Chapter 3

Nativism

in the Works of

V S Naipaul
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“….We cannot understand all the traits we have inherited. Sometimes we can be strangers to ourselves.” - V S Naipaul

3.1 V S Naipaul: An Introduction

Sir Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul (more popularly known as V S Naipaul) is certainly a prominent expatriate of the present time especially among the writers of Indian origin. He is the seventh Indian or person with Indian roots who is awarded Nobel Prize and second for literature after Rabindranath Tagore.

His contribution, as a writer in English in the West, is quite noteworthy and it manifests varied experiences, too. He is also among the eminent writers of the commonwealth who has significantly contributed to the postcolonial literature. His works show a deep concern for the cultures of the colonized countries, the socio-political and cultural history of India and the economic conditions of a few Eastern Countries passing through a period of transition from colonial dominion to independence. Most of his early works have been instrumental in placing the society of Trinidad on the literary map of English speaking world. The works afterwards have projected him as a journalist, a successful novelist, a keen writer of travelogue and a great master in the art of nonfiction novels. He is
considered to be one who has with his brilliant skill of language and fascinating narrative technique swept the western world off.

It is his self – consciousness that is manifest in his writing in a very peculiar way. Critics have also tried to explore other levels of this self – consciousness. An overview of his works say that his earlier works take us back in time to his family history and then to the history of (Caribbean) Trinidad itself. We are taken back to the Trinidad of 1930 and 1940. He traces the history of the Indo – Trinidadian family and their cultural adjustments in the light of the colonialism. In this process of self - realization, he also gazes at other cultures. In this gaze, England is an obvious point of reference. It is because of two reasons: First one is the impact of the colonial regime and the second one is it has gifted him with an identity. Secondly, Naipaul looks at India through three of his major works and various articles. References are also found in his works of many West Indian, South American and African countries, Iran, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, and the United States.

Naipaul himself is of the opinion, “To take an interest in a writer’s work is, for me, to take an interest in his life; one interest follows automatically on the other” (The Return of Eva Peron with the Killings in Trinidad, 212). The statement actually attests to a fairly universal response to literature. It seems humanly impossible to make a study of a writer’s work without taking an interest in the writer as a man. The names and personalities of great writers are as much a part of literary
heritage of a nation as their works. Would the literature of any country be the same, if we were left only with the works and knew nothing of the men behind them? In spite of all that has been said against the biographical approach, the writer’s life still remains key to a deeper understanding of his or her work (V S Naipaul: The Voice of Exile, 13).

Hence, it would be essential to study his biography before attempting to study his works as more or less they portray his life experiences.

3.1.1 Biography

V S Naipaul was born in Chaguanas, Trinidad on August 17, 1932. Trinidad is one among many islands which together are called West Indies. Trinidad and Tobago are the southernmost islands of the Caribbean archipelago. Geologically, they are an extension of the South American continent. Particularly, Trinidad is separated from Venezuela by 11 Kms (seven miles). Indigenous people, mainly Caribs and the Arawaks inhabited the island. Later, it was discovered by Christopher Columbus in 1498. It was in the regime of Spanish from 15th century itself to the time the British Empire captured it in 1797. Later on, it became an independent country in 1962.

Naipaul is the eldest son of a second-generation Indian. His Hindu grandfather had emigrated there from West India as an indentured servant. He, actually, had migrated from India (particularly Benares in Uttar Pradesh which is now called Varanasi) to teach the Indian cane-workers of Trinidad. His
father, Seepersad (1906-53), was a journalist and an equally good literary writer. He was a reporter in the *Trinidad Guardian* and also published a collection of short stories under the title *Gurudeva and other Indian Tales* in 1943. His literary aspirations were inherited by Vidiadhar and his brother, Shiva Naipaul. Shiva was highly talented. He was achieving great heights and a very high level of popularity. But, unfortunately, he passed away in an accident at a very early age, when he was in his early thirties. He also published a novel entitles *Fireflies*. He has a collection of short stories to his credit, too.

The family moved to Port of Spain, where Naipaul attended Queen’s Royal College, Trinidad. He was awarded Trinidad government scholarship in 1948. With the help of the same, he studied literature in England at University College, Oxford beginning somewhere in 1950. He, actually, left Trinidad for England in 1950 and he also did his Honours at Oxford University.

After his graduation in 1953, Naipaul worked for the BBC. As a writer, he hosted the ‘Caribbean Voices’ programme between 1954 and 1956 and later on, also worked as the editor of the same. He also worked with the literary journal, *The New Statesman* between 1956 and 1960.

He also got married to an English woman - Patricia Ann Hale - in 1955. Unfortunately, she died in 1996. So, after sometime he remarried to a Pakistani woman named Nadira. Since then, he lives in Wiltshire, England.
He has been travelling extensively and writing many successful and internationally acclaimed novels, short stories, and essays.

3.1.2 Awards and Accolades

V S Naipaul was knighted in 1989 / 1990 by the Royal family. He has many awards and accolades to his credit for his brilliance that is manifest in his works like John Llewelyn Rhys Memorial Prize, Somerset Maugham Award, Hawthornden Prize, W. H. Smith Prize, Booker Prize, The Nobel Prize, to name but a few. Following are the details of the same:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Award</th>
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<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Man Booker International Prize (Shortlisted)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Nobel Prize for Literature</td>
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<td>1993</td>
<td>David Cohen British Literature Prize</td>
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<td>1989</td>
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<td>1971</td>
<td>Booker Prize for Fiction for <em>In a Free State</em></td>
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<td>1968</td>
<td>WH Smith Literary Award for <em>The Mimic Men</em></td>
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<td>1964</td>
<td>Hawthornden Prize for <em>Mr Stone and the Knights Companion</em></td>
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<td>1961</td>
<td>Somerset Maugham Award for <em>Miguel Street</em></td>
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<td>1958</td>
<td>Mail on Sunday/John Llewellyn Rhys Memorial Prize for <em>The Mystic Masseur</em></td>
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He also holds honorary doctorates from Cambridge University and Columbia University in New York, and honorary degrees from the universities of Cambridge, London and Oxford.
Further, when he was awarded with the Bennett Award (1980), he himself expressed his heartfelt satisfaction taking the recognition bestowed upon his writings in general. He took it as a recognition to his vision and art. “Today, after he has received the Nobel Prize, he has been hailed as, ‘the greatest living writer in the English Language.’ He has also been bracketed as prestigious a writer as Joseph Conrad.” (V S Naipaul: A Literary Response to the Nobel Laureate, 9)

3.2 Major Works

V S Naipaul is primarily considered to be a writer of diaspora. He is the one who through his characters expresses the theme of identity crisis and rootlessness. He is, as the critics regard him, the best known for it in the literary world. Though not so explicit, without any doubt, all his writings have a very close relationship with his own personal life. “In between The Mystic Masseur (1957) – his first work and Half a Life (2001), he has produced a very huge corpus of writing that includes novels, short stories, non-fictional novels, travelogues, fictional biographies, fictional autobiographies, journalistic writings and history, proper among others” (V S Naipaul’s Narrative Art, 1). He is known for the following major works:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Year of Publication</th>
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<tr>
<td>The Mystic Masseur</td>
<td>1957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Suffrage of Elvira</td>
<td>1958</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miguel Street</td>
<td>1959</td>
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A House for Mr Biswas 1961
The Middle Passage: Impressions of Five Societies - British, French and Dutch in the West Indies and South America 1962
Mr Stone and the Knights Companion 1963
An Area of Darkness 1964
A Flag on the Island 1967
The Mimic Men 1967
The Loss of El Dorado: A History 1969
In a Free State 1971
The Overcrowded Barracoon and Other Articles 1972
Guerrillas 1975
India: A Wounded Civilization 1977
The Perfect Tenants; and The Mourners 1977
A Bend in the River 1979
A Congo Diary 1980
The Return of Eva Peron; and The Killings in Trinidad 1980
Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey 1981
Finding the Centre 1984
The Enigma of Arrival 1987
A Turn in the South 1989
India: A Million Mutinies Now 1990
A Way in the World 1994
Letters 1997
Beyond Belief: Islamic Excursions 1998
Letters Between a Father and Son  1999
Reading and Writing: A Personal Account   2000
Half a Life  2001
The Writer and the World: Essays   2002
Literary Occasions  2004
Magic Seeds  2004
A Writer's People: Ways of Looking and Feeling 2007

3.2.1 A Glimpse of his Major Works

When grouped together, as mentioned earlier, Naipaul’s works are studied as collections of short stories, novels, non-fiction novels, political works, biographies, autobiographies, travelogues etc.

He has two collections of short stories to his credit. *Miguel Street* (1959) is a collection of short stories. It also won Somerset Maugham Award. He also has written one more collection of short stories. It is entitled *A Flag on the Island* (1967). However, both the collections are different from each other. In *Miguel Street*, the society is highlighted; whereas, in *A Flag on the Island*, individuals have been the focus. The first one contains simple and homogeneous stories of the people of West Indies. An attempt has been made to recreate the society through allegories. He tries to create the society he has come from. The street, in the title, stands for multi-racial, multi-coloured, and multi-cultural society he lived in. Merits and weaknesses of the people are traced but they are not ridiculed. Instead, their merits like tolerance, innocence, simplicity and
welcoming nature are appreciated. All the seventeen stories, in fact, present seventeen persons representing their society culture and the ethnicity of the culture. In the second collection of the short stories, Naipaul presents heterogeneous themes, characters and narrative techniques. The individuals, herein, are not simple, tolerant and cooperative like in the first one; instead they are quite conscious of their identity, rights and are also quite active towards the attainment of their goals.

More popularly Naipaul is known for his non-fictions. They cover his journalist writings, novels in the new form, travelogues, history writings. Initial among them can be his visits to Caribbean Islands after his long stay in Great Britain. As a result, he has written about the Caribbean in *The Middle Passage: Impressions of Five Societies - British, French and Dutch in the West Indies and South America* (1962) and *The Loss of El Dorado: A History* (1969). He not only describes these islands but also cites the reasons why they are neglected quite continuously. He also talks of the typical qualities of those islands along with showing how divided and insecure they are.

His travelling to the Islamic countries has gifted us with two major books. They are: *Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey* (1981) and *Beyond Belief: Islamic Excursions* (1998). His visits to Pakistan, Afghanistan, Malaysia and Iran have been portrayed in these books. Though politically these countries are quite weak and backward, they
have been very significant culturally and commercially. He also projects the strengths and weaknesses of the Islamic fundamentalisms.

Further, his visits to India have produced three books about India: *An Area of Darkness* (1964), *India: A Wounded Civilization* (1977), *India: A Million Mutinies Now* (1990). In the first two books, Naipaul is found to be quite critical about India, whereas, in the third one his tone changes, in fact, his perception of India changes. The reason is: in his first two visits i.e in 1962-63 and 1975-76, he failed to find his roots in India and hence, he rejected it as his own land. In his first visit, he discovers that India cannot be his ancestors’ land and hence, he flew away. In the second visit, he is even more critical and outraged a lot of Indians because of his remarks such as India can never be his country. In the third attempt during his visit in 1988-89, he could understand India. He likes and appreciates the country and the people. He also presents, in the third work, why he had failed to grasp India in the past. He, actually, talks of awakening and liberation in India. Finally, it is also said that Naipaul portrays buildings, temples, markets, and cities in such a way that it becomes a handbook of India.

Similarly, *A Turn in the South* (1989) penetrates accounts of his visit to Latin American nations and his journey in the South of the USA. Through the black and white, liberals and the conservatives, he portrays one more facet of life.
Subsequent novels developed more political themes and he began to write about colonial and post-colonial societies in the process of decolonization.

*The Loss of El Dorado* (1969) deals with the history of colonization of Trinidad in particular and Third World countries in particular. He also explores the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized.

*Guerrillas* (1975) is a fictional history of Trinidad in the crisis. Though the idea and the outline of the novel are based upon the real events and incidents, the story is based on the fictional characters like Abdul Malik and his associates. Through the creative use of history, fictional history is created to show how directionless individuals and societies behave.

*In a Free State* (1971) won the Booker Prize for Fiction for Naipaul. It depicts rootlessness and a quest for identity as a world phenomenon. It has its characters residing in Africa, India and America.

One of the most sophisticated of his early novels is *The Suffrage of Elvira* (1958). The story of a village election aptly portrays the political scenario particularly of the Caribbean islands. It is also a satiric examination of the consequences of political change. Since people are completely unaware about the democracy and do not know the value of their vote, they are driven by everything other than democracy.
A Bend in the River (1979) is about the people nostalgic of their past, living in despair. The meaningless struggle against the orthodox ideas and meaningless world has been presented herein through the character of Salim and his useless migration to London.

Apart from these travelogues, history writing, novels and short stories, Naipaul has also attempted biographies and autobiographies through the use of fictional characters and incidents but matching (sometimes) exactly with his own life. His biographies include The Mystic Masseur (1957), Mr. Stone and the Nights Companion (1963) and A House for Mr. Biswas (1961); whereas his autobiographical novels are: The Mimic Men (1967), Enigma of Arrival (1987), and A Way in the World (1994).

The Mystic Masseur (1957) won the Mail on Sunday/John Llewellyn Rhys Prize in 1958. It was also adapted as a film with a screenplay by Caryl Phillips in 2001. It tells the story of a man called Ganesh Ramsumair, one who belongs to Trinidad. An imaginary confrontation between the Creole and Indian Society and the sophisticated and civilized wife of the governor is described in it.

His first novel set in England, Mr Stone and the Knights Companion (1963), won the Hawthornden Prize. It is a purely English novel. The theme and the setting also changes. It has to do more with the psychological problems.
His acclaimed novel *A House for Mr Biswas* (1961) is based on his father's life in Trinidad. It presents a picture of three generations of immigrant Indian community in Trinidad. The journey, quest for house of Mr. Biswas from his birth to the last breath has been presented in a biographical way.

*The Mimic Men* is an autobiography of the Third World. It deals with the intricacies of fallen politicians and it has also been presented through the eyes of a politician.


*Half a Life* (2001) follows the adventures of Indian Willie Chandran in post-war Britain, a new life initiated by a chance encounter between his father and the novelist W. Somerset Maugham.

3.3 Nativism and Naipaul

In the context of the present work, primarily, the problem, in the study of the works of V S Naipaul, was identifying his native and, then, studying his works with the same reference. There were a lot of questions unanswered like: Is India his native place? Or the place (Trinidad) where he was born? Or the Great Britain of which he has the citizenship? Some of his books are found to be English in nature, some Indian, whereas, some are closely associated with Trinidad. Hence, he is also considered to be a “Trinidadian writer who writes for an English readership.” (V S Naipaul, 21) Means he writes with England and at Trinidad. However, in the present work, he is considered to be “the product of distinctive combination of circumstances. A Brahmin Hindu born in Trinidad, he is an Indian by ancestry, a Trinidadian by nativity and British by residence as well as intellectual training and inclination.” (V S Naipaul: The Voice of Exile, 14)

Thus, present study is based on the fact that most of Naipaul’s writing issues from an earnest desire to understand his own position in the world. The unique combination of circumstances which related him to three societies and yet left him with a deep sense of homelessness, undeniably play a predominant part in shaping his sensibility and determining his writing career. He himself has said, “When I speak about being an exile or a refugee, I am not just using a metaphor.” (Newsweek, 34) He was, actually, born into exile, separated from his racial and cultural roots. He was, then, driven into another exile from the land of his birth. A third
dispossession awaited him in England. He was really and truly lost. Bruce King writes, “While the novels and short stories have seldom been about himself, they have reflected the various stages of his disillusionment with Trinidad, his despair with India and his concern with being a homeless ex-colonial.” (The New English Literatures, 108) “And then, he set out to discover himself and his world through his work.” (V S Naipaul: The Voice of Exile, 15) He himself has written, “Most imaginative writers discover themselves, and their world, through their work.” (The Return of Eva Peron with The Killings in Trinidad, 211)

There were three nativistic driving forces behind Naipaul’s works. First was his displacement from his ancestral land – India; second one was again his displacement from his native land – Trinidad; and the third one was the influence of his father. Thus, in his case, nativism has to be studied as spiritual nativism wherein cultures do not contact and clash but the root, society, culture, nation and thus, the identity of a person is found to be missing.

Naipaul’s view of Caribbean or Trinidad as the culture of mimicry and England - means of the West as the mimicked culture is the result of his reading and assimilation of colonial experience and colonial history. “He has explored with great sensitivity the predicament of the exile – the pain of homelessness and of loss of roots.” (V S Naipaul: The Voice of Exile, XIII) It is because Naipaul has, always, been preoccupied with
dislocation, migration, exile, identity crisis and the feeling of being rootless.

Therefore, he has been found, almost all through his literary career, in search for identity in his fiction. He is an Indian in the West Indies; a West Indian in the England; and a nomadic intellectual in the Third World. As given by Pandit, “The West Indians regard him as an English man because of his British education; the English look upon him as an Indian for his ancestry and the color of his skin; and the Indian refer to him as a West Indian writer.” (V S Naipaul: A Literary Response to the Nobel Laureate, 128)

3.3.1 A House for Mr. Biswas

* A House for Mr. Biswas * is Naipaul’s fourth novel that established his reputation, and in a sense, these earlier stories are still the immature fruit of his apprenticeship. They are less dense, less allusive than the later novels, and in place of the brooding vision of the third world embodied in such books as "Guerrillas" and "A Bend in the River," there is a humorous appreciation for the vitality of the populous Caribbean world.

* A House for Mr. Biswas * is without any doubt one of the most personal of the novels by Naipaul. Actually, the character of Mr. Mohun Biswas is created after his father – Seeprasad Naipaul. Further, the novel is also about his efforts of establishing himself. In a way, the house, in the title, is an assertion of his identity. “Since the days of Adam’s expulsion from the Garden of Eden, man
has been looking for a house; this primal search for shelter has become so much deeply entrenched that it has turned out to be an archetypal aim of all individuals.” (V S Naipaul: A Literary Response to the Nobel Laureate, 83)
The longing for a sovereign house is equated with asserting one’s own identity without others’ support - be it material or moral. However, gradually it becomes a pathetic struggle for a house where one can easily and freely express himself or herself. Mr. Biswas goes on, “I am going to get a job of my own. And I am going to get my own house too.” (67) There is also a song sung by Amy in Toni Morrison’s Beloved (81) which also depicts the importance of selfhood and identity, having some roots. The song is:
Through the muck and mist and gloam
To our quiet cozy home,
Where to sing sweet and low
Rocks a cradle to and fro. (Beloved, 81)

This sort of a quest for selfhood of a protagonist who is homeless, nameless and without individuality, personal status, independence and identity is narrated in a definite pattern wherein the protagonist moves from thesis to anti-thesis and back to thesis. It is also modeled on Naipaul’s father’s short story, “They named him Mohun”. It is an autobiographical work that draws upon an experience totally based on layered levels of alienation and exile. At an outline, the story is as follows:

The novel begins with the fact that Mr. Mohun Biswas, a journalist who lived on Sikkim Street in the St. James district of Port of Spain (the capital of
Trinidad and Tobago), was fired from his position at the *Trinidad Sentinel* ten weeks before he died. Before his death, he had been ill for quite some time, spending so long at the hospital and recuperating at his home that, eventually, the paper was forced to let him go, giving him three months’ notice and a complementary lifetime subscription.

The entire life of Mohun Biswas was, actually, filled with misfortune (and the death even was tragic and untimely). Further, he is born with the evil sixth finger. In addition, their made also proclaims that he is an ominous baby. He is predicted to be a lecher, a spendthrift and a liar. It was also predicted that he would eat his own parents. And, when looking for his missing son Raghu drowned in the river, the proclamation was considered to be true. He, gradually, gets so poorer that he is reduced to a skeleton; and is also doted with eczema scars. It is resultant of the malnutrition and social neglect. He is found to be fit for nothing. Even in the school, he is ridiculed by his teacher, Mr. Lal. He goes to the extent of compelling him to write on the blackboard that he is an ass and the class also giggles.

The fact is: Mr. Biswas was born in a village with all ill omens. His entire family is scattered after his father’s death. Even he had to move with his mother to Pagotes. At school he discovers a talent for lettering, and, that is why, he, then, becomes a sign-writer. As the financial condition of the family is not good, so, he is sent, by his aunt Tara, to a pundit to learn to learn Hindu rituals. Unfortunately, he leaves in disgrace after eight months. Then, he goes to work in a rum shop run by Tara’s brother-in-law. There, he is wrongfully
accused of stealing a dollar. So, he again leaves the place and joins one of his school friends in the sign-writing business. For the same, he happens to go to Hanuman House. It is the home of the Tulsis. He is, then, trapped there. Somehow, he happens to marry Shama, the sixteen-year-old daughter of Mrs. Tulsi. He is also expected to join the family and live there by working on the land with the other members of the family. He is not happy there. He rebels immediately. But, unfortunately, he is without any money or position of his own. So, he finds himself dependent on the Tulsis.

He, actually, disrupts the smooth running of the house. He is sent to a small rural village, The Chase, to act as manager of a Tulsi food shop. There, he spends around six years. His family grows. But the shop, continually, loses money. As a result, his family has to spend an increasing amount of time at Hanuman House.

Later on he also joins them there. Again he is sent to Green Vale to act as an overseer for Mrs. Tulsi’s powerful brother-in-law. The work does not suit him. He constantly feels persecuted by the labourers under him. He also suffers a mental breakdown. He has to return to Hanuman House because the house he had built was destroyed by a storm. He had to have it recovered. Again for his livelihood, he leaves the Tulsis and goes to stay with his sister in Port of Spain. He finds some work as a journalist on the Sentinel newspaper. This also leads to his reconciliation with the Tulsis. He also goes to live with his family at Mrs. Tulsi’s house in the city, which she also shares with her younger son, Owad, till the time, he is sent abroad for study.
A close relationship develops between Mr. Biswas and his son Anand. He also
takes a growing interest in his education. Meanwhile the Tulsis move to an
estate at Shorthills. Mr. Biswas is also persuaded to join them. The Tulsi
family begins to disintegrate under new social and economic pressures. As a
result, Mr. Biswas leaves them and returns to Mrs. Tulsi’s crowded house in
the city. He lives there until he moves to his own house in Sikkim Street. He
also had a fierce quarrel with Mrs. Tulsi and Owad.

His job at the *Sentinel* also changes to that of social investigator of ‘Deserving
Destitutes’. He is given a government post in a Social Welfare Department.
His has all his hopes in Anand. He also wins an exhibition to the prestigious
Queen’s College in the city. Meanwhile the house, Mr. Biswas has bought in
Sikkim Street, leads him to heavy debt. There are two reasons for that. First is
the house is over-priced; and the second is it badly in need of repairing.
Though there is a major loss and over-pricing, Mr. Biswas is happy that he
possesses his own house and land.

The happiness of Mr. Biswas does not last long. The government department,
he was transferred to, is dispersed. So, he returns to the *Sentinel*. But after
some time he is put on half-pay; and eventually he is dismissed. He also
develops heart-trouble.

His son Anand is now studying at a university in England. He has gone there
on a scholarship. But he does not return during his father’s illness. Fortunately
for Mr. Biswas his daughter, Savi, comes back. She also gets a well-paid job. But, the poor fellow had suffered enough meanwhile and so, he dies suddenly. He is also given a traditional Hindu cremation. Thereafter, his wife and children return to the empty house.

Thus, the novel becomes a fictional biography of Mr. Biswas. It covers the “journey of his life, from his birth to death. It is an elaborate explanation of various stages of growth in his life. Covertly, the novel, whose time span is the first half of the last century, is the fictional history of the immigrant East Indians in West Indies, particularly, the second phase of their history.” (V S Naipaul’s Narrative Art, 21).

If some of the incidents are elaborated in detail, they reveal a lot of expressions where Naipaul cries over his rootlessness, dislocation and identity crisis.

It deals with displaced, isolated and dispossessed characters striving really very hard to find out a habitation where they can start their life and lead it towards some prosperity. Actually, Naipaul was also suffering from this sense of rootlessness, nowhereness and semipermanency. He was in search of his roots, native, a house where he may find peace and solace and live happily. Being a Brahmin gypsy and a nomad, he lives everywhere as an outsider or a traveller. He suffers from the pangs of alienation but at the same time also tries to establish his identity by narrating his life struggle and experiences on
the societal, traditional and cultural affinities with Trinidad, India and England.

“With the decline of the British imperialism and the rise of the American power bloc in the second half of the twentieth century, the world has seen mass migration, expatriation and varieties of exile, which have given new shapes to individual and national cultural experiences.” (V S Naipaul: A Literary Response to the Nobel Laureate, 106) People were also living rootless lives. The same has also been the life-story of Naipaul. He was born in Trinidad in a large Brahmin family of Indian origin in the state of Uttar Pradesh, his early education at the port of Spain, and then going on scholarship to Oxford. From his very childhood, Naipaul had found his father to be a victim of the limited, poverty-ridden, backward Hindu world for his career in journalism and story writing in his diaspora identity. He had also realized the factors that had denied his father to be a potential writer. Talking about the same nostalgic feeling and the impact of his father on his writing, Naipaul himself says in an interview with David Bates:

The writing that has mattered the most to me is that of my father…. It taught me to look at things that had never been written about before, and seemed dull in life, yet when transformed to paper became very surprising. A great deal of my vision of Trinidad has come straight from my father (The Sunday Times, May 26, 1963).

A House for Mr. Biswas is Naipaul’s most personal book that is shaped after his father’s stories, a vital portion of his heritage to his son who considers
them a unique record of the life of the Indian or Hindu community in the Trinidad in the first fifty years of the twentieth century. Through his father’s stories, he was learning a great deal about a writer’s craft as they gave him a way of looking, an example of labour, a knowledge of the literary process, a sense of the order and special reality. “The novel is the fictional version of experiences Naipaul has recalled in later autobiographical surveys.” (V S Naipaul: A Literary Response to the Nobel Laureate, 107). He describes this as, “very much father’s book…. written out of his journalism and stories, out of his knowledge.” (Finding the Centre: Two Narratives, 72)

Mr. Biswas’ struggle is, actually, threefold: to build his house, to succeed as a journalist, and to prepare his son to leave home for study. His being caught in the Tulsidom and his own dream for a house of his own is quite symbolic. It is an archetypal symbol. It connotes stability and permanence; above all being attached to something (some roots) and having an identity of one’s own.

Thus, A House for Mr. Biswas or the character of Mr. Biswas is not simply an overreaction of the writer to some specific situations, societies and cultures. It is, in fact, a result of fear of extinction and the annihilation that his father endured and transmitted to his son. “In reconstructing his father’s life, he has traced the inception of his own process of self-creation on different planes in both tone and intention, theme and breadth, alienation and identity.” (V S Naipaul: A Literary Response to the Nobel Laureate, 107).
There are also instances where he openly disapproved of many of the Tulsi’s practices and policies. He even challenges their religious belief and associates with Hindu of another sect with whom the Tulsis disagree. The religious ambiguity and syncretism, and in some cases, even neglect of traditional religion, is one of the earliest aspects of cultural confrontation with which Naipaul deals with in the novel. He also progressively shows how (sometimes subtle and sometimes obvious) western – oriented Creole culture of Trinidad destroys Hindu traditional customs and beliefs and the resultant shifting of attitudes and psychological bewilderment. It is found that the Creole culture and the prevailing orthodox Hindu belief system definitely give people some room for social transmission. It also highlights the problem of geo-political uprooting of people and the consequences of socio-cultural hybridity. The sense of uprooting weakens the traditional forces. Mr. Biswas’ desire to own a house also symbolizes an individual’s strong impulse to protect his identity. All this ends in transplantation, exploitation and rootlessness.

The way Naipaul sufferers from rootlessness, tries to find one and is in search of an identity, a culture he can relate himself to; travels almost all around the world visiting various countries, Mr. Biswas also happens to go to various houses (in fact, there are repeated references of houses), to live and to practice varied cultural traditions.

First of all, his family is split (means he becomes homeless) and along with his mother he goes to his sister, Dehuti. Then, he is sent to the Pundit Jayaram. Afterwards, because of the accuse of the theft, he has to move to his aunt,
Tara. Once again he goes back to his sister through Ramchand, with whom she had run away. His going to Hanuman House, association with Tulsi House, his gifting a doll’s house to his own daughter, Savi, his starting to make a house, entering into the half-house, going back to Hanuman House and finally, completing the house and living there, everywhere there is the reference of a House.

Further, thus, house is the central metaphor in the novel. It contains a number of houses. To name them, there is Hanuman House, the Chase House, Green Vale House, the Tulsi House in Port of Spain and Mr. Biswas’ own House in Sikkim Street. In addition to these houses there are also more references of houses like Raghu’s hut, Ajodha’s house, Tara’s house, Dehuti’s quarter, to name important ones.

House, which primarily means freedom and security, having roots, being attached to some place, culture and society and an identity, is central herein. It also gifts unity to the structure of the novel. And that is perhaps the reason why it has been entitled *A House for Mr. Biswas*.

Further, Hanuman House is portrayed as the central house among all the houses mentioned and described in the novel. As given by Shashi Nath Pandey, “Hanuman House is a miniature India and its members tenaciously preserve the memory of their native country.” (V S Naipaul: *Critical Essays*, 2) Naipaul describes it as:
Among the tumbledown timber and corrugated iron buildings in the High Street at Arwakas, Hanuman House stood like an alien with fortress (80).

It is also described to have concrete walls and narrow doors. It provides security and protection to its inhabitants. People from outside cannot see the life inside the house. The world therein is quite closed and narrow. Even the Tulsis do not go outside so frequently. And that is why their thinking suffers from orthodox and narrow-mindedness. The word fortress denotes a wider meaning. Mrs. Tulsi is the head of the house, so she is the fortress. Others need to obey. Only the Queen (Mrs. Tulsi) and the guardians (Seth and Prince) and Owad have their identity. Further going deep down in the layers of meanings, the story also presents Hanuman House as a metaphor of the society, a community; and the life therein a community or a group life. It is true that it has its own virtues and vices but, the fact is, everybody gets his or her primary needs satisfied. In return, every member is assigned some work, duty. Thus, everyone is living a social, group and public life rather than an individual life. Every daughter in the Hanuman House is a family of a society we find around us.

Thus, through the depiction of a society, a community in the form the Hanuman House, Naipaul tries to address his own inner void, failure, isolation, dispossession and rootlessness. According to Satyendra Nandan, the Hanuman House is the microcosm of the slave society. Metaphorically, the word Hanuman in the name of the house refers to the supreme servant of the
Lord Rama. It means that it is a community wherein a lot of slaves are serving the Tulsi. However, one was out of love, respect and devotion, whereas the other one is based upon the mutual needs.

Further, due to migrations (after marriage migrations of the daughters and sons with their in-laws and migration from rural to urban area), Tulsi is fragmented into Biswas, Seths, Tulsi etc. Naipaul presents this disintegration of the Tulsi family to have a symbolic reference to the disintegration of the Hindu community in West Indies. And Mr. Biswas’ struggle against Tulsi is his confrontation with the community for seeking personal recognition.

Mr. Biswas’ stay at Chase house and the house itself are also metaphorical. Unplastered rooms, simply made up of mud and a roof of old rough thatch and the disintegrated floor symbolize how the house is exposed to dangers from outside. Similarly, Naipaul also had his identity and roots disintegrated and exposed to dangers. Even the elders represented by him are rough to him. Further, the description of the kitchen given by Naipaul is:

The kitchen remained askew and rickety, he did not wall off part of the gallery to make a new room, and he did not thought it worthwhile to plant tree that would bear flowers or fruit in two or three. (186)

This disconnection of the kitchen and the room is suggestive of two things: one it suggests that Mr. Biswas and his wife – Shama were not living together and there was also a huge gap between their thinking. The gap is made visible by showing the need for restructuring of the gallery. The other meaning is that
though Mr. Biswas had a house (identity) of his own, it was in crisis, lacked in stability and identity in the other culture(s).

One of the basic themes of the novel is the theme of culture clash – the difficulty of adjustment of the protagonist in Tulsidom and his constant yearning for a life of liberty from the Hanuman House.

In addition, the theme of identity crisis also rings from the novel. Because of the problem of identity - symbolically a house, Mr. Biswas has to undergo a lot of tests, trials and tribulations; adjustments, ups and downs. He earnestly longs for a house of his own, means for a free, fair existence, stability and having proper identity. But, unfortunately, like most of the countries of the colonial regime, he is not able to have an identity of his own, literally a house of his own. Unfortunately, Mr. Biswas is found to be a modern man, absolutely alienated from the society. He has perpetual fear of insignificance and alienation.

The same has also been confessed by Naipaul in his Autobiography. He says that there was a migration from India to be considered, a migration from within the British Empire. There was my Hindu family, with its fading memories of India; there was India herself. And there was Trinidad, with its past slavery, its mixed population, its racial antagonisms and its changing political life; one part of Venezuela and the Spanish empire, now English – speaking, with the American base and an open – air cinema at the end of Bogart’s street.
Commenting upon Naipaul’s position in the world at large, it is frequently commented that he lives in permanent exile. Meenakshi Mukherjee goes to the extent of saying that he belongs to a fraternity patronizing “their apprehension of reality (which) has been affected by the experience of more than one country and conditioned by exposure to more than one culture.”

Further, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, the story in the novel follows or progresses in a particular pattern: thesis – anti-thesis - thesis. One may find that the pattern repeats itself several times. With reference to the story, the protagonist – Mr. Biswas moves from Hanuman House to a house of his own. But, unfortunately, he has to come back to the Hanuman House with all his sorrows, dejection and disappointment. Despite his several attempts to get a house of his own, every time he fails. His disappointment starts with Chase from where he has to return to Hanuman House. Second effort was going to the Green Vale. There he tries to construct a house for himself. But misfortunate also follows him. The house collapses so does the protagonist psychologically. His third attempt is his shifting to the Short Hills where he has his own house for his family. He is partly independent and his mother also comes to stay with him. He is found to be on good terms with Tulsis, too. But, one bad night the house catches fire and he is back to live with the Tulsis in the Port of Spain. Though the life is confortable there, Mr. Biswas is not happy with the kind of treatment he gets there. Even his wife is willing to have an independent residence. So, Mr. Biswas buys a house in Sikkim Street, in Port of Spain. He moves there with his family and passes away. The house,
unfortunately and ultimately, becomes an emblem of the loss of his El Dorado – the golden and dearest dream of his life. As given by Nayak, “We see death and darkness rising in him. During the last months of his life, his emotional states are marked as the consequences not only due to strokes but also to a life-time struggle and unbearable tension made by his indomitable spirit and a few gratifying successes.” (V S Naipaul: A Literary Response to the Nobel Laureate, 114)

However, his passing away starts the story with a vivid description wherein Mr. Biswas, the protagonist, is referred as a loser, in fact, quite unfortunate since his birth. The description given by Naipaul is:

Mr. Biswas was forty-six, and had four children. He had no money. His wife Shama had no money. On the house in Sikkim Street Mr. Biswas owed, and had been owing for four years, three thousand dollars. The interest on this, at eight per cent, came to twenty dollars a month; the ground rent was ten dollars. Two children were at school. The two older children, on whom Mr. Biswas might have depended, were both abroad on scholarships (2).

Finally, Naipaul imposes the orthodox objective structure to the novel. It is objective because it is narrated by a third person. This third person is a person who is omniscient and is always with the protagonist. The narration by this third person is chronological with two entities – House and Mr. Biswas at the core of the structure. The same has also been conveyed by the title also. The
novel is weaved into two parts consisting of chapters. The first part of the novel presents the rural Trinidad and the Hindu community; whereas the second part depicts the urban Trinidad and higher values. The chronological narrative (of the life of Mr. Biswas) is placed in parentheses – between prologue and epilogue. However, surprisingly, in the prologue and the epilogue, only the narrator is present. The protagonist is dead. Editorial voice of the narrator is made instrumental by the author. Further, Naipaul achieves this effect by making the narrator and the protagonist alienated from each other. Both are strangers and outsiders. Though the narrator sympathizes with him, he does not develop intimacy with him. He remains formal in his relation and also addresses him as Mr. Biswas. The same is interpreted by Nayak as, “Alienation characterizes the affinity between the protagonist and the narrator as they are marginal men in whom body and soul are in conflict. Alienation or rootlessness is related to the loss of and quest for identity. It is the loss of identity that results in alienation…. Mr. Biswas is denied the honor or satisfaction of absorbing into the Hindu world or to represent it in the outside world. Mr. Biswas’s sense of belonging is a pre-requisite of assuming an identity…. Identity needs one’s social and cultural base to be established which seems to be in crisis with his status as an outsider, a victim of denial, betrayal and tyranny.” (V S Naipaul: A Literary Response to the Nobel Laureate, 115) For the same reason, Das also opines, “the house in this novel is a symbol not for rootedness but for freedom – freedom from slavery and oppression.” (Aspects of Commonwealth Literature, 102)
3.3.2 Half a Life

Half a Life by Naipaul is also all about exile, alienation, cultural tradition, soil and roots.

It is said that all cultures are hybrid and heterogeneous by nature. Because it is really very difficult to deny the existing continuity of long traditions, linguistic heritage and sustained habitations.

Edward Said, in Culture and Imperialism (1993), says, “Survival, in fact, is about connections between cultures.” (408) Exile is a status to the marginal. It is, actually, a mental condition. As a mental condition, it is called a sense of insecurity and anxiety. In most common situations, men and women in exile often search for authentic identity and home. Naipaul is also found to be in search for an identity. He is not happy and satisfied with Trinidad, feels uprooted in India and again in England he fails to identify himself with the culture and values of the British.

In Half a Life, Naipaul portrays the lives of the people of mixed descent in three different locales – India, England, and Africa. A princely state in British India is the setting of the first part of the novel; second one is set in post-war London with West End Clubs and pavements – lonely ones; similarly, the third one is set in a province of Portuguese Africa. Moreover, they are not only the background settings of the novel but also internal and integral parts of the novel. Further, they are taken from the real life. Story is found to be full of irony and sarcasm.
However, Naipaul himself writes initially that the novel is, “not exact about the countries, periods, or situations it appears to describe.”

It is about homelessness. He also presents the struggle for identities. It is also called, “a treatise on the pangs of the exiles”. Those living in exiles are living without a meaning and a purpose that is why, Naipaul calls it Half a Life.

It is true that the novel has a very thin structure. Even then there is a very wide cast of characters: Perci Cato – a Jamaican of mixed parentage, Marcus, an ambitious businessman, Roger, a young lawyer, Perdita, Roger’s Fiancée, Carla, the Convent girl, Richardo, a Militaryman, The Nornhas, Julio, Correia, a formidable Portuguese, Greca Carl, the manager’s wife, Gouveria, an architect, Mrs. Nornha, a good storyteller, and Ana.

The protagonist of the novel is Willie Chandran. He is born of a Brahmin Father and a schedule caste mother. He leaves India for England and then England for Africa. Thus, the locales and the story therein are in three parts. The first part is entitled ‘A Visit from Somerset Maugham’; second one is called ‘The First Chapter’, and the third one is labeled ‘A Second Translation’. British India that is untouched by the colonial agitation is the locale of the first part. In the second part, post-war London and the lonely pavements is the locale; whereas, in the third part, province of Portuguese Africa living in the final stage of colonialism locates major story.
Finally, all the fictional experiences and the story depicted in the novel are restlessly nomadic. Further, Naipaul elaborates and narrates on the themes of exile, alienation, displacement and dislocation. Bhagabat Nayak rightly writes, “The book is about the confused identities, a theme that Naipaul discusses in almost all the books he has written – people coming from small places, smaller historical contexts and struggling with the looseness of their selves and their lives. The novel has three parts with different settings cast in different eras. Each part is a narration of an individual narrator. In the first part, Willie Chandran’s father tells his story which took about ten years.” (V S Naipaul: A Literary Response to the Nobel Laureate, 236-37) It, actually, reminds the readers of Naipaul. He writes:

I must go back. We come from a line of priests. We were attached to a certain temple. I do not know when the temple was built or which ruler built it or for how long we have been attached to it; we are not people with that kind of knowledge. We of the temple priesthood and our family made a community. At one time I suppose we would have been a very rich and prosperous community, served in various ways by people whom we served. But when the Muslims conquered the land we all became poor. The people we served could no longer support us. Things became worse when the British came. There was law, but the population increased. There were far too many of us in the temple community. This was what my grandfather told me. (20)

Willie’s father was an idler student of BA at the university. But he had no interest in literature. So, he decides to hear the call of Mahatma Gandhi, father
of the Nation – India for the students to boycott the university. He, finally, decides to follow Mahatma and sacrifice his life. He looks back to his ancestral land and marries / lives with a backward class girl. He does so to get Mahatma’s favour. To get that favour, even he goes to the extent of refusing to marry the daughter of the principal. Disappointed his father says, “You have blackened all our faces and now we will have to face the anger of the school principal. You have dishonoured his daughter.” (24)

As a result, he is charged with corruption. He is also forced to leave his job at the Maharaja’s. Then, he takes shelter in a temple. He goes in silence. He finds it the need of the hour. It also proves to be a great help to him in that sort of a situation. He lives in the temple on the bounty of the pilgrims and becomes a holy man. But he could not reside there forever. Further, he also takes a vow which Naipaul puts as, “privately, in the recesses of my heart I took a view of sexual abstinences, a vow of brahmacharya.” (33)

But he is found to be hollow. Soon he becomes the father of Willie and after some time the father of a daughter also. She is given the name Sarojini. The name was given after the woman poet of our independence movement. It was view a view to have the blessings of the similar kind. An esteemed international marriage is also planned for her. Then Naipaul writes, “This was the story that Willie Chandran’s father told. It took about ten years. Different things had to be said at different times. Willie Chandran grew up during the telling of this story.” (35)
The second part starts with Willie Chandran’s experiences in the mission school. Willie and his sister Sarojini go to the mission school. It is because her mother also attended the same school. In this part, Naipaul, actually, intervenes as an omniscient narrator. Willie now sets out for his life journey.

Willie’s stay at the mission school proves to be disillusioned. On one hand, he is ashamed of his father, whereas, on the other, his mother becomes a victim of Indian caste system. In her school, Willie’s mother found that a ragged and half-starved servant was serving water to all the students. He was giving it from a barrel. He would pour water into a brass vessel or in an aluminium one when a student would come to drink water. Finally, when she goes to the servant, no choice is offered to her. Instead, he poured water in a dirty tin. Later on, the poor girl realizes that aluminium was for Muslims and Christians and other people of those strata, brass was for the people of the caste and that poor tin was meant for her.

Later on, Willie goes to London for higher studies, of course with the help of one of his father’s friends. But, there, he finds himself uprooted from his own culture and hence, without any kind of fulfillment. He meets a lot of people, comes in good contact with them, becomes friendly but, even then, he fails to adapt their culture. He is completely cut off from his roots i.e. culture. He is found to be aimless; floating aimlessly like the survivor of a shipwreck. He is trying to find security. Thus, Naipaul presents culture shock resultant of a changed environment. In fact, Naipaul himself is suffering from cultural alienation. The same is presented herein through the life-story of Willie. It is
like transplanting a tree. Uprooted and transplanted tree does not normally have healthy roots nor does it have normal growth. Hence, one’s complete growth and fulfillment is not possible unless and until the person finds himself or herself on one’s own culture. Though Willie makes a lot many of efforts to settle down, moves from place to place, tries to be used to new environment, he is overtaken by the feeling of alienation from within. It is, actually, a result of his failure to get a place in the world. The story further elaborates the same.

Ultimately, Willie moves to England on scholarship. He is one among the immigrants in post-war London. There are lonely pavements of West end clubs and isolated streets. There he passes through sexual encounters leading again to failures. He also attempts writing in English.

In the run, Willie develops friendship with Percy Cato. He is of the Jamaican mixed parentage. He had an Indian grandmother. Actually, he is a bohemian. He also meets some frightening men. Among those he meets a person who is working for BBC. He advices Willie to work for BBC. Initially, Willie’s work is accepted by the publisher. But, later, stories based on India and other related themes come back. He, thus, fails to succeed even as a writer. He reacts, “let the book die. Let it fade away. Let me not be reminded of it. I will write no more.” (123)

Fortunately, Ana comes to his rescue. She is quite young, thin and really very pretty girl. She has a kind of admiration for Willie’ stories, too. He is happy in her company. His half-life is full and complete.
Along side his happiness, some sorrow also follows. The tenure of his scholarship ends. Willie is now found to be even in a pathetic situation. He thinks, “My life is going to change completely. I will have to look for a place to stay. I will have to look for a job. It will be a different London then.” (130)

Fortunately for him, Ana proves to be survivor. Willie moves to Africa with her. She leads him to her home in a region of Portuguese Africa wherein people are living their last days of colonialism. He encounters sex with other ladies without any kind of feeling of guilt or betrayal. He finds another man in himself. One day he sleeps on the front steps of the estate house and becomes unconscious. When he wakes up, he finds himself in Military Hospital. He is among the soldiers with red eyes and shining faces. Post-Independence Civil War starts and he feels, “The physical pain of my damaged body was like the other pain that had been with me for months and perhaps for years.” (227) He, further, feels that he has already given eighteen long years to Ana and now cannot give her any more. He has an earnest desire to live a life of his own. He, finally, leaves Ana and goes to Berlin to his sister Sarojini.

Because of colonialism, one may find that people live under western influence, try to follow the western cultural practices and lifestyles. But, ultimately, his own native culture and traditional forms form a base of all his growth and achievement. One can find satisfaction and fulfillment only in one’s own native culture. Even those who, are carried away by the maze of some cultures, strongly feel a need for their culture after a considerable period
of life. The life they live till then is called half – life herein. As said by Savitri, “The story tells us that uprooted from his own culture, man feels identity crisis, because one cannot cut off from his own culture, neither can adopt fully the foreign culture.” (V S Naipaul: A Literary Response to the Nobel Laureate, 224) What happens with Willie is quite the same story. His cultural and resultant social alienation in England and later in Mozambique finds the roots in Willie’s cultural alienation, which is again a result of his parental alienation. The same way Willie’s realization of the fact that his middle name is quite alien and subsequent queries also refer to his roots but reveal the theme of rootlessness. Loss of identity also forms an integral part of the novel. It becomes clear through the expressions like,

“The loss of the passport worried me more than everything else.
Without my passport, I didn’t see how I could prove to any office in Africa or England or India, who I was?” (150)

Thus, the title of the novel is quite appropriate and in line with the theme of the novel. Uprooted from his own culture, Willie lives a half – life. Further, as given by Asha Chaubey, “Naipaul focuses on the half – ness of his personality, the incompleteness of his life for all of which he is moved with despise for his father. He blames his father for the half – status that he has been accorded.” (V S Naipaul: Critical Essays, 170) Asha also writes, “This story of Willie’ father is told by him in his reply to Willie’s question regarding his middle name. 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 lies like 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 his parental authority is concerned.” (V S Naipaul: Critical Essays, 169) It is expressed as,

My decision was simple. It was to turn my back on our ancestry, the foolish, foreign – ruled, starving priests my grandfather had told me about, to turn my back on all my father’s foolish hopes for me as someone high in Maharaja’s service, all the foolish hopes of the college principal to have me marry his daughter… and to do the only noble thing that lay in my power, which was to marry the lowest person I could find. (11)

He is even found to be tongue – tied when his teacher used to ask, “What does your father do?”

Similarly, his sister Sarojini is also living a half – life. With her husband she is wandering here and there. Percy Cato, Willie’s friend in London has no place to stay and hence, he is living half – life. Greca and her husband also lead a half – life. They move from town to town, house to house, and job to job. Naipaul calls himself a man without a country and an outsider in search of his roots, native. The situation without those roots, culture and traditions is called leading a half – life.

The language of the novel has dignified simplicity. Naipaul hardly uses any derogatory words. The use of first person helps him stay away and narrate the
story; it is quite an objective way of narration. The story flows as it is uttered by the characters. The rest is left to the readers. However, it is full of irony. Though the novel meets an abrupt end, it is justified by Roger, the journalist in the second part. He tells Willie,

I know your great namesake and family friend (implying Somerset Maugham) says that a story should have a beginning, a middle and an end. But actually, if you think about it, life isn’t like that. Life doesn’t have a neat beginning and a tidy end. Life is always going on. You should begin in the middle and end in the middle, and it should all be there. (83)

3.4 Conclusion

Both the novels and, in fact, almost all of the novels by V S Naipaul deal with culture, identity and roots. It is because he, himself, had to undergo a lot of ups and downs to assert his own identity. He could not find his roots nor could he adjust himself to a country. He himself admits, “Living in a borrowed culture, the west Indian, more than most, needs writers to tell him who he is and where he stands.” (The Middle Passage, 73) The study of both the novels show that Naipaul has made a quite successful attempt to give a voice to all those who are homeless and rootless.

One may find that both the novels deal with the major theme of identity crisis as a result of rootlessness or homelessness and craving for one’s land, home, identity and native. Almost all or at least all major characters are rural and poor and are taken from the quite lower middle class society. Moreover, as
Prasad says, “They long for a free and fair existence but unfortunately they are not able to cross the boundary of the colonial society.” (V S Naipaul: A Literary Response to the Nobel Laureate, 120) Further, Ormerod also believes, Naipaul’s is a world of “homeless nomadic migrants, making middle passages from Africa or India to the West Indies thence to England and back again, for, after three hundred years, there is no society and no system of values in which they can take root.” (In a Direct Land: The Novels of V S Naipaul, 162) Prasad further opines that against this crucial and critical background, the characters of Naipaul are seen struggling for permanence and stability – Mr. Biswas’s desire for a house and Willie’s and almost all characters’ half - lives.

Pandit also opines, “Every individual in the world, however low his social and economic status, desires to possess some space that could be his very own, his house or home. This desire is more evident in people who, for some reason or other, are displaced from their origins and for whom homelessness is an everyday phenomenon. The realization of this rootlessness forces them to create a solid home – space even in an alien land.” (V S Naipaul: A Literary Response to the Nobel Laureate, 130)

The language in both the novels comes naturally as the flow of a river from a mountain. All the sorrows, sufferings, miseries and pains of Biswas and Willie or other characters in the novels are quite natural and resultant issues of people living in an alien land or of the people who are deprived of their native or home land. Biswas is in search of his house whereas, in case of Willie, he always carries his native with him.
Champa Rao Mohan in her preface to *Postcolonial Situation in the Novels of V S Naipaul* writes, “Writing from the unique position of being an East Indian in the West Indies, Naipaul has been able to capture the experiences of the colonized in all its psychological depth, by virtue of which he has carved a niche for himself as a novelist of the colonial experience.” (*Postcolonial Situation in the Novels of V S Naipaul*, V)

Similarly, in the Introduction of the same book, Champa Rao Mohan also opines, “Naipaul deals predominantly with the East Indian experiences in the West Indies. He presents a poignant picture of the East Indians struggling to preserve their identity in an alien environment, but ultimately succumbing to the influence of the dominating culture. The compromises that these Indians have to make in order to come to terms with the alien environment and forge an identity for themselves, form a long and painful process, which is touchingly retold by Naipaul.” (*Postcolonial Situation in the Novels of V S Naipaul*, 13)

Quite the same way Mohit K Ray in the Preface to *V S Naipaul: Critical Essays* gives, “Naipaul is one of literature’s greatest travelers and his leading theme of rootlessness, the alienating effects of colonial past on today’s postcolonial people has taken him to Africa, South America, India and all over the world – *not in search of roots but in search of rootlessness.*” (vi) He finds it so because he finds him, “an uprooted person adrift in the world his
experience of the two worlds to none of which he could really belong.” (V S Naipaul: Critical Essays, v)

Finally, William Walsh also writes commenting upon Naipaul and his theme of rootlessness, “We are all, all our lives, stiffening in a rented mansion.” (V S Naipaul: A Manifold Voice, 71)