

## CULTURAL ALIENATION IN NAIPAUL'S *HALF A LIFE*

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### ABSTRACT

Studies on different issues such as, the quest for one's identity, the sense of belongingness, the idea of rootlessness and cultural separation upon this novel are insufficient. Likewise, there are no studies done on the theme of some aspects of alienation on this novel. Thus this study area desired to fill that gap by explaining the relevant genres of alienation and their impacts upon the major character in the story. The study revealed the agonies of alienation which have brought the loss of native cultural heritage and sense of place that the protagonist faces both in his home and foreign lands. Failure to face one's real established history and genuine ancestry lead to administer a kind of imagination to shape a mimetic and pretended identity and tries to live behind its mask is seen in the study. The study has tried to first identify crucial delineations and concepts of alienation with some critical explanations regarding the genres on the basis of Marxist Theory of Alienation. *Half a Life* is a story of alienation. Naipaul's *Half a Life* is a story of alienation and rootlessness. It also comprises themes of displacement, exile, the quest for identity and diaspora. Willie Chandran is the protagonist in the story. Strife of alienation has engulfed him with other social and cultural problems. During the course of his exile to the places he hasn't ever known, he encounters a great deal of problems of placelessness, selflessness and identity crisis. The student researcher has exerted all his effort to explain the troubles of alienation that suffer the protagonist in this part.

**Keywords:** Cultural Alienation, Naipaul's *half a Life*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

*Half a Life* is a record of Willie Chandran's quest for identity and the feeling of rootlessness. Willie Chandran asked his father one day, why is my middle name Somerset? The boys at school have just found out, and they are mocking me. (*Half a Life* p.1) These are the opening lines of the novel. Right at the very beginning there is an implication of perspective which reflects the search for identity and roots as his middle name sounds alien. Willie Chandran feels rootless as the students make fun of him at school. The name Somerset is borrowed one. It indicates half of his name is not his own. It implies that people are half-lived and half realized.

Willie's story is set in post-independent India and it goes to London from there to Africa. As Willie questions his father why his name was after a famous English writer, his father tells him a story and it takes first thirty five pages and remaining pages are about his struggle for life in London and Africa.

Willie Chandran and his sister Sarojini grow up despising parents especially their father. He was bitterly unhappy to stay in India. He managed to get scholarship in a second grade college in London and went there so that he could discover himself in London but ironically in his search for completeness he comes aware of his inadequacies. He even loses half of his life that was within his reach. Thousands of miles from home, he begins to sense the condescension and indifference with which the British treated his father, and disdain gradually metamorphosis into empathy. Willie was lost in London for a while. The education that he was getting was absolutely devoid of perspectives. He pursues everything half-heartedly. He feels like a fish out of water as he could not break away from conventional barriers such as culture and tradition: And just as he ate without pleasure, so, with a kind of blindness, he did what the lecturers and tutors asked of him, read the books and articles and did the essays. He was unanchored, with no idea of what lay ahead. (p.58) This situation unfolds before him a complicated picture which relates to his roots. Culture alienation seems to be in Willie's blood. Then his restless soul yearns for an anchor. Half-ness of his personality, the incompleteness of his life for all of which moves with despise for his father and blames for the half-status that he has been accorded.

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Willie fails to see the dilemma of his father as a youth and also does not realize that his father has become victim to the circumstances. His father tried to create an image but lost his identity. Oscar Handlin says that the history of immigration is the history of alienation and its consequences... For every freedom won, tradition lost. For every second generation assimilated a first generation in a way or the other spurned. For the gains of goods and services, an identity lost, and uncertainly found.

For a while Willie seems to have found his ground when all of a sudden he comes to realize that he could not rebel that distance from his roots which gave him freedom without asking. For his identity in a different world Willie projects a borrowed, make-believe identity and venture to survive: He spoke of his mother as belonging to ancient Christian community of the sub-continent, a community almost as old as Christianity itself. He kept his father as Brahmin. He made his father's father a courtier. So playing with words he began to re-make himself. (p. 61)

Willie meets different kinds of people in the process settling down in London. All those people are leading a half-life in their own way. One of such people is Percy Cato from Jamaica of a mixed parentage and he was more brown than black. Percy also in the same bottomless sea of multiculturalism and he is ashamed of his background. Instead of presenting facts he makes fiction and says to Willie that his father went to Panama as a Clerk: He was a Clerk. You know those people over there. They can't read and write at all. Willie thought, He is lying. That is a foolish story. His father went there as a Laborer. He would have been in one of the gangs holding his pickaxe before him on the ground like others. (p. 62) Percy Cato is a fashion-loving guy. He loves clothes. He always wears a suit and tie. His shirt collar is always clean and starched and stiff, and his shoes always polished, with new looking insteps and heels. They are very nice and solid. This excessive alertness about fashion seems to take its origin from the need to hide his not so ambitious background. Their fictional recreation of these lives as well the sense of dressing up provides these exiles a shelter from realities. Willie Chandran is a man doomed to live under a shadow. His cultural background and his awareness of his incompleteness have brought inhibition.

In his bid to survive Willie Chandran adopts Notting Hill Culture. The Bohemian Culture of Notting Hill is alien to Willie even then he adopts it. The freedom he wants to enjoy in London is unsatisfactory to him. The girls with whom he sleeps are not his friends but lovers of his friends. Willie keeps planning to declare his love before Percy and the world, when June marries her childhood friend leaving both Percy and Willie in the lurch, Perdate who happens to be Richard's friend leaves Willies side after frustrated experience of one night

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