

“Where Everything Starts Unraveling:” Sensibility, Rupture and Possibilities in V.S. Naipaul’s *Half a Life* and *Magic Seeds*

Mohammad Rezaul Karim *

Department of English Language and Literature, College of Science and Humanities, Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University, Al Kharj, Saudi Arabia

Ramesh Sharma

Department of English, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Assam Don Bosco University, Guwahati, Assam, India

Wahaj Unnisa Warda

Department of English Language and Literature, College of Science and Humanities, Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University, Al Kharj, Saudi Arabia

Abstract—V.S. Naipaul is one of the widely read postcolonial writers. He was born in Trinidad in 1932, had roots in India, migrated to England for higher studies and took British citizenship. He died as a British citizen in 2018. His writings distinguish themselves in having a wider coverage of the postcolonial world, like the trajectory of his life, and accordingly larger experience with the problems of this world. In the same line, he has a world readership. However, the greater part of this readership sees him as a colonial and offensive writer rather than voicing their issues and suggesting solutions to them. However, the discourse of Naipaul, as it evolves in the texts like *Half a Life* and *Magic Seeds*, being explored in this paper, is quite different and tends to have a counter-discourse to such views; it is neither colonial nor offensive. It can be seen pointing to larger future possibilities beyond the crisis of the postcolonial world and this can be understood in the light of the terms like historical sensibility, mimicry, rupture and bildungsroman.

Index Terms—historical sensibility, mimicry, rupture, bildungsroman, discourse

I. INTRODUCTION

It is wrong to have an ideal view of the world. That's where the mischief starts. That's where everything starts unraveling. (*Magic Seeds*, p. 293)

V.S. Naipaul, born in 1932 in Trinidad, has a long history of literary career. He publishes his first fiction, *The Mystic Masseur*, in 1957 and the last fiction, *Magic Seeds* in 2004. He has written extensively on Caribbean islands, Africa, Europe and India exploring their civilization, history, politics and most importantly their transversal relations and their implications in the postcolonial world. His publications following *The Mystic Masseur* (1957) included *The Suffrage of Elvira* (1958), *Miguel Street* (1959), *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961), *The Mimic Men* (1967), and *Guerillas* (1975), which focused on the Caribbean context; *In a Free State* (1971) and *A Bend in the River* (1979), on the African context; *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987) on the African context; *Half a Life* (2001) and *Magic Seeds* (2004) on the Indian context. His views are frequently expressed in terms of mimicry, ambivalence, dislocation, and displacement in relation to the colonial and postcolonial world. They are generally the widely read themes in his works and are often understood as conditions leading to a crisis. He has consequently gained the attention of his readership worldwide, which frequently becomes a fierce retaliation to his views. Contrary to this view, the narrative discourse in him as it evolves can be seen quite different. It can rather be understood, as paper unfolds, as an agency with a strategy to negotiate many of the postcolonial crises to unfold future possibilities. The relevance of Naipaul persists. “Within a larger spatio-temporal horizon,” observes Dexu (2016), “critical reflection on his self-formation as well as the English identity in crisis is still relevant to and can shed light on today's conflict-ridden human relationships across races and regions” (p. 148).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Most of the readerships on Naipaul are phase value retaliations. Most of them have subjective perceptions; they are negative and shallow. They claim he “...indirectly absolves the imperialist and colonizer, in the Caribbean, Africa, or India” (Charles, 2022, p. 22). Dayan (1993) levelled him “racially specific and horrific in their implications for the so—

* Corresponding Author.

called Third World” (p. 159). Naipaul is “plagued by limitation of vision, orientalist ideas, islamophobia, prejudice and misconceptions” (Al-Quadri & Habibullah, 2012, p. 23). Pathak et al. (2012) compared him with an “inquiline” (p. 27). Bakari (2003) called him a “gadfly” (p. 243), Walcott (2008) termed him “mongoose” and Huggan (1994) stated “...not [to be] spoken about all; and if ... spoken about, then it is in terms of stunned disbelief... or thinly disguised contempt...” (p. 200). Hemenway (1982) found him “fiercely pessimistic, singularly unsentimental, somewhat lacking in charity and sympathy...” (p. 191). According to King (2003), he always ends in “inactivity, Indian fatalism” (p. 22). King (1983) asserted that Naipaul denied “the West Indian any hope for development or salvation” (pp. 231–32); Boyers (1981) found the books of Naipaul “unpleasant, and there is no reason to feel that they should appeal to everyone” (p. 359). Mustafa (1995) found his map “is Conrad's writing rather than colonial history and his quest canonical rather than historical” (p. 3). The opinions are problematic and hence need confrontation. Contrary to these, “*Half a Life*”, and by implication *Magic Seeds* as its sequel, as Krishnan (2020) observes, is adequately “a hopeful work” (p. 233). In the same line, it is quite appropriate to add another observation from him on the politics of the Naipaulian discourse in the historical sensibility and its rupture and their relevance to the modern world. He thus writes, “Naipaul's writing offers the reader an historically grounded engagement with... intractable issues, in ways that reveal the traces of its own disorientation, resentment, and prejudice. In this ironic manner, Naipaul found compelling and disquieting ways to hold a mirror up to the modern world” (Krishnan, 2020, p. 244).

III. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

This understanding of Naipaul is passionate and personal, taken at face value, rather than critical which seriously underscores the critical view of a wider significance of his discourse. It is also offensive because it does greater damage than opening up the fecundity of the discourse that Naipaul presents. On the other side of the conventional views, there are other larger areas of interest in Naipaul. The discourse of Naipaul signals a distinctive tendency- a strong sensibility towards spatial-temporal transition, its bearing upon history, its reception and its anticipation of future in the postcolonial world. Apparently, this sensibility often tends to get disoriented leading to a crisis. This is only a politics of the narration to observe total honesty, while trying to represent the harsh reality of the transitional phase. However, the disorientation is often understood as the end of the discourse and hence the conventional readings view Naipaul as ending in crisis where he “offers no solutions” (Eid, 2000, p. 12) to it. This view can be confronted. In Naipaul, rather, the crisis can be understood as a resource signaling the beginning of many of the future possibilities. The discourse itself as it evolves, unlike the conventional understanding, can be seen as having a strong sense of inherent resilience to the rupture pointing to resolutions of many of the postcolonial crises for future possibilities.

IV. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The aim of this paper is to show that the discourse of Naipaul has a strategy for an enabling role, unlike the conventional understanding, to transform the postcolonial crisis into possibilities. The objective is to explore the manifestation of this narrative strategy as 1) a historical sensibility, 2) its rupture, and 3) the rupture “where everything starts unravelling” as possibilities, as an enabling phenomenon for the postcolonial world through the analysis of two fictions- *Half a Life* (2001) and its sequel *Magic Seeds* (2004).

V. METHODOLOGY AND PERSPECTIVE

This paper uses the term “resilience” as an inherent tendency of the Naipaulian discourse that gradually evolves and resists any kind of reading, as in the literature review in reference, which attempts to reduce, limit and corner the discourse to a narrow and shallow implication. The term invites for a broader understanding of Naipaul.

The term “rupture” implies an apparent initial crisis in the thinking of decolonized character, the protagonist Willie for instance, in the fictions under enquiry and his gradual coming into terms with it. This ability to come into terms evolves gradually through his growing maturity, his resilience, and gives an orientation to his disoriented life. And it is where he concludes the epigraph above. The “sensibility” implies an inherent tendency in the discourse of Naipaul to interact with history for a sense of present and future to contradict any critical attempt to corner it to a point as in the review above.

The paper uses “mimicry” from the postcolonial theoretical platform to understand the condition of the rupture. However, unlike the postcolonial understanding, the mimicry here does not have the colonial component, the east-west encounter. This is rather a mimicry of native ideas, not the Western, which initially seems to disorient the thinking of the protagonist. The paper also uses the idea of “bildungsroman” to show how the fictions educate Willie through a series of ruptures to land him into a consciousness.

In this sense the idea of resilience, rupture, mimicry and bildungsroman are operated in this paper as a part of methodology to explore “unraveling” of possibilities in Naipaul as a counter discourse to the critical “limitations.” The paper uses APA 7th edition as formatting tool. In case of e-resources when there are no page numbers, the papers use (n.p) meaning the resource has no page numbers as the indicator.

The paper next attempts to explore the narrative strategy as the historical sensibility, its rupture and unravelling of possibilities in the rupture.

VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

A. *The Historical Sensibility*

History is very much integral to the works of Naipaul. Sanjay Krishnan (2020) in *V. S. Naipaul's Journeys: From Periphery to Centre* rightly expresses that Naipaul "...did not know how to treat the unfolding political crisis without first acquiring more historical knowledge" (p. 52). "Naipaul... insists on the importance of history" (p. 550) writes Prescott (1984). According to Cooke (1979), "the search for history in the landscape becomes the focus of Naipaul's later novels" (p. 31). The significance of history in him is precisely observed by Rigik (1995) when he quotes him from *Finding the Centre* where he says that, for Naipaul, "actually to write, it was necessary to go back. It was the beginning of self-knowledge" (p. 53). This historical sensibility framed around Krishnan, Prescott, Cooke and Rigik are crucial as the beginning to understand Naipaulian discourse. Characters such as Willie Chandran and his father in the fictions under investigation are examples of how this historical sensibility and the discourse's shifting between the past, present, and future give the discourse significance. They also provide insight into the state of the present and can be used to craft future development strategies.

The discourse of Naipaul right from *The Mystic Masseur* to *Magic Seeds*, the first and the last fictions, have a strong tendency to sense transitional period in the history. It is in this sensibility a solution to the present and a possibility for the future are seeded. In all the contexts-Caribbean, Indian or African- the same transitional period marks a starting point. It is also a politics of his writing from where the present looks clues for solution of the problems in the past and the future starts showing its horizon. At such critical junctures, characters are left with choices. Some see options in them for a best choice while many cannot and thus get lost while trying to adapt with the changes around. For them the narrative historical sensibility gets ruptured. The story of both the fictions begins with the second category of the characters. It starts in the 1930s, a transitional phase in the history of freedom struggle in India, as a mimicry. "And when sometime in 1931 or 1932 I heard that the mahatma had called for students to boycott their universities..." (p. 9) reveals Willie's father in *Half a Life* when he plunged him for the first time into the freedom movement in India led by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi.

This idealism, as Naipaul shows, is problematic. The narrative shifts to Willie, in the 1950s, leaving for England to pursue his studies as a young man. Following his time there, he moves to Africa for a period and when he returns from Africa, goes to India to join the Naxalite organization in south India in the 1970s, when he is in his 40s, which culminates in *Magic Seeds*. In other words, the narratives are shaped by the context of the 1930s to the 1970s in India. In this sense, Naipaul covers a period of almost seventeen years of the freedom struggle, and approximately twenty-three years (1947-1970) of experience with freedom in the selected fictions, which was a great transitional phase in Indian history from where it was for the first time moving away from dependence towards independence in the strongest sense of the term. However, the narratives also sense contradictions, seizures in this sensibility and this triggers a sense of temporal crisis, an initial rupture in the sensibility.

B. *The Rupture*

It is the time of a series of turmoil and dynamic changes in India for and from independence, which the fictions acutely sense. In other words, the fictions begin with a period of a huge historical transition witnessing both non-violent and violent movements, the first led and oriented by Gandhi and the second, after his death, a rupture of the former. This rupture is appropriated in the novels through the figures of Willie's father and Willie himself. This is the paradox of the postcolonial India that the fictions under consideration unveil. Willie's father dives wholeheartedly, if naively, into the Swadeshi Movement in the 1930s, the point where the novel *Half a Life* begins, tries to foolishly mimic Gandhian ideals of self-sacrifice and becomes a representative of the disorientation, and Willie the representative of the post-independent rupture in the 1970s.

Half a Life, according to Bruce King (2003), is a "version of a multigenerational family story within a colonial setting and tells of a foolish father, his bad marriage and his relationship to his son..." (p. 183). The foolishness rapidly spirals the father into the rupture. The foolishness as a condition of mimicry begins to unfold in the first part of the book, "A Visit from Somerset Maugham", when a confused Willie approaches his father and asks, "Why is my middle name Somerset? The boys at school have just found out, and they are mocking me" (p. 1). In return, the father begins to narrate a story that begins with his admiration and mimicry of the Gandhian value of "sacrifice" and foolishly ends in utter disgust. His story may be read as operating at two levels. First, during the freedom struggle in the 1930s, he jumps into the Gandhian call without thought and eventually regrets his hasty decisions, gets disoriented and lost, when it is already too late to redeem. Second, as a consequence of the first, his fallacy spills over to the next generation, Willie, leading to a double-disorientation, a crisis until he accommodates it. The fictions by and large explore the disorientation of Willie more than his father's; almost half of the first fiction and the entire second fiction are the story of his series of disorientations.

The stupidity of the father has ramifications in his legacy in the form of the psychological rupture in Willie. He thinks that the Gandhian ideal view has ruined his father and by implication himself. The sense of loss in the father of Willie signals other spiraling ramifications in his generation. Willie instantly desires for freedom from his father. Kaur (2015) points to this generational effect, writing, "*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-lived life, and Willie follows in those same promises ..." (p. 10). The story of the father quickly translates into anger in Willie. But, on the other hand, he has no issue with his mother, he "loved his mother" (*Half a Life*, p. 39). He learns from the story that she has no role in his existential dilemma as much as his father. Thus, a complicated relationship develops between them, gets strained and continues so throughout the fiction. Badirdast and Amjad (2017) have suspected the formation of the Oedipus complex in Willie as one of the consequences, which runs sublimated throughout the narrative, an indication of the toxicity of a psychological disorientation inherited by his generation. They opine the detestation Willie exhibits "...has psychological reasons like the one Freud calls, the Oedipus Complex, a kind of rivalry between Willie and his father for the mother. Therefore, it is compulsory to find the roots of such hatred that have risen to the degree of hostility and abhorrence in Willie's case" (p. 99).

Luiz Carlos Moreira da Rocha confirms the Oedipus complex as a consequence of the story that Willie hears. He says, "The origin and status of Willie's parents root in him a feeling of shame that drives him towards a world of falsehood and Willie hides his own origin behind a mask he projects before the world. In this projection, he assumes a kind of Oedipus Complex and hates his father and his own history" (p. 4). Both the arguments are true in the sense that Willie expresses his repressed anger against his father in beautifully crafted allegorical stories that lampoon him without mercy. What Willie can make out from the story of his father is a series of failures in terms of a hollow idealism. He is always critical of him and every mention of his father irritates him, to the extent that Willie reimagines and reinvents his past when in England, moving beyond mimicry to historical revisionism, if not negation. His anxiety is how to get detached with him with every possibility, which becomes evident in the second part of the fiction ironically titled as "The First Chapter". He writes stories at school, "King Cophetua and the Beggar-maid" for instance, in which he rhetorically denounces and ridicules his father. According to Choubey (2002) in "Naipaul's *Half a Life*: Coming to Terms with King Cophetua" "Willie's urge to do away with his father had been lying in his unconscious... 'King Cophetua amid the Beggar-maid' makes the urge overt and Willie imagining himself as the king's son kills him only to resurrect his image..." (p. 173), desire for detachment. Unfortunately, like his father, the more he tries to detach himself from his paternal lineage and the more he tries to reimagine his past, the more he gets mired in it. In other words, his attempts to orient his life results in other disorientation. He becomes his father, uncritically receptive to the world as it is presented to him.

The rest of the story in the fiction can be read as the impact of Willie's "world at home" even as he envisions a "world outside" (p. 482), in England and subsequently in Africa when he encounters multiple ruptures, both physical and emotional. He goes to England, the "world outside" in his twenties. His first experience in England is disappointment—his conception of London was of a "fairyland of splendor and dazzle" (p. 52) but once there he is let down, he does not know what he is looking at and where he is heading to; he is lost. He had read of Buckingham Palace and Speaker's Corner in school but their imaginary majesty collapses when he encounters them:

He thought the maharaja's palace in his own state was far grander, more like a palace, and this made him feel, in a small part of his heart, that the kings and queens of England were imposters, and the country a little bit of sham. His disappointment turned to something like shame—at himself, for his gullibility... (p. 52)

The implication of this experience is that Willie is quickly done with England but he does not know what lies ahead. Amidst confusion, he starts idling, finding temporary relief in sexual release by taking refuge in prostitutes. He also latches on to Ana, an African-Portuguese girl he meets and befriends in England. Ana, like Sandra in *The Mimic Men*, encapsulates the possibility of an alternative to Willie, and like his father, he too seeks escape in his relationship with a woman. Willie expresses his situation thus:

I've been believing in magic...My scholarship is nearly at an end, and I have planned nothing at all. I've been living here in a fool's paradise. When my time is up and they throw me out of the college, my life is going to change completely...I've been a fool. I've been waiting to be guided to where I should go. Waiting for a sign. And all this time the sign's been there. I must go with Ana to her country. (p. 130)

Willie was not anchored to India, nor to England. His decision is more an escape than a resolution of his sense of displacement or dislocation; what lies ahead is further confusion. He becomes like his father. His sister, Sarojini, anticipates this, writing to him, "You are like your father, holding on to old ideas till the end" (p. 131). He thinks that Ana's situation in her country must be something like his in India; in her he sees a hope, an emotional security, which is doomed otherwise everywhere else. Later, he explains why he relies on Ana: "I believed that she was in some essential way guided and protected, and as long as I was with her no harm could come to me" (p. 141). Therefore, at least in imagination Ana works as a shield, a security for him. Ultimately, he migrates with Ana and this brings him into another dislocation. What is obvious in Willie in England is that the psychological dislocation in him from "invaded" culture to "colonizing" culture. Although at times he feels the pull of the latter, eventually it fails to appeal him; England is only an "imposter" for him. Borbor (2015) has succinctly summed up his experience in England thus:

Willie also finds the sense of being lonely in London disturbing. He initially saw the privacy of the big city and his anonymity as an opportunity to escape from the hatred of his family background and 'playing with words, he began to remake himself. But this happiness over anonymity does not last long and it is replaced by a nostalgic longing for belonging to a community or a family. (p. 125)

Willie finds semblance in Ana which, however, is another level of rupture. Ana is from an unnamed Portuguese colony in Africa. The first impression of her country on him was, as in England, another lost; he immediately feels he will not last there: “I am not staying here. I am leaving. I will spend a few nights here and then I will find some way of going away... I must not unpack. I must never behave as though I am staying” (pp. 133–35). He eventually returns from Africa to his sister in Berlin.

Willie is then situated next in the Marxist insurgency, its social dimension and confusion in India. Willie initiates a similar attempt akin to his father to mimic the Gandhian life of sacrifice which quickly and ironically draws him to insurgency and its nexus with politics and violent crime. *Magic Seeds* sees Willie experiencing a series of other ruptures with the insurgency. Once inside into the Naxalite movement, Willie quickly realizes how facile his motivation to serve others was and how hypocritical the movement itself is. Willie's hollow idealism is confronted by the anarchic violence of the movement, even if its aim is to seek political and social justice. Willie finds an organization of incompetent men. Throughout the fiction, as Davis (2005) observes, Naipaul “...never romanticizes the grim conditions and hypocrisies that he encounters” (p. 344). Diaz De Olarte (2019) rightly says, “In *Magic Seeds*, Naipaul points at revolution as a shelter for weak men born under the protection of an incipient prosperity and equal opportunity who reject responsibilities and hide their idleness and incompetence in utopia” (p. 85). Further, Olarte rightly terms the revolution as “political mimicry” (p. 82) and that “Willie Chandran's experiences in the revolution constitute Naipaul's narrative instrument to turn Naxalism into a metaphor of political mimicry. In *Magic Seeds* he uses attire as a metaphor of political indoctrination” (p. 89). In *India: A Wounded Civilization*, with reference to the Naxalite movements, Naipaul writes, “The Naxalite movement—for all its tactical absurdity—was an attempt at Maoist revolution” (p. 386). Haldar (2007) observing the irony of the situation in the fiction summarily opines, “Any movement that puts emphasis on imitation of some foreign pattern, and discards tradition while taking up pretenses to hold up the adopted image, is likely to be a failure” (p. 102). Thus, Naipaul represents the adoption of the foreign pattern as political mimicry, which significantly defines the nature of the movement that Willie joins. As Ravindranath (2018) writes, Naipaul “...portrays the inner reality of the revolutionary movement with his objective observation, shows inherent pain, anguish, tragedy and futility of individual lives in the pursuing revolution” (p. 41) or in short, its rupture which is beautifully appropriated in Willie.

C. Possibilities: “Where Everything Starts Unravelling”

Unravelling of the possibilities from rupture is an impact of the experience of Willy at different social exposures—brutal, naked and raw— in India, England and Africa wended across the fabric of the fiction. The more the discourse in the narrative unfolds, the more unravelling of the possibilities in the rupture get surfaced. Singh (2014) notes, *Half a Life* “...delineates Willie Somerset Chandran's search for self-development and self-knowledge” (p. 20) which is, it may be argued, attained at the end. The remaining part of the fiction can be read as the story of how a disoriented youth gradually attends to self-knowledge through a crisis or how he sees possibilities within the crisis. Davis (2005) differentiates *Half a Life* from *Magic Seeds* in which the first is seen as a “Bildungsroman” and the second as a coming to “practical maturity”:

If *Half a Life* is a Bildungsroman, even as its protagonist remains (as the title suggests) half-formed, still a drifter, then *Magic Seeds* is Naipaul's gift to Willie. Through a series of misadventures more farcical than tragic, Willie, back in England at book's end, comes to a practical maturity. (p. 345)

This analysis endorses Davis and hence attempts to explore bildungsroman in *Half a Life* and the practical maturity in *Magic Seeds* where both seek to unravel possibilities in the stories of ruptures in Willies.

D. Bildungsroman

The Bildungsroman is an education novel. It attempts to transform an immature protagonist into a matured individual through a series of brutal and adventurous exposures to life. The second half of *Half a Life* thrusts Willy to England and Africa to a series of similar experience. The more he drifts, the more he becomes conscious of the world outside, and with that, his ignorance begins to diminish. One day he comes across Krishna Menon, India's spokesperson in international fora at the time, who was on his way to New York and the United Nations Headquarters. Vengalil Krishnan Krishna Menon (1896–1974), was a diplomat and politician who led India's overseas wing of independent movement, and later the architect of the Non-aligned Movement, and also associated with diplomatic matter in Suez crisis. Willie learns from the newspaper at his college the following day that Menon is going to deliver a speech at the United Nations on the occupation of Egypt by England and France. The Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser, had nationalized the Suez Canal in 1956. First, Israel invaded Egypt, followed by France and England. The plan was to retain western control over the canal by removing Nasser. However, with the intervention of the US, the Soviet Union and the UN, the three forces withdrew, which strengthened Egypt. Willie has no knowledge of these developments and as he realizes now, his father, his idealism has not prepared him for these changes.

Willie senses that he has to reinvent himself—he starts a creative, reflective way of revising his own history for his present purpose. He reconstructs his family right from his grandfather to adhere to this English way of life. Thus, in his mother's uncle, the firebrand, he sees a kind of trade-union leader and no longer a backward and low-caste entity; in his mother he sees a Christian and in his grandfather a courtier in place of a pundit. Kumar and Naj (2015) think:

Willie understands something else, he was clear in his own mind now to which world he belonged... 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. (p. 59)

The attempt to re-invent himself makes him an artist; he publishes his book with the help of Roger, one of his friends. He also had another understanding. Willie says Africa is like a version of India, admitting that "...after a year or so I began to understand—and I was helped in this understanding by my own background—that the world I had entered was only a half-and-half world, that many of the people who were our friends considered themselves, deep down, people of the second rank" (p. 160). His eventual withdrawal has another level of understanding. He says, "...all the old ghosts were already with me, the ghosts of home, the ghosts of London eleven or twelve years before... I didn't think that anything was going to happen to me..." (p. 187). Willy becomes more aware of the disorientation ghost.

In *Magic Seeds* Willie realizes the revolutionary organization is incompetent in two ways. Firstly, as Hayward (2020), observes "*Magic Seeds* (2004), with its portrait of Maoist guerrillas, revisits the theme of false prophets of revolution who, opposing victimization, merely cause greater harm to ordinary people" (n. p.). Willie discovers that "they are not so brave. They are only meaner" (p. 53). A recruit admits, "We have no skill" (p. 64). He also realizes that "the rebels invoke the language of universalism, but in reality, they are acting out private dramas" (Krishnan, 2020, p. 241). A leader speaks more as a defeated man who is "...fearful of mass desertion, fearful of violence and the break-up of this camp" (p. 54). Keso, one of the commanders, is an unsuccessful medical student. Bhoj Narayan, another cadre, says he wanted all the feudal killed and adds, "I didn't want others to do the killing, I wanted to be there myself" (p. 60). A character named Einstein joins the organization because he had lost his university job.

He further learns, as Halder (2007) states,

Naxalite Movement was largely due to the urban 'revolutionaries' having little knowledge of the poor villagers. The urban elite... failed to understand that the villagers did not share their views most of which were borrowed. Those 'revolutionaries' were either idealists, eager to atone for the sin of their forefathers, or misdirected people like Willie himself, who did not know why they had joined the Movement. Most of them, again, were psychopaths who joined the movement to satisfy their perverted desires. (p. 92)

Willy on realization of the fallacy of his idea of serving humanity through the naxalite movement has no option but to surrender to the police. Eventually, with the intervention of Sarojini who in turn seeks Roger's—Willie's friend who helped him publish his book in England (in *Half a Life*)—help to write to the police that Willie was a "pioneer of modern Indian writing" (p. 174). This intervention allows him to get "special amnesty" and thus freedom from jail which once again carries him to England. The surrender, which is also a big risk, is Willy's ultimate coming into consciousness of the hollowness of the idealism of his father that haunted him like a ghost around the world and a starting point to abandon it.

E. Practical Maturity

Back to England after several years surfaces Willy into several practical maturities. He is no longer in the dimension of his ideal view of the world, of his father that fails to anchor him anywhere so far. Kakutani (2004) seminally observes, "The people Willie meets in London are every bit as loathsome as the revolutionaries he met in. They are all narcissistic snobs, obsessed with status and class, and their own agendas of revenge..." (pp. 2–3). Willie's "magic seeds", his desire to start anew by detaching from his historical vanity, fails. London does not offer escape or emancipation. He realizes that London is offering him nothing else but vanity. He realizes that "there was no true place in the world for him" (p. 238), neither in London before Africa nor in India. A terrible sense of loneliness assaults him and this experience connects him to a terrible vision, "back to that childhood when on some especially unhappy evenings there came, with the utmost clarity, a child's vision of the earth spinning in darkness, with everyone on it lost" (p. 238). Willie proclaims, "It is wrong to have an ideal view of the world. That's where the mischief starts. That's where everything starts unraveling" (p. 293). This is attaining of wisdom. Grosu (2013) rightly notes that, "*Magic Seeds* tells the story of how... a person can grow and achieve the wisdom of accepting his own flaws, his own mistakes" (p. 58).

Rahaman (2015) convincingly compares Willie with Tiresias, the Greek seers who never fails in reading past, present and future, writing that:

Willie in *Magic Seeds* is very much akin to the character, Tiresias of Eliot's *The Wasteland*... In his autobiographical novel *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987), Naipaul looks London as 'modern-day Rome'... but in *Half a Life* and *Magic Seeds* we find his changed perspective to see London—London of Eliot's day". (p. 34)

Tiresias, a metaphor for both insight and blindness, helps to reveal Willie's return and experience in London. This can be interpreted in two ways: first, as Willie finally comes to terms with his flawed idealism and realizes that reflection is more important than looking for meaning in the trivial; and second, as he changes from a lost child to someone who can foresee possibilities in it – an unravelling of possibilities in chaos, an enabling phenomenon.

The ideal view of the world as a fallacy that Willie recognizes in England seems to limit the scope of the impotence of the decolonized imagination in the sense that the "world outside" here might be reductively assumed to encapsulate only England. However, as Chaubrey (2013) writes:

The two novels... have occupied a momentous place in his literary monarchy. On one hand the [*Half a Life*] presents the dialectics of homelessness, fissured identity... On the other hand the latter [*Magic Seeds*] begins

from isolated life style of Willie Chandran... In these two novels, Naipaul disparaged the Western world for ethical blankness and lack of people's fidelity. (p. 44)

Identity as rooted to a particular culture or place or political ideology is laid bare as a futile concept in a world that is not one's own, and ethical blankness and lack of fidelity in it are of course the eventual insight that Willie attains. Nevertheless, other experiences like Willie's pessimism with the guerrillas, his cry on the very first day of the duty, his attempt to escape from them by getting arrested, and the discovery of the rampant and organized corruption during his incarceration which all contribute to this insight. Willie's disillusionment in India is the part of the same disillusionment that he encounters in England at the end.

What can be affirmed is that in the context of India the decolonized imagination in terms of freedom was a success story because with it the whole nation had only one goal, where Gandhian ideals played a difference in educating people about the colonial entrapment. Caste, class, immigration, security, poverty, and education are just a few of the real emerging issues facing post-independence India that are manifested as emerging concerns that a feudalotary and colonial mindset cannot address. This was evident in the story of Willie and his father. However, with the next generation, no such great emergency surfaces, and no such personality comes up with a different outlook to educate and orient and balance the thinking of the people. Therefore, Willie's epiphany about himself is also about the limitations of the imagination of decolonized peoples in the world. This however, does not mean that Willie has a dystopian vision, as critics like Salman Rushdie and Laura Feranda Bulger who have conventional view on Naipaul think, of the postcolonial world.

Salman Rushdie thinks that concern for the human race is central in Naipaul after *A House for Mr. Biswas* was published. Rushdie (1987) writes, "A few years ago, VS Naipaul said... his highest ambition was to write a comedy to equal his magnificent 1961 novel, *A House for Mr. Biswas*... But there were doubts... his affection for the human race appeared, to me at any rate, to have diminished..." (n.p.). Bulger (2009) concludes that Willie's realization is nihilistic, saying, "Back in London, he is the same loser that he was during his first incarnation in *Half a Life*. *Magic Seeds* ends with Willie's nihilist remark: 'It is wrong to have an ideal view of the world'" (p. 34). The discourse as it evolves seriously downplays these views. In leaving Willie at this crucial but incomplete juncture, Naipaul reaffirms the crucial ethos that he wishes to exhibit in his writing, and which he expressed in his *Nobel Lecture (Two Worlds)*, stating, "All the details of the life and the quirks and the friendships can be laid out for us, but the mystery of the writing will remain. No amount of documentation, however fascinating, can take us there. The biography of a writer—or even the autobiography—will always have this incompleteness" (Naipaul, 2001). This same "incompleteness" is a crucial aspect of *Half a Life* and more importantly, its sequel, *Magic Seeds*. It is also the fecundity of incompleteness that allows Willie to attain the significant insight that the "world outside" is a contestation not only of a "world at home" but the individual who inhabits these worlds. Willie intelligently realizes that "[t]he two worlds co-existed. It was foolish to pretend otherwise" (*Magic Seeds*, p. 10).

Phillips (2004) reiterates this and states that Willie "was clear in his own mind now to which world he belonged. It had seemed natural to him 20 years and more years ago, at home, to want to hide. Now all that followed from that wish seemed shameful" (n.p.). Similarly, Mohan (2013) argues that this paradox of the imagination in the fictions reflects the muddled orientation/disorientation of the decolonized imaginary, both at the level of the individual as well as that of nation – states:

Naipaul has been able to delineate the idea of freedom in all its nuances. However, whether freedom is explored as a psychological category or a political reality, it is always experienced as a burden. Finally, it can be concluded that in his later fiction Naipaul is obsessively preoccupied with the paradox of freedom in postcolonial societies. (p. 113)

The idealism in Willie and his father land them nowhere because they cannot differentiate themselves from the colonial psychosis, and its resultant confusion. In an interview (Ek Din Ek Jeevan) with Singh (2019), Naipaul emphasizes on "[t]rue revival [that] will come when people understand the past is dead..." and this exactly Willie realizes towards the end.

Although the arrival at the practical maturity to see flaws in the ideal view of life comes at the end, the same may be viewed as an enabling, and ultimately, emancipatory moment for Willie. However, such an arrival is only made possible by a spiral into the past, being exposed and subjected to a dynamic of paradoxes—between orientation and disorientation—appalling and often awful, which in fact functions as one of the inevitable prescriptions of Naipaul for building the intellectual capacity and resilience required to undertake self-critique for the future. Freedom from the long history of intellectual depletion/deficiency, as Naipaul represents in terms of these characters in *Half a Life* and *Magic Seeds*, is yet to be fully realized because the fictions close the moment Willie comes to the maturity. However, through the representation of Willie and his father in the narratives, as Premdas (2002) observes, "Naipaul... taunted us in our imitation of imported materials and models as the inspiration of our selfhood" (p. 229). The development of a critical understanding, no matter how preliminary, of the world outside, to repeat Davis (2005), "...is Naipaul's gift to Willie. Through a series of misadventures more farcical than tragic, Willie... comes to a practical maturity..." (p. 344). Theroux (2016) in Introduction to *V. S. Naipaul: The Indian Trilogy* sees a "fundamental deficiency" in Naipaulian characters which does not allow them to see raw reality and hence baffles their judgment. However, at least Willie transcends the deficiency, the rupture and attends to maturity and this underscores all the subjective and shallow

conventional accusations. We find a matured and intelligent Willie at the end. The rupture in Naipaul at least in this case, therefore, also means a beginning of re-orientation towards possibilities. This “maturity” is borne out of concern for the tragic colonial subject and Naipaul as an author–figure affirms his creative role unconventionally portraying this irresolution as a crucial aspect of postcolonial realities around the world, and in India.

VII. CONCLUSION

It is thus safe to conclude that although there are many hasty generalizations in regards to understanding of Naipaul which often run subjective and belittling, the story of his fictions severely counters them. The narratives begin with a strong historical sensibility but swiftly plunge into its rupture. But the rupture gradually unravels revealing an inherent resilience in his discourse to a limited understanding of it. The rupture becomes a turning point in understanding the present. This is appropriated in the fictions in terms of the story of the father of Willie and Willie himself. The fictions are also educating, Bildungsroman, in reference to Willie which lead him through various twists and turns, ups and downs across the world – in India, England, Africa and Germany – in which he gets enriched in terms of wisdom bit by bit. Eventually we are left with an individual in Willie who can see holes in the false values, ideals, of life that he carries, resolves to discard them and have a new start with a practical maturity.

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Mohammad Rezaul Karim is currently working as an Assistant Professor of English in the College of Science and Humanities, Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University, KSA. He holds a Ph.D. in English from Gauhati University, India. He has been teaching English language to the undergraduate students for the last 6 years. He has presented papers at both national and international conferences, published research articles and papers in various journals, and also authored two books. His main area of interest is comparative literature and English language.

Ramesh Sharma is an Associate Professor and Head, Department of English, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Assam Don Bosco University, India. He has a Ph.D. in English from Dibrugarh University, India. He has been teaching literature at UG and PG levels for the last 9 years. He is also a Ph.D. supervisor. He has presented paper at national and international conferences. He has authored four books and edited four others. He has published papers in various journals and also several books' chapters. He keeps interest in Diaspora Studies, Ethnography and Oral Literature.

Wahaj Unnisa Warda, has been working in the Department of English Language and Literature, Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University, Saudi Arabia for the past ten years. Prior to that, she worked as a senior lecturer in India for thirteen years. She has presented and published papers at various International conferences and journals in London, India, Australia and Saudi Arabia. She is a member of various national and international organizations besides being a reviewer for international journals. Her areas of interest are psychoanalysis, Classical Mythology, and detective fiction of the 19th century.