

ROLE OF IDENTITY CRISIS IN V.S. NAIPAUL'S *HALF A LIFE*

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Abstract:

V.S. Naipaul's Half a Life defines the theme of Identity crisis which is faced by the protagonist of the novel, Willie Somerset Chandran. V.S. Naipaul puts in Identity crisis even at the beginning of the novel through the enquiry of Willie about his middle name, Somerset. The role of identity crisis lies in the novel two generations ago. It has started from great-grandfather of Willie. After knowing the past story through his father, Willie considers himself as half Brahmin and backward caste. He completely dislikes his identity in the society, embarrassing of his life which is at the bottom of the society in economic status. Willie wants to flee out of India. After leaving India, the author portrays Willie to face the problems of identity crisis in different situations. The protagonist, Willie travels around three different countries, England, Africa and Germany. However the character is switched around different domains but the role of identity crisis chases behind him till the end. V.S. Naipaul clearly exhibits even the cultural disaster when Willie faces the issue of identity crisis in the novel.

Keywords: Identity Crisis, Migrate, Economic and Role.

Identity crisis starts to play its predicament when any individual migrates to unfamiliar or different domain. Identity crisis is an indistinguishable part of postcolonial studies in literature. Identity may be given by birth or the existence but the way of defining the identity only by the role play. Identity is important to self-concept, social mores and national understanding.

Half a Life defines the theme of Identity crisis which is faced by the protagonist of the novel, Willie Somerset Chandran. In this novel, Willie migrates to various domains where he possesses different role of identity that creates issue of Identity crisis with different situations. At the beginning of the novel, Willie is very curious of knowing the middle name because his name is incorporated with Christian identity by this ancestral root is Brahmin. V.S. Naipaul puts in Identity crisis even at the beginning of the novel, when Willie enquires, "Why is my middle name Somerset? He says the boys that at the school have just, Made out and they are mocking at me" (HL, 1).

The mixing of different name brings new identity in family or society that Muthumala comments, "On the other hand his surname indicates his mixed ancestry. Here Willie feels that his name also increases his sense of identity crisis" (131). Willie's father explains that he has named him to reveal his gratefulness to famous writer, Somerset Maugham who has given him a new identity. The writer has made Willie's father become familiar through his virtuous description of the life of Willie's father, which helps him to free from the identity as mendicant. However it can be understood that V.S. Naipaul has initiated the identity crisis two generations ago.

Dooley comments about the narrative technique of this novel is different, "third person omniscient narration, fictional characters and reasonably straightforward plot" (9). The first part of the novel, Willie's father recollects the story of his past which was told by his grandfather. Nayak argues, "The novel has three parts with different settings cast in different eras. Each part is a narration of individual narrator. In the first part Willie Chandran's father tells his story which took about ten years" (254). They were the family of

priesthood. After the invasion of Mughals and British, Willie's great grandfather is become poor. His survival is become hard due to unemployment and population growth, so he has decided to visit Maharaja's Palace for help. While travelling, the people offer him alms and shelter as he belongs to priesthood. With the identification as Brahmin, he is appointed as a letter - writer by the officials of Maharaja's Palace. Thereafter, he is promoted and gained good reputation. This job is very helpful and secures the family. Willie's grandfather has also worked as secretary in the Maharaja Palace.

Willie's father is frustrated with his life because his family wants him to complete his BA degree and marry the daughter of the principal of the Maharaja's College where he studied. He has a rebellious thought and to lead a life as his wish. His father goes through a series of upheavals in the search of identity. In an effort to break his ancestry he is descended from Brahmin family marries a woman of low caste which leads him to bear the consequences. He disguises himself as mendicant in the temple to protect from the threat of his life caused by the principle of the Maharaja's College and Fire band leader, uncle of his wife and he has possessed an embarrassing life. After the visit of the writer, Somerset Maugham, he is recognized as the person who takes vow of silence which provides him a new identity. After knowing the story, Willie considers himself as half Brahmin and backward caste. He completely dislikes his identity in the society, embarrassing of his life which is at the bottom of the society in economic status, and it makes him feel ashamed of his fact. V.S. Naipaul portrays the condition of identity crisis from the schooldays of Willie and his sister, Sarojini. The dreadful experience of discrimination in drinking water happens just because of identity. The backward students use rusty old tin to drink water whereas Muslim or Christian children use aluminum and people of other caste use brass vessel. This situation makes Willie to adopt the principles of the mission school. He believes that he can grow popular in the school, if he keeps away distance from his parents and he feels disgust about his mixed identity.

He wishes to go abroad but his father refuses to send him. Willie's father is afraid of that his son may lose the cultural heritage, if he goes to foreign countries. Later on, Willie's father sends him abroad after confrontation with son. Willie migrates to London with full of dreams and he does not know about the place, people of London and destiny of his life.

Identity crisis starts to play its role again in London where Willie hopes to find his own identity while studying literature in a college. He has no knowledge of London lifestyle. However Willie rejoices his liberation, he gets entrapped in vicious circle. V.S. Naipaul brings out sense of alienation which is the root cause of identity crisis, Willie faces it. Willie tries to reconstruct his identity by contacting his father's friends. Accordingly, he writes a letter to the journalist and the great writer, Somerset Maugham. Willie's feels embarrassment after meeting the journalist. He feels ashamed by sarcastic attitude of the journalist towards him as being an Indian origin. Hence, he withdraw his decision of contacting friends of his father to avoid being shamefaced. But he makes use of their names to promote his identity or existence as friend of famous writer Somerset Maugham and the famous Beaver book journalist.

Consequently, he gains a new confidence and competence with the evolution of new role of identity. He has a friend named Percy Cato, a Jamaican of mixed identity. Likewise, Percy also falsely fabricates about his ancestry to hide his identity. Willie loses his cultural heritage by borrowing and practicing the lifestyle of Percy. He misleads to have illegal relationship with girlfriend of his friends who make him uninterested in neither his studies nor making effort to betterment of his life. This signifies the quest of Willie which Naipaul portrays its dissimilarities, socio-cultural history and its bond with modernity.

In a party, he meets a man who offers him a job possessing a different role of identity. He works in BBC paper and get chance to write scripts on commonwealth programmes. Then, he leads bohemian life by accommodating the life of Roger, Percy, Richard, Peter, etc. Richard and Peter is the friend of Roger. They both have completed their study in Oxford University. He writes a book and becomes anxious to find publisher to publish his book. With Roger's recommendations, Richard agrees to publish his work.

Through his writing career, he expects to have a new identity but the book could not receive favorable reviews after publication. As a result, he stops thinking of being a writer. Willie is incompetent which made his life be hatred. He fails to attain the good economic status and he does not want to return India so he gets confused of the survival in London.

Meanwhile, he receives a letter from Ana, an admirer of his book. She is a young girl from an African country but residing in London. She expresses her desire to meet him. When she meets him, she narrates some stories of her life. Willie listens and comprehends the way of life in Africa and also knows more about Ana. She narrates the story of her friend becomes a nun due to her economic status. She is afraid of life in Africa which is worse than her present condition.

When Ana comes to his college to meet him, Willie realizes that she is the only person who accepts him completely. He falls in love with her. He hopes that his experience with love might bring him sense of fulfillment which he desperately seeks. He gets exhausted with possibility of finding prosperity future in London and he seeks for new identity migrates toward Africa and gets married to Ana.

In Africa, Willie thinks to discover his own identity but he needs to go through arduous time. The couple makes their home in Africa for eighteen years, living among an eclectic population of people and manages them in English. His failure in attempt to learn language means failure to attain his identity in new land. He remains under the shadow of his wife. The same conflict resides within Willie's relationship with Ana and he is disloyal to his wife by having illegal affair with an African woman.

He doesn't want to be shadowed by his wife. Willie is incorporated with the life style of Portuguese Africa to include himself among them. He suffers from the same problem as he has faced in London. He makes people of London to recognize by his name Willie Chandran. But in Africa, people address him as "Ana's London Man". His life becomes the imitation of Ana's life. As the result, he feels that he has lost his identity and alienated more than in London. Once again, Willie finds himself in a predicament. He feels,

I don't know where I am. I don't think I can 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. (HL 135)

Willie is now forty one which means he spends half span with the crisis of identity issue. When he wishes to escape from his confines, he becomes powerless and remains entangled. Finally, he expresses his desire to leave Africa to Ana. He mentions the reason for his migration as "I am forty-one. I am tired of living your life" (HL 227). Willie finally faces the reality telling Ana about his miserable life in Africa and needs to find his own. She becomes anxious and tries to console him. But she fails in her attempt to convince him to stay. Even Ana not lived her life with own identity.

Willie decides to move to Berlin, Germany and settle with his sister, Sarojini. After his dreams are shattered he wants stand an identity. When Willie goes to her house to begin a new life, he finds her with the identified role of modernized woman. She becomes bold and authoritative but her husband is not staying with her. She is courageous to face her life in alienated country without the support of patriarchy. Willie completely depends on his sister even for his basic needs. Willie has not attained a stable identity even at the end the novel and V.S. Naipaul admits Willie is yet to explore.

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