

**THE CRISIS OF UNBELONGINGNESS IN V.S. NAIPAUL'S:  
*MAGIC SEEDS***

**Dr. Deepak Kumar**  
Associate Professor  
Department of English  
H.N.B.G.U. Srinagar,  
Garhwal (U.K)

Diasporic consciousness in the world of literature is becoming an increasingly dominant phenomenon. It is the mental flight of a people constantly trying to reconstruct their present from a past that is lost to them. Their roots shoot down only to strike against a frozen, fractured consciousness and diasporic literature is born. V.S. Naipaul's unique position as a 'twice removed diasporic writer and his three books spanning three decades of his engagement with India provide this unprecedented opportunity. His vision being coloured by the very same diasporic consciousness that birthed his quest, he is caught within the ripples of his own making in his first real encounter with India. His initial bitterness generated a unique sense of detachment, which in addition to being essential to any original quest has yielded transparency to his struggle to establish a connection with India.

Nobel Prize winner for the year 2001 V.S. Naipaul can be categorized as a multi-cultural, diasporic, post-colonial, South-Asian writer. He was born in 1932 in an Indian-style house that his maternal grandfather had built in Chaguanas. As a part of the diverse voices that have contributed to the richness of English literature, V.S. Naipaul can be considered an important voice of the present. His all works present an apprehension of his place in the world and an assessment of the world he inhabits through excavations in time and place. Like most expatriate writers he realizes that he can portray only what he has experienced. Naipaul provides in his writings his truth- as an outsider and yet an insider living in the three different countries. His writing focuses on the strong ties that linked him to three countries and made him feel homeless with an inability to feel accepted anywhere.

Naipaul's latest novel *Magic Seeds* can be considered as a piece of diasporic writing. It is the second part of Naipaul's novel, *Half a Life*. In this novel, the novelist brings the protagonist to India from Africa. It was published three years after *Half a Life* in 2004. *Magic Seeds* is about the adventures of Willie Chandran as he continues on his journey to achieve masculinity and feels like a complete man. He travelled in different countries, lived in these very different contexts, and feels at home nowhere. As Naipaul explains in the beginning of the novel, "It had begun many years before in Berlin, another world. He was living there in a temporary, half-and-half way with his sister Sarojini, . . . this new kind of protected life, being almost a tourist, without demands and without anxiety" (Naipaul 1). This novel deals with the story of the protagonist's disillusionment. *Magic Seeds* continues Willie's story, it picks up where *Half a Life* off, Willie living with his sister in Berlin. The opening suggests a retrospective approach:

**An International Multidisciplinary Research e-Journal**

Like, Naipaul, Willie does not have a place which he can call his home; an outsider is an outsider, always and ever as he tells, “I was always someone on the outside. I still am, what can I do here in Berlin?” (Naipaul 2). These lines define his grief of homelessness. His sense of displacement is not diminished after the departure from Africa, and Berlin does not seem to be the city where he could finally settle. As critics point out:

Man’s homelessness is not an external fate: Naipaul attributes it to concrete historical circumstances. Naipaul often finds the plots for his novels in history, and the dramatic actions flow from the conflict between character and historical circumstances. (Mittapalli 85)

As Naipaul is a well-known novelist of Indian origin. His novels have brilliantly described colonial and ex-colonial societies. Rob Nixon remarks on his homelessness sensibility, “he tends to perceive himself as standing, a solitary homeless figure, in the pure space of authorial of politics” (Nixon 159). The exile and home are the two face of the Diaspora’s literature. In India, Africa, and London colonial education alienated, from his own culture and traditions made Willie exiles in his own land, according to Chaturvadi, “He talked about nostalgic sensibilities and feelings, articulating a pain for the loss of secure home that had seen left behind” (Chaturvadi 7). Naipaul novels always are related to the problems of the colonized people, like Willie, who undertakes a reverse journey from his sister’s place Berlin to India. In spite of all this, Willie has a hope of finding some purpose in life, as Naipaul says, “The world began to change for him” (Naipaul 9). Sarojini, like her brother, has also made an international marriage to Wolf, a radical- chic German documentary- maker. She was impressed by an Indian thinker who proposes recasting his country without the class warfare that turned other revolutions into blood path, even she pushes her brother Willie to join the philosopher’s rebel army. She talks and encourages him to take up a violent revolutionary cause. She also inspires him to go the, “real place with real people” (22). She persuades him that it is only a fantasy that he can escape him from past, “You and I half belong to the servile races. I am sure you know that. I am sure you half accept that. That is why you have lived as you have lived” (Naipaul 7). Willie’s sister told him about a mysterious ideological fanatic named Kandapalli who has come up with a new refinement on the class struggle. He calls it, “Revolution was to come from below, from the village, from the people. There was to be no place in this movement for middle-class masquerades” (Naipaul 11). Novel seems to represent some sort of struggle, as protagonist was not satisfied with his life and his not at home anywhere sensibility. Above these lines indicative of the existential tremors of homelessness. Through these lines Naipaul presents Willie and his sense of alienation, his identity crisis, and his displacement, homelessness feeling. Finally, Willie decided to join the guerrillas in India, and come to his homeland after long time, as he decides to go the other world, his own world. Even his sister believes that, “He will find the real world, not the simplified life of the prosperous West in which life’s meaning has been reduced to marking time with meals and shopping until death comes” (Griffiths 54).

In *Half a Life* he leaves India to go to England and then to Africa, but disappointed by his unsuccessful quest for home and a place of belonging, he decides to return to India and join a revolutionary movement for equality and reform of the political system. According to critic Victor Ramraj, “Diasporic writings are invariably concerned with the individual’s or community’s attachment to the centrifugal homeland. But this attachment is countered by a yearning for a sense of belonging to the current place of abode” (Paranjape 163),

**An International Multidisciplinary Research e-Journal**

And Naipaul's novel themselves are journeys between source cultures and target cultures, between change places, or merge. Like *Magic Seeds*, where protagonist realises that there are two worlds, but unlike the young Naipaul's protagonists Willie understands something else, he was clear in his own mind how to which world he belonged. As Willie felt, "I thought of the two worlds, and I had a very good idea of the world to which I belonged. But now, really, I wish I could go back" (Naipaul 27). 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 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 leave the outer world and to enter this strange chamber... among these people. ...He was a stranger. (Naipaul 53)

The movement between these two different ways of seeing might have been interesting, but while Willie continues to criticise his former self, "But I must go back to the old way of seeing. Otherwise my cause is before I have begun. I must understand that now I am among people of more complicated beliefs and social ideas" (Naipaul 27).

He met many revolutionaries there, and thinking such a commitment to revolution might bring purpose to his life. The main obstacles in the way of change in India towards a democratic and progressive system are identified by the leaders of the guerrilla fights. Joseph one of the commanders, an educated revolutionary with a degree from an English university, readily conversant with the new statesman and the subtiles of socialist politics, After much hardship, Willie is taken to a rebel training camp, to join some revolutionary vague and instead of leading to any sense of sense of homelessness, "I no longer know where I am. I don't think I will be able to pick my way back. I am in their hands now" (Naipaul 47). In this condition of Willie, critics present their views: "half-made societies and half made nation all these themes are bundled in the story of Willie Somerset Chandran who drifts through three continents and three only half-finished sketches of existences" (Mittapalli 66).

It is to this world-wide crisis of homelessness that Naipaul's work is a sensitive response taking into its sweep both the cause and consequences of the situation, Joseph send Willie to a kind of commune, where he's introduced to others who pack him off to a camp in the forest, and he actually, things up a member of a different faction almost immediately he realises, "There has been some mistake. I have fallen among the wrong people" (Naipaul 49). As Willie knows he's with the wrong crowd, but he strikes with them for some years, "I must give no sign to these people that I am not absolutely with them" ( Naipaul 51). It is not specified what old rules the revolutionaries are fighting against, When Willie superiors make him a courier, because of his experience surviving an African revolution, he has a startling perception, never having felt at home anywhere, he is yet able to look at home everywhere. And he expressed his pain of alienation, "I was unhappy where I was. I had a strong idea that my place was in this world here ...I must try to pick my way back here tomorrow" (Naipaul 59). Willie search for his identity and a place of his own in the world. He confronts the sense of placelessness and discovers that he can't create a fixed identity. Like Naipaul who empowers himself through his writing. He is

An International Multidisciplinary Research e-Journal

seeking his own home in the world; and he constructs a home for himself through his creative writing.

Willie Somerset Chandran also struggled for his existence, like his creator. Willie's problem, as he sees it, was that he had always been someone on the outside. Willie find himself in a much worse situation than before. Destiny plays a trick on him and by mistake he gets involved with the radical murderous wing of revolutionaries instead of the ideological liberal one, led by Kandapalli. As he was trapped in a group of violent people and instead of finding his authentic self he gradually loses. In that time he wrote a letter to Sarojini, and expressed his grief:

I feel I am lost. I don't know what cause I am serving, and why I am  
doing what I do. ...what this has to do with the cause of revolution  
I cannot see. I see only that I have put myself in other people's hands.  
I have lost my freedom for no good reason that I can see. I am  
thinking of running away. (Naipaul 66-67)

During his activity as a courier for the Guerrillas, Willie was made aware of one important quality he had, "I have worked at all my life, not being at home anywhere, but looking at home" (Naipaul 74). This homelonic feature which Willie manages to put to good use for the guerrillas cause is quite ironic. And strike out against it. But one thing that starts triggers his identity crisis and identity search, and the unhappiness attached to his lack of belonging.

The crisis of unbelongingness is always a feature which one cannot ignore while reading Naipaul's works. There is a strong desire of independence and identity in his writing. Naipaul works give a sense of his biography of departure from the colonial background of Trinidad to the cosmopolitan culture of England. In *Magic Seeds* Naipaul's protagonist also feels, homelessness, he struggled for his identity and place for him. As he come India to do something, but he becomes failed to achieve anything as novelist expressed his grief in his novel *Magic Seeds*:

It was a strange time for Willie, a step down into yet another kind of life;  
patteress labour, without reward or goal, without solitude or  
companionship, of letters from Sarojini, with no prospects' of letters from  
Sarojini, with nothing to anchor himself to. (Naipaul 168)

As Willie felt that the Guerrilla movement is something that is imposed upon the peasants and that he has no way of truly knowing what exactly the peasants want from their lives. And after many years with the guerrilla, his personal identity seems to be disintegrating too, "I have forgotten myself. Now I am truly lost. In every way. I don't know what lies ahead behind; my only cause now is to survive, to get out of this." (Naipaul 125). Willie's sense of self, his aspirations, his life direction, all disperse leaving him, and he more confused about his purpose in the world than he had ever been before. When Willie eventually decides to escape it is only because another of the revolutionaries agrees to help him that he is able to go through with it.

They surrender themselves to the police. But Willie does not fight off this new social sole in prison. He adapts to it and tries to perceive it as his new life that he unwillingly has to live. He can only admit to himself that returning to India has been a mistake, he can find no pattern or thread of meaning and views his experiences as no more a product of his will than his childhood development had been in the family ashram, and thought that he had done nothing in his half-a-life where ever he lived. *Magic Seeds* continues the search and maintains his pitiless attitude towards the third world. Willie Chandran's failed fulfilment of his life that Naipaul like his own

wounds. Willie Chandren, who drifts through three continents, and three only half- finished sketches of existences until in the end:

Willie continues writing to Sarojini and she come to his rescue. As always Sarojini, Willie's sister does manage to help him out of this mess as well. Sarojini enlists the help of Roger, an old friend of Willie in London. He serves years in jail before he moves to England. His failure in making a contribution to the reconstruction of India is not a personal failure, but as the novel implies, it is a failure of India as a nation. In the semi comic turn of events Willie is eventually successful in extricating himself from prison life when one of his old English literary friends Roger, a lawyer persuades the authorities to release him on the ground that a long – forgotten book of stories has established Willie as a pioneer of modern Indian writing. He moves in with an old friend, Roger, and muddles along, taking what come his way but barely trying to shape his life. The real world and the present are not place where Willie feels too comfortable. And he finds he doesn't like going about London any more as he says, "I have given part of my life and I have nothing to show for it. I can't go there again; I must let that part of me die. I must lost that vanity. I must try now to be only myself. It such a thing is possible" (177).

According to Naipaul it no longer excited him to see the London of his past. And to see it too often was to strip it if memories, and in this way to lose precious pieces of himself. Willie noticed that the appearance of London's population has changed.

Roger constantly tries to define and explain the changed world around him... but Naipaul feels that lack of direction and purpose is the root of the problem. As before Willie feels that he might finally live some of the simple peaceful like that he had longed for in Britain. But, an unfulfilling affair with his friend Rozer's wife and a changing Britain caracteriezed by aggressive immigrants and a slothful. Working class leaves Willie as unhappy as ever, "Now he understood that in the old days, in these places, there had always been, together with the darkness and incompleteness of his vision, a darkness in his head and a pain, a kind of yearning for something he didn't know in his heart". Yet, in the final part of his existence, when he is exiled to London, we understand that he had not been entirely aware of his shifting selves.

It in London, his final destination that he grasps the process of becoming that he had and eryone during all this wandering. Experience, age, wisdom help him see how he has grown as an individual. Of course, Willie sees no connection between the messy world he has left behind and the Western world in which he is now content to belong on the same terms that were decreed unacceptable at the beginning of the novel. Finally, Willie has made a discovery about himself. He gets a job as a fact checker for an architectural Magazine, London, and his work there requires him to attend classes on architecture. He finds that the subject suits him and, for the first time, gives him as appreciation of the physical details and cultural continuity of London. Willie perceives this strength as his greatest achievement along with the freedom in which he can now rejoice, "What his essence was he still didn't know, though he had lived so long in the world. All that he knew at and had a new strength, ...now I don't have to join anybody. Now I can only celebrate what I am, or what I have become" (Naipaul 88). He feels that at last, on his own, he has found something good to tell Sarojini. Poignantly, when he tries, he cannot write a letter about it because it entails a rejection of her ideas view of the world.

At the end of the novel, Willie is his own man for first time. Identity crisis is one of the major issues in the current literary sphere. Magic Seeds is a moving story of a man searching for his life and fearing he has wasted it and a testing study of the conflicts between the rich and the

poor, and the struggles with in each. It stunningly captures the present moment that take us into hearts and minds of those who use terrorism as an ideal and a way of life and who aspire to the frightening power of wealth. As we have seen, all Willie's existence had been under the sign of someone else's involvement, of joining someone else's cause. Only towards old age does he understand that what he had been searching all over the world. Roaming from one place to another cannot be found. "...Understanding as a result with the deepest kind of ache that there was no true place in the world for him" (Naipaul 228).

### **Works Cited**

- Chaturvedi, Sadhana. "The issues of Belonging and Identity: Naipaul's *Magic Seeds*". Delhi, 2013.
- Griffith, Glyne A. "Travel Narrative as Cultural Critique: V.S. Naipaul's Traveling Theory." *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 29.2 (1993): 11-14. Print.
- Naipaul, V. S. *Magic Seeds*. London: Picador, 2004.
- Paranjape, Makarand. *In Diaspora: Theories, Histories, Texts*. New Delhi, 2001.
- Mukherjee, Arunoday. *V.S. Naipaul's A House for Mr. Biswas: A Compendious Study*. Kolkata, 2011.
- Mittapalli, Rajeshwar. *V.S.Naipaul: Fiction and travel Writing*. New Delhi. 2008.
- Nixon, Rob.London *Calling:V.S.Naipaul Postcolonial mandarin*. New York Oxford. 1992.159