Chapter - VI

HALF A LIFE

An Inter Continental
Post-Colonial Dilemma
The novel **Half a Life** was published in October 2001. It depicts the agony and dilemma of an immigrant (again a favourite theme with Naipaul) through the tale of three generations of an Indian Brahmin family. **Half a Life** presents two sets of father-son stories, each of whom has his own fears, his own solitariness, but sadly there does not exist any channel of communication between them. In this novel "fact and fiction, biographical materials and historical facts are all mixed up in creating a wonderful fictive world." Out of three people, it is only the youngest the protagonist who is given a name. His father and grandfather despite having strongly influenced his story remain anonymous. The novel has been rightly described as "a devastating work of exceptional sensibility, grace and humour."²

The novel is divided into three parts, One: A Visit from Somerset Maugham, Two: The First Chapter and Three: A Second Translation. The Story moves through three different settings — India, London and Africa and three different eras and told by three narrators. The first part of the story is told to Willie Chandran by his father. His father's name is not mentioned anywhere in the novel except as Willie's father. The second part of the story is told by the omniscient narrator the author, and the third part of the story contains Willie's life in Africa and recounted by him to his sister.

**Half a Life** confirms Naipaul's stature as the greatest living analyst of the colonial and post-colonial world. In the words of Patrick Marnham, "In **Half a Life** Naipaul remains constant to himself, awkward and uncompromising, succeeding where few novelists venture to go.... And once again demonstrating his ability to raise the failed lives of his characters to the tragic dimension by reference to public issues and universal truths."³

Exile has been the subject of his writing. In his earlier works he attempts at defining his own situation and seeks an answer to the problem that hampered him at the start "I didn't know who I was"
(118). With his epic, *A House for Mr. Biswas*, he had come to know who he was and how he came to be on the tiny island of Trinidad. From his position of total deracination, he turned his attention to other last individuals in the 'half-made' societies as crippled by the burden of a borrowed culture, of mimicry and parasitism. So his attempts reveal Naipaul's quest for identity in the world left by colonialism. People living in such half-made societies have no complete life of their own. Their life is in a way half a life. Perhaps this may be the reason for choosing the title 'Half a Life' to his novel. In fact, many Naipaul's characters reveal their living a half-life. Willie Chandran, the protagonist of this novel is not an exception for this.

The novel *Half a Life* starts with a conversation between father and son. The protagonist Willie Chandran questions his father as to his middle name being Somerset. Because of this middle name Willie has been mocked by his school boys. His father told him that he was named after a great English writer. This question forms the very essence of a person's existence. The answer to this question brings into light the irony of Willie's existence and at the same time prepares the background of his half-life in half-made societies with people who are themselves leading a life which is half-discovered, half-realised and half-lived.

On account of this occasion, Willie's father began to tell the story. It took a long time. The story changed as Willie grew up. Things were added and by the time Willie left India to proceed to England this was the story he had heard.

Willie's father was a Brahmin. He came from a line of priests. He was attached to a certain temple. He didn't know when the temple was built or which ruler had built it, none the less for how long they had been attached to it. Things became worse when the British came. He was doing penance for something which he had done, and he was living as a mendicant in the outer courtyard of the big temple. It was
a very open, public place. His enemies among the Maharaja’s officials were hounding him, that made him to take a vow of silence. This had won him a certain amount of local respect, even renown. A Writer came to India to get material for a novel about spirituality. It was in the 1930’s. After looking at Willie’s father this writer published perhaps eighteen months later about him in the travel book. This publication made him famous not only in India but also abroad; people came from England to find what the writer had found. Thus he became a social figure.

When he was attending the University to get B.A. degree, he didn’t understand the B.A course. He questioned regarding The Mayor of Casterbridge, Shelley, Keats and Wordsworth. At this stage, he decided even to follow Mahatma’s call. In the front yard of his college he made a little bonfire of university notes, Shelley and Keats.

Inspired by the Mahatma’s speech he decided to marry a low caste girl. There was a girl at the university. She was small and coarse-featured, almost tribal in appearance, noticeably black, with two big top teeth that showed very white. This was the girl he thought that he should go and make a declaration to and in her company live out a life of sacrifice. Both of them met several times at a hotel. Someone informed about this affair to the girl’s uncle. Her uncle was a fire brand. That made him nervous. He kept her in a image-maker’ss house in the town. The image-makers were of a neutral caste, not low, but very far from being high and perfect for his father’s purpose.

He began to work for the Maharaja’s State. He grieved for himself. This kind of servile labour had formed no part of his vision of the life of sacrifice. He did a number of jobs like working in the audit section, as an assistant inspector. One day his father asked whether the school principal had great ambitions for his son-in-law, he replied
that he was not interested, more over that he was already married. This made his father wild, and lose his tolerance and kindness. He had betrayed all his family members. Now his father was worried about getting good will from the school principal. Facing different difficulties at last he became a man with an establishment of his own.

There was one little blessing. It was assumed that he was married to the girl. He took a vow of sexual abstinence, a vow of brahmacharya, like the Mahatma, but he failed. He was full of shame. She was pregnant, little Willie was born. Now she was very proud. It can be observed, how Willie's mother was being affected by colonialism. She took lessons in flower arrangement from the wife of an English officer. At that time independence had not yet come. She took lessons in cooking and house-craft from a Parsi lady. She was trained as to how to entertain the guests. Willie's father himself was mortified. She had set out the table in her new way on the side plate of each guest she had placed a towel. Willie's father didn't think it was right.

Because of her, Willie's father felt ashamed among his relatives. The following words of Willie's father, tell that he was not a happy man.

"This shame was always with me, the little unhappiness always at the back of my mind, like an incurable illness, corrupting all my moments, all my little triumphs" "

He had never read about towels on a dining table or seen them in any of the foreign films that he had gone to. She insisted, and used the word 'serviette' or something like that. She was no longer on the defensive these days and soon she was saying foolish things about her husband's ancestors, who knew nothing about modern house-craft. Nothing was resolved when the first guest came and he had to retreat into his own melancholy and go through the whole evening with those towels on the table.
This was the nature of his life. His utter wretchedness, self-disgust, can be imagined when, with everything he had spoken about, and in spite of his private vow of brahmacharya, which represented the profoundest part of his nature, Willie’s mother became pregnant for the second time. This time it was a girl, and this time there was no room for any kind of self delusion. The girl was the image of her mother. He called her Sarojini, after the woman poet of the Indian independence movement, in the hope that a similar kind of blessing might befall her, because the poet Sarojini was a great patriot, yet was also remarkably ill favoured.

Willie Chandran and his sister Sarojini went to the mission school. One day one of the Canadian teachers asked Willie, after his father. Willie said with irritation everyone knew what his father was. Willie’s mother had been educated at the mission school and it was her wish that her children too should go there. Most of the children at the school were backward, who would not have been accepted at the local schools for people of the upper caste. She had faced many problems in the local school during her childhood.

Willie loved his mother, he understood more about the mission school. He began to long to go to Canada, where his teachers came from. He even began to think he might adopt their religion and become like them and travel the world teaching. On one occasion when asked to write an English composition, there he wrote as if he were a Canadian. In that composition he mentioned; Mom and Pop how they had taken their children to beach, explaining their house and foreign life.

Willie’s mother upon seeing this composition was extremely pleased and proud. Willie’s father was however ashamed of it. Several times Willie had written compositions. His father read them and decided to send him to a far away place for his studies, because
Willie's mind was diseased, and he had become antagonistic to his father's policies.

The relationship that V.S. Naipaul shared with his father has some literary value besides being an intensely personal one. Its literary merit derives from the fact that V.S. Naipaul owes his position today largely to his father. Besides, the father-son bond was so strong that when Seeparsad died in 1953, he left for V.S. Naipaul many worlds unrealized, many words unshared and many dreams unspoken. V.S. Naipaul's creative process is an attempt to realize those worlds, share those words and speak of those dreams. The thread of father-son relationship runs through most of his works of fiction besides serving as the inspiration for his masterpiece *A House for Mr. Biswas*, which he has described as very much his father's book. Naipaul's indebtedness to his father may be understood from his confession in his Nobel lecture delivered on December 7, 2001:

“If it were not for the short stories my father wrote I would have known almost nothing about the general life of our Indian community. Those stories gave me more than knowledge. They gave me a kind of solidity. They gave me something to stand on in the world. I cannot imagine what my mental picture would have been without those stories.”

The story takes symbolic dimensions with the spirit of the cave signifying the cave-culture, the dark ages or the evil of the bush. The Brahmin is Willie's paternal ancestors and the tribal headman is his mother's uncle - the fire brand who had gained political mileage out of his father's association with his mother. Willie's rage and even hatred for his father seems to have reached its summit. He wants his father not to miss the point at any cost and with this aim in mind he blatantly entitles this story 'A Life of Sacrifice.' This is the phrase used by his father when Willie had expressed his desire to go to
Canada, the land of his dreams. Expressing his inability to afford such an extravagance, his father tells him:

"For me it has been a life of sacrifice. I have earned no fortune. I can send you to Banares or Bombay or Calcutta or even Delhi. But I can't send you to Canada."  

Finally Willie's father stopped talking to his son. Willie became very unhappy. His mother tried to comfort him, but she failed. She informed all the matter to her husband, who thereupon talked to Willie and consoled him. He gave a word that he would be sent to England. Willie's father had written letters to some of the people whom he knew in England. After some weeks, a reply had come from the "House of Lords" from a famous man. The letter contained a little gold and a place had been prepared for Willie for his higher studies on a scholarship in London.

Willie Somerset Chandran becomes consciously aware of the realisation that his middle name sounds alien. The query regarding this unleashes a torrent of memories, unfolding before him a complicated picture which relates to his roots. It is this revelation that breeds contempt in the mind of this twenty year old for his father and subsequently, for himself. Thus begins Willie's attempt to run away from the shadow of his past. But past is like a shadow one can never betray and in the vain attempt to wash one's hands of the past, one always stakes one's present as well as future. "The cultural as well as social alienation that Willie Chandran undergoes in England and then in Mozambique takes its roots in cultural alienation which is more pronounced as paternal alienation."  

At twenty, Willie the mission school student who had not completed his education went to London. He knew that London was a great city. He met several important persons. Some of them had insulted him while others gave him respect. When he entered into London, the colonial impact could be observed in every walk of life.
At the college he had to relearn everything that he knew. He had to learn how to eat in public. He had to learn how to greet people and how, having them, not to greet them all over again in a public place ten or fifteen minutes later. He had to learn to close doors behind him. He had to learn how to demand for things without being peremptory.

Gradually, learning the quaint rules of his college, with the churchy Victorian buildings appearing to be older than they were, Willie began to see in a new way the rules he had left behind at home. He began to see it was upsetting, at first that the old rules were themselves a kind of make-believe, self-imposed. Towards the end of his second term he saw with great clarity that the old rules no longer bound him.

He remembered his mother, who with her mission school education was probably a Christian. He began to speak of her as a full Christian. He read mission magazines in the college and adapted certain things. He spoke of his mother as belonging to an ancient Christian community of the subcontinent, a community almost as old as Christianity itself. He kept his father as a Brahmin. Willie is moved with a contempt for his father who has given him a half status in society. It is his father's mistake which remains a curse on him. Being a half-Brahmin he cannot relate fully to the low caste and being a low caste mother's son he is not completely and whole-heartedly accepted in the Brahmin community. "His inacceptability or half-acceptability leads him to rejection as far as his parental authority is concerned." Naipaul focuses on the half-ness of his personality, the incompleteness of his life for all of which he is moved to despise his father. He blamed his father for the half-status that he has been accorded. He made his father's father a 'Courtier' so, playing with words, he began to remake himself. It excited him and began to give him a feeling of power.
Cultural alienation seems to be in Willie’s blood. His father had revolted against his family tradition and had created quite a stir in his times by deciding to marry a low caste woman. Those were times of the national movement and the impact of Gandhi was in the air. Sacrifice was the ideal presented before the youth by Gandhi. Willie’s father decides to follow this ideal and keeps looking for a suitable opportunity for the same. Gandhi’s call was for the upliftment of the neglected segments of society – the untouchables and low caste who were usually discriminated against. Willie’s father, the son of a priest decides to marry a low caste woman simply to show acquiescence to the ideal of sacrifice. There is no question of love between him and the girl, instead the very sight of the girl breeds repulsion. His father’s sacrifice initially looks like a fad but eventually it turns out to be a real sacrifice for he enters into a relationship which not only mars the prospects of a bright and secure career but also brings forth two children with whom he bears no affinity. His whole life is scarred by this one sacrifice but the roots lie in paternal alienation.

In the story of Willie Naipaul focuses on the half-ness of his personality, the incompleteness of his life for all of which he is moved with spite for his father. He blames his father for the half-status that he has been accorded. Willie fails to see the dilemma of his father as a youth and also he does not realize that his father had become a victim of circumstances. He had tried to create an image for himself but then he had got imprisoned in that image and lost his identity completely. Like the protagonist of R.K. Narayan’s Guide he becomes a mendicant because that was the only option left. In the transformation of Willie’s father from a dreamy-eyed rebel to a mendicant, tradition completes a circle taking him back to the juncture where his ancestors had lived and which he had strongly detested. Willie, does not notice the hard compulsion of his father’s confession: “There was no escaping the role now.” He hopes to rebuild his future against establishment. When he starts he hopes to reverse
the cycle of history. Willie decides to search for a meaning in his life away from the settled passive life of his parents. The break from past pushes Willie into a limbo, in which position he keeps dangling for many years to come. In trying to break out of the established conservative mould of his life Willie sets another, more complicated mould for himself wherefrom there seems no escape.

Willie's new confidence began to draw people to him. One of them was Percy Cato. Both became good friends. Percy was a Jamaican of mixed parentage and was more brown than black. Both of them shared their backgrounds. When Percy was in his Negro mode he claimed fellowship with Willie. In the other mode he wanted to keep Willie at a distance. Percy Cato introduced his girl friend to Willie. Her name was June. She worked at the perfume counter. His friend took him to the club. Willie was attracted to June. Both went to a club, then indulged in sex. The words of June betray how she insulted the culture of Indians, June, letting his (Willie) head rest on her plumb arm, said,

"A friend of mine says it happens with Indians. It is because of the arranged marriages. They don't feel they have to try hard."

Willie thought of his father with compassion for the first time. Now Willie was a changed man. The interesting point is Willie reveals that he was in love with June. Just a week later, Percy took him to a party in Notting Hill. June came in after a while and went with Percy.

This incident made him contemplative. If anybody had asked him, Willie would have said that Percy was teaching him about English life. In fact, through Percy, and without knowing what he was being introduced to, Willie was becoming part of the special, passing bohemian-immigrant life of London of the late 1950's. This hardly touched the traditional bohemian world of Soho.
Suresh Shukla discloses that "The bohemian culture of Notting Hill is alien for Willie but not being able to define his own 'culture', he seeks to adopt to the Notting Hill culture in his bid to survive." Whatever freedom Willie attempts to enjoy here is unsatisfactory because it needs crutches for support. Even the girls Willie sleeps with are not his friends but the lovers of his friends. Quite like Eliot's Prufrock, Willie keeps planning to declare his love before Percy Cato and the world when June marries her childhood friend leaving both Percy and Willie in the lurch.

It was a little world of its own. The immigrants, from the Caribbean and then the White colonies of Africa, and then Asia, had just arrived. They were still new and exotic. There were English people both high and low, with a taste for social adventure. They wished from time to time to break out of England and people with colonial connections who wished in London to invent the social code of the colonies. There were English people who were ready to seek out the more stylish and approachable of the new arrivals. They met in Notting Hill neutral territory, in dimly lit furnished flats in certain socially mixed squares. They were gay and bright together. But few of the immigrants had proper jobs or secure houses to go back to. Some of them were truly on the brink, and that gave an edge to the gaiety.

The author is analyzing, quite reluctantly the problems of 'Mulattoes' in the Trinidadian Society. The novelist indirectly compels traveling through different parts of the Global Campus. This is the reflection of the fact, the protagonist's social mobility remains quite uncertain. These 'Mulattoes' consider or think of themselves to be of mixed blood. They are neither pure White nor Black. It should be noted that the writer seems to have over-emphasized expressions such as: "a man of mixed race, mixed race people, mixed population, a mixed racemes and racial recognition."
A few West Indian writers like Keneth Ramchand, Ismith Khan and Claude McKay have referred to the fictional image of the Mulatto males, females, "as socially insecure and sexually over-changed"12, in spite of intellectual pursuits resulting in prosperity or good position, they fail to cover 'social-knife-scar' inwardly. They impress as restive, rebels and racketeers of ribaldry.

In a bi-racial social system the marginal individual faces an identity crisis which can be successfully resolved by assimilation irrespective of the society, be it of the Whites or Blacks or the Blacks.

From this story one is reminded of the scenes in The Guide by R.K. Narayan where the protagonist becomes a popular mendicant by chance. It can also be alluded to stories of fake pundits in Naipaul's early works. In The Mystic Masseur, Ganesh becomes mystic though he does not really possess mystical powers. Here Naipaul has written a farcical adventure of an Indian adaptation to his West Indian culture. William Walsh remarks, "the core of fiction, the change which is both magical and inevitable, from con-man into man worthy of confidence is an ancient theme in Indian writing."13 But the cost of the change is too high. Ganesh, the sincere school teacher, degenerates into a fake pundit whose lucky cure of a paranoidic enables him to practice sham politics. Willie's father, a sincere follower of Gandhiji's principles becomes a fake mendicant to protect himself from the threat of his customs, parents, the principal and the fire brand uncle of his wife.

Coetzee points out that Naipaul's India in this novel is abstract and his London sketchy. It is only his Mozambique which is convincingly realized. Coetzee further adds: "The Mozambique part of the novel belongs to a mode of writing that Naipaul has perfected over the years, in which historical reportage and social analysis flow into and out of autobiographically coloured fiction and travel memoirs."14 In his last days in Mozambique, Willie observes the Portuguese friends
in Africa enjoying the moment even though "the world was closing down for them in Africa." They fill the room with talk and laughter, like people who didn't mind, like people who knew how to live with history. Willie, in a note of appraisal says, "I never admired the Portuguese as I admired them then. I wished it was possible for me to live as easily with past." Coetzee states that "the freedom to go against orthodoxy is consistent with Naipaul's ultimate position towards his own colonial past."  

Willie Chandran was selected for The British Broadcasting Corporation. A stout young man who worked in BBC invited him to work in B.B.C. This well meaning person was an editor who produced programmes for some of the overseas services. He went to the B.B.C studio and showed his talent, where everything was recorded. He excelled in his duties. At this time he met a young lawyer called Roger. Both became friends, they met about once a week. When Roger questioned Willie about his idea on his work, Willie replied that he wanted to write. Willie showed his typed stories which he had done at the mission school. When Roger saw Willies stories he didn't pay any compliment but criticized him. Willie was mortified and burned with shame. Grieving for the friendship, he began to think of June and tried to meet her but found it was not possible.

Roger introduced his girl friend to Willie. Her name was Perdita. Roger was tired of her. Roger said to Willie that his editor was coming to London soon. On this occasion he had arranged a big dinner party. Roger described the different life styles of different persons, like Marcus who was dedicated to inter-racial sex. Another man was Richard who was a bed room Marxist and another was Peter, whose style was entirely different. Peter and Richard were coming with a Colombian woman, for dinner which was to be arranged by Roger at ten.
The invitees to the dinner had come there. The editor recollected about Gandhi that he had seen him in 1931. The Colombian woman Serafina was escorted by Richard and Peter. The others, Willie, Roger and Perdita were also there. Serafina had a conversation with Willie regarding men and their cosmic strength. The editor cleared his throat once or twice and expressed that he was so thankful to all of them because through their conversation he came to know where the world was going. The editor narrated a story which brought tears to all of them. Willie was fascinated by the editor's story. Meanwhile Willie's eyes were on Perdita. After the party was over all people left the place.

The next day Willie wrote a story about the editor. He was surprised upon writing such a nice story. The stories seemed to be just waiting for him. He had written twenty-six stories in all. He showed all of them to Roger. Roger thought it was a fair size for a book. He began to send the book out to people he knew in publishing. Every two or three weeks it came back. At last Willie met Richard showing his stories, by striking a contract, Richard gave some amount to Willie, to get it published.

Five weeks later there was a party at Richard's house in Chelsea. Willie went early. He met a psychologist. After sometime Roger and Serafina came in for dinner. Observing the things which were happening in Richard's house, Willie thought that Richard was acting just as everybody else was acting. Afterwards, Roger and Willie talked about the party and about Serafina. Both talked the crooked ways and wrong doings of Richard and Serafina.

For many weeks Willie had been in and out of Roger's house at Marble Arch, taking advise during the preparation of the manuscript. Some how he was fascinated about Perdita. At one stage he thought of going to Roger's chamber to discuss about the love affair between them. But he didn't do it because that weekend the race riots began
in Notting Hill. The newspapers and the radio were full of the riots. When he came out of the college everyone was reading the newspapers. They were black with photographs and head lines. He heard 'blacks are going to be a menace.' Willie felt at once threatened and ashamed. He felt people were looking at him. He felt the newspapers were about him. He stayed in the college, didn't go out. This kind of hiding wasn't new to him.

His friend Roger wrote a letter to encourage him. Hiding away in the college, Willie now saw more of Percy Cato than he had done for some months. They were still friends but their different interests had scattered them apart. A letter came to Willie from India. The handwriting on this letter was his father's. The letter, informed that in India they were fine, the marriage of Sarojini had been solemnized. She got married to a German. As his father expected an international marriage, it was a great satisfaction to Willie's father.

In the third part of the novel, it occurred to Willie one day that he hadn't seen Percy Cato at the college. His enquiries revealed that Percy had packed his bags and left the college without telling anyone. Willie was forlorn at the news. His sister Sarojini wrote from Germany. She recounts her life at Germany with her husband Wolf. It also intimates that she would come to London for a few days to see him. Willie was not happy with that news.

His sister came and stayed in a small hotel near the college. She came everyday to Willie's college room to prepare a little meal. He was asked number of questions by his sister regarding his degree, and in what way it would help him. He answered that he was waiting for a reply concerning a book written by him. At this juncture, Willie contemplated and gave a number of statements of his experience in London. The following words of Willie disclose how he was affected by the influence of colonialism:
"I don't know where I am going. I am just letting the days go by. I don't like the place that is waiting for me at home for the past two and a half years I have lived like a freeman. I don't like the idea of marrying someone like Sarojini. The trouble is I don't know how to go out and get a girl on my own. No one trained me in that. I am like my poor father. All men should train their sons in the art of seduction. No body talked about sex and seduction at home, but I discover now that it is a fundamental skill all men should be trained in......"18

Willie telephoned Perdita early one morning, to come to him. But she didn't come. He went looking for June. He hadn't seen her at her work place. There he came to know that she was married. Out of his emotions he met a woman on the street to have sex. He failed and was full of shame. When he saw a prostitute whom he had given half a week's allowance going with someone; he thought —

"Humiliation like this waits me here. I must follow Percy. I must leave"19

He had no idea where he might go. Willie could only go back to India, and he didn't want that. All that he had now was an idea and it was like a belief in magic that one day something would happen, an illumination would come to him, and he would be taken by a set of events to the place he should go. What he had to do was to hold himself in readiness, to recognize the moment.

Facing different problems, his book was published. Some of the reviewers didn't give any compliments. Besides he had two letters from Roger, and another was from a girl or young woman from an African country. She wanted to meet him. He at once wrote to her asking her to come to the college. She was doing a course of some sort in London. Her name was Ana. Willie didn't want the woman to be let down. He wanted her to stay an admirer.

But as soon as he saw her all his anxieties fell away and he was conquered. She behaved as though she had always known him, and
had always liked him. She had a wonderfully easy manner. The most intoxicating thing for Willie was that for the first time in his life he felt himself in the presence of someone who accepted him completely. He thought of Perdita, and June, among them she was the best woman. Both of them fell in love. Both of them shared their sweet memories in their past life. The very bias and grounds of Willie's attraction to Ana is his want of wholeness. In Ana, Willie discovers a kind of reciprocity.

Willie Chandran decided to go along with Ana to her country. At first Ana hesitated and then accepted. A letter came in his last week at the college from Sarojini. She counsels on how to lead life in Africa, and mentioned about the love affair of Ana, and cautioned to be careful of strangers.

Now the total scene changed. Willie and Ana left England to Africa. Willie thought about the new language he would have to learn. He wondered whether he would be able to hold on to his own language, or he would forget his English. He thought all the time when he was in the capital, in the house of one of Ana's friends,

"I am not staying here. I am leaving I will spend a few nights here and then I will find some way of going away"²⁰

Naipaul could understand the agony of losing one's language. Immigration threatens with the loss of heritage to preserve. An immigrant tries desperately to stick to his heritage, food and language. Attrition of heritage, language finds an important place in the colonised, immigrant mindscape. "Existence is meaningless unless it is expressed appropriately and language is the tool and power of expression, displacement brings dispossession of this power which aggravates the sense of alienation."²¹ The immigrant is always at a disadvantage in a foreign land. His or her escape depends on the degree of his or her adaptability to that which is essentially alien. In the process of initiation, language becomes the most potent
instrument to come to the immigrant's help. But an inability to forget the native language casts a shadow on the immigrant's prospects in his or her adopted country.

The loss of proper language becomes even more ironical in view of the fact that Willie is an emerging writer and a writer's very existence is dependent on his language. Ana makes an effort to overcome the sense of alienation, she enrolls herself at a language school in England. The explanation she gives to her family shows the significance of the language issue in the culture of diaspora:

"I wanted to break out of the Portuguese language, I feel it was that had made my grandfather such a limited man. He had no true idea of the world. ....And I didn't want to learn South African English, which is what people learn here. I wanted to learn English, English." 22

Willie and Ana arrive at a little low-built concrete town. The house was in the middle of an overgrown old garden and in the shade of a great, branching rain tree. The air was hot and stale inside. Looking out from the bedroom window, through wire netting and dead insects, at the rough garden and the tall paw-paw trees and the land falling away past groves of cashews and clusters of grass roots to the rock cones which in the distance appeared to make a continuous low pale-blue range. Willie thought;

"I don't know where I am. I don't think I can pick my way back. I don't ever want this view to become familiar. I must not unpack I must never behave as though I am staying" 23

The first day at Ana's estate house, he was moved to wonder on seeing settings and the architectural constructions of the house. He found all the strange old Portuguese colonial furniture. He loved Ana and believed in her luck. Ana was a woman who had given herself to him. As long as he was with her he felt a sense of reassurance that no harm could come to him.
Willie came to know about African way of life. He met an African maid. She told her family problems, she also spoke about her father Julio and how he treated her family. He speculates,

"I hardly knew to a colonial country in Africa of which I knew little except that it had difficult racial and social ideas."

One day Ana and Willie went to a party. She introduced him to a second rank Portuguese. At that party all of them ate keeping their heads down. So in the colonial State they kept their heads down and made what money they could. That was to change in a couple of years but at the moment that regulated colonial world seemed rock solid to everybody. Willie completely accepted this.

Willie described about the crops of the estate. Most of the colonial shops they used were Portuguese. One or two were Indians. Ana's parents began to live separate lives. And for many years no one outside the family knew that anything was wrong. It was the pattern in colonial days. Once Willie lost his passport and was terrified. At last he got it by taking the help of Ana.

On weekends Ana and Willie usually set out on a two hour long journey to see her friends. In the beginning Willie felt life to be rich and exciting. He liked the houses and the culture of the Africans. Willie learned to use a gun. Willie narrated about the African government. The government was authoritarian. The peace was continuing, people no longer lived with the idea of danger. There was a named man Correia who had started different business, Correia invited Willie to take up books business. Correia began to think of manufacturing helicopters. Willie admits,

"I found myself amazed at how little I knew of the modern world. And amazed at the same time at the ease with which Correia was picking his way through it."
For years Correia had talked of a calamity to come, something that would sweep away the life of the colony, sweep away all his world. On one Sunday they went to a beach restaurant, afterwards Correia led all of them to his beach house. Carla and Correia wanted to go to Europe to see their two children who were in their teens. But due to some unavoidable problems they could not go.

Willie got to know about the Correia’s estate manager called Alvaro. With this friendship Willie was involved in deep sex. One afternoon both were at café. Alvaro said:

“I will come for you tomorrow evening. It’s much better in the evenings, and it’s much better at the weekends. You’ll have to find some way of making your excuses to Madame Ana.”

“Sexual promiscuity is a factor witnessed in the third world immigrants who move from the parochial society which imposes sexual taboos to a liberal Western World which is not infested with such inhibitions.” The process of adjustment in this respect bares before the immigrant, the narrowness of his native background, to combat which he indulges in sexual excesses. Willie Chandran is a man doomed to live under a shadow. His cultural background and his awareness of his incompleteness has bred inhibition. Willie may hide himself by projecting a false ancestry but he cannot kill his reality and at all crucial moments his background and his half-ness become apparent and give him away. His sexual frustrations are not his own, they are the frustrations of a society, of a race and of a culture.

Willie himself at the end of his Indian sojourn, realizes that he carries his alienation within himself, place is irrelevant. He comes to accept his rootlessness, his placelessness as final and this is what makes him a free man, no longer seeking to attach himself to anything outside himself. The cause of man’s isolation and alienation is within him. This realization comes to Willie after his sexual encounters with
African prostitutes. As in The Mimic Men, Naipaul describes a number of sexual encounters explicitly, but these scenes remain cold and passionless, and reasserts. Naipaul’s attitude in his earlier books that sex introduces more barriers between people than it brings down.

Willie and Alvaro after crossing many villages reached the night markets. There many young African girls were dancing and selling their lives. After enjoyment Willie always degraded or insulted his parents in his heart. The following words reveal his thoughts:

“I thought of my mother and I thought of my poor father who had hardly known what sex was”

At last they went to the place Alvaro had been looking for. It was a place with facilities for sex. It was a big warehouse like a building. At the ware house the girls were abusing their own bodies and darkening their lives. Some kind of spirit was locked up in every girl. Willie was touched by a girl, and went after her. In the ware house he began to have an idea that there was something in the African heart that was shut away from the rest of them, and beyond politics.

The significant sexual encounter he has in Africa is with a child prostitute. Coetzee says that “the African women Willie sleeps with reveal the truth of his desire in a naked way.” In identifying the sexual embrace with the girl as the ultimate arena of truth Naipaul comes closest to articulating the nature of the spiritual journey. Willie is engaged in measuring his distance from a way of life that treats denial of desire as the road to enlightenment. Coetzee tells that through intimacy with African women, Willie is able to free himself from the ghosts of London.

The following words of Willie tells how a person would react to his emotions.
"When the girl had looked at me with command and I had felt the tension and strength in her small body. I could think of no reason. Why I had done What I had done?"30

Willie's adventures in Africa are mainly sexual. His relations with Ana have never been passionate. Many times he betrayed her. Another textual reference of Willie, reveals how he had learnt about sex:

"I began to live with a new idea of sex, a new idea of my capacity. It was like being given a new idea of myself"31

The recent volume on Naipaul The Humour and the Pity edited by Amitava Kumar has a piece by J.M. Coetzee. It is called "The Razor's Edge." Coetzee dwells for a while on Willie's sex-life. He says what Willie "learns about in London is principally sex."32 The girl friend of a Jamaican fellow student takes pity on him and relieves him of his virginity. She then gives him a useful cross-cultural lecture. Marriages in India are arranged she says. So Indian men don't think they need to satisfy a woman sexually. But things are different in England. He should try harder. Later, when he picks up the courage to approach a streetwalker she commands him to do it "like an Englishman" (121). Willie had found less and less pleasure in the places of pleasure. The main reason was that the act of sex there, which used to excite him with its directness and brutality, had grown mechanical. He gave himself none at all. So he was more restless and dissatisfied.

Carla found a new manager for her estate who was called Luis, and his wife Graca. Graca was a convent school friend of Carla. At a special Sunday lunch Willie happened to see Graca. Her eyes attracted him so much. In his own words, he confesses:

"Those eyes had looked at me in a way that no woman had looked at me before."33
He met her again two weeks later at a patriotic occasion. There were more than a hundred people in the room. When the programme was going on, all the time he was thinking of Graca. Accidentally he met her alone. Willie asked her to meet him later. Though Willie had past experience in sex, again he was dragged by his own desires with Graca. He enjoyed the affair with Graca. In his own words he describes how he was captured by sex:

"How terrible it would have been if I had died without knowing this depth of satisfaction, this other person that I had just discovered within myself. It was worth any price, any consequence."

Willie began to arrange his life around Graca. He didn’t care who noticed. With one part of his mind he was amazed at himself. Willie lost his shame. Graca shared her family problems and her childhood with Willie. When Graca went with any other person, Willie became jealous. She had lovers in her past life. In fact he had never known jealousy before.

The psychological damage is obvious. Ana helps Willie to get over it. Some other African women he makes love to when he is in Mozambique make him feel even better. Coetzee points out,

"Willie’s adventures in Africa are mainly sexual, he begins to visit African prostitutes, many of them, by Western standards, children ....with uncharacteristic compassion, his thoughts go to his parents in benighted India, to “my poor father and mother who had known nothing like this moment.”

A few years he felt himself helpless in this life of sensation. With fear of God he started respecting the religious outlawing of sexual extremes. Ana heard about the relationship between Willie and Graca. When Ana questioned Willie, he said it was true.

Coetzee states that “the freedom to go against orthodoxy is consistent with Naipaul’s ultimate position towards his own colonial
past, namely that just because he is descended from indentured Indian plantation workers he cannot be locked forever into postures of victimhood. The other point brought home is that wherever on this globe one dwells, one has to lead a life and make it as unencumbered and uninhibited as possible, sexuality too being a part of it.

Carla had sold her estate to a big property company in Portugal. So Luis and Graca were going to be on the move again. The property company wanted the estate house for their own directors when they came out on a tour. The company apparently believed that the colonial order, and colonial style were going to continue after the war. But things were not all bad for Luis and Graca. The company wanted Luis to continue to stay on as the estate manager.

In order to build a separate house for Luis an architect had come from Portugal called Gouveia. At this time the war commences. Great events in the life of the colony, the final rites, happen at a distance. The colonial government in the capital closed down. The guerrillas took over. The Portuguese population began to leave. The army withdrew from the town. People had died, but the army hadn't really wished to fight this African war. The war was like a distant game. It was as though the army, with some political purpose, had colluded with the guerrillas.

In due course of time the new government put together a kind administration. The great hardship was over but just at this time there were rumours of a new tribal war. Willie didn't think he could live through another war. He could see that it would have a point for Ana. For some weeks he was perplexed. He didn't know what to do. Even he didn't have the courage to tell Ana. It was the rainy season. He slipped and fell heavily. He was admitted in the run-down military hospital in the town, the physical pain of his damaged body was like the other pain that had been with him for months and perhaps for years.
The novelist signals at the variety of problems due to cultural pluralism. There are institutional conflicts as well as class conflicts. One cannot ignore social mobility, yet the basic line of cleavage remains clearly discernible. With the very inception of the novel, the novelist sympathetically projects mental make-up of Willie and his sister; they seem to be fairly confused and remain tongue-tied as the class-teacher asks: "what does your father do?"[37] This unforgettable event at the school keeps on rankling at the back of the protagonist's mind for a fairly long time.

Naipaul does not show much faith in individualism, he hardly shows any right ideology of opposite groups to be on right or left. Mixed marriages often break-up. It is a race love that can survive two patterns of culture, irrespective of the age difference or the colonial heritage. The kind of love Naipaul presents here seems to be a infatuation and not a romantic one. Elucidated as under:

"These were the days of my intense love making with Ana. I loved her in that room that had been her grand father's and grand-mother's, with a view of nervous branching and the fine leaves of the rain tree for the luck and liberations she had brought me, the undoing of fear, the granting to me of full manhood."[37]

Loss of identity is an inevitable evil of colonisation which afflicts both sides, the colonizer as well as the colonized. Willie comes to know this plain truth in time and decides to call it a day. For years he has allowed himself to become an easy victim to slippery substances. But on a rainy day when he slips after having spent eighteen years in Africa, he comes to realise that at forty-one, it's high time to stop making a fool of himself. He wants to emerge out of the shadow of the image of 'Ana's London man' which was thrust on him without his knowledge. He is resolved that there are not going to be any more slips for him. Resolutely he tells Ana:
"I mean I've given you eighteen years. I can't give you any more. I can't live your life any more. I want to live my own."38

Ana is in the same boat and she knows the agony too well. She has herself been leading a borrowed life. She tells Willie,

"Perhaps, it wasn't really my life either."39

Ana started thinking, when Willie had no idea where to go after the completion of his studies she became intimate with him. Indeed Willie had a great gratitude towards Ana, without her he was not a complete being. Willie decided to leave Ana, because he was tired and some how vexed.

Ana asked him whether he was afraid of the new war. Willie expressed his deep love and affection for Ana. Even the last words of Willie to Ana remind of her goodness and his gratitude to her:

"I know. You did everything for me. You made it easy for me here. I couldn't have lived here without you. When I asked you in London I was frightened. I had nowhere to go. They were going to throw me out of the college at the end of the term and I didn't know what I could do to keep afloat. But now the best part of my life has gone, and I've done nothing"40

Finally, Willie goes away from Africa in search of his own life. "There is no full life except for the life we live. We make and remake ourselves to suit our circumstances. Naipaul's Half a Life raises interesting questions about what life really is all about."41 In its humorous and sensitive vision of the half-lives quietly lived out at the centre of the world; V.S. Naipaul's graceful novel brings its own unique illumination to essential aspects of the shared history.

Naipaul's treatment of Africa shows his understanding of Africa in a better way. While narrating his story in Africa to his sister, Willie finds that "there was something in the African heart that was shut away from the rest of us, and beyond politics."42 This insight comes to Willie when he watches some girls dancing and then he becomes
submitive to sexual desires. "Willie's submission to sexual desire is wholly believable for the very reason that he has previously been stunted into half-life by the constrictions of caste in India and class in England. Africa turns him into sensuality." Willie discovers some purpose in life though temporarily, through his sensual associations in Africa but he realizes that these experiences cannot be permanent.

S.S. Sharma, in his article draws, attention to two modernist works and alludes with Half a Life. One is James Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. "There, a connection is established between the evolution of Stephen Dedalus’s sexuality and his arriving at a certain identity or self-image. Stephen's awareness of his writerly potential also had something to do with his growth. Part of that applies to Half a Life's protagonist Willie Chandran also." Both Stephen and Willie become exiles. The other work is T.S. Eliot's poem Gerontion. "Gerontion's 'lack' at the level of not having a definite clear-cut 'history' to back him up, is one part of his shrivelled condition. The other is the fact of his having stayed away from war." Willie in this novel stays away from the civil war that breaks in Africa and is frightened of it.

Naipaul shows an anti-black bias in Half a Life, a profound understanding of one part of the African way of life. Willie fares much better in Africa than he does in London. In a larger sense the novel points to innumerable predicaments of various half and half people and of people uprooted from a way of life on account of factors often out of their own control. A war, an uprising, a change of government, ethnic hostilities that make people feel threatened, caste considerations are some of those factors. The major strength of Half a Life is that it shows a much better understanding of the attitudes to sex characteristic of the non-Indian Black and the mixed-race people in areas where they and Indians live in close proximity.
Many critics pointed out that Naipaul's early books are hilarious, and then they become progressively more serious, then very grim indeed. Naipaul's reply was: "Even my funniest books were all begun in the blackest of moods, out of a sense of personal anguish and despair ..." There is real pain and distress in these books including A House for Mr. Biswas to support a merely comic intention. In his later novels the grim view of life begins to dominate and there is an increasing tendency to illustrate a held opinion. Naipaul's Half a Life is a generous and good humoured book loaded with depth and seriousness. In this novel, he once again goes back to his early days of writing to produce a comic absurdity. In the words of Karl Miller, "The Indian chapters about the temple-haunting high-caste father, his vow of silence, his college education, his marriage - are a wonderful achievement, in the likeness of the comedy of manners with which he began his career." 

"I am the sum of my books" said V.S. Naipaul in the Nobel acceptance speech on Dec. 7, 2001 and went on to add, "Each book, intuitively worked out, stands on what has gone before and grows out of it. I feel that at any stage of my literary career it could have been said that the last book contained all the others." He received the prestigious Nobel Prize after publishing his Half a Life book. As said by Naipaul, this novel describes the feelings of exiles, their sense of rootlessness and cultures. In the words of Maggie Ball, "Half a Life has been over eight years in the making and combines many of the traditional Naipaul themes such as cultural alienation, the concept of national literature, how we define ourselves with an unusual narrative structure."

Paul Theroux and Naipaul were friends over thirty years but in 1997 Naipaul abruptly broke off the relationship. Theroux's controversial account of his 'life and times' with V.S. Naipaul, Sir Vidia's Shadow: A Friendship Across Five Continents came out of this hurt. Naipaul's Half a Life, is a finely wrought conventional
novel, which some readers see as partly a response to the Paul Theroux version of Naipaul's visit to East Africa.

Larry David Nachman points out, the generating principle of Naipaul's work is culture. Being a subtle observer of cultural distinctions, Naipaul's "sense of culture cuts through all those banalities of contemporary thinking which are reflected in the... Third World." His observations about societies representative of the Third World focus on their victimization on account of their clinging on to antiquity: "India by itself could not have rediscovered or assessed its past. Its past was too much with it, was still being lived out in the ritual, the laws, the magic, the complex instinctive life that muffles response and buries even the idea of inquiry."

Many critics praised *Half a Life* for using English beautifully and magisterially. The novel combines fiction, autobiography and history with the greatest skill. Though it is deeply discomforting and dismaying, it also has extraordinary performance and elegance by an extreme clarity. Though this novel, Naipaul has again confirmed that he is a master of precision, depth and complexity. He is able to convey the moral atmosphere of three continents within the scope of a comparatively short book. His ability to entertain with hard-wrought truth is unique.

J.M. Coetzee observed that "Naipaul is a master of English prose, and the prose of *Half a Life* is as clean and cold as a knife." The novel ends in the middle, and the recent novel *Magic Seeds* (2004) continues Willie's story. James Wood gave a beautiful compliment on this novel, "*Half a Life* confirming Naipaul's stature as the greatest living analyst of the colonial and Post-colonial dilemma. In the simplest possible prose, in sentences dried down to pure duty, this novel unfolds its compelling, story." *Half a Life* thus, shows up as a novel of surpassing emotional conflict, agony of separation and pathos of yearning for what is lost.
In a recent interview with Farrukh Dhondy, Naipaul remarked, "My concern in the book (Half a Life) is also the historical side of things. Willie runs away from his background, and even when he gets to Africa, this Portuguese province, he is reminded of the background from which he came." The theme of cultural tradition is seen along with that of exile and alienation. Willie as a rooted person in his own cultural tradition, "fails to establish any fulfilling relationship through his escape from caste and class." The exploration of one man's struggle to learn to live and love is convinced through the story of Willie. His life story of the first forty one years living in exile seems to suggest that man's search for wholeness is only half-successful. In the words of Maggie Ball, "the displacement of the novel's characters, from Willie through to the other exiles he comes into contact with, and how they manage this disappointment forms the tension in the story." Willie's bohemian life style in London sets him apart from other expatriates who sweat out a living. In Africa, as Ana's 'live-in' man, he is largely "a half-and half man." Though he parts with Ana to live 'his-own-man', he is seen on his own in Berlin with his sister, it seems that his search for his identity again begins. It reminds the optimistic note of protagonist-narrator of The Mimic Men, saying at the end after having been through so many failures and setbacks. "I have cleared the decks, as it were, and prepared myself for fresh action. It will be the action of a free man." His latest novel, Magic Seeds is also a bleakly comic story of Willie Chandran, (the protagonist of Half a Life is again featured here) who responds to the anxiety of his own displacement by trying to find 'his war'. Here Willie returns to India and joins up with a Maoist revolutionary group, lives in the jungle, wondering all the while what on earth he is upto. Naipaul does not see the book particularly as a sequel. "This thing was quite a separate idea," He says. Here also he repeats the earlier themes. As said by Purabi Panwar, these latest novels are not necessarily his best but both are remarkably well in building a bleak world of 'discomfort and yearning.
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