



Research Paper

## Theme of Personal and Geographical Displacement in V. S. Naipaul's *Half a Life*

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**Abstract:** *V.S. Naipaul is one of the popular literary artists of the world as he does not write for art's sake alone like Emerson and Thoreau, he has his own views on culture, civilization, democratic values, prudence, wisdom, manners, faith, heroism, travelling, adventure etc. As an intellectual he observes man and his manners. As a satirist he can be ranked with Swift, Pope, Dr. Johnson & Henry Fielding. He wrote a lot on the problems of Asians and Africans as he is the product of Trinidad. Like Gandhi, he understands the various problems of these people and expresses them in his works in his own ways.*

**Keywords:** *Democratic values, class struggle, existence, despair*

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V.S. Naipaul was conscious of his creativity and literary sensibilities. There is no denying the fact that humor, irony, and satire are his primary tools. He fails to tolerate the exploitation of these races by the European nations. After 1965 most of the African nations became free from western slavery and yet remained the victims of colonialism. Since they had no culture of their own, they accepted western pattern. A few critics believe that his picture of India and other nations is gloomy, and he has been run down as a pessimist. He is an observer of life and does not hide the complexities and ugliness of Asian and African life. He lived in England to find his center and travelled in USA for the same purpose. Like Charles Dickens and E.M. Forster, his range is wide as he describes different kinds of people and their manners. Like Ulysses, he wants to see the whole world and remove the gap between the seen and unseen places of course, he gathers knowledge about races and seats and describes them in true colors impartially. Most of the critics accept him as a 'serious traveler' as his approach is just i.e., without preconceived perceptions. Like Oliver Goldsmith, he visited the whole of Europe, Asia, Africa, and other nations of the world. In *A Writer's People: Ways of Looking and Feeling*. V.S. Naipaul mentions what he has seen and experienced at different times. As a minute observer of life. V.S. Naipaul is well acquainted with the various evils as caused by growth of industrialization, colonialism, imperialism, fascism, and Nazism.

V.S. Naipaul got the Nobel Prize for Literature (2001) for his novel *Half a Life*. In the beginning of the novel the hero wants to know – Why is he called after Somerset Maugham, the great British novelist who is popular form Of Human Bondage, Cakes and Ale and The Razor's Edge. It is well known that Somerset Maugham had deep interest in Indian philosophy and accepted the principles of right knowledge, right conduct, and right philosophy. Like T.S. Eliot, H.D. Thoreau, and Emerson, he accepted the lesson of The Gita – Do thy duty and reward is not thy concern. Willie's father felt inspired with the call of Gandhi to boycott education and came forward for Swaraj. He had planned a life of celibacy and get failed to control his lust and as a result married a dark-complexioned woman of low caste. Consequently, like Gandhi, he begot a son Willie and a daughter named Sarojini. Despite his best efforts, Willie failed to choose any profession for himself and fails in life. Sarojini gets married to a German photographer who is planning a career in film and industry.

Due to sheer good luck Willie gets a sort of scholarship to join Oxford University and leaves India behind. However, the author exposes the orthodox system of India in the beginning of the novel. Then he satirizes the fact that a lot of Indians lost their career due to Gandhi's call to boycott education. Willie led a life of melancholy as he had no regular means of income. His father had married his mother against the desire of his grandfather and hence suffered numberless agonies. Willie, his father, and his mother know the true meaning of "sacrifice" for the nation. Like Gandhi, Willie's father followed concept of Civil Disobedience and as a result his father's principal was angry with him. His father tolerates all problems of the audit department and often feels frustrated and alone. His father, like Gandhi, had his own concept of spirituality though he studied Browning, Shelley, Hardy etc. with keen interest. Fate takes away the pleasures of his father's life and he pays the price as a freedom fighter. Through Willie's father V.S. Naipaul describes strength to fight against British imperialism. Quite often they were arrested and tormented in the prisons. Nobody bothered for the sickness of their wives and

the education of their children. After all Willie's father adored the volunteers of the independence movement of India. Yet he had the moral courage to fight against casteism and married a girl of low caste.

V.S. Naipaul does not discuss Marxism in detail. In *Half a Life* he refers to the firebrand supporter of Marxism through the uncle of Willie's mother. The author does not analyze Marxist theories of dialectical materialism, class struggle, four stages of economic growth, the last stage of the success of Proletariat, the theory of surplus value etc. Since Willie's mother got the support of a relative Marxist, nobody could dare to harm his father. However, his father could not be a great man as he wanted to be. But there was no limit to his grief. His father was investigated for corruption. Yet he supported the cause of backward people and ultimately succeeded. Willie's father narrates:

Elsewhere in the country they were talking of Gandhi and Nehru and the British. Here in the maharaja's state, they were shut off from politics. They were half-nationalists or quarter-nationalists or less. Their big cause was the caste war.(28)

Yet his father struggled for existence as independence had not yet been granted to the country. He had no courage to give up his wife. But he wanted to get rid of self-delusion. Sarojini grew young and took her own decision. Ultimately, as a supporter of international marriage, she left for Germany without bothering for her father's permission. Soon Willie's father realized the generational gap between himself and his son – He is not me.

Willie wrote the story *A Life of Sacrifice* and his father failed to understand the situation. Willie too felt nervous as there was no chance to make progress in life. But fate helps Willie Chandran and he reached Oxford College with the help of a scholarship offered by a Lord. Here he notices the gap between man and man and feels lost:

Willie thought he was swimming in ignorance, had lived without a knowledge of time. He remembered one of the things his mother's uncle used to say: that the backwards had been shut out for so long from society that they knew nothing of India, nothing of the other religions, nothing even of the religion of the people of caste, whose serfs they were. And he thought, 'This blankness is one of the things I got from my mother's side.(55)

Now he realized that life remained pretty hard for his father as nobody realised his inner conflicts and despair. In London he failed to appreciate the splendour of Buckingham Palace. A lot of things were different here and he took time to adjust in that Western situation. He observed the beauty of various buildings, churches and other institutions, Now he decided to hide his past and pretended to be the son of a Brahmin. His friend Cato told him that he had come from Panama Canal. However, Willie noticed that Cato was very particular about his dress and beloved. He loved June and enjoyed sex with her freely. After getting necessary information about the prostitutes, he reached Piccadilly Circus. But he failed to satisfy June sexually. Percy illustrated a few British manners to Willie and discussed the problem of immigrants too. He observed the gap between Whites and the Blacks. Soon he got a minor job in B.B.C. and wrote a script for them. The money he got for the script made him feel happy though he had no real understanding about Indian culture and Indian civilization. Now he became conscious of the tension between Christians and non- Christians and the author describes the racial prejudices sarcastically. He asked several questions from himself – Who is the real champion of labourers? Where is the school for writers to learn the art of creativity? Why do the people lead a life of distress and tension? What are the grievances of a writer? How to understand the large Indian world?

Soon his script was recorded and there was no limit to his joy. But alas! His pleasure proved short-lived as he failed as a press reporter. He became conscious of the fact that creative writing is not that easy. Since Willie fails to concentrate on any project and lacks sincerity, he fails in his mission. He writes a few reviews for *The New Statesman* and finally feels disgusting. He realizes that everybody can't become Hemingway:

The stories didn't come so easily now. but they came, one a week, two a week. And whenever Willie felt he was running out of material, running out of cinematic moments, he went to see old movies or foreign movies.(88-89)

In spite of all courage that Roger creates in him, he fails as an artist and becomes conscious of his bread and butter. There is no source of delight for him as he loses every hope for bright future. He has no home to find shelter and the society fails to accept him. Savitri Tripathi remarks:

Uprooted from his own culture, Willie reaches London but is unable to get fulfilment anywhere. He comes in contact with many friends but cannot adopt to the culture of that place. Cut off from his roots and culture, he aimlessly floats like a survivor of a shipwreck, trying to find security but finds none anywhere. Naipaul deals with the crisis arising out of a change of environment, which is known as cultural shock.

V.S. Naipaul develops the theme of *Half a Life* and describes the shallow aims of Willie. After deserting Ana he reaches Berlin to enjoy life with his sister Sarojini. When he had lived here for a few weeks, his sister asked him his future plans or does he wish to remain aimless his whole life? But Willie fails to decide his future course of action. After all he had wasted 18 years of his life in South Africa – the place where Gandhi lived for more than twelve years and struggled hard for the rights of the Blacks. Is he just a victim of case psychosis or colonial psychosis? He tells her that he supports the concept of equality for citizens of south Africa. However, he repents for the wastage of time. Had he thought of this plan, he would have done something noble there. But alas! Gone are the days of luxury and he is good for nothing here.

Willie realizes that a common man like him too can fight against injustice, tyranny and exploitation. If Gandhi can solve the problem of violence in Noakhali (Bengal), he too can create history. Now there is a mixture of thoughtfulness and intuition in him and he finds himself self-illuminated. He reconsiders his life and decides to return to India as he has an inner urge to join the movement. At last he accepts the importance of simplicity and naturalness. He acknowledges everything without remorse and shame. His sister Sarojini asked him not to feel disheartened when he left Berlin for India. He had vigour and zeal to pursue a noble cause and begin the journey of life again.

At times, Willie feels himself to be an ascetic as he has come to seek new purpose of life . But alas! he joins the group of Tamil guerrillas and fails to adjust with the rough and tough life of camps Willie leads a purposeless life all alone. Through him , the author discusses various political, economical and social issues of Asian and African countries .

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