

## An Investigation of Cultural Multifariousness and in V.S. Naipaul's *Half a Life*

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### Abstract:

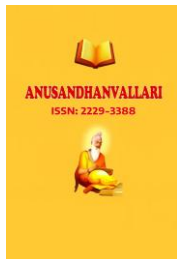
This paper explores the reflections of cultural multifariousness in Naipaul's *Half a Life*. Naipaul investigates many racial groups, social strata, colonies, and empires. A typical colonial character in *Half a Life*, Willie Chandran is perplexed by the plural but unequal society he was brought up in. To go away from the embarrassment his parents' union had brought him, Willie considers making his getaway to a far-off place. A significant portion of the novel is with Willie's journey to London and then, later, Africa in pursuit of a peaceful environment. With a hopeful note, the novel is concluded. Willie realises that he has spent his entire life running away from one location and culture to another. With the next half of his life, he hopes to begin a new life. The existential predicament of the hybrid subject, uprooted and deracinated but frantically looking for similarities to his own circumstances, is the subject of *Half a Life*. In the process, he confirms that he may find a place to rest in the journey of homelessness. The title of the novel refers to the novel's overarching concern: persons stuck during unexplored migration pathways; caught amid history, ambition, and love; and caught in the flux of non-belonging and lack of self-knowledge. This is true of Willie's in-between, half, and hybrid existence.

**Keywords:** History, Culture, Homelessness, Identity, Alienation, Exile

V.S. Naipaul holds a unique place in the world of literature as an expatriate author and a divisive critic of imperialism. He has demonstrated exceptional skill in managing a wide range of literary works, including essays, short tales, autobiographies, fiction, travel, and journalistic writing. His fictional universe employs the world's ethnicities, traditions, and civilisations while revealing a critical eye towards it. Along with a sense of dislocation, alienation, exile, homecoming, and the mystery of surviving as an individual and as a society in the residue of colonial and postcolonial eras, he has skilfully portrayed the theme of a desire for identity. Naipaul's works portray people and society as they are impacted by the chaos and degradation that permeate their cultures.

The lives of people of mixed descent in Portugal, Africa, India, and England are examined in *Half a Life*, along with their struggle to define who they are. Naipaul defined exile as the feeling of unpredictability and anxiety that comes with leading a half-life. In the novel, three narrators tell the story in three different sections: the first takes place in India, where a father's decisions and attitudes have a big impact on his son's life; the second takes place in London, where the narrator faces the challenges of starting a writing career; and the third takes place in Portuguese-Africa, where the narrator depicts the ambivalences of half a life, i.e., Willie Somerset Chandran, the main character, is the son of a Harijan mother and a Brahmin father, and they record his life.

There are several fascinating side trips from England to Africa and other places in *Half a Life*. Its protagonist and plot both float with the chaos in post-colonial England and Africa, but Willie never becomes a simplistic figure; instead, he keeps floating with his fate. A tale of one man's journey from childhood to middle



age, it seems to be a powerful tale about the turbulence of modern history, the death of old injustices and the rise of new illusions, and their spiritual legacy of homelessness and dislocation. He is a sad man with half a life left and probably more peripheries to visit along the way.

In the first scene of *Half a Life*, Willie asks his father where his Anglo-Indian given name came from. He is experimenting with multiculturalism for the first time. The question prompts him to look for his Anglo-Indian hybrid ancestry. He lives and travels to England, continents of Africa and India. He eventually gives up on finding a sense of belonging after living on these two radically different continents and feeling alienated in each. The largely autobiographical novel skilfully captures the half-agony of the exiles. They integrate into the new country, culture, and customs while retaining as much of their own as they can by letting go of their sense of alienation. Willie has to unlearn his prior knowledge because the story is set in three different locations.

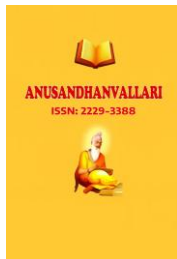
Willie faces the challenges that an immigrant in a new location is expected to face. Despite these challenges, he realises that assimilating into the global village is the new way of life in the modern period. As a man confused by his background in a plural but unequal society, Willie embodies the archetypal colonial personality. The caste system in India is clarified by Naipaul. There has always been serious concern surrounding the identification problem. Willie's ongoing seclusion from Africa, England, India, and Germany to recover and validate his identity is also depicted in *Half a Life*. Naipaul returns after a long absence with a novel in which the world citizen is the main character. The work gives the reader a peek of its many settings as they accompany the protagonist on their journey. The novel follows the lives of three generations and is set in three different places. The action of the novel starts in India after freedom, moves to London, and ends in Africa before independence.

Because of their colonial background, all of Naipaul's protagonists travel to Imperial nation. In the first part, which takes place in India, a father's sacrifice has a significant impact on the life of his children. The challenges the son faces when he starts a writing career in London are the subject of the second portion. The uncertainty of people leading half-lives under colonial control is revealed in the third installment, which is set in Portuguese Africa.

Willie inherited the ethnic diversity of his father. Due to his father's name choice and his birth, he is a worldwide citizen. Through his father Chandran's storytelling, Willie learns about his roots, culture, heritage, and family history. He was still unable to understand and come to terms with the second name, though. He is aware that the well-known English writer Somerset Maugham, who came to Willie's town in the years before independence, is the source of his second name. Chandran thinks his son's name ought to be combined with the great name. Willie consequently just has a "half-name."

In *Half a Life*, Willie struggles to identify with a particular culture and looks for his roots. He is enmeshed in the conflict between his untouchable mother and his Brahmin father as an Indian descendent in the 1930s. Without giving the repercussions much thought, Willie decides to wed an untouchable woman from the lower class. He is driven to contribute to the Gandhian cause. For three generations, the Chandran family has been both a part of and excluded from India's caste system. As a young college student, Willie's father, a high-caste Brahmin, was an outsider who constantly defied the rules established by both his father and the university. Willie's grandfather, who worked as a secretary in the maharaja's palace, wanted his grandson to marry a schoolmaster's daughter and carry on the high caste way of life.

Willie's father was determined to rebel against them. He claims that his rebellion was spurred by disdain for the laws set by those in authority over him rather than by a conscious motive. He so marries the first low-caste girl he meets at school to live a life of sacrifice, in his own words, despite his father's disapproval and at the risk of losing his scholarship to study medicine. After leaving a life of high caste, Chandran marries a woman of a lower caste. Genuine motivation for such an attempt is scarce. Chandran's sacrifice, meanwhile,



cannot be entirely revoked. Inspired by Gandhi, he follows the road of cultural pluralism. He is a grassroots example of cultural diversity since he opposes the caste system.

Surprisingly, Chandran's disobedient and rebellious attitude towards the caste system led him to get more interested in politics. A march and protest the Maharaja state follow his legal battle with the high castes, who make up a case against him. He gradually changes into a "holy man," fighting for the "untouchables" caste. He simultaneously becomes the champion of the untouchables. It takes a certain amount of hypocrisy to be a devout man. He does not understand what sacrifice really is. He acknowledges that he has become a hero because of the people around him. The heroic persona he adopted and the reputation he gained were not motivated by any political goal. The following sentences make fun of Chandran's goal. He helps to abolish the caste system, but his intentions are not sincere. It makes sense for Chandran to acknowledge that his actions were not intentional. The nation's current setup has given him this opportunity. One obstacle to fostering cultural pluralism in India is the caste system. People are categorised based on their caste. They are not given the chance to improve their social status beyond their caste. One of the core human rights is being violated by this. India maintains a caste system despite its cultural diversity.

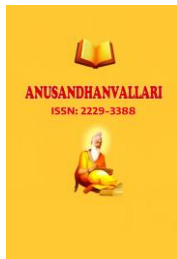
Throughout the novel, Chandran experiences heartbreak due to the harsh conduct of Indian culture. Even though Chandran supports cultural variety, his dishonesty cannot be justified. He gained a great deal of fame and respect among a select group of sensible and learnt people for his decision to marry a girl from a lower caste in violation of social norms and in line with Gandhi's teachings. "...even though he gains a reputation in 'certain intellectual circles' and is praised by international news outlets for his brave stance" (31). But after a few days, his determination to challenge the system weakens. It faces fierce rivalry and opposition from the caste system. It tells the story of a regular person who wants to alter society but is compelled to follow the phoney and deceptive socioeconomic system.

Chandran never leads a tranquil life after marrying a woman from a lower caste, even though he is a superior leader in the cultural variety. As a result of his marriage to a woman from a lower caste and his empathy for those from lower castes, he gradually grows embarrassed. Like Gandhi, he takes an oath promising to maintain celibate after marriage. This is not done, though, and Willie and Sarojini are the outcome of the union. The children's names are kept after much debate. In honour of a female poet connected to the Indian independence movement, he gave his daughter the name Sarojini. As the girl gets older, the father becomes distasteful of her because he perceives a mark of low rank in her features. In addition, he becomes depressed and ashamed of his low-caste daughter because she looks a lot like her mother.

Willie and his mother get along well and have a respectable connection. Since he knows that his father has made her the victim of the situation, he remains by her side. But he gradually loses that regard as he discovers that his mother and maternal uncle are both uneducated. The personification of cultural diversity is Willie. His respect for his mother is based on her expertise. He leaves his mother and her family when he learns they are uneducated. He is constantly searching for ways to improve the state of society. He tries to hide every facet of his family that makes him feel ashamed and embarrassed and to escape modern society.

Willie starts to deny his own existence and construct a new one for himself in his fictional world. He feels ashamed and degraded by his father's opinions. He has a strong dislike and disdain for his father throughout the story. The family has a half-status in society because of this. His son is cursed because his father made the mistake of marrying a lowborn woman. As the son of a low-caste woman, Willie is not accepted by the Brahmin community and, as a half-Brahmin, finds it difficult to communicate with the low-caste. He disregards his parents' authority because he is frustrated by society's rejection of him.

Willie subtly compares a fictional figure who offers his own two children as sacrifices to the devil to his father's secret shame. He uses his stories to vent his anger at his father. He hates the strange and ridiculous



idea of a life of sacrifice that his father had. His father, who is married to a low-class family girl, claims to lead a selfless life. He opposes racism as well as Brahmanism. He never accepts his father's seeming selflessness. He and his father are involved in a literary contest. In his writings, he disparaged Chandran's selfless existence. Willie writes a variety of pieces and gets great feedback from his instructors. On the other hand, it makes his father angry. Despite the stories' lack of clarity about Willie's true emotions, they provide him a chance to consider who he is and how he feels.

Willie goes to a Christian school run by Canadians. He wanted to become a Canadian citizen and a Christian missionary. He sees himself as a young Canadian man with access to all the conveniences that citizens of a First World nation enjoy. He leaves the school after realising the missionaries' imperialist perspective. He is accepting of different faiths. He is depressed, too, when he learns that his own religion is being disparaged. Until he realises the repercussions, he blindly accepts the Canadian mission schooling. He has to make a tough decision after witnessing insults to his own culture, beliefs, and God. He never, however, openly shows his appreciation for the culture of his home country. Nonetheless, the act guarantees that culture is engrained in its followers' blood. Cultural identity acts as a unifying factor when it is in danger.

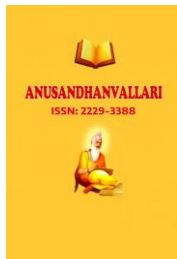
Willie learns the missionaries' real intentions. He acknowledges that the goal of missionaries is to win people over to Christianity. He realises that they are destroying the native religion. The horrific and terrible incident gives Willie a renewed respect for his own faith and culture. Because of his education in European history, literature, music, and language, he feels cut off from his own culture. He never received a thorough Hindu education. Nonetheless, his parents' multiculturalism causes him to struggle with a fixed identity.

After accepting the scholarship, Willie moves to London in pursuit of a better life. Disillusioned with his school, his parents, and his future, he enrolls in a London-based college of education for older students. He starts writing and becoming active in the literary community. A turning point in the novel occurs when he moves to London. His life changes from one that is recognisable and identifiable to one that is unknown and unrecognised. His estrangement and separation from his original homeland are sources of stress for him. England is a place of fresh start for him. In London, Willie meets Ana Correia, the heiress of a Portuguese-born Mozambican plantation. He tells her stories that surprise her. She finds similarities between her life and the novels. Willie worries that Ana might learn about his real background, though. In his heart, he worries about how unoriginal his work is. After several years of marriage, he learns that Ana was aware that his works lacked originality. She makes it clear that she like his short stories because they are set in a fictional world.

Like Naipaul, Willie is a cross-cultural product. In England, Willie writes for a while. His stories, which he writes and publishes, are utter failures. Given that many immigrants found it difficult to establish a sense of identity in a strange country, his future is not totally bright. He sees it as a fresh start. He sees this as a new system, a new culture, a new set of customs, and a new financial landscape. Ana invites him to join her. She asks him to come to Africa with her. Willie also moves because he is unhappy with life in London. When he met Ana, he was forced to integrate into yet another society. In the end, he weds Ana. To start afresh, Willie follows her to her family home in one of Portugal's strongholds in East Africa. He wants to establish his own identity. In the country where his wife is from, the colonial system is falling apart quite quickly. His 1959-1977 stay in Africa, which connects the first and second parts of *Half a Life*, is a collection of colonial life events that illustrate the latter years of Portuguese rule.

Just as he was in India and London, Willie still feels foreign and alien in this country. Crossing borders is never just a spatial problem. It is a social and cultural issue as well. because the person has to adapt to a new social and cultural setting. The learning curve for adopting them is quite high. He keeps going on his journey of self-discovery.

Willie becomes a part of the half-and-half society. He makes friends with affluent individuals of mixed heritage.



This group of estate owners is wealthy. Regarding their fifty-fifty status, they are insecure. He and his wife moved to an unknown African colony after they were unable to find a permanent home in London. He was determined not to go back to India. But even in the colonial state of Africa, he is still searching for himself. He is not entitled to claim the nation or its culture. But he is not the supporting character Ana was looking for, nor is Africa the place he imagined to be his home.

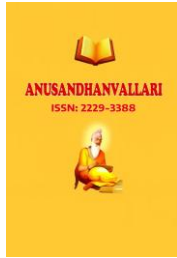
Willie understands the dangerous situation he could be in in a conflict. But despite all that hardship, he finds himself lured to the wealthy lifestyles of those folks. He is immediately attracted to the settlers' twisted way of life. He is obsessed with ladies, while Ana is focused on managing the estate. He starts seeing the daughter of Ana's maid. It takes place after he visits an underground site. A married woman in their neighbourhood is the object of his affair. He learns that living in Africa is pointless after a string of sexual adventures. He could not find stability in wealth and money.

Willie attributes his bad luck to Indian culture. However, things would have turned out quite differently if he had stayed in India. He is aware of the repercussions of going back to his homeland. Ana, in Willie's opinion, is the most sensible option in this circumstance. His sister and mother had the same social situation. They were as poor as he was. They took advantage of their situation. Willie blames Chandran's intercaste marriage and the shame attached to it. He realises his mistake at the end of the novel and decides to start over with the second half of his life.

Like Naipaul, Willie belongs to a marginalised and inauthentic group of people. His goal is to elevate the voice of his ethnic identity from the periphery to the forefront. He effectively maps his ethnicity and carves out a niche for himself in terms of subjectivity construction and self-identity through *Half a Life*. The main theme of the novel is the protagonist's journey from one location to another, from one culture to another, and from one unfixed state to another. Additionally, the "in-between" space gives colonial people, immigrants, exiles, and migrants more options from their eclectic heritage. It goes without saying that their identity will not be set in stone or determined by their past.

The diverse civilisations that Naipaul experienced in Trinidad, England, and Mozambique, as well as their quest for identity, are described and evaluated in *Half a Life*. It goes without saying that people from different countries have confused identities. Three separate parts or sections make up the work; their locations are as different as their ages. Three narrators were a problem for them. Willie's father gives the first account, talking about the first ten years of his existence. He has priestly ancestry. But in the 1930s, he becomes so enthralled with Mahatma Gandhi's teachings that he gives up on his English studies. He gets into a lot of trouble because he is attracted to and seduces a Dalit girl, but he is saved and becomes a champion against the caste system since he chooses to marry her. To persuade others that he has made a significant sacrifice for people who have endured long-term unfair treatment, he marries her in defiance of his brahmacharya pledge.

*Half a Life* explores the existential dilemma of the hybrid subject, who has been uprooted and deracinated but is desperately looking for parallels to his own situation to confirm that he may be able to find a place to call home on his journey of homelessness. The title alludes to the main theme of the novel, which is in line with Willie's ambivalent, half-and-hybrid identity: people caught amid uncharted migration pathways; caught on the precipice of history, ambition, and love; and caught in the whirlpool of non-belonging and ignorance of themselves. Like other cultural characters in Naipaul's writings, Willie is obligated to both their ancestor and to each other by an inbuilt urge to learn the truth about who they are and where they live, no matter how twisted the route. Because of his lack of roots, Naipaul finds it difficult to relate to and identify with the traditional values of what was once a colonial power in England. He is also unhappy with Trinidad's cultural and spiritual poverty and feels cut off from India.



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