

**A JOURNEY TOWARDS SELF DISCOVERY IN V. S. NAIPAUL'S *MAGIC SEEDS***

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*(Research Scholar, Dept. of English, H.N.B.Garhwal Central University, Srinagar)***ABSTRACT**

V. S. Naipaul is one of the finest writers of English prose and famous for his dissecting tone and piquant style of narration. His novel *Magic Seeds* highlights the experiences of non-western protagonist Willie Chandran who has been uprooted by historical currents. Both considerate and critical, he brings to light the failures of developing societies in the postcolonial era. Given the formlessness of their lives, such people seek to find order. Writing as a dispossessed person, the one who has been culturally uprooted and forced to create his own world, Naipaul not only presents but also shares subjective perception. He finds personal reverberation with the worldview of the dispossessed former colonial subject who is busy in the pursuit of establishing their individual identity. Thus, his journey as a prominent diasporic writer writing about subaltern people in terms of caste and class ends as a writer with a high sense of maturity.

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V.S. Naipaul is the second literary personality from Indian roots after Rabindranath Tagore to be awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 2001. Most of the works of Naipaul deal with the theme of isolation, frustration and negation in a colonized society which turns out to be cruel, villain and hostile to the expectations and aspirations of the

protagonist. He also deals with the clash of culture between the old and the new in multi-racial society. Search for identity is the foundation upon which the works of Naipaul stand. Fiction is an instrument of analysis for Naipaul. Perhaps, this is the only reason why his literature revolves round the recurring themes of colonial phobia, individual's search for



identity and clash of culture. The identity of a person is affected by his history and culture. At the issue of identity Stuart Hall states:

It is something not a mock trick imagination. It has its histories and histories have their real, material, and symbolic affects. . . . It is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narratives, and myth." (257)

The writings of Naipaul construct three dimensional structures which are historical, social and psychological. To a large measure his works provide a clear cut influence of Indian life and culture and the background gives the multiple experience of a marginalized culture. The novelist himself had to face many ups and downs to assert his identity in a disinherited tradition. He admits: "Living in a borrowed culture, the West Indian, more than most, needs writers to tell him who he is and where he stands" (*The Middle Passage* 73). Shelter is a burning issue for Naipaul's protagonist. They have to undergo a lot trials and tribulations, ups and downs. They have a desire for a free and fair existence but they are not able to cross the boundary of the colonial society because Naipaul is of the opinion:

The colonial world was a pretty awful world .People has now forgotten it but I still carry it with me a little bit. I grew up at the far end of imperialism. It was very unpleasant...I haven't written about personal psychosis at all. I've written about real things. (*India Today Plus* 59)

Emphasizing the need of house Naipaul states the meaning and significance of house. He says that exile and home are the two faces of the same coin - the full meaning of one can be grasped properly only in relation to the other. Home is not simply where one lives. It is one's identity- national, cultural, spiritual. Home is where one belongs- it is the soil that has nurtured one's body and spirit. Home is security, Exile, the loss of home. Home is a place where a man gets solace and security. Home is the place with which we remain intimate even in moments of intense alienation from it. In diasporic

literature home varies from person to person. Vijay Mishra, a famous critic has aptly shared his views regarding Indian diasporic writers on home which is quiet appreciable here. He says:

Their homeland is a series of objects, fragments of narrative that they keep in their heads or in their suitcases. Like hawkers they can reconstitute their lives through the contents of their knapsacks: a Ganapati icon, a dog-eared copy of the Gita or the Quran, an old sari or other deshi outfit, a photograph of a pilgrimage or, in modern times, a videocassette of the latest hit from the home country. (Mishra "*New Lamps for Old*" 68)

In India, Africa and South East Asia Colonial education made men ignorant from their own culture and traditions and made them exiles in their own lands .The men became alienated in their own house. They talked about nostalgic sensibilities and feelings, articulating a pain for the loss of secure home that had been left behind.

V.S. Naipaul has some biographical sketches or else Indian names with Indian based stories. Once Naipaul wrote to his mother from Oxford on May 3, 1954 .saying:

I don't see myself fitting into Trinidad way of life. I think I shall die if I have to spend the rest of my life in Trinidad. The place is too small, values are all wrong and people are pretty...Ideally I would like first of all to arrange for some sort of job in India... . (*Between Father and Son* 277)

The experience of exile and alienation is a common theme of post-colonial literature today. Some interesting psychological dimensions of this pragmatic experience may be tracked back much earlier in the colonial situation of the indentured laborers in Africa and the Caribbean islands which may have special bearing for the Indian reader in particular.

It is to be located in the psyche of the displace marginal/marginalized uprooted man



through generations in the colonies of Asia, West Indies, among the slaves and indentured laborers, who were perhaps the worst victim of white imperialism. After the horrible history of the Caribbean islands in the previous centuries,—the genocide of the Arawaks and Caribs, the sugar plantations and slave trade came the indentured laborers from Asia and North Africa, the so-called “immigrants.”

Journey is used symbolically and traveling becomes a metaphor for quest, and “that not only presents the exile as inherent to the human condition but stands as a potent symbol for the physical and mental nomadism of diasporic life” (Bande 151). In this way the expatriate writers aestheticized their Homelessness. These writers believe that in this permanently unsettled world, “home is what one creates only through a combination of memory and desire”(Vijayasree 227). Expatriates often suffer and miss the family bonds and its protective fold. This home sickness is more intense in the case of Indian writers because they belong to that culture in which family happens to be the most helping and supporting unit. They try to narrate family sagas through myth, memory and legend.

It was a challenge for the writer to create in this vacuum and find out some sufficient frame of reference in order to rescue or construct the identity of the people in exile. The Nobel award winner of this year is a glorious case in point. Targeting the issue of constructing identity, Edward Said, in his recent book *Reflections on Exile*, a collection of essays writes in the title essay:

Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unbearable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted. And while it is true that literature and history contain heroic, romantic, glorious, even triumphant episodes in an exile's life, these are no more than efforts meant to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement. The

achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind forever. (*Reflection on Exile*. 173)

After being awarded the Nobel Prize, Naipaul reacted with an adequate and un-Naipaul-like response of authentic pleasure and expressed his hearty thanks which include England and India, but surprisingly no revelation of Trinidad; of course if such epithets as 'surprising' or 'unexpected' or 'unusual' could at all be applied to Naipaul who has all along remained unpredictable, paradoxical, enigmatic and apparently enjoyed being so. The brief statement he made from his home in Wiltshire after receiving the award was: “I am utterly delighted. This is an unexpected accolade. This is great tribute to England, my home, and to India, home of my ancestors and to the dedication of my agent, Gillon Aitken.”(*The Telegraph* 12-10-01)

Before focusing on *Magic Seeds*, it is important to get the crux point of his previous novel *Half a Life*. The protagonist of *Half a Life* is Willie Chandran who is in quest of stability and completeness in the whole novel. When the novel *Half a Life* opens, the protagonist of the novel puts a question before his father why he is named after an English writer. On getting no justified answer to his question Willie feels a sense of negation to himself. This sense of negation starts in Willie from very beginning. Willie always thinks about his self-discovery. His mixed parentage punctured the bright future prospect of the life of Willie. Willie's unusual origin, his education, and his experiences in early life makes him alienated and uprooted. All these facts are responsible for making Willie unable to settle down anywhere. Willie decides to go to London to get completeness and construct his new identity. Reaching London, he finds himself in a different situation. He is an outsider there. At the end of the novel *Half a Life* Willie Chandran marries Ana, his girlfriend, and goes to Africa as Ana's London man leaving his culture, country and personal identity behind. Willie lives in Africa with Ana in her house as husband and wife. He became famous there as Ann's London man. His experience of love with Ann, he hopes, might bring him the fulfillment he so desperately seeks. At Ana's estate house in Africa,



Willie feels like a stranger, and says, It may be because of something in our culture that in spite of appearances, men are really looking for women to lean on (*Half a Life* 141). And further, Ana was important for me because I depended on her for my idea of being a man (142). Willie wants to discover some object in life through his sensual associations and sexual encounters in Ana's Africa. One day Willie gets a slip while he was coming down step at Ana's house. During the treatment in the hospital Willie realizes that he has wasted the crucial phrase of his life being Ana's London man. Finally Willie decides to leave Ana and goes to Berlin to stay with his sister all his expectations and dreams about Africa and Ana proved futile and pessimistic. However, at the end of the novel *Half a Life*, he finalizes to leave Ana realizing, that it is not his life and chooses to stay in Berlin with his sister Sarojini who is a film maker and also leading half a life. But even in Berlin he cannot find himself. He was a confused and perplexed man. Willie starts searching his identity and roots. *Magic Seeds* starts where *Half a Life* comes to an end.

In the novel, the novelist presents the characters who are products of a racial and culture mixture. In the novel all the characters are living in multi-cultural society. They are discovering their roots and identity. Throughout the novel Willie is drifting without solid and fixed identity. One cannot achieve a fixed identity in multi-background. *Half a Life* has been set in three locations: first there is post-independence India, then London, and finally pre-independence Africa. These all are the places with which Naipaul can identify. These three locations stand for different meaning in the novel. India and Africa are inexact, vague and pessimistic while London is clear and optimistic.

Willie deeply thinks that he must seize the time to construct his subjectivity because he has spent too much time leading a life of gypsy: He thought that was how I appeared in London. That is how I appeared now. I am not as alone as I thought. Then he thought:

I am wrong. I am not like them .I am forty one middle life. They are fifteen or twenty years younger, and the world has changed. 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)

Protagonist Willie moves from India to London and finally to Africa in late 1950s, where he marries a Portuguese woman and seems to be settle there with Ana. . When he slips down from steps in Ana's house he realizes that he has wasted the best part of his life by being Ana's London man. At last Willie says to Ana:

I am forty-one. I am tired of living your life....the best part of my life has gone, and I have done nothing...it would be still your life. I have been hiding for too long. ( 227)

This paraphrase shows Willie as a crestfallen man and he is broken from body and soul. He does not want to remember his past any more. Ana is also tired of living with Willie. She is leading a half life. Both of them are sailing on the same boat so Ana said," Perhaps it wasn't really my life either."(227). Finally, the following lines reveals his philosophy of life:

Willie thought, 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 through I am staying. (135)

Naipaul's next novel *Magic Seeds* brings the hero of the novel back to India from Africa after almost 18 years. The beginning of *Magic Seeds* is the ending of *Half a Life*. In *Magic Seeds* we find Willie a neglected and uprooted from his own culture. He cannot get any permanence satisfaction anywhere. He is unable to adjust anywhere. He leads a half life .He has forgotten his roots and origin that is why he is very curious about finding his lost roots .Now he does not want to live without identity.

After the gloomy period had gone, Willie is living in Berlin with sister Sarojani. Willie feels relaxed after having faced suffocating life in Africa. But soon we come to realize that all Willie's constructive purposes of taking control of his life are not destined to be fulfilled. His visa is expiring soon and Willie,



exactly as it happened in London years before, is forced to face the reality of thinking about what to do. But the only answer that he is able to give his sister is "I don't see what I can do. I don't know where I can go (...) I was always someone on the outside. I still am. What can I do here in Berlin?" (Magic Seeds 55)

Willie is still lost and disillusioned in himself. His sense of negation and displacement has not diminished after the departure from Africa. Berlin is definitely new and promising place for Willie. But he comes to realize that this is not city where he can settle. He is the victim of colonial psyche. The fact that Willie has not gone through such a profound change, is also proved by his persistent refusal to share his personal thoughts, even with the sister. Moreover, the narrator explains that Willie refuses to reveal his true feelings to both other people as well as to himself; thus, at this point of the narration, Willie's extreme difficulty in creating any form of authentic dialogue or form of communication becomes evident. He rejects his previous life in London and Africa as an unauthentic life in which he did nothing but hiding his true self both to others and to himself. All his previous desires and needs now seem to him to have been "false", as they were not part of himself but the product of an alienated condition. It is at this point that Sarojini starts telling him about an Indian guerrilla movement whose leader is a certain Kandapalli: according to Sarojini this revolutionary movement, which fights to emancipate the poor low-caste Indian villagers from the land owners' abuse of power, is part of the same regenerative process in our world. Willie decides to join the movement and therefore leaves Berlin for India. A new kind of emotional life came to Willie" the time spent in Berlin seems like a time of reconciliation and revelation, a time in which Willie eventually manages both to find his location in the world and to develop a different, new and more authentic way of relating with himself. After more than twenty years Willie saw India again:

India began for him in the airport in Frankfurt, in the little pen where passengers for India were assembled. He studied the Indian passengers there (...). He saw India

in everything they wore and did. He was full of his mission, full of the revolution in his soul, and he felt a great distance from them. India began to assault him, began to remind him of things he thought he had forgotten and put aside, things which his idea of mission had obliterated; and the distance he felt from his fellow passengers diminished. ... He felt something like panic at the thought of India he was approaching. ... He felt 'I thought of the two worlds, and I had a very clear idea of the world to which I belonged. But now, really, I wish I could go back a few hours and stand outside the Patrick Hellman shop in Berlin, or go to the oyster and champagne bar in the KDW64. (Magic Seeds 25-26).

Somehow, he joins the guerrilla group and starts to live in the jungle, sometimes finding shelter in the small country villages, sharing his time exclusively with the other members of the movement. Willie's placement with communist guerillas is absurd and he thinks that:

There has been some mistake .I have fallen among the wrong people. I have come to the wrong revolution. I don't like these faces .And yet I have to be with them. I have to get a message out to Sarojini or to Joseph. But I don't know how .I am completely in the hands of these people. (49)

Willie is totally confused and perplexed with the people of guerrilla movement. His mind is with a number of questions about his position.

Willie lost himself in conjecture about the people around him... They were all people in their late thirties or early forties, Willie's age, and he wondered what weakness or failure had caused them in mid-life to leave the outer world and to enter this strange chamber ...



Among these people ... he was a stranger. (52)

After years of purposeless and risky life, here, lost in the jungle, Willie realizes that he is losing also himself, and therefore the only purpose becomes that of surviving. Willie says "I've forgotten myself. Now I'm truly lost in every way. I don't know what lies ahead or behind. My only cause now is to survive, to get out of this." (125)

Eventually, together with another absconder of the movement he escapes and he intentionally gives himself up to the police: for his involvement with the revolutionary actions he is given a ten-year sentence. Fortunately, Willie will not spend much time in jail due to the intervention of his sister Sarojini and his friend Roger, a lawyer, whom Willie met when he was in London. After six months Willie is free and again bound for London. His return to London signs the last stage of Willie's peregrinations around the world. Willie during his entire life keeps looking for his roots everywhere. Willie said, "It is the one thing I have worked at all my life, not being at home anywhere, but looking at home." (p. 74). There seems to be no magic and no miracle in the life of Willie Chandran but history is being repeated. Displaced life is not going to cease at all. The quest for roots still continues. Thus Willie represents the fragmented cultures and displaced populations. The title '*The Magic Seeds*' refers both to the abortive revolution sown by the revolutionaries and also to the seed that will produce a race less society, a new class of drifters' for whom 'Home' remains a utopian dream which is never realized. Thus we see that Willie's search for self remains a cry for moon.

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