Chapter VIII

Exile in the *Magic Seeds*

‘Exile” is perhaps one of the most commonly reoccurring terms in the post colonial literature. It tends to be as old as written literature itself, yet despite its age it never ceases to be relevant. As a matter of fact, in the emerging Global Village of the modern society, terms like “exile” and “displacement” have gained unprecedented weight. Understandably, the meaning of the term has undergone multiple alterations over time.

According to *Post Colonial: Key Concepts* the condition of exile involves the idea of a separation and distancing from either a literal homeland or from a cultural and ethnic origin’(85). Edward Said defines exile as “the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home” (1). Exile can be painful and unsettling for anyone who has left the homeland as Said asserts: exile is “terrible to experience” and “its sadness can never be surmounted.” And although incidents of “heroic, romantic, glorious, even triumphant” moments in an exile’s life exist in literature and history, they are merely efforts meant to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement (1). Unfortunately, an exile never fully overcomes the impact of displacement and separation from the homeland, but makes attempts to build new loyalties and affiliations by becoming a citizen of the world since he/she can no longer belong to the homeland that is lost.

Further as Ashcroft et.al explains exile was also produced by colonialism in another way, as pressure was exerted on many colonized peoples to exile themselves from their own cultures, their languages and traditions. The production of this ‘in-between’ class, ‘white but not quite’, was often a deliberate feature of colonial
practice. As Gauri Viswanathan (1989) has shown, it was the basis for the
development of the education system in India following Macaulay’s notorious Minute
on Indian Education. It was also the condition of many of the creolized intellectuals of
West Africa (de Moraes-Farias and Barber 1990). The possibilities shown by this class
of colonially educated ‘natives’ to broker their position into a radical and nationalist
political strategy does not mean that they did not suffer a form of profound exile. Such
conditions of localized alienation or exile could sometimes contribute to the
generation of new social and cultural practices and the questioning of old traditions.

Indeed, many modern writers perceive their personas as “outsiders” with
regard to their native culture; often, they aspire to define themselves as “global
citizens,” persons with intellectual realms spanning beyond the frame of a single
culture, and founded on universally applicable references. The main factor
contributing to such aspirations is perhaps the fact that one of the defining traits of the
modern intellectual is the construction of his identity around the idea of alterity.
Alterity becomes more and more prevalent in the context of the above mentioned
global village, where the self can seldom be conclusively defined among the countless
alternatives for one’s existence and identity. This “global village” is a world in which
the private the inner world becomes “reality”; the outer world turns by necessity into
“the artificial” or “constructed.” The artist is thus left to oscillate indefinitely in an
interstice placed between his own reality and the society in which he lives.

Most often, the response to such conditions is a search for identity, the quest
for a homeland even if a fictional one through self-discovery or self-realization;
alternatively, one may witness a nostalgic recollection of a lost world. In countries
belonging to what may be called “master cultures,” like England or America, this
quest can materialize in an attempt to legitimize a cultural heritage like James, Eliot.
In the case of “smaller cultures” or cultures traditionally influenced by a regnant society the same pursuit shifts towards uncovering a national identity. As one sees, in the case of many writers of Romanian origin, such a pursuit and the failure to achieve its goals is probably one of the main intellectual incentives for striving to belong to a “better culture.”

V S Naipaul a West Indian by birth, Indian by ancestry and English by education and mental training is regarded as a mouth piece of exile and rootlessness. In spite of being connected with three socio-cultural surroundings- Indian by ancestry, West Indian by birth and English by accommodation- he fails to find his roots in any of them. The search for home and roots make him an emigrant writer. His emigrant identity fails to provide him a coherent identity, resulting in a fragmented identity of Naipaul. Naipaul constantly suffers from exile, rootlessness, identity crisis, alienation which reflects in his writings. Naipaul confirms about his exilic nature in an interview saying, “When I speak about being an exile or a refugee, I am not just using a metaphor, I am speaking literally” (Evans 62). His expatriation gives way to displacement, and exile and alienates him from the countries, cultural identities and communities, wherever he goes fails. He suffers from perpetual homelessness and identity crisis.

His birth in Trinidad makes him as exile and separates him from his Indian roots and culture. The colonial domination in Trinidad drives him into another exile from his land of birth. His migration to London further sets him in exile from both his ancestral and native place. He finds himself lost and displaced. Bruce King writes, “While the novels and short stories have seldom been about himself, they have reflected the various stages of his disillusionment with Trinidad, his despair with India and his concern with being a homeless ex-colonial.”(2)In Naipaul’s own words,
“Most imaginative writers discover themselves, and their word, through their work”

( Naipaul, Return 211)

Though proclaiming his ever exiled status in West Indies and living in England, V. S. Naipaul makes no final commitment to any country for his identity and this effrontery has enabled him to renounce himself as a citizen of the world. Naipaul’s conscious travel from one place to another, from Trinidad to England and from one state of mind to another. The curse of homelessness turned into a disguised grace in his solitude and by shedding away the weak nerves of being alienated he procured himself to rejoice the never ending exile. His new vision and ideology forced him to look on displacement, on alienation, on exile and on rootlessness as the new truths of the enigmatic human existence and this novelogue concludes with a conviction to concern with this truth at large.

As Said opines the pain of being an exile reflects in Naipaul’s writings. He tries to achieve a coherence of identity and home through his fictional characters. Most of his characters are constantly seen drifting from one place another just like Naipaul in quest of home and identity. Nanda Kishor Mishra, in his article “Trajectory of Displacement: Expatriate Sensibility of V. S. Naipaul” maintains that in establishing a sturdy link between exile as a literary theme and his personal history, Naipaul has emerged as a rare individual writer with a self-autonomy as measure of his ostracism (Mohit K. Ray ed, 147). His novel Magic Seed has been analysed from the perspective of exile.

*Magic Seeds* is a sequel to Naipaul's 2001 novel *Half a Life*. The novel begins where the *Half a Life* ends. It reflects a deep understanding of Naipaul’s alienation from the three cultures of Indian, Caribbean and British. He neither discards his
Indian heritage, nor adjusts with the Caribbean and finally fails to merge with the metropolis of London. The failure to acknowledge has turned him into something of a permanent deracinates. The vision of the triple exile has found a new dimension in his *Magic Seeds*. Before focusing on *Magic Seeds*, it is important to get the crux point of his previous novel *Half a Life*.

In the novel *Half a life*, the protagonist of the novel Willie Chandran, a boy of mixed inheritance half Brahmin and half Dalit seems to live a life of exile since his birth in India. Due to his half Brahmin and half Dalit identity, he feels separated from both the communities. In addition, the domination of colonial culture in the mission school further leads to the cultural disintegration and fragmented identity in him. He feels torn between these half-half identities and wants to do away with it. Willie’s unusual origin, his education, and his experiences in early life make him alienated and uprooted. He sees his migration to England as an escape from all his suffering and thus he moves to England on scholarship, but his stay at England does not turn out to be as smooth as he has imagined and he suffers from cultural alienation there. He has to relearn every little thing in the English ways of life. He feels equally torn and exiled from the culture of England. Moreover, the racial riots further aggravate the conditions and he plans to run away from England too but he does not want to return to India. Soon he comes across Ana, an admirer of his book, a girl of mixed inheritance half Portuguese and half African and takes her as the sign for which he has been waiting and thus moves with her to her country. In Africa he stays there for eighteen long years but still suffers from the exile state and does not feel at home. The African people with their culture, language and ways of life make him feel as an outsider. Moreover, the Gruella and tribal wars further disturb him and he plans to leave Ana and Africa. 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. The novel ends with Willie still houseless and looking for a place to call home.

In the novel the Magic Seeds, Willie continues to suffer from homelessness and exile. The opening passage of the novel hints at the unanchored and rootless life of Willie who has been living ‘half- and –half way’ with his sister, Sarojini in Berlin. Though Berlin has provided him a temporary security and protection as he tells: “After Africa it had been a great refreshment, this new kind of protected life, being almost a tourist, without demands and without anxiety”.(1) He realises that the time to end this sort of life has come when his sister reminds him of the visa renewal and asks him if he has decided where to go and what to do. Sarojini accuses Willie of living a purposeless life just drifting from one place to another in order to hide himself. Willie expresses his helplessness by saying that he could not do anything in Africa even after his eighteen years stay because he did not belong to Africa and was just an outsider and that is what he feels even in Berlin. Sarojini blames Willie for this and says:

You were on the outside because you wanted to be. You’ve always preferred to hide. It’s the colonial psychosis, the caste psychosis. You inherited it from your father. You were in Africa for eighteen years. There was a great guerrilla war there. Didn’t you know?(2)

Earlier the half –half identity had made Willie feel ashamed of himself and he had been running from one place to another to hide his identity but after staying with Sarojini for six months and listening to her talks, Willie discovers his new identity and also finds a purpose for his life. He learns from Sarojini that how people like him
all over the world have been striving hard for a purpose, the purpose to be revolutionary:

He was clear in his own mind now to which world he belonged. It had seemed natural to him twenty and more years ago, at home, to want to hide. Now all that had followed from that wish seemed to him shameful. His half-life in London; and then all his life in Africa, that life when he was permanently in semi-hiding, gauging his success by the fact that in his second-class, semi-Portuguese group he didn’t particularly stand out, and was ‘passing’, all that life seemed shameful.(10)

The necessity of finding a purpose to existence lies at the heart of Willie’s determination to establish order and coherence in his life by writing it up as a history. So Willie leaves Berlin and goes to India to serve the people of guerrilla war and to make his life purposeful. He thinks himself to be a changed person and thus feels distanced from the other fellow Indian passengers at Berlin airport who are still the mimic men. Willie cannot prevent himself to look at India with the eyes of the coloniser. As soon as he reaches India, and sees the airport, he finds himself still on the side of coloniser and wishes to run back to Berlin. He feels exiled and distanced again with the place and the purpose for which he has come there.

But detail by detail the India he was observing, in the airport pen, and then in the aircraft, the terrible indie of Indian family life- the soft physiques, the way of eating, the ways of speech, the idea of the father, the idea of the mother, the crinkled, much used plastic shop bags(sometimes with a long irrelevant printed name)- this 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. After the long night, he felt something like panic at the thought of the India that was approaching, the India below the colour—destroying glare he could see from his window. He 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 a few hours and stand outside the Patrick Hellmann shop in Berlin, or go to the oyster and champagne bar in the KDW.(26)

Though Willie claims to have a sympathetic view towards Africa and India yet that turns out to be a mere false proclamation and he still nurtures the colonial outlook towards both the countries. His confession before Joseph proves his colonist vision:

I always had sympathy for Africans, but I saw them from the outside. I never really found out about them. Most of the time I saw Africa through the eyes of the colonists. They were people I lived with. And suddenly that life ended, Africa was all around us and we all had to run.(36)

The colonial education in the missionary school and his long stay in the metropolis have almost made him a British by intellect and vision. The way he describes the airport building and other Indian places after returning from Berlin clearly show his exile from everything of Indian identity:

The small, shabby air-port building was full of movement and echoing noise. The Indian passengers from the aeroplane were already different, already at home, already (with briefcases and cardigans and the plastic bags from shops in famous foreign cities) with an authority that separated them from lesser
local folk. The black-bladed ceiling fans were busy; the metal rods or shanks that fixed them to the ceiling were furry with oil and sifted dust. (26-27)

Willie struggles to keep away from his Eurocentric vision of looking at his own country and tries to look at it with a new vision with more concern and empathy but he is again and again haunted by his Eurocentrism:

Willie thought, ‘Twenty years ago I wouldn’t have seen what I am seeing now. I am seeing what I see because I have been made myself another person. I cannot make myself that old person again. But I must go back to that old way of seeing. Otherwise my cause is lost before I have begun. I have come from a world of waste and appearances. I saw quite clearly some time ago that it was a simple world, where people had been simplified. I must not go on that vision. I must understand that now I am among people of more complicated beliefs and social ideas, and at the same time in a world stripped of all style and artifice. This is an airport it works. It is full of technically accomplished people. That is what I must see.’ (27-28)

Willie joins the gruella people who take him deep inside the forest for training. He 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 discovers that he has joined the wrong group and he does not share anything common with their ideologies. He feels his placement with communist guerrillas is absurd and thinks: “There has been some mistake. I have fallen among the wrong people. I have come to wrong revolution. I don’t like these faces. And yet I have to be with them.” (49). Besides, his long stay away from India proves to be a disadvantage for
him as he fails to assess the background of his fellow companions of the Guerrilla war:

And 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. He had been away from India too long. He couldn’t assess the backgrounds of the people around him. He could only read the faces and the physiques………………….. Among these people … he was a stranger. (52)

Willie articulates before Bhoj Narayan that places like London and Africa may appear to be exciting and grand from a distance to people, like England has appeared to the naughty boy in the William Blake’s poem but on arrival, the places seem to be as ordinary as any other place. He too finds them to be ordinary like India, so now he wants to move back to India his world:

Willie said, ‘It seems more exciting than it was. Words can give wrong ideas. The names of places can give wrong ideas. They have too grand associations. When you are in the place itself, London, Africa, everything can seem ordinary. At school we learned a little comic poem by William Blake. I don’t think I remember it all. There was a naughty boy, And a naughty boy was he. He ran away to Scotland, There people there to see. There he found that the ground was as hard, And the cherry was as red, As in England. So he stood in his shoes and he wondered. That was me. That was why I came looking for you. I was unhappy where I was. I had a strong idea that my place was in this world here.’(59)
Soon Willie is sent along with Bhoj Narayan, his fellow companion in the guerilla war, go to a place called Dhulipur. They are provided with an accommodation in a tanner’s area which is full of awful smell of ‘decomposing flesh and dog’s excrement’. There Willie comes to know the real reason for them being sent to Dhulipur when Bhoj Narayan says: “They are testing us. They wish to see whether we will break. Do you think you can stand it?”(57). Willie tries to fight the smell by overcoming it mentally thinking about such moments of alienation and exile which he has faced in Africa, London and India earlier:

And then, as he had done at various points in his recent journey and just as sometimes in the past, feeling lost in Africa, unable to pick his way back to safety or to what he would be easy with, and with no one to confess his anxiety to, he had taken to counting to different beds he had slept in since he was born, to keep track of things), so now in the street of the tanner he began re-living the stages of his descent in the past years. From the desolation and real scarcities of a broken-down estate house in an abandoned Portuguese colony in Africa; to the flat in Charlottenburg in Berlin which at first had seemed to him a place looted and bare and unkempt and cold, speaking of post-war neglect, and full of earlier ghosts he could scarcely imagine; to the airport town in India, to the Rivira Hotel, to the Neo Anand Bhavan, to the guerrilla camp in the teak forest, and now this shock of the tanneries in a small town he didn’t know and wouldn’t be able to find on a map: separate chambers of experience and sensibility, each one a violation with which he in the end would live as though it was a complete world.(58)

As the day progresses both Willie and Bhoj Narayan seem to run short of money and they fail to get any further instructions from their commander. So they
start working in a sugarcane factory to meet their daily needs. Willie finds himself lost and does not feel he is serving the revolutionary purpose for which he joined the guerrilla group. He experiences the same feeling of leading someone else’s life as he has lived in Africa. He feels that he has become a mere puppet in the hands of the guerrilla people and lost all his freedom. He feels detached from these people and their purpose of guerrilla revolution. He wishes to run away. The letter he writes to Sarojini reflects his alienation and exiled state in India with the guerrilla group:

Dear Sarojini, I don’t have to tell you that I came into this thing with the purest of hearts and the wish to do what with your teaching and promptings of my own mind had begun to seem to me to be right. But now I must tell you I feel I am lost. I don’t know what cause I am serving, and why I am doing what I do. Right now I am working in a sugar factory, carting wet bagasse from ten at night to three in the morning for twelve rupees a day. What this has to do with the cause of the revolution I cannot see. I see only that I have put myself in other people’s hands. I did that once before, you will remember, when I went to Africa. I intended never to do it again, but I find now that I have. I am with a senior man of the movement here. I am not easy with him, and I don’t think he is easy with me. I have run away from the room we share to write this letter. I believe he is one of the action men you wrote me about. He told me that the peasants don’t like jokes, and can kill people who they feel are teasing them. I feel the same is true of him. He asked me why I had joined the movement. I couldn’t of course tell him the whole story in two sentences and I said, ‘Good question.’ As though I was in London or Africa or Berlin. He didn’t like that, and I couldn’t laugh it off. I have made a few more stumbles like that with him, and the result is I am afraid to talk freely to him, and he
resents this. He is the leader. He has been in the movement for three years. I have to do what I am told and I feel that in a few weeks I have lost my freedom for no good reason that I can see. I am thinking of running away. I have two hundred marks from the Berlin money. I suppose I can change this at a bank, if they don’t get suspicious, and then I can go to a railway station, and pick my way back to our family house. But that would be a kind of death to me, too. I don’t want to return to that horrible family unhappiness. I am sorry to be writing like this. I don’t know how long I will be in this town and whether it will be worth your while to write me at the poste resante. I will give you a new address as soon as I can.

Bhoj Narayan with his complete faith in the guerrilla revolution appears to be quite firm and settled in the everyday affairs at Dhulipur, working exhaustively in the sugarcane factory. Willie on the contrary, having lost all faith in the motives of the gruella group, feels wretched exhausted, and drained up of all strength. His spirits sink deeper and he suffers from human nullity. He struggles hard to keep up high spirit and thus prays for strength to bear all the ordeals of life. Soon a courier arrives to inform them that the time has come for their next action. He informs Willie that from now onwards he has to do the work of a courier because a courier need to look at ease everywhere and Willie “looks at home everywhere” even at the bagasse yard and thus will not draw any suspicion on him. Willie ironically says: “it’s the one thing I have worked at all my life, not being at home anywhere, but looking at home.”

The colonial education colonised the minds of the colonised. The European books became the source of western culture. They portrayed the European ways of living and culture as civilised and all other as primitive. The more educated a person became the more he got alienated with his native country culture. Besides, embracing
the European life style and culture came to be regarded as a sign of modernisation. Thus in order to become modern the natives gave up their culture and started mimicking the European culture. The colonial language, undoubtedly, became a hegemonic instrument in the hands of the colonizer to make the natives believe that not only is their religion and culture backward but even their language cannot do them any good. Thus, it was essential to learn the superior language, the one of the mother country, England. As Fanon states:

Every colonized people- In other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of his local cultural originality- finds himself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation, that is with the culture of the mother country. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle. (Fanon,18)

The people who still followed the country life style and ways of life were mocked down by the city people, thus Ramchandra states how his wearing country clothes of ‘long shirt’ and ‘pyjama’ made him feel ashamed of himself when he went to his college in the town. He articulates: “When I first went to the town I was ashamed of my clothes all the time.”(111) His college friends then took him to a tailor and got a suit stitched for him. As soon as he wore the stitched suit he found himself to be completely transformed from a ‘country boy’ to a ‘city man.’ The new identity of the city man created new needs in him and he soon found himself struggling to cope with his sexual desires:
Then the tailor asked me to look at myself in the mirror. That was another shock. The country boy had vanished. The city man was looking at me. But then something unexpected happened. I became full of sexual rage. I was a city man. I had a city man’s needs. I wanted a girl. But no girl would look at me. (111)

The lack of sexual education and training in Indian culture result in their sexual alienation and incompetence. Both Willie and Ramchandra suffer from this and have trouble with their sexual life. Willie blames the concept of arranged marriage in Indian families responsible for this and complains how it spoilt his life:

Willie said, ‘All of us from the subcontinent have trouble with sex. We are too used to our parents and families arranging it for us. We can’t do it for ourselves. If I didn’t have that trouble I wouldn’t have married the girl I did. I wouldn’t have gone to Africa and wasted eighteen years of her life and mine.

If I had been easier about sex, if I had known how to go out and get it, I would have been another kind of man. My possibilities would have been endless. I can’t even begin to work them out. But without that talent I was doomed. I could get only what I got. (111-112)

Ramchandra reveals that he could not entice any girl due to his lack of sexual knowledge and training. So he started reading English books like ‘Mills and Boons’ to learn the art of seduction. Ramchandra explains:

That’s why I read them. I read them for the language, the conversation. I thought they would teach me how to approach girls at the college. I felt that because of my background I didn’t have the correct language. I couldn’t talk
about films and music. A certain kind of talk and then the sexual experience – that was what I thought.(113)

Ramchandra practised the language he learnt from the Mills and Boons books on the girls of his college to attract and impress them, but instead of becoming a charmer he became a mocker. As Bhabha comments his ‘mimicry’ turned out to be ‘mockery’ and the girls laughed at him. Though one of the girls did not laugh at him but she used him as a convenience and went with another boy. This makes Ramchandra ‘full of sexual rage’ and he despises himself for mimicking the western ways of life. He gets to know that a guerrilla revolutionary is a sort of ascetic and a saint. Being enraged from the insult of the girl, he joins the guerrilla revolution and vows to abstain from sexual life.

Willie too suffers from culture alienation on reading European books like The Vicar of Wakefield and The sorrows of Satan. So eventually stops reading them. Willie said:

I had a lot of trouble with the books we were told to read. I tried reading The Vicar of Wakefield. I didn’t understand it. I didn’t know who those people were, or why I was reading about them. I couldn’t relate it to anything I knew. Hemingway, Dickens, Marie Corelli, The Sorrows of Satan- I had the same trouble with them and all the others.(112)

Though Ramchandra experiences similar feeling on reading The Three Musketeers but could easily relate with books of Lenin, Marx, Trotsky and Mao. Thus both Willie and Ramchandra’s endeavour of reading the European books to become modern, ends in futility. While Willie suffers from Cultural alienation, Ramchandra ends up becoming a mere mocker.
Willie had been longing for a house to call home and a bed of his own to sleep. It is this desire that had made him wander from one place to another, even from one country to another, but all these years he had only slept in others’ bed in other people’s houses. His sleeps at different beds remind him of the exile status. Therefore whenever he feels rootless and unhomed he counts the beds he has slept in, but after joining the guerrilla revolution and wandering for many years hiding himself, when he returns to his room at last in the base, he feels happy to possess a place of his own:

In spite of the general gloom Willie was happy to be in a place where he had already been. He felt he had ceased to be flung into space; he felt he might at once again come to possess himself. He liked the low clean thatched roof—so protecting, especially when he was on his string bed—where he could store small things between the thatch and the rafters; he liked the plastered beaten—earth floor, hollow-sounding below his feet.(134)

When Willie is reassigned to a new squad, he finds himself suddenly among the suspicious strangers. This makes him lose his room in the low-eaved hut, which he has grown to think of as his. With the loss of his room he again feels disoriented and lost. He once again longs passionately to find himself—to save himself, to get in touch with himself again, to get away to the upper air.; but he fails to console himself and waits to see Einstein, his fellow member in the guerrilla group.

Eventually, Willie is captured and thrown into jail, where the prison routine provides relief from life as a jungle fighter. From there, with comical luck, Naipaul shifts Willie to England, where he restarts his disengaged life working for an architectural magazine. His guerrilla experiences have jaundiced his view of the
society in which he once maintained a static existence. By novel's end, Willie progresses toward finding himself at home in the world.

Soon Willie and another man from the squad get the order to get villagers to kill the better off villagers. When they approach a villager to do so, he expresses his helplessness and asks Willie to do. Willie tries to persuade him to teach how to shoot, simultaneously finds a richer farmer on the way. The squad leader comes at the right moment and asks Willie to shoot the man. Willie shoots him, but after this incident feels that he himself has become a maniac:

When his blood cooled Willie thought, ‘I am among absolute maniacs. ’ A little later he thought , That was my first idea, in the camp in the teak forest. I allowed that idea to be buried. I had to do that, so that I could live with the people I found myself among. Now that idea has resurfaced, to punish me. I have become a maniac myself. I must get away while I still have time to return to myself. I know I have that time. (146)

Eventually, together with another deserter of the movement he escapes and he 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.

When Willie reaches London , the earlier experiences of marginalisation and cultural alienation during his stay in London haunt him and he is reminded of his exile status which had caused him to mimic European ways and also to reinvent an imaginary identity so as to fit in the modern life of London. Now when he has returned to London after thirty two years he does not want to do any mimicry and just
wants to be himself. It seems that Willie’s search for identity has been quenched with his realisation that he is a free man and does not need to confine himself to any cultural, ethnic or national boundary. He must only try to be himself. He contemplates:

Willie felt old stirrings, the beginning of old grief. But then he thought, ‘I have been there. I have given part of my life and I have nothing to show for it. I cannot go there again. I must let that part of me die. I must lose that vanity. I must understand that big countries grow or shrink according to the play of internal forces that are beyond the control of any one man. I must try now to be only myself. If such a thing is possible.’(176-177)

Since Willie now considers himself to be a free man he does not like the idea of staying at a place for ever. His enquiry from Roger as, ‘Will I have to be here now for ever and ever?’ (178) hints at his displeasure to stay for ever in London. Though he has returned to London, a place he had known but he was not at all sure of the kind of life he is going to lead here. And further asks, ‘What will happen to me? How will I pass the time?’(178)

Willie talks about his escapist tendency as how he went to different places in search of home and purpose thinking that there he would soon find something that would give meaning to his life and identity but everything turned out to be just a mess, and as soon as he reached those places the first thing he wanted to do was to run away. Ironically he did not do that and stayed at all those places for quite a longer period of time:

When I went to Africa I remember that on the first day I looked out of the bathroom window and saw everything outside through a rusty screen. I never
wanted to stay. I thought that something was going to happen, that I would
never unpack. Yet I stayed for eighteen years. And it was like that when I
joined the guerrillas. The first night in the teak forest. It was too unreal. I
wasn’t going to stay. Something was going to happen and I was going to be
liberated. But nothing happened, and I stayed seven years. (178)

Willie’s escapist tendency emanates from Naipaul’s own tendency to run away
from one place to another in search of intellectual adventure. Naipaul asserts:

I travel to discover other states of mind. And if for this intellectual adventure I
go to places where people live restricted lives, it is because my curiosity is still
dictated in part by my colonial Trinidad background. I go to places which,
however alien, connect in some way with what I already know. When my
curiosity has been satisfied, when there are no more surprises, the intellectual
adventure is over and I become anxious to leave. (FC, 11)

Willie shares with Roger that he has never been the master of his life and has
always led a life, following others. Even the decisions which he felt were his own
did not turn out to be in his favour and he found himself only drifting from one place
to another. Life was never the way he thought and always there has been a series of
surprises everywhere:

Willie said, ‘my life has been a series of surprises. Unlike you, I had no
control over things. I thought I had. My father and all the people around him
thought they had. But what looked like decisions were not decisions really.
For me it was a form of drift, because I didn’t see what else there was for me
to do. I thought I wanted to go to Africa. I thought that something would
happen and I would be shown the true way, the way meant for me alone. But as soon as I got on the ship I was frightened. (179)

Willie’s stay for seven long years in the guerrilla revolution leading a life of an austere abstaining from drugs, and sex has made him feel like a prisoner in a jail but now it seems to evaporate and give way to the new feelings of sexual desire and drinks. These new demands make him feel overpowered by another man who had lain hidden within him for years and which he feels he will not be able to get rid of. He says:

I began to understand that I was no longer in the jail, and some other person, not absolutely myself, began to crawl out as if were from hiding. I am not sure I can get rid of him. I feel he will always be there, waiting for me. (185)

Willie’s belief that, he has overcome all his insecurities of identity, and place as a free man seems to be crushed with the emergence of the new man hidden within him. Roger’s house once again reminds him of his homelessness and makes him long for a room of his own:

Then a new thought, issuing from the new person who had possessed him, assailed him, ‘I have never slept in a room of my own. Never at home in India, when I was a boy. Never here in London. Never in Africa. I lived in somebody else’s house always, slept in somebody else’s bed. In the forest of course there were no rooms, and then the jail was the jail. Will I ever sleep in a room of my own?’ And he marvelled that he had never had a thought like that before. (185)

Succumbing to his new needs he drinks whisky and gets sexually involved with Roger’s wife Peridita. At Roger’s house he finds the book he had written twenty
eight years ago and learns it from Peridita that the book was used by Roger to prove that Willie was a pioneer postcolonial writer and not a politician in guerrilla war thus helping in his release from jail. As Willie goes through the book he is transported to a time twenty eight years back, when he had written the book. The reading of the book makes him realise that he has become a transformed man.

As he goes on a visit to all the old places of his acquaintance thirty years ago, it dawns on him that the same places with their architectures appear to be different to Willie. He can now see all the separate buildings as ‘things made by men’, ‘made by many men at different times’. He feels a change in his way of looking. He realises that earlier too these places existed but he could not see them as he is seeing them now because at that time his vision was burdened by his own darkness and incompleteness. Now as a free man, unburdened by his darkness and incompleteness, the same buildings appear different to him. Moreover the awakening of the new free man has lifted his feeling of being oppressed and he feels he has new strength:

Now that darkness and weight were not with him. He stood unburned before the buildings many different men had built. He went from place to place- the pretentious little college with its mock –Gothic arches, the fearful Notting street, the street with little club north of oxford Street, the small side street near Marble Arch where Roger had his house-every-where seeing the little miracle happen, feeling the oppression lift, and feeling himself made anew. He had never had an idea- never since his childhood-what he might be. Now he felt he was being given some idea, elusive, impossible to grasp, yet real. What his essence was he still didn’t know, though he had lived so long in the world. All that he knew at the moment was that he was a free man-in every way-and had a new strength. It was so unlikely, so unlike the person he had felt himself
to be, at home, in London, and during the eighteen years of his marriage in Africa.(196)

Whenever Willie revisits a country he thinks himself to be a new transformed man and tries to look at the old places with his new vision. It happened on his revisit to India, he had felt that he was a transformed man and tried to look at things with his new vision, the same thing happened on his second visit to London. He feels himself to be a free man and tries to explore the city with his new enlightened vision, but as had happened in India, he was soon overpowered by his original vision and he lost interest in the places, similarly, London too loses its charm and he experiences the same boredom of routine life:

His new way of looking no longer offered surprises. It no longer excited him to see the London of his past. To see it too often was to strip it of memories, and in this way to lose precious pieces of himself. The famous sights were like pictures now, taken in at a glance, hardly offering more than their postcard images- though sometimes he could still be startled by the river: the wide view, the light, the clouds, the unexpected colour. He didn’t know enough of history and architecture to look for more; and the traffic and the fumes and the tourists crowds were exhausting; and in the big city he began to wonder, as he had wondered in the forest and in the jail, how he was going to make the time pass.(197)

When Willie goes with Roger to his rich banker friend, he experiences detachment from both the place and the people there. He finds everyone materialist who do not understand the nullity of life. He had to shed his materialist self-leading
the life of a guerrilla revolutionary. Besides the whole experience in the forest has introduced him to the concept of nullity in life. He contemplates:

    But in the forest and in the jail I changed. You can’t go through that kind of life without changing. I have shed my materialist self. I had to, to survive. I feel that these people don’t know the other side of things.’ The words came to him just like that. He thought, ‘words would have meant something. I must work out what the words mean. The people here don’t understand nullity. The physical nullity of what I saw in the forest. The spiritual nullity that went with that was very much like what my poor father lived with all his life. I have felt this nullity in my bones and can go back to it at any time. Unless we understand people’s other side, Indian, Japanese, African, we cannot truly understand them.’(211)

Like Willie, Sarojini too leads an unanchored life of an exile. Although she had stayed at Berlin with her German husband for twenty years but still she did not feel the place as her own and became tired of her life in Berlin. She regrets that though she has lent her service to people with best of intentions but they did not turnout the way she had anticipated and now all the people, whom she had suggested, suspect her intentions. So she decides to go back to India. Later on, after her father’s death she decides to take over the ashram business though she lacks the religious wisdom of her father. Willie warns her not to indulge herself in that as he does not find it suitable for her. He says: “Dear Sarojini, You run from one extreme to the other. The idea of the ashram is an idea of death in life, and it goes against everything you have believed.”

Yetas has been predicted by Willie, Sarojini soon discovers the futility of her presence in the ashram and her inability to serve the purpose of the ashram. She decides to
move back to Berlin to her husband and continue with his documentary making. She writes:

I have decided to close down the ashram. I cannot give people what they come to me for. I was never a spiritual or unworldly person, as you know, but I thought after what I had been through that there was going to be some virtue in the life of withdrawal and stillness.(236)

Willie takes the work of architecture in Peter’s company, the banker friend of Roger. Since he has no previous knowledge or experience of this field he has to take training. While attending the training lectures during weekends he again suffers from the same feeling of rootlessness, and the pain of always being an exile. He is reminded of all the earlier life of exile experienced by him as a guerrilla in India, Ana’s London man in Africa and during his previous stay in London, and during his childhood with the family in the ashram. He experiences the same pain of homelessness which he has experienced several times during his childhood:

But he very soon began to be assailed by a loneliness that took him back to long days and weeks as a guerrilla; terrible unexplained periods of waiting in small towns, usually in a dingy room without sanitation, where when the sun went down an unfamiliar squalling life developed outside, not attractive, not tempting him to wander, making him question the point of what he was doing; back to some evenings in Africa when he felt far away from everything he knew, far from his own history and far from the ideas of himself that might have come to him with that history; back to his first time in London thirty years before; back to some evenings in his childhood when understanding the strains in his family, between his melancholy father, a man of caste, cheated of
the life his good looks and birth had entitled him to, and his mother, of no caste and no looks, aggressive in every way, whom he, Willie, yet loved deeply; understanding as a result with the deepest kind of ache that there was no true place in the world for him-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. (237-238)

Willie writes to Sarojini describing how his life in London although has apparently granted him physical freedom from the jail in India and provided a sound body and mind but still he feels enslaved. He feels like ‘a man serving an endless prison sentence’. He suffers from lack of philosophy to cope. Besides he has discovered that there are many such people in his company who are leading a life of freedom from slavery simultaneously. To count Roger and the ‘brown suit’ man whom he has met recently in Peter’s office are among a few. In another letter to Saorijini he further expresses his inability to cope up with his new profession of architecture which he took so late in his life. He revels that in order to bear with it he needs ‘an injection of optimism’ which his friend Roger gets from a woman he adored but he does not want to do that. He finds the current job very demanding and thinking that perhaps he should change his job to something which is simple and undemanding. He indeed mentions about Marcus, a West Indian African who had the dream of sleeping with only white ladies and makes sure one day he has a white grandchild with whom he would walk proudly through the streets of London. He has been successful in his goal. Thus, Marcus seem to be the happiest man with his goal of white grandchild achieved as Roger says, ‘the happiest and most successful people are those who have very precise goals, limited and attainable’, but he finds himself not among such successful people and he still seems to suffer from rootlessness, the novel
ends with Willie’s note of pessimism: ‘it is wrong to have an ideal view of the world. That’s where the mischief stats. That’s where everything starts unravelling. But I can’t write to Sarojini about that’ (294)

Willien Chandran’s constant state of exile since his birth seems to become a part of his personality. The insecurities and alienation of fragmented identity and homelessness which began with his birth in the novel *Half a Life* seem to persist even in its sequel *Magic Seeds*.

While in *Half a Life* Willie is seen drifting from one place to another from India to London then to Africa and finally to Berlin due to his identity crisis and placelessness, in *Magic Seeds* the purposelessness of his existence becomes the source of his exilic state and displacement. The problem of identity crisis though to certain extend has been resolved with Willie’s acceptance of his identity of a free man but he still seem to struggle with the purposelessness of his service to the place of his work.

He does not seem to serve the purpose of guerrilla war in India and finally decides to leave by surrendering to the police, similarly in London he does not find solace working as an architect in Peter’s office. The novel ends with Willie still in search of purpose of his existence.

Willie’s search for existence is indeed the reflection of Naipaul’s own search for the real purpose of his existence. With *Magic Seeds*, though Naipaul seem to have resolved his identity crisis by accepting the identity of a free man, but perhaps he still needsto find an end to the quest for the purpose of his existence.