



Post-Colonial Consciousness and the identity crisis: A critical study in V.S. Naipaul's magic seeds

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Abstract

This Research- paper tends to explore the different shades of the post-colonial consciousness and identity-crisis in V S. NAIPAUL s novel – Magic Seeds (2004) ^[1]. Before we proceed to the process of exploration of the above idea, let us have a cursory glance at the biography of the author Sir VIDYADHAR Suraj Prasad Naipaul (1932-2018) happens to be an Indian – origin, Trinidad-born British writer, having received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2001.

This novel introduces Willie Chandran as the chief protagonist and the hero who keeps drifting through postcolonial India, guerrilla camps, Berlin and London having his transnational identity. After getting disillusioned with his barren life in Berlin, while staying with his sister Sarojini, he switches back to India and starts campaigning a Maoist Guerrilla movement. He has to spend 7 years in the forest in alienation as a revolutionary for security reasons. After the collapse and the failure of his movement, he gets imprisoned and later released and deported. He is remaining in London along with his sister once again, being secluded and purposeless. The title of the novel— 'Magic Seeds' have a sarcastic allusion referring to revolutionary idealism lacking ground reality- seeds that never grow. Willie joins Guerrilla movement not from any valediction but from boredom and rootlessness and identity-crisis. He has to come across displacement thrice from India to London, London to Africa, then back to India and again then back to London. He lacks his own identity, his permanent home and the sense of belongingness, that is why he remains as a drifter wandering from one place to the other place. He lacks his permanent identity, neither being an Indian, nor an Englishman nor a Trinidadian.

Naipaul represents his character under the impression of a post-colonial consciousness and the identity-crisis. Willie observes and finds India as a Centre of corruption, exploitation and violence like a stagnant water despite independence. The title of the novel is very much ridiculous and absurd mocking at the beliefs that history or ideology can magically redeem the personal barrenness, boredom, rootlessness and identity-crisis. It looks like a waste land without any relevant culture, neither any revolution, nor migration leading to salvation. He remains as a wanderer and a drifter searching out his own identity and his own home.

V.S. Naipaul was born at Chaguanas, Trinidad and Tobago on 17th August, 1932 and passed away on 11th August, 2018 at the age of 85. He is much better known for his deceptive simplicity, precision, originality and profundity in his style. He dealt with clear language, concrete details, exploration of complex themes of displacement, identity-crisis, transnational identity, diasporic elements and post-colonial societies. On the basis of the story of the novel— 'Magic Seeds', the fundamental themes explored in the novel are Post-colonial Consciousness and identity-crisis, as Willy Chandran, the chief protagonist of the novel, remains culturally uprooted men also occurs in the novel - the failure of the political ideology, the boredom of the post-colonial subject, post-imperial disillusionment, the cultural conflict between Oriental and the Occidental.

Keywords: Magic Seeds, drifting, Postcolonial, guerrilla, disillusionment, alienation, released, deported, secluded, rootlessness, identity-crisis, transnational, belongingness, ridiculous, sarcastic, displacement, diasporic, political ideology, oriental, occidental, etc.

Introduction

This research-paper titled – Post-Colonial Consciousness and the Identity-Crisis: A Critical Study in V.S. Naipaul's Magic Seeds tends to dwell upon the exploration of the hidden secrets of the fragrance of the Post – Colonial Consciousness and Identity – Crisis through the reflection of the character of Willie Chandran, the main hero and the protagonist of the novel. The title of the novel is very much metaphorical and sarcastic, as in Indian folktales, magic seeds refer to quick transformation in the idealistic and miraculous way. It leads to the touch of escapism reflecting a false hope. Neither the revolution nor the Western exile, nor his drifting from one country to the other succeeds in bringing about any kind of transformation in his character and attitude. He feels isolated, desolate, alienated without having his fixed identity and is suspended like a pendulum, like a rolling stone without any constancy and resolution.

V.S. Naipaul's novel— Magic Seeds came out in 2004, as a sequel to his previous novel— Half a Life which had

previously come out in 2001. Much like its predecessor, it deals with the adventurous pursuits of Willie Chandran, the Indian hero, a drifter who keeps wandering from country to the other, from Germany to India, England and some other places for maintaining his own identity. He also represents as the carrier of the cultural clashes between the East and the West— the oriental and the occidental, as found in E.M. Forster's novel— A Passage to India. Magic Seeds introduces a very CRYSTALCLEAR vision into the illusions, disillusionments, displacements, transnational identity, diasporic experiences and the post-colonial consciousness as reflected in the political and social movements, brought about by 'mimic men' and 'mini men', residing the East and West respectively — India, England, Germany and America. V.S. Naipaul has used both terms — 'mimic men' and 'mini men' to deal with post-colonial identity and the cultural studies, in his novel— The Mimic Men (1967). The term — 'Mimic Men' denotes the meaning — such people from previously colonized countries who

tend to imitate the culture, manners, conventions, traditions, manners, language and values of their colonizers. These people have borrowed identity, not their own identity, being isolated & from their own roots. They happen to imitate British/French culture and dress, speech, education, institutions, but it is a silly practice and unauthentic task. Naipaul takes up these people as 'Mimic Men', as they are PRACTISING someone else's script. They are not creating their own identity and culture, just mimicking the colonial one. For example, a politician in a newly independent country like India who wears a three-piece suit in 40°C heat, keeps quoting Shakespeare in parliament and runs institutions that reflect Westminster, but feels detached and isolated from his native place he represents, having lost his own identity and culture. Thus these 'Mimic Men', by copying others to degrade people who are diminished by their mimicry, become smaller and 'mini men'. They are no longer becoming the authors of their own versions.

The novel introduces Willy Chandran, the main hero of the novel— Magic Seeds as a typical representative of 'half-made societies'. He is striving as a drifter, travelling from one nation to the other in order to maintain his own identity and survival. In the opening scene of the novel, he is found in the Cold War Berlin, remaining over there along with his sister Sarojini, the left-wing activist and documentary filmmaker on Guerilla camps. She is suggesting Willie to leave Germany and go to India to join a peasants' revolution so that he could attain authenticity of his own identity and survival. Sarojini represents herself as the spokesman and mouth voice of the author. Sarojini tends to remind Willie about the transnational identity and hybridity of the two nations — Germany and India, the occidental culture and the oriental one.

She utters —"One world was ordered, settled, its wars fought. In other world, people were more frantic. They were desperate to enter the simpler, ordered world"^[1]."

The People residing in Third World Countries happen to remain outside a hundred loyalties and are tied down by the "residue" of old imperial histories. As she points out, Willie Chandran, belongs to the latter world though he is a drifter between the TWOWORLD reflecting his post-colonial consciousness and the identity-crisis. Sarojini tells him — "We all have ways to go"^[2].

She has to add that revolution is the only means of creating an ordered and simpler world. But the question is; What kind of revolution is required?

V.S. Naipaul, a dexterous explainer of post-colonial consciousness, diasporic experiences and identity-crisis, explains the relevant dimension behind the mass political movements and upheavals, particularly in Indian societies. Magic Seeds must be read as a social document on the modern life and civilization. It is reflecting an indication on the strange, idealistic and bloody revolutions occurring in some parts of India there is a message for the readers by the portrayal of Willie and his fellows that they have to realize the strangeness and paradoxes invested in the underground movements for the liberation of lower-caste peasants in India. By now, India has become the hotspot of many NAXALBARI groups (numbering around 40) that claim to wage an uncompromising fight against the imperialists and native reactionaries including the revisionists and new-revisionists. The ideological acceleration to Violence - NAXALISM dictated the Marxist dictum—

"Force is the midwife of the old society pregnant with new". Mushroom growth of NAXAL groups are occurring in West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand and Andhra Pradesh. Naipaul got himself interacted with some activists from Andhra Pradesh. The futility, vanity, hollowness and triviality of these activists build up the basic platform of Magic Seeds.

His two travelogues — An Area of Darkness (1964) and India: A Wounded Civilization (1977) — do shape the basic foundation of the main theme of the novel — Magic Seeds. There still remains a lot of hopes, aspirations and expectations, as India can be secured from the false political ideologies, cultural clashes, societal prejudices and disillusionments. She can switch back to her ancient glory, well-ordered world, authenticity and the scientific lifestyle; if she gets stuck to the Gandhian ethical values unconditionally. Sarojini, talking to her brother in the novel utters that Gandhi Ji can save the country from the deterioration of values and degeneration of humanity and morality. She does utter in the novel -"He created the wave. He was a mixture of thought and intuition. Thought above all. He was a true revolutionary"^[3].

Since the dawn of civilization, in the history, various revolutions have occurred in the various countries bringing about a radical change in every walk of life, whether it is the French Revolution, Industrial Revolution in England and 1857 Revolution in India. Alfred Tennyson very relevantly cites in his famous poem— The Passing of Arthur —

"The old order CHANGETH, yielding place to the new,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world,
And God Himself fulfills them in many ways,
For what are men better than sheep or goats,
That nourish a blind life within their brain,
If knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer,
More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of."

One must have the chronological record of every event carrying the historical significance. Lack of the historical perception will bring about a revolutionary ups and downs in the timeless DOWNGRADATION and degeneration.

Unfortunately, Willie Chandran has no knowledge about the glorious history of India's cultural ancestral heritage. So Sarojini does recommend Mahatma Gandhi's autobiography — My Experiments with Truth to Willie Chandran introducing him about the ethical significance of the Indian history. Willie thinks —"I wish this healing book had come my way 25 years ago. I might have become another man. I would have aimed at another life. I would have felt that I was not alone in the world, that a great man had been there before me"^[4]."

There occurs the four projects of imperialism and post-colonialism are beautifully dealt in Magic Seeds. In the post-colonial perspective, history as 'discourse' remains solely to be Western. And Europe is found to be the centre of the colonial sovereignty of all histories, including the ones we call 'Indian', 'Chinese', 'African' and so on.

In this perspective, Indian History itself is in a position of 'subalternity'. This is evidenced in one of the instances found in Magic Seeds. The soldiers of upper caste Hindus were included in the British East India Company in the Northern India. But after the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, held at Meerut, the upper caste Hindu army was degraded and was denied any further military opportunities. Sarojini comments "the warriors who had won an empire became servile in British propaganda, and the frontier people they had

conquered just before the Mutiny became martial ones. It is how imperialisms work. It is what happens to captive people [5]"

In the opening scene of the novel, Willie Chandran is found to be living in Berlin for the last six months escaping from an 18 year stretch in the MAELSTORM of Africa. In Africa, he could have searched out a cause as it had been under the pangs of a great revolution. During the 18 years of his life spent in a Portuguese colony in Africa along with his half-white wife Ana, he had led a half-and-half life and had lived her life, which is made clear towards the end of *Half A Life* when he tells Ana as he decides to divorce her and return to Germany:

"I am forty-one. I am tired of living your life. and even I go to Portugal, even if they let me in there, it would still be your life. I have been riding for too long [6]."

In *Magic Seeds*, Sarojini has to request him to undergo the pleasures of leading simple and satisfied life on the margins of the Western societies. She wants him to give up his passiveness and explore the historical agency maintaining his own identity in the global perspective. This is just like an intertextual connection with what the narrator of Naipaul's *A Bend in the River* (1979) [10] tells -"The world is what it is, men who are nothing, who allow themselves to be nothing, have no place in it [7]"

After his sister's motivation, Willie gets back to India with a view to joining KANDAPALLI, the true revolutionary. *Magic Seeds* introduces the unsuccessful story of the different dimensions of the revolution, executed by the middleclass masqueraders, variants of 'Mimic Men'(earlier discussed) who happen to imitate others' creativity and ideologies. In 1961, Naipaul dictated his theory and notion of mimicry in *The Middle Passage* (1962), Frantz Fanon railed against the 'nauseating mimicry' of the underdeveloped national bourgeoisie, in the *Wretched of the Earth*. In his celebrated chapter —"The Pitfalls of National Consciousness, he held the opinion: "In underdeveloped countries, we have seen that no true bourgeoisie exists; there is only a sort of little greedy caste, avid and voracious, with the mind of a huckster, only too glad and accept the dividends that the former colonial power hands out to it. They are incapable of great ideas or inventiveness [8]"

The revolution dealt in *Magic Seeds* leads us to a very close reading with Grenadian revolution against America. It is better known as — "New Jewel Movement".

In his famous essay —"An Island Betrayed", Naipaul produces an ironic situation between revolutionaries' perception of their actions as alleviating island's dependency and that of Naipaul who take up these actions as mimic measures leaving the Grenadians even more cravenly dependent. To stand his argument has to be braced up by the term 'mimicry' frequently applied in the rigid sense of an exact replication whose exactness is the mask of its insanity. Naipaul does much allegation for the alleged influx of derivative idealism on the internationalist workers involved in the 'New Jewel Movement'. He puts down: "They were anxious for the socialist mimicry to be as complete, as pure, as possible. As the mimicry was perfected, so the excitement grew among the faithful in many countries. Little Grenada, agricultural, backward, and black, had not only had the revolution, it had also had an eruption of all the correct socialist forms [9]."

V.S. Naipaul, in HISANOTHER essay — "What is Wrong with Being a Snob", very aptly comments that while creating a classless society in England, Britishers should

never deny the class-differences but to wage ceaseless class war. "The democratic ambitions of the post-imperial welfare state betray the best English values and hasten national degradation [10]"

Karl Marx's theory of the class-conflict is very much relevant here when he utters -"We must not forget that this undignified, STAGNATORY, and vegetative life, this passive sort of existence. rendered murder itself a religious riot in India [11]"

THUSIT can be very briefly summed-up to say that Naipaul presents a very graphic picture of the confused modern world as done by Matthew Arnold in his famous poem— 'Dover Beach'.

It can be concluded to say that the dwellers of this modern world are more confused in *Magic Seeds*, as the WASTELANDERS in T.S. Eliot's *Waste Land* are spiritually dislocated leading a pendulous life. The novel also deals with the, another shade of the author's distaste for Maoists, British workers and white Liberals. Lack of attentiveness and resolution are also pointed out as the causes of the problems of the modern world shown in the novel — *Magic Seeds*. Willie Chandran is represented a sufferer of the identity-crisis in the post-colonial world as a failed revolutionary like a rolling stone gathering no moss.

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