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Sense of Alienation in V.S. Naipaul's *Half a Life*

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By

Krishna Prasad Timsina

Roll No.: 90/075/076

Symbol No.: 280685

T.U. Regd. No.: 16635-91

Central Department of English

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Letter of Approval

This Thesis entitled “Sense of Alienation in V.S. Naipaul’s *Half a Life*” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Krishna Prasad Timsina has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

Members of the Research Committee:

.....

Prof. Dr. Krishna Chandra Sharma

Internal Examiner

.....

Mr. Badri Prasad Acharya

External Examiner

.....

Prof. Dr. Jib Lal Sapkota

Head

Central Department of English

Date.....

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Krishna Prasad Timsina

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Abstract

This research work analyses the central character of Half a Life, Willie Somerset's quest for the purpose in his life. Fragmentation, alienation, and exile are common features in postcolonial literature. In V(idyadhar) S(urajprasad) Naipaul's Half a Life Willie Chandran is the representative character of those people who have experienced the bitterness of postcolonial reality of the immigration in the foreign land. He despairingly searches for his own stable identity but cannot find any fixed identity up to the end of the novel when he is already a forty plus aged man. He proves himself as an idler and cannot get a particular form. He feels bitterness in between his double identities. To study the sense of alienation and fragmentation of the main character, it is appropriate to use postcolonial theory which is the main supportive backbone. Post-colonialism expresses about the human consequences of external—foreign—control and economic exploitation of the native people and their land. In this novel Naipaul shows how Willie suffers from multiple external forces and tries to seek his own identity in real life but in vain. Colonization causes the flux of identity, alienation, and individual predicament, and decolonized individuals still suffer from the colonial attitude and demeanor of the colonizers as an outside force even in the time of postcolonialism which forms the hybrid identity of individuals.

Keywords: Alienation, postcolonial, imperialism, fragmentation, rootlessness, hybridity, identity crisis.

The present research explores the sense of alienation in postcolonial world in V. S. Naipaul's *Half a Life* which is caused by the influence of colonization as an outside force to dismantle the identity of colonized individuals even in postcolonial era. Naipaul is one of the renowned writers in literature in English and a product of post-imperialist society. Naipaul is an expatriate from Trinidad whose primary business as a novelist is to project carefully the complex fate of individuals in a cross-cultural society. He has written extensively about many aspects of postcolonial society. But knowingly or unknowingly, whether he writes a travelogue or a novel, he tends to end up dealing with the identity crisis of an individual. *Half a Life* is the story of alienation of Willie Somerset Chandran. The protagonist is frustrated in his attempt to attain a particular form in his life: up to the last part of the novel, he has already reached middle age without even finding a purpose in his life.

The text opens up with a simple question of Willie Chandran. He asks his father why his middle name is 'Somerset'. His father replies without joy that he is named after a great English writer Somerset Maugham to whom he first met in the 1930s in India when he was doing penance and living under a vow of silence. Willie's father tells his story that begins with the visit of the great writer in the 1930s to collect materials for a novel about spirituality and his rejection of education in response to the Indian Mahatma's call and marriage with a woman of low caste in the name of sacrifice. Again his father reveals that he got into the condition of living a life of a mendicant and taking a vow of silence is because of rejection of him by his family and tradition.

The novel recounts the story of Willie Somerset Chandran. He is the son of a Brahmin father and a Dalit (outcast) mother who is frustrated by his split parental identity and this realization evokes him to dream of his own distinct identity. Willie

goes to England for higher education in the 1950s. He starts his journey into the world which is completely a foreign one. When he reaches there he immediately realizes that he is worse than a child in English society. Though he is well schooled in English language and literature and there is no one to help him. His dreams get shattered as he fumbles for friendship, for sex, and for acceptance.

Willie writes a book and manages to publish it but it turns out to be an unsuccessful book. His failure to meet his expectation forces him to abandon his ambition and lives a life in despair. In the course of time, he receives a letter from his fan Ana, a mixed Portuguese and black African girl. She is very much influenced by his book and admires it. As time passes they fall in love with each other. Ana is a rich and influential girl in Africa. She takes him to meet her big family. He feels strange in this new land. He does not know their language or culture but he finds Africa finer than he expected. Willie does not want to stay there but he has nowhere to go. In the way, he travels to London from India and to Africa from London. Though Willie feels like leaving the place immediately he steps in it, he stays in Mozambique for eighteen years consuming his own loneliness and wandering aimlessly. There is rumor of civil war in African bush in the background of independence. People like Ana feel unsafe with their mixed identity. They have no proper identity to assimilate with either African or Portuguese people. They are torn between their double identity. African local people regard them as foreign invaders. Willie feels he cannot live with Ana anymore. He realizes that he needs to live independently. Lastly, Willie declares that he has decided to leave her though he does not know where to go.

Finally, Willie writes a letter and goes to Berlin to live with his sister, Sarojini. She lives a poor life with poor supplies and household appliances. Like Willie his sister is also living a strange life in the strange land that fate has bestowed to her.

Willie is around forty years, a middle aged man without any fixed identity. It seems that he has risked nothing in life to give him a definite shape. He internalizes that all his life he has been hiding from himself.

This research work focuses on Willie Somerset's quest for purpose in his life. Willie is the core personality around whom all the incidents in the novel move. He is the representative character who stands for those people who have experienced the bitterness of postcolonial reality of the immigrants in a foreign land. He desperately searches for his stable identity but cannot form any identity till the end of the novel when he is already a forty plus middle aged man. He is lost in the maze of alien cultures.

He feels suffocated and choked in his futile struggle. His lifelong fear is solidified when he wanders in different countries. He finally proves himself as an 'idler' and cannot get a form. He behaves as a hybrid character begotten by an upper class Hindu father and an outcast mother. He suffers due to his in-between double identities. His hybrid identity is similar to cultural hybridity faced by people in the colonial land. They can neither cling to their root culture, nor can they fully assimilate to an alien culture.

One of the most seminal novels by Naipaul *Half a Life* has got wide variety of responses since its publication in 2001, just after the author was awarded with the Nobel Prize for Literature. *Half a Life* is a story of Willie Chandran. The tale is at first set in post-independent India then to England and then moving to pre-independent Africa and very briefly in Germany. The places Willie Chandran passes through feel as if they all are cultures of confusion. Willie is disillusioned with education, his parents and uncertainty of his future. Naipaul's works show the cross-cultural tension on the part of Indian immigrants. The novel is about the struggle of

Willie Somerset Chandran to find his own identity in post-colonial world. His father, a Brahmin, is described as a person who went through his life by outer influences, and sparsely by own intention, what ends up in a marriage with a woman whom he neither loves nor respects.

Many critics have based their research on the autobiographical overtone of the author in the novel *Half a Life*. Regarding the novel Mahender Singh highlights the autobiographical tone and isolation in the alien land in his article, “A Postcolonial Study of V.S. Naipaul’s *Half a Life*” (2014). He writes:

Literature of the third world is no exception to this general tendency in modern writing in which the theme of individual’s predicament in the form of rootlessness, crisis of identity mainly lying behind the desperate affirmation of traditional culture has been explicitly explored. Naipaul’s fictional work is concerned with the complex fate of the individual, societies and cultures and the resultant ambiguities in human adjustment, the colonial situation that produces a special kind of human psychosis when man is eager to search a niche for himself at any cost. (20)

Here, Singh claims that since Naipaul himself feels like an outsider, we can regard *Half a Life* as the culmination of Naipaul’s own life. Singh sees the pains and pathos of immigrants who have seen their life without any definite shape and purpose in the foreign land. The problem of minorities in England which is both geographically and culturally very remote from their root culture is the central issue Naipaul captures in almost all of his novels. His novels can be taken as a single long story of alienation, fragmentation, rootlessness and sufferings of migrants suspending between the root culture and the alien culture. The unsteady ground they step on, the ever-changing realities of the migrants are prominently painted in the canvas of his own experiences.

As an immigrant, Naipaul's texts are mostly autobiographical. He presents his firsthand experience in his works which gives it an authentic voice. He has shown the alien world through his characters.

Moreover, Mohit K. Roy in *Studies in Literature in English* acclaims *Half a Life* as an exceptional piece of literature. He states, "The novel has been rightly described as a devastating work of exceptional sensibility, grace and humor" (13). Similarly, Asha Choubey in her article "A Critique of Naipaul's *Half a Life*: Searching for Identity in Limbo" sees the sense of loss brought by displacement of the central character. Willie is not able to stick to his meaningful existence as he feels uprooted and dislocated. He feels culturally and linguistically uprooted from his original self. The dislocation and consequent loss of identity has been a recurring theme in the literature of diaspora. Paramananda Jha shows the unsuccessful attempt of the protagonist to find some meaningful purposes of his life in his article "Exile, Alienation and Cultural Tradition: V.S. Naipaul's *Half a Life*". According to Jha, this novel shows Willie Chandran's lifelong quest to find a purpose of his life. He says, "*Half a Life* is a delineation and evaluation of the mixed societies (which Naipaul came across in Trinidad, England and Mozambique) and their quest for identity. There is no difficulty in understanding that the people coming from various lands are the people of confused identities" (216). Willie despises his father. He thinks his father is an escapist who has taken his vow of silence as a weapon to rationalize his weakness. Willie thinks his father is an idler. Willie is set into a new life in London to search for the meaning of his life.

The novel carries the lifelong dilemma of the character, Willie Chandran, his nameless father and grandfather, none of them is able to define his existence. They can see their life slipping from their own hands but they are helpless. He always fears

that he may fail like his father. He disgusts his father throughout his life but is going to end miserably like his father. Willie's father is unable to earn any fortune and properties for him and even Willie has made forty years of his life futile. He is in a dilemma. He can neither live a life like his father as an Indian and slave of colonialism nor can he give his life a new meaning. His attempt to fly in the sky of freedom is shattered by the meaninglessness of his life.

In Naipaul's writing, there is always an area of darkness looming in edge of towns, colonists come and conquest, empires rise, shrink and fall, new societies emerge, but always the darkness remains, waiting to cover over whatever remains of the fragile civilization. This is an unsettling vision, shaped by the author's familiarity with the margin of metropolitan civilization. It also refers more specifically to his native Trinidad and the fragile societies of the former colonies. Homi K. Bhabha focuses on the world of immigrants in the geographically and culturally alien world in Naipaul's *Half a Life*: "Naipaul's people are vernacular cosmopolitans of a kind, moving in between cultural tradition, and revealing hybrid forms of life and art that do not have a prior existence within the discrete world of any single culture or language" (12).

Bhabha also emphasizes the importance of geography and location. He further writes, "The locale that informs is Naipaul's judgment is, the world of extortionate boarding-houses...a world of migrant life that features prominently in Naipaul's early fiction" (13). Willie chooses self-exile from his country to search for his new destination. He hates his father for not being able to make his life meaningful. He even secretly doubts that he may end his life like his father if he follows his footsteps. Willie wants to escape this life of uncertainty and dreams about his life in European countries. He takes Europe as panacea. But he is disillusioned shortly after he plunges

into the alien culture which could never be his way to a new identity.

The experience of double consciousness is a constant fact of life for the narrator of V.S. Naipaul's *Half a Life*. The novel opens in India, and then follows its narrator Willie Chandran, as he studies in England and later he moves to Africa with Ana, the African woman who becomes his wife. The African section of the novel is set in an unnamed African country modelled on Mozambique. As an exilic Indian intellectual living in his wife's estate with no fixed role or occupation, Willie exists in a no-man's land of racial and class hybridity: he is clearly an educated person and a kept man, a 'pure' ethnic Indian other living above his station and among racially mixed Europeans and African people. As Robert John Balfour in his article "V.S. Naipaul's *Half a Life*: and *Magic Seeds* and Globalization" states that "the ensuing instability has been an occupation for the colonized subject, though characterized by recurring displacement, disenfranchisement, dispossession and despair" (18).

Although he spends eighteen years in the country, Willie has not become creolized. He and Ana have no children to tie them to the land; Willie has not opened a business or otherwise established any professional relationship with people other than his wife. Chandran's rootlessness marks his life as a sojourner, a traveler whose stay in a given place is anything but permanent. Willie is a never settling character whose trauma is so great that he can rest nowhere. Though he has reached the age of forty-one, he is still thrown out of gear. He has nowhere to go, none to call his own. Willie takes Ana as his place of retreat. It seems that Willie is hiding from himself. His nostalgic life leaves him suspended in-between his two cultures. Willie is an ever-losing hero. His life with Ana is nothing more than an argument. Ana takes him as her English man as she is interested in him and he goes with her as he finds that is the only solution to his immediate crisis.

Postcolonial studies is an academic discipline that analyzes, explains, and responds to the cultural legacy of colonialism and imperialism. It speaks about the human consequences of external control and exploitation of the native people and their lands. In post-colonial sense, the themes of alienation frequently appear in both superficial and figurative forms. It is a product of the overall process of colonizing the society and the mind. The victim is experienced at cultural, historical, linguistic and existential level. The character, the protagonist, experiences exile when they travel to the land of colonizers for the purpose of earning an academic field or finding work. This is typically done to escape the oppression of the colonial supremacy. The subject adapts certain characteristics features and ideals of the culture; that is oppressing them as a result of becoming a marginal members of society in the nation that is colonizing them. The post-colonial protagonist experiences an identity crisis as a result of the cultural repression and validation of the imperial. It drives his/her to look for a legitimate and positive image of the self to replace the one that was created by the imperial other. Alienation is very similar to rootlessness or exile in the sense that the subject is no longer “at home” in their native land either physically or psychologically. This can occur in native home land or the foreign land.

An individual is said to have been subjected to physical alienation when colonial law deems them to be guilty of a crime or to have engaged in subversive activity. It can result in the individual being imprisoned or having their societal rights taken away. Most of the postcolonial novel takes a psychological approach to the subject of alienation, defining it as the condition of feeling as though one does not belong a real place to call “home”. Postcolonial subjects are alienated on two fronts: the first one is by Eurocentric and imperial systems that will never totally accept them both culturally and racially. The second is by native cultures that have either

reluctantly to the colonial system or rejected them because they speak the language of colonizers to have received the education of the empire. Both of these factors contribute to postcolonial subjects' feeling of alienation.

In other words, the deepened condition of loneliness, hollowness, rootlessness, worthlessness and separation has been mentioned by the twentieth century. It is also known that all kinds of seclusions are products of socio-economic historical conditions or existential ones. In postcolonial life alienation has been depicted as an essential hallmark and its three different varieties can be described: (1) Marxist sense of alienation. (2) Existential sense of alienation and (3) Colonial sense of alienation. For Marxian definition, alienation is an estrangement from what one acts and from what one receives for their works. We can also simplify this as when a laborer fails to get material reward corresponding to his labour, he feels alienation himself from both the act and products of his labour. Having been degraded of a sense of being human creature he works like a machine-reluctantly and unintentionally.

We were in a café in the capital, having a coffee, before driving home, and he lifted his chin at a group of brightly dressed African women, brilliant in the mid-afternoon light, who were passing, who were passing in front of the café window. Normally the afternoon view was of torpid begging children, very dusty, who leaned on walls or shop windows or posts, opened and closed their mouths in slow motion...Even when you gave them money they seemed not to know; and they never went away, however much you gave them; you had to learn to ignore them. The women were not like that. They were quite regal.

(179)

Another existential sense of alienation formulated by European existentialist writer-philosopher of nineteenth and twentieth century; Sartre, Camus, Heidegger and

others. This type of alienation places human existences and are alienated from their own individual and make authentic selves.

About existential alienation Sartre has his own conclusion: “As a structure of human reality, this alienation is ontological and unavoidable as opposed to self-alienation.” (18) For which one is morally respectable. Sartre insists that the ontological alienation does not take away the freedom for itself. Camus’ *Stranger* that describes the fundamental existentialist alienation: “He does not easily attach or identify with other people.” (19) The absolute melancholic detachment from the world, society, its norms, values and views forms the basis of existential alienation. The narrator of the *Half a Life* describes the existential reality ground:

HIS NEW CONFIDENCE began to draw people to him. One of them was Percy Cato. Percy was a Jamaican of mixed parentage and was more brown than black. Willie and Percy, both exotics, both on scholarship, had been wary of one another in the beginning, but...He thought that women might have been like his mother, but in an impossibly remote setting, where the world would have been altogether outside her control. Percy put his hand on his crinkly hair and said, “The Negro is actually recessive.” Willie didn’t understand what Percy mean...He was a Jamaican but not strictly of Jamaica. He was born in Panama and had grown up there. He said, “I am the only black man or Jamaican or West Indian you’ll meet in England who knows nothing about cricket. (61)

Postcolonial Theory is essentially a non-western phenomenon. While it is necessary to make a distinction between the very different experiences of people of color under European and American rule, it is also possible to make a more general theoretical point. Colonialism and racism are both outcomes of “the other.” The idea of one and

the other stems from European philosophical thinking that both pre-dated the system of European model of imperialism, which included conquest, slavery, colonialism, and exploitation of non-European and justified as a set of practices based on difference. For hundreds of years, colonialism, a manifestation of imperialism, was the means whereby Europeans controlled peoples of other continents, until two World Wars gradually eroded a rule that included over ninety percent of the globe. The “Post” of Post-Colonialism is both the aftertime of a historical period and the critique of the episteme or mindset that led one small part of the world to dominate the Other.

More than three-quarters of the people living in the world today have had their lives shaped by the experience of colonialism. It is easy to see how important this has been in the political and economic spheres, but its general influence on the perceptual frameworks of contemporary peoples is often less evident. Literature offers one of the most important ways in which this new perception are expressed and it is in there writing, and through other arts such as painting , sculpture, music, and dance that the day-to-day realities experienced by colonized people have been most powerfully encoded and so profoundly influenced.

The literature of African countries, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Caribbean Countries, India, Malaysia, Malta, New Zealand, Pakistan, Singapore, South Pacific Island countries, and Sri Lanka belongs to post-colonial literature. Perhaps because of its current position of power, and the neo-colonizing role it has played, its post-colonial nature has not been generally recognized. But its relationship with the metropolitan centre as it evolved over the last two centuries has been paradigmatic for post-colonial literatures everywhere.

In the 1994 afterword, though, Said also located postcolonialism in the pat (to a point) by approving quoting Ella Scholar’s suggestion that postcolonialism concerns

itself with “continuities and discontinuities...on the new modes and forms of the old colonists practices” and not on a “beyond” (348).

In postcolonial studies the writing centre changed from the middle of Europe to world over. The marginalized countries like India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and other Asian countries; outside Asia, Nigeria, Canada, Australia, South Africa and many Islamic countries are foregrounded in postcolonial studies, Hans Bertans in his book *Literary Theory: Basics*, rightly argues:

In recognition of this new situation, in which writing in English from the former colonies-including India Pakistan, Sri Lanka and other Asian countries-has proved itself as a vital and as important as the literature written in English itself: we now usually speak of literature in English rather than of English literatures’ if we want to refer to English language. (195)

Postcolonial discourse attempts to redefine, reformulate and reconstruct the colonized self. The postcolonial should mean the period beginning with national independence in contrast to the colonial rule. It is because the age of colonization is over, so the whole world is to be considered as postcolonial world, but if we think, it is continued colonialism in hidden form. Postcolonial theory-as epistemology, ethics, and politics-addresses matter of identity, gender, race, racism and ethnicity with the challenges of developing a postcolonial national identity of how colonized people’s knowledge about the world is generated under specific relations between the powerful and powerless, circulated repetitively and finally legitimated in service to certain imperial interests.

Postcolonial literature includes both the writings in the period of colonization and after colonization. It includes the attempt of colonizers to falsify the native culture and show superiority of their ruling culture and the experiences of the natives in the

colonized and post colonized worlds. Along with the ending of colonization the world entered into a global era. The independent countries started searching their identity. They tried to correct the mistakes created by westerners about their culture and language. They tried to bring the real picture of the formerly colonized world. Post colonialism includes a long time period including the western invasion and rule, the end of the colonial era and even the postcolonial era. Postcolonial discourse is the discourse of the colonizers that they created to sustain and justify their rule and it is also the discourse of the natives to correct the false history. It is the feelings and experiences of the colonized and marginalized people.

The postcolonial writing is a protest against the traumatic history of colonization. It is also an attempt of rediscovery and invention of the self-identity of the colonized people. It is a strong blow against their misrepresentation. It's a proof of intellectual equality or superiority of the colonized to the colonizers. Postcolonial writings includes the issues of hybridity, multiculturalism, diaspora, existentialism, alienation, rootlessness and many more other modern issues. Most of the issues are commonly experienced by the people who were once colonized.

The postcolonial literature is mostly the literary resistance of the colonized world against the colonizers. Postcolonial literature is also a resistance of the colonized people against their former oppressors. It is an existential art. The postcolonial writers came forward with their revolutionary ideas that strongly resisted against the oppressors. They established their new identity in the free world. The postcolonial writers had gone through similar experiences of oppressors and domination. They have the bitterness and deep rooted scar of exploitation.

Identity crisis, sense of loss, alienation, hybridity, multiculturalism, rootlessness, diasporic experiences are the common issues raised by postcolonial

theories. They are the outcomes of colonial rule felt by the colonized people. Though such issues are the pivot along which the postcolonial writing move. Identity crisis is the common experience felt by the colonized people. Most of the postcolonial writings have vividly depicted the issue of identity crisis. The colonized people feel lost under the influence of the alien culture of the colonizers. They can see their own culture being eaten up by the dominating culture of the colonizers. Their language and culture are inferiorized as the barbaric culture. In response to this blame the colonized people are compelled to follow the culture of the colonizers. This makes them mimic men. They adopt the colonizer's culture and language so that they may not look barbaric. But this brings a double identity in them. They can neither follow the alien culture nor can remain in their root culture.

Postcolonial theory is a counter attack against the established Western Theory which terms western culture as "universal". Said argues that this is no more oversight; to the contrary, it is a motivated silence. Such 'universalism' has, for Said, played a crucial role in connecting European culture with European imperialism for centuries, for imperialism as a political project cannot sustain itself without the *idea of empire*, and the idea of empire, in turn, is nourished by a philosophical and cultural imaginary that justifies the political subjugation of distant territories and their native population through claims that such peoples are less advanced, cognitively inferior, and therefore naturally subordinate.

The novel *Half a Life* is such kind of book which provides us with the opportunity to think about the problem of a sense of loss and alienation. It presents as an autobiography not only of Willie's life, but also of Naipaul's life. In the book, it seems that Naipaul belongs to at least three countries, but none of them gives him the sense of home: he is indeed a rootless person. Willie is only one of the representatives

among those immigrants who try their best to claim for their identity and sense of belonging. So it is of great significances of history. In this regard, this paper begins with the analysis of the book in order to explore the protagonist's sense of alienation in postcolonial atmosphere. Willie is the central character around whom the incidents in the novel move. He is a representative character who stands for those people who have experienced the bitterness of the postcolonial reality of the immigrants in the foreign land. He desperately searches for his stable identity but cannot form any identity till the end of the novel when he is already a forty plus middle aged man. He is lost in the maze of the alien cultures. He suffocates and chocks in his futile struggles. His lifelong fear is solidified as he wanders in different countries. He finally proves himself "idler" and cannot get a form. He as a hybrid character begotten by an upper class Hindu father and an outcaste mother. He suffers in between his double identities. His hybrid identity is similar to the cultural hybridity faced by the people in the colonial land. They can neither cling to their root culture as it is termed as a barbaric and the "Other" culture by the colonizers, nor they can fully assimilate to the colonizer's alien culture.

From his father's story, Willie understands his family history, culture, heritage and roots. However, he cannot accept his second name which is named after the famous English writer Somerset Maugham, who visited Willie's town in the years before independence of India since he thinks that he should be named after his family. Willie thus possess only a half name. The novel seems to reveal Willie's father's intention that his son 'mimics' the white man's name. as Homi K. Bhabha says, "The problem with mimicry is that it is not representational of something rather it is "metonymy of presence", or something that literally stands adjacent British identity appearing to reproduce it, but always failing, undercutting or ironically parodying

Britishness through the markers of difference” (540). Willie’s awareness of his mother’s low caste and the resultant status of his father built a sense of shame in him, but at the same time his resolve to survive forces him into a world of falsehood, a make-believe world. The truth about him was ugly, hence he takes to falsehood with impunity and once he presents his projected image before the world, Willie starts living the image. Years ago his father had also projected an image inspired by Mahatma Gandhi’s call for sacrifice. He paid dearly when he was forced into marriage with a low caste woman whose very sight breeds repulsion in him.

Because of the misplaced ideals he had to marry in haste and regret in leisure. Willie does not learn from his father’s mistakes and allows history to repeat and even repeats itself. Even as a child when Willie is asked to write an English composition, he pretends he is a Canadian and writes an invented story which is based on the bits of life he has known through American comic books instead of narrating his own life he recreates it with his imaginative skill. In attempting to free himself from his half-ness, Willie, however, goes on creating worlds of falsehood. Willie hates his parents more particularly his father and realizes that in order to avert more harm the bird must be allowed to scale the skies. He reflects:

I used to think that you were me and I was worried at what I had done to you.
But now I know that you are not me. What is in my head is not in yours. You
are somebody else, somebody I don’t know, and I worry for you because you
are launched on a journey I know nothing of. (49)

Disillusioned with school and his parents, and uncertain of his future Willie obtains, with the help from one of his father’s contacts, a scholarship to a college of education for mature students in London. He joins the immigrant bohemian society of Notting Hill, gets an opportunity to write pieces for the BBC; he badly attempts sexual affairs

with his friends' girlfriends June and Perdita, through both find his performance culturally inhibited. He spends eighteen years of his life in a "half-and-half world" during the days of colonialism, with half and half friends. "People of second rank" (160).

Willie can clearly see the gap between the colonial mimicry of the colonizer and his desire to construct himself in a chaotic world. He is aware of the paradoxical nature of his mimicry. However, he becomes a "mimic man" the person people expected him to be, just like Ralf Singh in *The Mimic Men*. As a matter of fact, the western name is hallow because he cannot possess a western identity simply by possessing a western name. In the novel, Naipaul presents character who are product of racial and cultural mix and shows how they struggle to find their identity in the multi-cultural society they live in. In general these characters tend to deny one or more racial characteristics in order to become "more respectable" in their estimation. However, they eventually discover that their identity cannot be fixed because they are the fruits of multiple cultures. All through the novel, Willie is drifting without solid and fixed identity. His identity is multiple and changing.

Willie goes to London thinking that he will be able to discover himself, find out his face but ironically in his search of completeness he loses even his half-life that was within his reach. In London for a while Willie is lost, as if in a limbo. The education he was getting was absolutely devoid of perspectives. He pursues everything half-heartedly.

The learning he was being given was like the food he was eating, without savor. The two were inseparable in the mind. And just a he ate without pleasure, so, with a kind of blindness, he did what he lectures and tutors asked him, read the books and articles and did the essays. He was unanchored, with

no idea of what lay ahead. (Naipaul 58)

Floating in the bottomless sea of multiculturalism, for a while seems to have found his ground when all of a sudden he comes to a generalization that he did not need to rebel for the simple reason that distance from his roots has given him freedom without asking.

In search of his identity in a strange world Willie again projects a borrowed, makes believe identity and ventures to live the image once again:

He adopted certain things he had read, and he spoke of his mother as belonging to an ancient Christian community of the subcontinent, a community almost as odd as Christianity itself. He kept his father as a Brahmin. He made his father's father a 'courtier'. So playing with words, he began to re-make himself. It excited him, and began to give him a feeling of power. (61)

In this way, he always tries to construct a British self and he is always in the process of becoming. While trying to settling down in the London life, Willie comes across with some people who have similar hybrid identity. Each of them is leading a half-life in their own way. There is Percy Cato who was "a Jamaican of mixed perentage and was more brown than black" (Naipaul 61). Percy Cato, in many ways is like Willie. He is ashamed of his background and instead of presenting facts about his life, like Willie he believes in presenting fiction. He tells Willie that his father went Panama as a clerk when Willie understands "He is lying. That is a foolish story. His father went there as a labourer. He would have been in one of the gangs, holding his pickaxe before him on the ground, like the others, and looking obediently at the photographer" (62). Percy Cato loves to dress immaculately. This excessive alertness about fashion seems to take its origin from the need to hide his not so ambitious background. Their

fictional recreation of his lives as well as their overwhelming sense of dressing up provides their exiles a kind shelter from their modest realities.

Homi K. Bhabha is one of the most crucial figures in contemporary postcolonial studies. In his book *The Location of Culture* he demonstrates colonialism, race, identity and difference into the volume. At the beginning of the introduction of *The Location of Culture*, he says, “It is the trope of our times to locate the question of culture in the realm of the beyond” (Bhabha1). In the very context what does beyond mean? “The beyond is neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past”. But in the beyond, “there is a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction”.

Willie and Percy’s fictional recreations only seem to end up cheating themselves: they are an escape from an unbearable reality. Their make-believe identities are their performances. The creation of identity here has doubled meanings. Apparently, Willie seems to forsake his Indian tradition and family history. It is his loss of cultural heritage. Even so, when he looks back on his life, he will understand his loss of cultural heritage at the stage of being in London. On the other hand, his performance of creating identity displays the third space. He constructs his own subjectivity in London by learning to create his identity. The content of the third space is what Bhabha called in his book *The Location of Culture*:

Hybridity, “through which other, non-Western-centric positions may emerge to articulate and set up new structures of authority, new political initiatives.

The process of hybridity thus produces something different, something new, and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representations.

(207)

Sexual promiscuity is a factor witnessed in the third world immigrants who move

from the parochial society which imposes sexual taboos to a liberal Western world which is not infested with such inhibition. The process of adjustment in this respects bares before the immigrant, the narrowness of his native background to combat which he indulges in sexual excess. Willie Chandran is a man doomed to live under a shadow. His cultural background and his awareness of his incompleteness has bred inhibition. Willie may hide himself by projecting a false ancestry but he cannot kill his reality and at crucial moments his background and his half-ness become apparent and give him away. His sexual frustrations are not his own: they are the frustrations of a society, of a race and of a culture. Willie is divided without himself in his bid to achieve assimilation or accumulation, which is the only option left to the immigrants in order to survive amidst cultural or imaginative schizophrenia, in this sense a state of divided identity – divided by culture, history and circumstance.

Willie's life in London is full of frightening incidents. He becomes desperate to satisfy his carnal desires. Naipaul also exposes the pretensions in London life through Willie's eyes. He finds that the college was full of various pieces of tradition, he comes in contact with a lot of people belonging to different races, who had come to London to try their luck. He learns that the people in London wanted West Indian chaps to drive the bushes, but nobody in London liked to rent rooms for the accommodation of the black people. So some black people like Percy were encouraged to buy properties and rent to West Indian drivers. In the eighteenth century, there were about half a million black people in England: they have been vanished. They have been disappeared in the local population. They were bred out. The Negro gene is recessive one.

The bohemian culture of Notting Hill is alien for Willie but not being to define his own culture, he seeks to adapt the Notting Hill culture in his bid to survive.

Whatever freedom Willie attempts to enjoy here is unsatisfactory because it needs crutches for support. Even the girls with whom Willie has physical relation are not his friends but the lovers of his friends. Willie keeps on planning to declare his love before Percy and the world when June marries her childhood friend leaving both Percy and Willie in the lurch. Perdita who happens to be Richard's friend leaves Willie's side after the frustrated experience of one night.

Failing to obtain a concrete place of his own in London. Willie does not know where he is going. He can "only go back to India, and he does not want that" (121). The cultural identities focus on searching for a new route and creating a new meaning in the flow. Just like James Clifford's assertion on travel, Willie must undergo the journey of travelling towards his self-identity. Willie decides to go to Africa with Ana, the first woman who has admired his writing. Later he marries Ana who is of mixed Portuguese-African descent. Willie follows her to her inherited estate in Mozambique in an attempt to make a new beginning. In his wife's home country, Mozambique, the colonial system is gradually breaking down. Willie remains a stranger and outsider in this country, just as in India and London: indeed, now he suffers an even greater sense of alienation. He does not want to stay here long: "I don't know where I am. I don't think I can pick my way back. I don't even want this view to be familiar. I must nit unpack. I must never behave as though I am staying" (135).

Immigration threatens with the loss of heritage to preserve which an immigrant tries desperately to stick to his heritage food and language. Existence is meaningless unless it is expressed appropriately and language is the tool and power of expression. Displacement brings disposition of this power, which aggravates the sense of alienation. The immigrant is always at a disadvantageous position in a foreign land

and his/her escape depends on the degree of his/her adoptability to that which is essentially alien. In the process of alienation language becomes the most potent instrument to come to the immigrants' help. But an inability to forget the native language casts a shadow on the immigrant's prospects in his adopted country. In his Nobel lecture he revealed candidly the trauma of migration and consequent loss in these words: "The world outside existed in a kind of darkness; and we inquired about nothing. I was just old enough to have some idea of the Indian epics, the Ramayana in particular. The children who came five years or so after me in our extended family didn't have this luck. No one taught us Hindi. Sometimes someone wrote out the alphabet for us to learn, and that was that; we were expected to do the rest ourselves. So, as English penetrated, we began to lose our language" (Naipaul. *Two Worlds*. December 7, 2001. Released by the Nobel Foundation).

This loss of proper language becomes even more ironical in view of the fact that Willie is an emerging writer and writer's very existence is dependent in his language. One also remembers that on the publication of his first book Willie was introduced as "a subversive new voice from the subcontinent" (122). With his remigration to Africa Willie's voice itself becomes a prey to despotic forces. It is quite ironic that English, the language Willie loses, it is "proper language" as a writer in London. When a writer loses the language he is used to writing in, he is truly silenced and deprived of his power. Here we see the significance of English as a universal language since this means it is also the language of the diaspora; this imperial language, as lingua franca, is we might say necessary evil.

In Africa, then, Willie does not have a sense of belonging. He feels he is "nowhere". Ironically, he stays here for eighteen years. In London, at least, he was a writer known as Willie Chandran, but in Africa, he becomes merely "Ananias's London

Man” (145). His only consolation is that he ironically discovers an affinity with “half-and-half friends” (161) in this “half-and-half world” (160). These friends regard themselves as “people of the second rank” (160). The exiled people share Willie’s sense of loss, disorientation, and dereliction. Through their images of reflection, he gets epiphany to understand that, by employing the perspective of the “other” he becomes even more trapped. Furthermore, immigrants develop a sense of non-belonging in a new and alien world on account of the loss of their native language. Even Ana feels that she needs to learn English to survive in London. The reason she gives to her family as:

‘I wanted to break out of the Portuguese language. I feel it was that that had made my grandfather such a limited man. He had no true idea of the world...In his mind, because of the Portuguese language, all the rest of the world had been strained away. And I didn’t want to learn South African English, which is what people learn here. I wanted to learn English English.’(155)

The very basis and ground of Willie’s attraction to Ana is his desire for wholeness. In Ana Willie discovers a kind of reciprocity. It is her half-ness that strikes a bond with Willie. While reflecting on Ana’s admiration of his book Willie thinks: “It was possible that she belonged to mixed community or stood in some other kind of half-and-half position” (124). This lacking and bond binds him with her for eighteen years in Mozambique. But once again he is disillusioned.

Having lived half a life in Africa for eighteen years, there Willie consciously senses his “loss” in this new land, especially after slipping “on the front steps of the estate house” (135). At this moment he has an epiphany living with Ana in Africa only mirrors for him the intrinsic limitation of his half-life. This self-realization forces

him to get back the time he has wasted. Therefore, he decides to leave Ana in the hope of discovering his own true identity: "I cannot live your life any more. I want to live my own. I must stop living your life here" (136).

He makes a decision to courageously face any possible challenge in the future. After leaving away from Africa, Willie goes to Germany where his sister Sarojini lives. He sees Tamil boys who raised funds for the great Tamil war on the street: "They have proclaimed who they are and they are risking everything for it. I have been hiding from myself. I have risked nothing. And now the best part of my life is over" (138).

Willie deeply realizes that must seize the time to construct his subjectivity because he has spent too much time leading a life of escapism. Willie is looking forward to start a new life with the future half of his readers. Willie will continue to search for his identity and a place of his own in the world. In the process of constructing subjectivity, Willie confronts the sense of placelessness and discovers that he cannot create a fixed identity. He therefore comprehends the identity is not stable but created in the process just like the assertion of the post-colonial discourse.

To sum up, in great precision and balance, Naipaul reanimates the dilemma of the late and post-colonial experience-the path of marginality and exile, the fear of throwing oneself into a void, the failure of the liberated to remake their societies, the inexorable slide into ruin. He reminds us again of what a fine and unusual writer he is. In *Half a Life* we are introduced to the compelling figure of Willie Chandran. Springing from the unhappy union of a low caste mother and an upper caste father constantly at odds with life. Willie is naively eager to find something that will place him both in the immigrant and bohemian communities of post-war London. It is only in his first experience of love that he finally senses the possibility of fulfillment. *Half*

a Life, is explicitly concerned with drawing out the metaphysical-private while keeping it embedded in society and history. This small, sparely written tale embodies a fragile idea of freedom, a vision of human life disentangling itself from the encumbrances of time and place.

Sense of alienation is deep rooted in Naipaul's *Half a Life*. Willie's lifelong struggle to form his own fixed identity is proved futile finally. Willie ends at the same point from where he begins. The novel even ends abruptly. This highlights its theme of meaninglessness and failure. Willie fails miserably in his life. He remains a nobody in his exile. He is rootless and alienated. He lifelong fears that he may end like his "idle" father and tries his best to establish himself. But unfortunately he proves to be another failure. His sense of alienation is brought by the poison of colonialism. The existence of colonized people is endangered by the effects of colonialism.

Half a Life is a novel about the colonial and post-colonial dilemma. The never resolved dilemma of Willie Chandran who has seen the same dilemma in his father. In fact, Willie is a representative character of all those whose life has been poisoned by colonialism. Their exile has given birth to the sense of alienation. Naipaul has carefully chosen his protagonist as Willie Somerset Chandran. The name is very significant to represent the fragmented half reality of the protagonist. The title suggests that the characters are living with fragmented realities. Even their name is incomplete and borrowed of people of colonizer. Their reality is copied or mimed. Willie Chandran's middle name was borrowed or copied from a great English writer. His name has great significance in the later development of the novel. As his name suggests, Willie Chandran ends up being nothing more than a mimic man. He is highly influenced by the western culture and life styles. *Half a Life* is a novel of incompleteness. In India, Willie's parents are of mixed caste and personality that does

not make for anything approaching as a whole. Willie's father sets the example for the son of a half-lived life, and Willie follows in the same footsteps. He has no firm objectives, no clear ambitions. He cannot take his life in a fixed route. He is just a driver. He hovers around but cannot reach at the depth.

Naipaul has artistically presented the plight of the immigrants who are in exile. The exile is fostered in the post-colonial backdrop. Sense of alienation is the result of Willie's life in exile. He is a hybrid product whose reality is a mixture of two or more cultures. Alienated people are lost and rootless. The life in diaspora is fragmented into bits. The struggle of Willie Chandran can be seen as the novelist's own diasporic experience.

After all, the hybridity of identity, alienation and crisis of the original identity are the aftermaths of postcolonial societies which originates from the culture and ideology of outsiders as colonizers. The original identity of the individuals is influenced and shaped in the postcolonial societies, and thus individuals cannot truly become what they actually want to be.

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