

## REASONS BEHIND MIGRATION IN V.S. NAIPAUL'S *HALF A LIFE*

**POORNIMA M. D.**

Ph. D. Scholar  
Department of English  
Karpagam University  
Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu (INDIA)

**DR. V. UNNIKRISHNAN**

Professor  
Department of English  
Karpagam University  
Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu (INDIA)

### ABSTRACT

*This paper focuses on the reasons that stimulate migration in V.S. Naipaul's novel Half a Life. Though there are many aspects of the diasporic experience, there is a need for analyzing the reasons behind migration. The novel Half a Life portrays the life of Willie Somerset Chandran who migrates to London and then to Africa due to various reasons. Not only Willie but also other characters such as his sister Sarojini, wife Ana and her father, Willie's Jamaican friend Percy Cato and so on depict the life of migrants in different ways. Migrations as well as re-migrations occur in this novel forming the 'leit motif' of the novel which prompts the reader to analyze the reasons behind such movements. This paper also brings out the expectations and disappointments of the migrant in the foreign land which lead him from ignorance to experience.*

**Keywords:** *Reasons, adaptation, assimilation, migrants, diaspora*

#### Introduction-

The word 'Diaspora' has attained different shades of meaning in the course of globalization. There are many Indian diasporic writers whose contributions to literature represent the life of migrants all over the world. V.S. Naipaul's novels also come under such a category. *Half a Life* is one of his best diasporic novels. There are many aspects to be viewed in a diasporic novel: the relationship of the migrants with the home land and the host land, the cultural behaviour of the migrants and so on. This paper focuses on the reasons which have influenced the characters to migrate from one country to another. In the novel *Half a Life* there are many migrant characters like Willie Somerset Chandran, his wife Ana, Willies' sister Sarojini, Graca, Percy Cato, his girlfriend June who have their own reasons for migration. Some other characters like Julio, Marcus, Ana's step father embody the mixed

racess in Africa. They also express the experiences of the mixed race in Africa and in London where the treatment of the Blacks by the Whites can be seen explicitly. The relocation happens due to the need for survival and the desire to escape from the personal crisis in the home land. These two elements, which are prominent enough, can be seen in the life of the protagonist and other migrant characters in the novel.

### **Reasons behind migration in *Half A Life*:**

Before revealing the reasons for migration of the protagonist of the novel, Willie Somerset Chandran, the readers are provided with the flashback of the father of Willie who explains how he had acquainted with the English writer Somerset Maugham, after whom Willie is named. In the flashback of Willie's father, he narrates the migration of Willie's great grandfather from a remote village to the town of 'Maharaja's palace'. The new rules of British Empire in India forced Willie's great grandfather to migrate. This becomes the reason for the forced migration that had happened during colonization. The flashback throws light on the life of migrants; how they find it hard to attain their space and root themselves in the adopted society and also the reason behind it.

To identify the reasons for migrations in the novel *Half a Life*, there is a need to know about the past of the protagonist Willie. It helps to understand the factors that influenced him to migrate. He put in a mission school by his mother. He influenced by English language and started learning it. He began to long to go to Canada. He dreamt of the place. Even in the school composition book, he wrote a story in which he pretended to be a Canadian and addressed his father and mother as 'Pop' and 'Mom'. The story also described kids in beach, children in holiday clothes driving off in the family car. All the details of foreign life are taken from the American comic books available in his mission school. This is evident of his illusion. He conveyed his expectations on his father through the stories which he wrote in school composition note book. His father, after reading the stories, understood his desire to move abroad and made his mind to send him far away. When he talked to his son about getting a degree, Willie immediately expressed his thought, "I want to go to Canada" (HL43). (This is the moment that brings out the spark of migration in the novel.) But his father said that he had no fortune to send him to Canada but could afford to send him to Benares or Bombay or Calcutta or even to Delhi. He explained his father that the 'fathers' in his school would send him there and they would make him a missionary. These flashback stories of Willie indicate how the psyche of Willie adores the foreign land. The reason behind his migration was to become missionary in Canada. He is a xenophile kind of a person who represents many migrants who crave moving abroad without having any knowledge of host country.

The narrator explicitly describes the reason and conditions in which Willie decided to move abroad. But his inspiration of going to Canada and becoming a missionary collapsed as he

came to know about the other face of a missionary. Still his idea to move from India was executed by his father's endeavor. Willie got a scholarship in a college of education in London and he began his voyage by ship in which he stored up all the details of that 'stupendous first crossing'. In the ship, he observed other passengers' confidence that made him unwilling to speak with them and later discovered his strength in maintaining silence: "he looked without trying to see and heard without listening"(HL 51). This is an evidence of voluntary diaspora. The first journey to any new land, for any migrant, is a kind of exploration with indistinct ideas. Similar thoughts are seen in Willie.

Willie moves from one country to another; from India to London, from London to Africa, and from Africa to Charlottenburg. But he never returns to India. When he finds his scholarship and his education going to end in London, he starts to think about his future. His idea of leaving London comes from his Jamaican friend Percy Cato who decides to leave as he has been afflicted with legal problems and the murder of a West Indian Kelso in a race riot frightens him as well. His sister Sarojini also advises him to think of leaving. But he strictly does want to return to India. He thinks,

*I don't like the place that's waiting for me at home. For the past two and half years I have lived like a free man. I can't go back to other thing.... If I get my teaching diploma and decide to stay here and teach it will be kind of hiding away. And it wouldn't be nice teaching in a place like Notting Hill...I would walk with the fear of running into a crowd and being knifed like Kelso. It would be worse than being at home. (HL117)*

The reasons for Willie moving out of London are: the end of his studies, his lack of interest in teaching in Notting Hill, departure of Percy Cato, fear of being knifed like Kelso. He is unclear in his idea as to where he could go. He knows that Percy could go to Jamaica or to the Panama Canal or to the United States. For Willie, he has only the choice of going to India. But he does not want that. He starts expecting a moment to come which would help him making a decision on the place to go. The expected moment comes when his affair with the African girl Ana develops.

His relationship with Ana induces him to decide to go with her to Africa. His sister Sarojini's letter also strengthens his mind. This is the one of the major reasons for Willie to migrate to Africa with Ana. If this reason is examined, it would be clear that many migrants universally possess this kind of diasporic intention, i.e. they decide to move away from the present host land to some other country except their home land. It happens because people are more exposed to the world in their host land than in their homeland and this exposure makes them to get more acquaintance of people from many other countries in the host land. This, in turn, revelation tends them to get even more exposure in some other countries and they gradually lose their disinterest in returning to their home lands. They even intend to settle in the host

land where they feel more comfortable and many even become citizens of the host land. Their relationship with their home lands also gradually decrease as a consequence. In search of new life or identity or to improve their living status, people are determined to make more than one migration.

Willie declares his intention to Ana and prepares to accompany her to Africa with the same mind and idea that he has had when preparing to London. He starts 'removing his presence bit by bit from the college room, undoing the centre of his London life'. The narrator describes his thoughts on moving to a new place yet again:

*He wondered how he would ever set about getting a footing in the city again if at some time he had to. He might have luck again; there might be something like the chain of chance encounters he had had; but they would lead him into a city he didn't know. (HL132)*

He has had acquaintance with many people from many other countries in London. He has also had many new kinds of experience in London. Mainly, he has changed his identity as per his wish and lived a free life. He has no interest in returning to India where he is expected to live a life he lived before – in the circle of his father and in the Indian society. So, he wishes to escape and tries to find shelter in Africa than in London or in India with the help of Ana.

After marrying Ana, Willie stays in Africa for eighteen years. All those years, he feels that he has lived Ana's life and not his own. He says to her, "I've given you eighteen years. I can't give you any more. I can't live your life any more. I want to live my own." (HL136). Even at this situation, he lacks making a proper decision on where to go. He barely thinks that he doesn't know where about to go but should stop living her life in Africa. When he decides to move out of London, he is not clear in deciding on his next destination. Similarly, he is undecided when he wants to get out of Africa. This reflects the unstable mind of the protagonist. Later, he determines to write a letter to his sister in West Berlin. After six months, he leaves Africa and joins his sister in Berlin. There he leads his life by depending on her.

Other migrant characters in the novel, who do not belong to India, also face the consequences of migration. For instance, the character Marcus is the West Indian West African. He represents the black who lost their whole identity in the course of many years. He is in England with an interesting plan which is to have a white grandchild. His idea is to open an account in bank for the whites where the blacks are prohibited from holding accounts. He says, "In the eighteenth century there were about half a million black people in England. They've all vanished. They disappeared in the local population." (95). He is so strong in his idea that the negro populations in foreign places are large and their numbers are decreasing. This is a typical kind of migration. Marcus who migrated to London many years ago, expects

to get completely assimilated into the white –society by having a white grandchild. When his thought is to adapt as a whole, it pertains to the culture as well as the complexion of the people.

Another migrant character, Ana’s father, provides a typical example. A Portuguese by birth, he was settled in Africa with Ana’s African mother. He moved to Africa during the period of Portuguese colonization when the Africans and the Portuguese were blended in the African society. He was looking after the estate of Ana’s grandfather. When his wife had another relationship, he had used some legal loophole and mortgaged away half of Ana’s estate along with the family house in the capital. He could not settle properly in any country. Ana told Willie that her father first tried to live in South Africa but it seemed hard for him and he also does not like ‘doing everything in a foreign language’. He was even frightened to go to Brazil and went back to Portugal which was his own land to lead his life with studios. This action of Ana’s father is evidence to a kind of remigration. Ana’s father did not find himself fit into any of the countries wherever he had visited and atlast returned to his own land.

#### **Conclusion:**

Through the novel *Half a Life* it can be figured out that the reasons for migration are marriage, education and an escape from the legal problems and family issues. In Willie’s case education is the reason for migration from his society but for him the migration also ensures a freedom from his family and his home land. It can be said that indirectly Willie has learnt to rebuild his new life in a foreign place from his great grandfather. His hatred for his home town and people makes him migrate to London but emptiness in his life in London drives him to accompany Ana to Africa. There is no occurrence of re-migrations either in the case of Willie or his sister Sarojini. She insists Willie to do so but she is not ready to do the same. But other characters such as Ana’s father prove that the migrants who could not fit in or root themselves in any other place returns to their own country. The theory of S.K. Sareen aptly applies to the novel: the search of identity, freedom, opportunities and prosperity are the prominent reasons for migration.

## REFERENCE

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