



(REVIEW ARTICLE)



## Half searching for identity for the sake of meaning in Naipaul's Half a Life

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### Abstract

In this novel, Naipaul addresses the identity crisis regarding the internal and external of man. The protagonist, Willie, emigrates to London from India, next to Africa, and returns to London. He is constantly looking for an identity to make meaning of his life. Willie was born in a religious, cultural, and backward society that affects him, and he lacks self-esteem and self-confidence. Looking outside without inside for a purpose in life is the essential problem. Therefore, Willie cannot find it. The protagonist fails throughout his journey, from the first space to the second space and the third one. He is disappointed in all his relationships, even with Ana, whom he loved and lived with for many years in Africa.

**Keywords:** Ana; Identity; Naipaul; First space; Second space; Third space; Willie

### 1. Introduction

No one asks Humans, either parents or god, whether they desire to live or not to live. In many places on our mother planet, parents who are the reflection of their traditions and cultures lack knowledge and have illiterate experience. Therefore, they cannot raise and educate their offspring satisfactorily. Society, in addition, is the reflection of the individuals. Accordingly, this phenomenon will not help give opportunities to people to unlock their potential. Constructing Identity requires the exploration of the internal and external worlds of humans. Society advances with literacy, gender equality, and freedom. Each individual must first educate herself or himself in modern education and science. Both genders should work together to move society forward. Everyone deserves freedom and opportunities, regardless of color, country, nationality, class, gender, ethnicity, religion, etc.

The content of the novel refers to the colonial and post-colonial generations. They face entirely different situations but still suffer. Their difficulties in life never end, but they change in nature and patterns. And it also varies from person to person to experience barriers and how to deal with them. Therefore, only those who can enjoy life, help others to enjoy it, and respect people, animals, and the environment can be prosperous. The author's emphasis on the significance of reading and writing shows that this is the only way people can find themselves and that it is useless to attempt outside yourself for meaning and happiness.

### 2. Theoretical Methodology

I have recently published two articles on two novels about identity crises concerning space and time. They concentrated on three areas; space one (India), space two (Europe), and space three (America). Nevertheless, in this study, the third space is dissimilar from the third space of the two previous studies. The third space embodies the United States of America based on Stuart Hall's discourse, but in this review, it symbolizes Africa. Based on textual reader response. Therefore, the theories and cases can set spaces and determine their impacts (Majeed, 2023).

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This study explores finding identity regarding meaning in Naipaul's *Half a Life*, relying on the textual reader-response approach. It concentrates upon the reader and their experience of a literary work depending on the text. The textual reader-response criticism is associated with several disciplines, such as psychology and psychoanalysis, for those attempting to find principles and individual responses. Likewise, the critics of the textual reader-response may share the concerns of critics of gender and feminism, postcolonialism, queer theory, and phenomenology (Scott, 1994).

Performing a deep reading of a text teaches the reader to look closely at the way a text operates and to glean some meaning from the workings of the text. In other words, the text directs the reader's interpretation. The textual reader-response approaches admit to the fact that the text does influence the way readers read and make meaning. Thus, interpretation emerges from the interactions between the reader and the text (Beach, 1993).

Many critics, such as Michael Riffaterre, Gibson, and Prince, believe that meaning resides within the text. However, Riffaterre is against the independence of meaning, as formalists claim, and the reader has some role in discovering the meaning. Riffaterre believes that meaning exists in the text itself, so the reader does not create meaning for it, but the reader's reading becomes a witness to its meaning. Therefore, the reader is immersed in the author's world to experience life. For Poulet, meaning is not independent of a literary text. He believes that the reader is as free as he has not begun to read the text. As soon as he opens the book and starts reading, he becomes a prisoner of the book. In general, not only literary texts but all other subjects have no meaning without existence and contact with human beings (Tompkins, 1980, pp. xiii-xiv).

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### 3. The title of the novel

The title is an examination and doctrine of the story in just two words. It expresses a half-life, half of the self, half of human communication, interaction, recognition, perception, and enjoyment. The missing half that is so close and you can't find it with you, but the half that is outside you pulls you and throws you everywhere when you know your youth is all over. When the man looks for the lost half outside his inner side, he cannot find the other hidden half inside. And the reason is that he is looking for it in the wrong place and space.

People may not be delighted because they always look for the other piece somewhere on earth or beyond. They live in fancy and imagine different worlds when they cannot discover them in practice. Time is like a monster; time and the outside world are infinite no matter how strong one sees oneself; one cannot break these barriers. Ageing and death are the great tragedies we must experience. In addition to the problems of time, ageing, and death, people have many other difficulties, many of which they have created against each other under different names. Men and women always desire to unite. Hence, they cannot survive without each other. An unhealthy environment with the concern of weakness of human beings and self-awareness hurts constructing a prosperous future for humanity and other species.

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### 4. Reading and writing

The text fully portrays the importance of reading and writing. Remarks several book titles as evidence that the author seriously intends to present the importance and value of the English language and literary works. The vital society is primarily determined by language, reading and writing books, and contemporary progress. Another area that keeps this novel alive is the author's attention to crucial historical events and their combination with the protagonist and other characters. The context illustrates the impact of history on the course of new generations and subsequent events. It deals with British colonialism, Portuguese colonialism, and postcolonialism.

Another strength of this story is the diversity of subjects, events, places, and times. And especially the issue of sexuality, which is a shame to talk about in backward societies. Therefore, Naipaul has successfully and without hesitation been able to break the barrier that the backward culture created by religion and illiteracy. In this novel, the author depicts several sexual scenes. Those scenes make the reader enjoy the story more and deepen with the events.

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### 5. Willie and His Background, India

"Why is my middle name Somerset? The boys at school have just found out, and they are mocking me." (Naipaul, 2001, p. 1). When a child is given a strange or uncommon name that is not accepted and insulted by the surrounding culture, regardless of whether the child has any responsibility for the name. Here, one feels completely responsible, even if it is not one's fault or negligence. Sometimes people are under a lot of pressure that causes confusions, hiding, disappearance, or fragmentation. And when he wants to resolve the situation, it takes a long time, which is often too late and useless. People who do not have a healthy, intellectual and worldview can never leave behind a healthy and

intellectual identity. Sometimes parents, amid identity loss and refuge, to give light or hope to their children's future through their names to encourage them and build a different personality, resort to a radical change that must first start with human personality.

Strange things sometimes attract you to look for more and bigger secrets. When Willie notices his middle name and finds it bizarre, it makes him start asking questions and digging into the reasons. Willie's father named his son Willie Somerset after an English writer. The importance of this name is evident in several ways. First, as a British colony, what benefits can Indians derive or learn from English language and literature. Second, his father, who could not complete his education, used the name as a symbol so that his son would not make the same mistake and drop out of school. Third, it is an experiment and search for the self, between East and West.

In chapter one of this story, the author, as a second-generation Indian, based on his deep experience and level of knowledge, focuses on the first space, the colonial era, and discusses the effects of that time. Another crucial point is the priority of books, literature, and general knowledge, which at the beginning of the first page of the novel, when talking about the reason for naming Willie's middle name (Somerset), directly links the reason to the name of a great writer, and tells his son to listen and build his mind, as a sign that everyone has different ways of seeing and interpreting things. Therefore, he does not want his son to be influenced by his father. People should experience things and life, and have their vision of life and the future (Naipaul, 2001, p. 1).

Naipaul bravely touches on important points in history, which are a major reason for the lack of a prosperous society and the existence of influential and innovative individuals. In addition to the importance of the role of books and literature, through Willie's grandfather, he points to the negative roles of the advent of Islam and subsequent British colonialism on livelihoods and identity formation. He believes that Islam has impoverished all people. "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" (Naipaul, 2001, p. 7). They have adversely affected the history of India and the creation of the identity of the Indian individual.

Another essential point that Naipaul emphasizes is the primacy of the male and female genders in building a true identity. When emotions dominate thought and the brain, people make effective mistakes. When Willie's father met his mother, he was ready to sacrifice everything for her protection, even though no real feelings of love had developed. At Willie's mother's request, Willie's father kidnapped her, dropped out of school, and got into trouble with his father. Now, Willie's father, who has an identity that is the product of culture, religion, and colonial influences, faces three profound problems.

Chapter two begins with Willie and his sister Sarojini going to a colonial mission school to spread European culture and traditions. These schools were mainly for people who were not admitted to local schools. This was their mother's wish, because their mother had taught at the school, and before going to the mission school, she went to a local school, but faced insults and expulsion. Therefore, he did not want his children to go through the same pain as he did (Naipaul, 2001, p. 36). The author portrays the emphasis on religion and class, which gives negative energy to human personality and identity (Naipaul, 2001, p. 37).

Naipaul presents the relationship between self-discovery, self-knowledge, self-creation, and the inner and outer sides of man, and places religion under the influence of the material world. He is influenced by the desire to become rich. For this purpose, he chooses a Brahmin, who has the highest rank in Hinduism. Having a lot of gold in exchange for slaughtering a child for each year. The Brahmin is exploited by his appetites and approves of the agreement. (Naipaul, 2001, pp. 43). The author believes that religions have not succeeded in creating a true and healthy identity that can serve themselves and humanity. Because religions themselves are man-made, a program that stems from an imperfect identity cannot produce a healthy and service-oriented identity that man and humanity can be proud of.

The novelist shows that religious experts are completely washing the minds of the new generation of contemporary thought. Therefore, the scene of children being slaughtered is an indication of the loss of their brains and thinking. When a person does not have his thoughts and opinions, he is considered dead. Human identity comes from healthy bases, not from sources that need help. We cannot and should not expose our children to such backward ideologies (Naipaul, 2001, pp. 44).

Once again, the author points to important events in history related to the construction of individual personality. From Naipaul's point of view, in any fall, one can get up and start again with more strength. The assassination of Gandhi Mahatma was a great loss for Indians (Naipaul, 2001, p. 48). The elimination of the identity of the freedom fighter. However, is a new beginning for Willie, who is now open to traveling to another continent by ship. It is an influential

opportunity that he has been eager for a long time. It is a wonderful chance to uncover one's identity and discover meaning in life. Willie is now in his twenties and has not graduated from mission school (Naipaul, 2001, p. 49). His knowledge of life is determined, he has little experience, and a door outside Indian space has been opened for him to find a purpose in life. Now it is time to attempt another space and a different world. Make a real journey and be able to interact with all future events and expansions. He should try new things and establish his own identity, discover a personality that serves himself, his surroundings, and all humanity.

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## 6. The Second Space, London

Upon arriving in London and taking a deep look around, with his unfounded character, Willie discovered two facts. The British government in India was painting a very grand and beautiful image of its country to the Indian people. For example, when Willie sees Buckingham Castle and Speaker's Corner, he uncovers that they are not as large and beautiful as he had been told. Willie has discovered that the castle of Maharaja in his country is much bigger and more wonderful than Buckingham Castle and Speaker's Corner. Therefore, he thought it was a shame for the king and queen, thinking they were impostors (Naipaul, 2001, p. 50). The second thing Willie realized was that he now knew he hadn't learned anything vital in life. He sees himself as a fool, in the crowds and busyness of the second space, London, he doesn't know anything about whatever comes up (Naipaul, 2001, p. 52). Now, it seems like he is lost in a sea, he must urgently learn to swim and embrace all obstacles and challenges. Otherwise, he is left in the middle of the sea and cannot find a purpose in life, nor does life give him meaning.

Willie was accepted as a student in a semi-charitable school, and his first practical steps began from here. At first it was very difficult to escape the old rules of India, and he realized that the traditions of his motherland were not his own. Hence, by the end of the second term, he felt that his ancestral traditions were not very relevant. Consequently, he believes he can be free now and this is the right time to express himself (Naipaul, 2001, p. 57).

Meeting Percy, who is of Jamaican descent, Willie faces culture shock for the first time in his life when he sees that Percy is an open-minded person who is working in a club and has a girlfriend named June who is working in a perfume shop. And Percy invited Willie to meet up and drink for the weekend. For Willie, mixing and getting to know the female gender was an interesting and sensitive subject, dealing with women for the first time and focusing on their interests. Of course, Willie is very interested in having relationships with females, and that is clear (Naipaul, 2001, pp. 61-62). Here the author depicts a very sensitive and influential subject that directly affects the building of personality and the creation of an established identity, sexual relationships are essential to having a healthy and innovative essence that restores value to forbidden or lost things.

The influence of racism and discrimination in Naipaul's text is very clear, "People don't want to rent to black people" (Naipaul, 2001, p. 72). Discrimination between whites and blacks, blacks from African or Indian countries have very little chance of renting a house. This is one of the reasons why the person becomes anxious and suspicious, sees himself as a foreigner and becomes anxious between the motherland and the foreign country. And that feeling will continue until it is looked down upon by the host country.

London is different from the motherland in every way, the chances of life and business for men and women, the importance of equal legal, economic, and social rights, especially between whites and blacks open a bank account. This is a clear and necessary signal as an effective step towards building the identity of black people. "He feels they might put him off in a discreet way. They might say they have run out of form. He does not want that to happen" (Naipaul, 2001, p. 85). But this doesn't and shouldn't apply to someone like Willie; He is still in the beginning of building his own identity. He still doesn't know how to shape his personality.

Naipaul describes in detail the influences that the external world has on man. He talks about the strong power of women over men, especially when it comes to sexuality. The author shows how two middle-class women can become rich, prove their influence over men, and impose their demands. The author does not hide that the two women are jealous of each other (Naipaul, 2001, p. 86). Here, Willie needs to understand the effects that men and women cannot survive without each other.

From the beginning of the story to the end, Naipaul pays great attention to reading and writing. It discusses several authentic written works for the reader to follow and read. There is a deep connection between reading and writing. In writing, what is in the heart, in the internal world is given to the readers. This negotiation process, this input, and output, and this encoding and decoding is very meaningful to be maintained and continued, humans need this exchange (Hall, 1980).

Willie feels very embarrassed and scared when the newspapers talk about black people in pictures and headlines. "Willie felt that people were looking at him, and the newspaper wrote about him". "Those blacks are going to be a menace", said a man who worked there. Thus, Willie always liked to hide, a hiding he had learned since childhood, particularly in times of religious or class crisis (Naipaul, 2001, p. 103). That was one of the obstacles that prevented him from constructing a confident personality.

Place and time are vital in Naipaul's novel. Everything is interconnected. That's why finding the circle you live in is essential. By trying to get away from his friend, Percy, Willie takes a big step to uncover a meaning in life. Willie feels that the personality he wants to bear is far from Percy's. Percy was always busy partying, entertaining, and drinking, (Naipaul, 2001, p. 104) which are not of metropolitan primacy and did not have a good enthusiasm for human development. Here is the direction of Willie's path to the world of learning, to reading and writing. To discover his will, he must choose the right path. The direction in which he can find his heart and reconcile it.

People who are loyal and caring when they are away from you, no matter how bad the relationship is; But they will still ask how you are doing, and the distance will be a way to build a better and healthier relationship. Especially among family members, who do not forget each other in sensitive and decisive times. Staying away from depressed loved ones often leads to healing. Because it makes the person's place feel empty and the person's value becomes clearer. Therefore, Willie receives his first letter from his father, after asking how he is doing, telling him that his sister Sarojini wants to marry an old German man. The news came as a surprise to Willie and his father. Willy feels that "it is something I have learned since I came here, everything goes in a bias. The world should stop, but it goes on" (Naipaul, 2001, p. 106).

Chapter three begins with Percy's sudden return to Panama, without warning anyone. And with the arrival of a letter from his sister, Sarojini, to Willie. The role of the male gender is well balanced. Emphasizing gender equality in society and facing challenges together is essential for Naipaul. When Percy suddenly leaves, Sarojini sends a letter to her brother to encourage him to finish his studies well, and not to look at his father, because their family believes that the father was not a successful person. That was strange to Willie because he thought he should take care of his sister himself, not the other way around (Naipaul, 2001, p.108). Therefore, the author emphasizes the importance of the role of women in society.

Jacques Derrida 's notion of the term 'differance' in 1967, is extraordinary, it is about the exchange of power between opposite binaries including men and women or male and female, black and white, and East and West. Derrida's deconstruction was a revolutionary in changing all the pillars of life, from philosophy to exchanging power, equality, democracy, class differences, etc. The influence of Derrida's discourse was first reflected in Europe and America, then moved to the East. Jacques Derrida had a great influence on subsequent discourses that followed postmodernism (Derrida, 1967).

"These random, unresolved pieces of terror or disquiet or anxiety seem in the most unsettling way to come out of no settled view of the world. They speak volumes of the disorientation of the young, and they augur ill for the new state' (Naipaul, 2001, p. 115). Willie is an inexperienced young man, unstable and disoriented, so his writings express himself completely. He is not optimistic about developments and what he is doing, even about writing his book. Accordingly, Willie needs to be a little optimistic and build self-confidence.

Although Willie has a good opportunity to show his ability in writing his first book, the lack of self-confidence and self-esteem have made Willie even more afraid of confronting a female journalist about the content of the book. Willie thinks that the journalist might look down on him and not see him as a book writer. Which then makes Willy's negative predictions turn out to be nothing like that. In fact, things went very well, and what impressed Willie was the journalist's beauty and simplicity. For the first time, Willie feels that someone fully accepts and appreciates him (Naipaul, 2001, p. 117). This will be a strong point to support Willie to develop further to take further steps to build his identity, and to become more confident.

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## 7. The Third Space, Africa

Lacking self-confidence and inexperience in living in a country that has not yet laid the foundation for the future, Willie believes he has nowhere to live after graduation. Therefore, anxiety and confusion occupy his mind. He must tell his girlfriend, Ana, that he wants to come with her to Africa to live with her (Naipaul, 2001, p. 123). So far, Willie believes that his problem is the problem of place and environment, not knowing that the crisis is inside himself. He can't be with himself; he can't find his authentic version.

“Neither Ana nor anyone else would have known that there was anything wrong. But all this while Willie felt that there was another self inside him, in a silent space where all his external life was muffled” (Naipaul, 2001, p. 125). Ana agrees that Willy should return to Africa with her because not only he could not adapt to life in London, but plus, she loves him. Willie has now entered a different world. That no one knows what good or bad things await Willie. Here in Africa, everyone looks at Willie with foreign eyes. They think he will only stay for a few nights, but only Willie and Ana know that they intend to stay forever. This is incredibly difficult for Ana, but because she loves Willie, she wants to believe it.

On the first day at Ana’s estate inherited from her grandfather, Willie says “Everything in the house \_was new to me. Everything in the bathroom was new to me\_ all the slightly antiquated fittings, and the old geyser for heating water... In that room especially I felt a stranger” (Naipaul, 2001, p. 131). Willie feels very strange, he misses his sister very much. He now believes that in the concrete house filled with Portuguese colonial furniture. Designed with white wall tiles, some of which are cracked and crack lines and grout black mixed with mold or dirt. The walls are a little inevitable, normal for people there, but very strange for Willie.

Despite his emotional plight, Willie had sympathy for the workers who had come from abroad and had mixed backgrounds, knowing that their hearts were now with their loved ones who were far away. Because Willie himself had a deep feeling that the place was not right for him, here, in Africa, he could not build himself, he could not have a goal or a dream to live for.

Ana, on the other hand, suffers “These people do not know that I am not a toy they just happened to make” Naipaul, 2001, p. 144). Anna, on the other hand, is full of a bad past. He will never forget how uncomfortable his father was with his mother, brother and Anna. Anna says no one could ask her father or tell him to do even the smallest thing. Individual unconsciousness means societal unconsciousness, inequality between men and women, masculinity and old traditions, all of which are sources of misery, destruction, displacement and exile of people.

Years later, Willie now feels that people who used to harass him are treating him better. Now Willie feels more comfortable and feels that people are embracing him completely and that he can continue with them. “But there was never anything like that, no flicker of racial recognition from the family inside. There, too, they accepted the new person I had become in Ana’s country “(Naipaul, 2001, p. 139).

The loss of his passport and wallet worried Willie, especially his passport (Naipaul, 2000, p. 147). The passport reflects the personality of Willie, who was originally born and spent his childhood in India. The man who came to London to study at the age of twenty has now graduated. He has been living with Anna in Africa for many years, although he has an Indian passport. But he has no eagerness to go there. Not to India, but not to London, not to Germany, not to Africa with her boyfriend. Willie is living in a major identity crisis. A passport with which he can explore countries, but without the possession of a genuine nominal identity, accomplishes nothing. Willie needs to explore his own heart, not a passport, but consciousness. Personal consciousness can heal wounds. It can only be done by oneself, not by those around one.

A balance between thoughts and emotions is necessary to stay awake. The effect of constant thinking on Willie is fully felt and has caused restlessness. This makes it impossible for him to be fully present with the moments. Therefore, his constant thoughts take them out of being present with the moments, which is resolved when he becomes conscious. Continuing in this way means constantly thinking with a lot of emotion, in which case he becomes temporarily emotional. A circle of doubt is created between his thoughts and emotions, which feed and strengthen each other. (Tolle, 2004, P. 27).

Due to the war between the Portuguese colonies and the guerrillas, the country suffered a major crisis, the colonial military and administrative forces began to retreat. There was a shortage of water, electricity, gas and petrol, and food. Here the author once again shows the important role of women. Through a lady named Graca. Graca is willing to share all the food and fuel in her house with her friends so that they can survive for a few days. Accordingly, she invites them all to his house so they can continue together until things get better (Naipaul, 2001, p. 209). The author believes that women have big and kind hearts. They are both friends, lovers and mothers. Without them, the houses are empty and unprosperous, and life is impossible.

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## 8. Conclusion

Towards the end of the story, it appears that Willie and Anna will henceforth part ways. Anna wants to stay to protect the property her grandfather left her. As he says, as a tribute to his grandfather. Willie plans to return to her sister in Germany.” And even if we go to Portugal, even if they let me in there, it would still be your life. I have been hiding for

too long.” Ana said, perhaps it was not really my life either” (Naipaul, 2001, p. 211). “I mean I have given you eighteen years. I cannot give you anymore. I cannot live your life anymore. I want to live on my own” (Naipaul, 2001, p. 211). Willie is now forty-one years old and has been with Ana for eighteen years. He wants to stop Ana’s life. He wants to separate from Ana and return to Germany to live with his sister.

Thus, Willie returns to his sister, and according to the story he cannot find meaning in his life. He needs to look the other way; he has to find the real place. Although time is not in his best interests, it is not impossible. All it takes is a deep contemplation into the depths of the heart. Trying several different spaces is enough to realize that he should stop looking outside himself.

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