

Alienation of Punjabi Youth in the Context of V.S. Naipal's 'Half A Life'

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Abstract

This paper deals with the trend of immigration among punjabi youth for better future. But it's difficult to adjust with the alien culture. The paper is based on the Noble Prize awardee V.S.Nai Pal's novel "Half a Life".

KEYWORDS: Migration, Alien, Culture, Native Palace, Values Haunt, Novel "Half a Life."

From the decade there is a trend of immigration among Punjab Youth in search of green pastures. But the people who migrate they find it difficult to adjust in the alien culture. Gradually they feel rootless and alienated from their family, culture and country. The native places and values always haunt him. This text is also related with such context when the protagonist Willie Somerset Chandran is a person who live half a life- half for himself and half for others, half for the culture he has come into and half for the culture he has left behind.

The publication of V.S. Naipaul's half a life coincides with the greatest literary honor of author's career. After successive disappointments, Naipaul was finally awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 2001.

Arguably, Half a life is Naipaul's first Novel in 22 years. Some including Naipaul himself, may dispute this, but it can be convincingly argued that a Bend in the River (1979) is Naipaul's last full-length work of fiction. Half a life brings Naipaul back into the arena of traditional storytelling. Critics agree that the pinnacle of this achievement in this area is reflected in the scope, details, comedy and depth of feeling of A house for Mr. Biswar (1961). A 22 year gap in sustained imaginative writing for a novelist of world stature is hugely significant, and it increases the burden of expectation.

But even more than for his storytelling prowess, Naipaul is famous for his searing, unforgiving and controversial portraits of formerly colonized societies struggling towards self-realization in the postcolonial world.

Half A Life is mainly the story of Willie Somerset Chandran, it is an odd tale, moving from India to England to Africa, and it is oddly told. The novel begins with an omniscient narrator, but after half a page Naipaul switches to the first person, allowing Willie's father to recount the story of the origins of Willie's unlikely name, as well as his own pathetic, misled life. As the chapter ends—this story completed—Naipaul switches back to an omniscient narrator. (Near the end of the Novel, Naipaul again allows one of the characters (Willie himself this time) to tell his own tale, jumping back to the first person (and, again, back in time).

Stroytelling is an important part of the novel, and much of it is expertly done by Naipaul. The opening chapter is a nice tour de force, a story told over a decade's time, shifting and changing as it was told and retold over those years yet fundamentally as set down here. Willie's father complains that he "unfitted" himself for life by abandoning his education ("In response to the mahatma's call"). Though from a good family, with a promising future, he became a mendicant—the only escape he could see for a foolish predicament he got himself into. Not only that, he also takes a vow of silence—rendering him unable to explain himself, or to tell his tale.

Silence, of course, easily passes for wisdom, and Willie's father chances to impress a visiting writer—Some rest Maugham. So much so that Maugham. So much so that Maugham recounts their meeting in a travel book he subsequent publishes.

Willie's father got himself into this situation by turning his back on family and tradition and looking to "marry lowest person I could find". At university there is a "backward" caste student he has his eyes on. Not because she is attractive or appearing. But because she fits his image of the sacrifice he wants to make. He winds up marrying her, and he even makes something of his life, but it is, understandably, a family history that shocks and disappoints young Willie.

The next chapter in the novel (numbered 2 but titled "The First Chapter") focuses on Willie's schooldays, and then his escape to England, to study. Here too, stories are important, a form of communication in the household where Willie (like his father before him) does not feel he can express things directly, willie writes several compositions which are lauded at school but which outrage and disappoint his actual audience—his father. (Similarly, hearing his father's life story led Willie to tell his father he despised him. Cathartic the tales may be, but they tend not to please their audiences.)s

Willie escapes to England, eager just "to get away from what he knew", Despite not having finished his own mission school education, despite already being twenty, he gets a scholarship to "a college of education for mature students". The world he enters is a completely foreign one. He fumbles—for friendship, for sex, for acceptance—and achieves at least a measure of most of these.

Willie also writes a book, and is able to publish it. It is not a success, and critical reception of it is poor. Willie is willing to abandon the ambition, this possibility:

Willie thought, "Let the book die. Let it fade away. Let me not be reminded of it. I will write no more. This book was not something I should have done, anyway. It was artificial and false (...)."

With no plans for the future as his scholarship comes to an end, Willie take up with Ana and follows her to the Portuguese colony of Mozambique. Here again Naipaul makes a radical cut and jump: "He stayed for eighteen years", Naipaul tells us, and jumps from beginning to the end of that period, when finally gives up on this life and on Ana. He goes to Germany, where his sister Sarojini, is living—are there the story of his nearly two decades in Africa, Naipaul again allowing one of his characters (Willie) to tell his

own story in his own voice – and allowing him to finish the novel, too, not bringing the story full circle back to the present. It is an odd set of leaps, and yet effective.

Half a Life is a novel of incompleteness. In India Willie's parents are a mix of caste and personality that doesn't make for anything approaching a whole. Willie's father sets the example for the son of a half lives life, and Willie follows in those same promise. In England:

Willie began to understand that he was free to take advantage of the opportunity. Most promisingly, perhaps, he finds he could become a writer, a story teller, but he allows this ambition to be thwarted. He chooses finally simply to flee again, into a world that is entirely fragmentary.

Mozambique is, at best, a "half-and-half world". The ambition of the people there, the ideal they strive for is Portugal. They are not fully Portuguese—often children or grandchildren, like Willie, of some mixed sort of marriage, or simply emigrants, neither truly native in the Country they left or the country live in. It is Ana's life Willie finds himself living, more than his own. After eighteen years he is done with it.

Still only just over forty when the book ends, plausibly still only half-way through life, there might be hope for Willie. But that is not Naipaul's concern: his focus is on the past, on what Willie became and was.

HALF LIFE is not one of action so much as one of reflection, with Willie constantly examining how his action and the actions of those around him serve to sharpen or obscure his view of himself. Naipaul's characters are well-drawn and memorable, while the relentless unraveling of nearly all of their lives infuses the novel with a melancholy resonance that Willie seems unlikely to ever escape despite his best efforts.

HALF A LIFE is an example of the triumph of style over substance in literature, Naipal's quiet tale of a life lived on terms other than those of one's own choosing is moving and memorable, providing a window into one life that might serve as a mirror for our own.