. His behaviour, verging on pomposity, was in keeping with the image that he tried to project and it was evident that he was the new head of the family despite the fact that his elder brother Shekhar was living in the same town. In his new role he could afford to ignore Seth and be casual towards Mr Biswas.

As a discriminating reader, you realize very soon what a fraud Owad was and how parochial he could get. It is not clear whether he was a good doctor or not. What comes across is his boasting about eminent persons he met in England (mainly Indians) and got the better of. He specially targeted Indians from India who were abominable in every way, he felt. Apart from the humorous side of Owad's description of life in England and Indians who had gone there to study, the irony of the situation is to be noted if one takes into account Naipaul's views on Indians as expressed in *An Area of Darkness*.

In the 1930s and 40s communism was fashionable among students in English universities in the wake of the Revolution in Russia. In fact many veteran Marxists in India had first received their initiation in the west. With Owad, Marxism was clearly a fad rather than an ideal or a set of beliefs. This is evident from the way in which Naipaul describes Owad's fascination with everything Russian, starting from the achievements of the Red Army to anything connected with Russia, even a Russian name. This, juxtaposed with Mr Biswas' deliberated mockery of Russian names gives a comic tinge to the hostility expressed in their word slinging. Owad considered Mr Biswas little more than a hanger on, the latter firmly believed that, given the same opportunities, he would have achieved much more.

The inevitability of Anand's encounter with Owad strikes the reader even before it actually takes place. I am sure you feel sorry for Anand after he is humiliated by Owad. Owad is the stereotypical brown sahib who tried to project a patriotic image with standards borrowed from the west. Would you have apologized to Owad if you had been in Anand's place? Possibly not, but times are different now and Mr Biswas' semi-dependent status makes things awkward for his son as well and Shama despite her great anguish had to make her son apologize to Owad as she realized it would be impossible for them to continue living in that house otherwise.

Mr Biswas was humiliated by Owad as well, and when he refused to compromise, Mrs Tulsi gave him notice and he had to start looking for another house. The two storeyed house on Sikkim Street that the solicitor's clerk proposed to sell him with its vines of Morning Glory seemed attractive but inaccessible, till a turn of fortune made it possible for him to think of buying it. Shama, who might have noticed the gross flaws in the construction of the house, only had a fleeting glimpse of it from their moving car and the sales deed was finalized. Mr Biswas was firmly convinced that his would be a home without the intrusive presence of the Tulsis. Of course the conviction wore off with each successive visit to the house as necessary repairs had to be undertaken before they could move in. How they settled down in the house on Sikkim Street and got used to its irregularities will be taken up in the next section.

### 3.7 COMING HOME

What had seemed the ideal house to Mr Biswas at night, revealed itself to be far from it as he took his family to it one afternoon. The elusive ideal house/home was not meant for the wanderer/immigrant, even after a lifetime of searching. Only
something far less, the shadow of a dream. As in the case of the other houses in the novel, this one is described in details, especially the flaws, which surfaced as they started living in it. Some were repaired but it was impossible to correct all of them and soon they decided not to talk about the flaws. Their ancestors had lived in barracks where conditions had been worse. Presumably, they could live in this defective house.

The elderly Indian next door with his solid, well-constructed house does not really serve as a contrast that might be the initial impression. He had not always lived in such a well-built house. The key sentence, “The past lay in the shed at the back of his house, in the ruinous wooden houses in the street.” (p.577-8) suggests that the old Indian had risen from humble beginnings and others around them were still struggling. It implies that Mr Biswas should not have any regrets about the house, there was still a future to look forward to.

Over a period of time Mr Biswas and his family not only got used to the house on Sikkim Street but started appreciating it as relatives from the extended Tulsi family like the Tuttles visited them and approved of the house. Such approval added value to the house and ironically, “Soon it seemed to the children that they had never lived anywhere but in the tall square house in Sikkim Street.” (p.581) The sentence that follows is even more ironic. To quote, “From now their lives would be ordered, their memories coherent.” (p.581) This statement is contradicted by what Naipaul says about his own childhood in “Prologue to an Autobiography”;

Disorder within, disorder without. Only my school life was ordered; anything that had happened there I could date at once. But my family life — my life at home or my life in the house, in the street was jumbled, without sequence.

(Naipaul, Finding the Centre, 40-1)

This is one of the instances of contradiction that you will find throughout Naipaul’s work and should learn to recognize as characteristic of his style.

The chapter ends on a positive note, indicating the human capacity to adjust to adverse circumstances and making life bearable, even happy. Slowly Mr Biswas settled down in the house on Sikkim Street, specially after he had called the solicitor’s clerk all the names he wanted to and got the the bitterness out of his system. The discovery of the extra space in the deed that was twelve feet away from the fence made him feel that the deal had been worthwhile and his love for gardening was once again reawakened. The laburnum tree planted by him “... gave the house a romantic aura, softened the tall graceless lines, and provided some shelter from the afternoon sun.” (p.584) This was the closest Mr Biswas could get to his dream house and he made the best of it. This was the right house for Mr Biswas. It had put an end to his wanderings and granted stability to his life. The immigrant had finally come “home”.

3.8 THE EPILOGUE

The Epilogue, short when compared to the chapter preceding it, attempts to round off the happenings in the novel, tying up loose ends. You get to know what Owad and Shekhar were doing though you might just be casually interested in their affairs. You learn that after the abolition of the Social Welfare Department Mr Biswas went back to the Sentinel. Was that a comedown for him? Monetarily yes, but Mr Biswas found it stimulating to work as a journalist and the only thing that depressed him was the debt of four thousand dollars that he had incurred because of the house, specially in the nights when he brooded over it, feeling that time was flying by and disaster was looming over him, “devouring his life” (p.586)
The description of his life and career makes it clear that both were on the decline, and the first heart attack came as a surprise to him though the reader had expected something of the sort.

If you are reading the book from the psychoanalytical angle, the Epilogue will provide clues about Naipaul's relationship with his own father who died when he was studying in England. One detects traces of guilt in the way Naipaul talks of Anand's cold response to his father's letters, specially Shama's letter informing him of the seriousness of Mr Biswas' illness. The difference in the ways in which Anand and Savi react to Shama's letter, emphasizes the point. To quote;

She wrote to Anand and Savi. Savi answered in about a fortnight. She was returning as soon as possible. Anand wrote a strange, maudlin, useless letter. (p.588)

Savi's return and her new job at a big salary made Mr Biswas' last days happy so that the novel, though it ends with Mrs Biswas' death, suggests continuity through the daughter rather than the son, a point which should be of interest to feminist critics. On the whole the women in the novel, Mrs Tulsi, Shama and Savi among others, are more resilient and stronger than the men, something possibly based on Naipaul's observations in his own family when his father did not have a job but his mother managed to run the family.

3.9 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, I gave you a chapter-wise analysis of the second part of the novel, including the Epilogue. Autobiographical parallels and contradictions were also pointed out. The chapter by chapter analysis of the text in this unit and the preceding one should not be treated as exhaustive. Read in conjunction with the novel it should trigger off your own line of thinking and help you to critique the text, something that would be helped by the broad guidelines in the next two units.

3.10 GLOSSARY

Narratorial skill: Devices used by an author to enhance the structure and content of a narrative or mode of presentation.

Racial memory: Deep rooted memory, generally of a traumatic experience, of a group of people, that is transmitted to the generations to come and finds a voice in literature/art produced by them.

3.11 QUESTIONS

1. Why did Mr Biswas choose to visit Dehuti and Ramchand rather than his brothers or Ajoba and Tara when he left Hanuman House?

2. How did he get a job with the Trinidad Sentinel? What difference did it make to his status in the family? How far can this be compared to Seepersad Naipaul's journalistic career?
3. Do you think that the house on Sikkim Street is the ideal house Mr Biswas had been looking for? Give reasons for your answer.

3.12 SUGGESTED READINGS

Naipaul, V.S. *The Middle Passage*. Andre Deutsch, 1962