

AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF ALIENATION, PLACELESSNESS AND PEACELESSNESS IN V. S. NAIPAUL'S HALF A LIFE

P. Mohaideen Fathima

*Postgraduate and Research Centre in English, Sadakathullah APPA College (Autonomous),
Rahmath Nagar, Tirunelveli*

Abstract

Dislocation and the possible difficulties of the immigrants are now the themes of 21st Century novels and writings. Correspondingly the main theme of diasporic writing is displacement of an individual and the consequent alienation. Generally the sense of estrangement moves an individual towards a state of placelessness and peacelessness which is usually the subject matter of Naipaul. Mostly Naipaul's novels are full of autobiographical elements. His characters to a large extent suffer from lack of geographical orientation. During an interview with Ronald Bryden Naipaul says that all his works are really one collection. He is really writing one big book. He has come to the conclusion that, considering the nature of the society he came from, considering the nature of the world he has stepped into and the world he has to look at, he could not be a professional novelist in the old sense. Thus the renowned novelist genuinely speaks through his characters and finds solace. His emotional and experiential aspects of life from place to place and time to time have been revived in the form of his characters. Thus, it results in his major theme of homelessness and unhomeliness. In line with this the alienating effects of colonial past on postcolonial people are highly transparent in Naipaul's Half a Life. The present study probes deep to analyse the identity crisis and its subsequent effects on the characters in the novel.

Keywords: *Dislocation, Alienation, Placelessness, Peacelessness, Unhomeliness and Hybridity.*

Introduction

As defined by Marx in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1844) alienation is a specific historical condition in which man experiences a separation from nature, other human beings and especially the products of his labour. Since man creates himself through labour, all of these forms of alienation imply an alienation of man from himself. Alienation for Hegel had been a philosophical concept expressing one aspect of the process of self-objectification in the dialectical process, Spirit objectified itself in nature (a stage in which it was alienated from itself) and then returned to itself. Marx regards alienation as a product of the evolution of division of labour, private property and the state: when these phenomena reach an advanced stage, as in capitalist society, the individual experiences the entire objective world as a conglomeration of alien forces standing over and above him. In this sense, alienation can only be overcome by the revolutionary abolition of the economic system based on private property (20), *Dictionary of Literary Terms & Literary Theory*.

V. S. Naipaul and his Themes in General

Sir Vidaidhar Swarajprasad Naipaul's works are mostly autobiographical in nature. He is the mouth piece of 20th and 21st century novelists. Generally his themes are

displacement, exile, unhomeliness and hybridity etc. He depicts through his novels so many things that he has experienced in his real life. His grandfather went to Trinidad for sugarcane plantation business. Though his ancestors were Indians he could neither be an Indian nor a Trinidadian. This kind of duality is inherent in most of the characters in his novels. *Half a life* is the best example for alienation and life in exile.

An Emergence of Identity Crisis

The main character of the novel, Willie Somerset Chandran, is born in the pre- independence India. Accordingly, the first part of the novel is about Indian life in a provincial town. India's ritualistic tradition ranging from life in temple, Sanyasi's life, vows of silence, caste prejudices have been presented in the opening part of the novel. Many of the characters in the novel suffer to the core because of their internal or external exile at one point or the other. The novel begins with a great question that Willie Somerset Chandran asks his father; 'Why is my middle name Somerset?' After living with the same name for years, the grown up school boy realizes his self being identified with three different names, as his fellow students laugh at him for the complexly coined name. A feeling of alienation emerges. Willie is made aware of the difference between his religion and name. Actually 'Willie' is a Christian name. His mother is a Christian and father, a Hindu. Therefore 'Chandran' is the father's family name and 'Somerset' is the name of a famous English writer, the well-known British literary figure, Somerset Maugham who wrote about Willie's father's Vow of Silence in one of his travelogues and that made the father a world famous man in India. The great matchlessness leads him to raise a lot of questions internally on many different occasions in the novel.

The Great Past Story as Narrated by the Protagonist's Father

In the novel even from the beginning one can find the loneliness of the main character, due to his incompatibility with his very self. In fact it is a novel within a novel. On being asked a question by Willie Chandran regarding the reason behind the combination of his name, Willie's father begins narrating a long story. During the course of narration the readers are left to know how far Willie's father, his father's father and great grandfather suffered due to the sense of alienation. They lost their identity and migrated from place to place. Their own nation became an alien nation for them. Thus Willie's father says:

My grandfather told me. All the complicated rules of community... My grandfather was skin and bones when he decided he had to leave the temple and the community. He thought he would go to the big town where the maharaja's palace was and where was a famous temple (5-6).

Once Willie's father who had been influenced by Gandhian principles followed them strictly in his life, especially, 'Life in Sacrifice'. It motivated him to fall in love with a Canadian girl who was in no way a perfect match for a man of high cast like him, a dark-complexioned, ugly-looking and low-caste woman. Willie's father and the girl were studying under the Scholarship Scheme in the same college. The love between the two did not materialise at the beginning, as the girl was very reluctant. With much difficulty the man married the girl and kept her secretly in a place. On close examination, the girl's personal features were not quite likened by the Gandhian disciple. Psychologically he moved away from her gradually.

A State of Peacelessness

By birth Willie's father was a high caste man and his beloved was a low caste woman. They knew very well that the society would not accept their relationship. As a result of this they faced many consequences in their life. For this act he was totally alienated by the society and also by himself. In order to escape from the problem he made a secret preparation. He began to think of taking sanctuary in the famous old temple in the town, as followed by his grandfather once, as a means of escapism. Thus, he sat in the courtyard and took a Vow of Silence in the temple. This brought a great change in his life, at the same time; he was far from his family, society and his new girl friend. Consequences were very severe. One day he came to know that his wife was pregnant. Then he realised that he could not follow the real Gandhian teachings fully, because Gandhi advocated the life of Brahmacharya. Again he got united with his wife and the newborn baby, Willie. Afterwards Willie's mother became pregnant for the second time and delivered a girl baby which was the image of her mother. The child was not attractive. He felt that it was the divine punishment.

The prominent characters in the novel suffer to the core because of their living in exile when Willie's father narrates the story he talks about his grandfather who moves to so many places for food and other personal needs. At last he gets the respectable job as a clerk in the Maharaja's palace. This kind of job is very secure. The pay is not very good but he would never be dismissed from the job unlike the previous ones. By way of working in the palace, Willie's grandfather gets an opportunity to participate in the temple activities. Then with the influence of the Maharaja, the old man gets a job for his son. Unfortunately, due to his own foolish decision and flashy principles Willie's father undergoes a great suffering.

Following the Principles, Loosing the Self and Troubling the Dependants

His excessive and strict Gandhian thoughts lead him to mystery after mystery. Actually the Gandhian principles are good in general, but they are not apt for him because

of his being a Brahmin. The moment he falls in love with an unfair foreign girl and marries her with the objective of sacrificing his very life for the girl, he gradually loses his personal space and peace. Ultimately the great decision to lose his personal self for the happiness of an alien girl fetches him a lot of trouble to the end of his life. Even the children Willie and Sarojini lose their personal identity due to their parents' interreligious marriage. Correspondingly Willie's father expresses: "I looked upon that kind of judgement-'from waiters, students, simple people as the first fruit of my life of sacrifice. They were only the first fruits. I knew that there were going to be greater battles ahead, severe tests... (14)".

One more notable thing in the novel is Willie's father's unhomeliness due to his race or high caste. For this reason he has been internally separated from his own son and daughter, because they resemble their mother. Their physical features are the mother's. Though Willie's father has been married to the low caste woman by his Gandhian thought, from heart to heart he has not accepted his wife. It reflects in his activities in many places. When Willie's mother wishes that her children should go to the mission school for education. The father feels that most of the children at the school belong to the backward community. In the school the teacher has trained Willie to write composition and he has got ten marks out of ten, but when Willie shows that to his father he feels ashamed of it. He thinks that the teacher is not that much qualified to assess.

Once Willie expresses his wish to go to Canada for his higher studies. His father simply refuses his wish and wants to send him to Bombay, Calcutta or even Delhi. But he denies sending him to Canada. In this context Willie's father says:

Your mother has put this low idea in your head. Why would the fathers want to send you to Canada? 'They will make me a missionary.' They will turn you into a little monkey and send you right back here to work with your mother's family and the other backwards. You are a fool (44).

These lines show his racial feelings. Thus, the feeling of hatred has detached him even from his own son. Consequently he has lost his son's love.

The State of the Daughter

The novelist has added one more story along with the main plot. In this track the readers are told about Willie's younger sister, Sarojini. She was born ugly like her low caste mother. It was because, Sarojini happened to be an unattractive girl, once Chandran's father in a desperate mood uttered:

The girl was the image of her mother. It was like divine punishment. I called her Sarojini, after the woman poet of the independence movement, in the hope that a similar kind of blessing might fall on her, because

the poet Sarojini, great patriot though admired she was, and much admired for that, was also remarkably ill-favoured (35).

Fortunately, an old lame German tourist falls in love with her. He marries her and takes her to his native country. Once Sarojini pays a visit to London from her newly migrated nation, Germany. In London she meets Chandran. Even after getting married to a German, who is a westerner, Sarojini remains a typical Indian housewife. Still she is an embodiment of ancient Indian tradition. She has not changed much.

The Protagonist and his Sense of Alienation

In the mean time, Chandran is in a dilemma. He suffers from identity crisis. Towards the end of his studies, he is in a condition to leave England. Where to go is the great problem with him. He does not feel like going back to India. The relief comes to Chandran in the shape of Ana. Ana is a Portuguese African girl. Her father is an owner of an estate in East Africa. Correspondingly Chandran gets an opportunity to go to Africa after marrying Ana.

When Ana and Willie leave Southampton, Willie has a fear to learn the new language, whether he would be able to hold on his own language or not is the problem. Anyhow as a man in exile he is forced to learn the language, but he has a dilemma in his mind. Hence he utters to himself:

Willie was trying to deal with the knowledge that had come to him on the ship that his home language had almost gone, that his English was going, that he had no proper language left, no gift of expression (132).

After marrying Ana, he goes to Ana's country; there he gets a different experience. The things and the situations around him gradually move him away from his personal self mentally. He could not associate himself with Africa psychologically. In the alien country he feels agitated most of the time. Scenes such as the people, their language their customs, geography, buildings and the settings in the house are totally new and strange. He thinks that he could get a permanent identity through Ana but he merely fails in that attempt. Hence Willie says:

I don't know where I am. I don't think I pick my way back. I don't ever want this view to become familiar. I must not unpack. I must never behave as though I am staying (135).

Conclusion

Naipaul has vividly described the issues, problems and difficulties of alienation, homelessness, peacelessness, identity crisis etc. in the novel. The internal troubles undergone by Willie Chandran in the Western world are typical scenes in the novel. However, Chandran is helped by a West Indian immigrant, Percy Cato. He is also shuttling

between three nations: Africa, America and Europe. Naipaul has clearly portrayed Chandran's pre-marital affairs in London. But he ever remains a drifter. He is very much particular in not becoming one with the unwanted activities. For some reasons or the other he makes it a point to keep away from the matters.

Half a Life is a novel depicting an individual's reaction to places. It describes a man's search for home or a place of belonging. The characters in the novel suffer from sociocultural issues which are part and parcel of every place. For a global citizen like Naipaul or particularly, his character, Willie Somerset Chandran in *Half a Life*, living in a multicultural society like England is a better alternative than being a part of unstable, shattered and corrupt societies. A mixed life in an alien land would at least give a feeling of possession for the time being.

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