

## INDIA: A MILLION MUTINIES NOW INDIA ON THE MOVE

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### ABSTRACT

*INDIA: A MILLION MUTINIES NOW DEALS WITH THE LAST VOLUME OF THE INDIAN TRILOGY. IT IS AN ACCOUNT OF THE WRITER'S THIRD VISIT TO INDIA, TWENTY-SIX YEARS AFTER HIS FIRST VOYAGE, DESCRIBED IN AN AREA OF DARKNESS. IN THE PREFACE TO THIS VOLUME, NAIPAUL STRESSES TWO IMPORTANT IDEAS: THAT, AFTER ALL THOSE YEARS, “THE MOST IMPORTANT THING ABOUT INDIA, THE THING TO BE GONE INTO AND UNDERSTOOD, AND NOT SEEN FROM THE OUTSIDE, WAS THE PEOPLE.” THE SECOND IDEA WAS THE REALIZATION THAT FAR FROM BEING THE POOREST COUNTRY IN THE WORLD, INDIA WAS “ON THE MOVE,” THAT “ALL OVER THE VAST COUNTRY MEN AND WOMEN HAD MOVED OUT OF THE CRAMPED WAYS AND EXPECTATIONS OF THEIR PARENTS AND GRANDPARENTS, AND WERE EXPECTING MORE. THIS WAS THE ‘MILLION MUTINIES’ OF THE TITLE; IT WAS NOT GUERRILLA WARS ALL ROUND. NEARLY EVERY ENGLISH-SPEAKER WOULD HAVE SOME IDEA OF THE BRIEF INDIAN MUTINY OF 1857 WHEN SOME MERCENARY INDIAN SOLDIERS OF THE BRITISH EAST INDIA COMPANY, CONFUSED AND ANGRY, BUT WITH NO CLEAR END IN VIEW, MUTINIED AGAINST THE BRITISH. THE MILLION MUTINIES OF MY TITLE SUGGEST THAT WHAT IS HAPPENING NOW IS A TRUER AND MORE GENERAL WAY AHEAD.”*

*NAIPAUL HAD A VERY EXPLICIT GOAL WHEN WRITING HIS THIRD INDIAN NARRATIVE: TO ATONE THE PREJUDICE BROUGHT ABOUT BY AN AREA OF DARKNESS, WHICH THE AUTHOR HIMSELF CONFESSED TO HAVE BEEN WRITTEN “IN THE GRIP OF NEUROSIS.” NAIPAUL'S OBSESSION WITH HIS NINETEENTH CENTURY INDIAN ROOTS APPARENTLY FOUND AN ANSWER IN HIS THIRD VOYAGE TO INDIA TWENTY-EIGHT YEARS LATER, WHEN NAIPAUL PROVES HIS MATURITY IN DEALING WITH THE REALITIES OF INDIA, OPENLY AND OBJECTIVELY.*

**KEY-WORDS:** MILLION MUTINIES, INDIAN ROOTS, INDIAN CAST SYSTEM, INDIAN RELIGIOUS SYSTEM

The third volume of the Indian trilogy, **India: A Million Mutinies Now**, was first published by William Heinemann in 1990; for the 2010 Picador edition, Naipaul added an explanatory, justifying Preface: About fiction and non-fiction: some words about India: A Million Mutinies Now”. It contains information – sometimes redundant, as much of the information will also be found in his Nobel Lecture and other prefaces and interviews – on his beginnings as a writer, on his origins in colonial Trinidad, and on the process of writing this particular travelogue. For the time being, we are interested in the following fragment in which Naipaul goes theoretical:

“Ideas are abstract. They become books only when they are clothed with people and narrative. The reader, once he has entered this book and goes beyond the opening pages, finds himself in a double narrative. There is the immediate narrative of the person to whom we are being introduced; there is the larger outer narrative in which all the varied pieces of the book are going to fit together.”

To reformulate, Naipaul traces the route of the abstract ideas which – enriched with the concrete addition of people and narrative (i.e. characters and plot) – turn into books which, further on, introduce the reader into their double narrative. As is the case with the Indian trilogy, the first, immediate narrative is that of Naipaul’s personal history, while the outer narrative is the narrative of India, because,

“Nothing is done at random. Serious travel is an art, even if no writing is contemplated; and the special art in this book lay in divining who of the many people I met would best and most logically take my story forward, where nothing had to be forced.”

Actually, the immediate narrative started in December 1988, when he reactivated his contacts for the book: he was to spend six months in India, struggling with the heat, and the poverty, and the bureaucracy, following what he called an “anticlockwise direction”: from Bombay to the south – Goa, Bangalore, Mysore, and Madras – then to the north – Calcutta – and west – Delhi, Lucknow, the Punjab and Kashmir. The route is thus chosen to take Naipaul to all the locations that spelt trouble, those places were “mutinies” were happening or were bound to happen. The term mutiny – which sends to the 1857 anti-British uprising in which thousands of Indians were killed – is Naipaul’s choice for the numerous conflicts all over India, “from regional secessionist movements to religious and caste tensions across the country from the ex-Naxalite followers in Calcutta to the suspicious Dalits or untouchables and the chauvinist Maharashtrians and the Shiv Sena, and from the Muslims in Bombay to the Sikh activists in Punjab.”

The book was practically written during December 1988 – February 1990. This time Naipaul turns still more systematic in his objective type of survey, and withholds other supervening agents or excesses of exordium deflecting direct involvement. The first edition of the book started abruptly, *in media res* (only in 2010 did Naipaul decide to add his Introduction): he landed directly in what he called the “Bombay Theatre”, more or less stylistically fictional, though based on realities:

“Bombay is a crowd. But I began to feel, when I was some way into the city from the airport that morning, that the crowd on the pavement and the road was very great and that something unusual might be happening. Traffic into the city moved slowly because of the crowd”

This is not Naipaul’s first impression of Bombay. In the other two books, the city gets prominence in his survey of India, and it contributes to a negative impression of the country. In *Million Mutinies*, the traveller has the patience to observe, investigate and wait until the exploration settles itself, not only for him but for the outside world as well. The very first striking event that caught his eye and roused his mind for enquiry is a pageant-like endless stream of humanity in the Bombay street, forcing the traffic to halt, including the writer’s taxi. They are peaceful, patient, and slow-moving, yet they seem to cherish revolutionary ideas. India seems to shape itself anew, Gandhi – with his Harijan philosophy (the untouchables are also children of God) – belongs to the past. Now it is the turn of Ambedkar and his Dalit supporters: the tortured, down-trodden, a worthless Hindu section of humanity now asserting their democratic rights. [1] Dr Ambedkar had been the spiritual leader of the untouchables – the Dalits –, encouraging them to renounce

Hinduism, the true cause of their enslavement, and take to Buddhism instead. Unfortunately, he died before completing his project of converting the Dalits to Buddhism, and thus almost turned into a deity: worshipped in each and every Dalit household, his photograph had acquired the status of a religious icon. The image of the leader featuring glasses, jacket and tie was a substitute for the picture of the mahatma, wearing homespun and loincloth. The harsh homespun worn by Gandhi's supporters symbolised sacrifice and service, their way of identifying with the needs of the poor. In the industrialised, money-worshipping India of the late '80s, homespun was a symbol of poverty. It was a total reversal, which Naipaul saw at the roots of Indian society:

“In seeking to rise, India had undone itself. No one could be sure of anything now: all was fluid. Policeman, thief, politician: the roles had become interchangeable. And with money – the money of which the crowded, ugly sky-scraper towers of Bombay spoke – many long-buried particularities had been released. These disruptive, lesser loyalties – of region, caste and clan – now played on the surface of Indian life.”

India was at the beginning of a social, political and economic upheaval that would lead to the nation's triumphant rise at the end of the century, a million mutinies leading to a new phase of creativity and progress:

“Independence had come to India like a kind of revolution; now there were many revolutions within that revolution. What was true of Bombay was true of other parts of India as well. [...] All over India scores of particularities that had been frozen by foreign rule, or by poverty or lack of opportunity or abjectness, had begun to flow again. And it was easy to see how someone like the man in the hotel, who had grown up with another idea of India and its development, could feel alienated and insecure.”

Once again, Naipaul sensed that something was taking place in a country where others still saw only a continuation of old patterns. The result is a long book, the longest he has ever written, but exceptional in its narrative perception. In the first section, “The Bombay Theatre”, he wrote of Dalits, of local political leaders, of activism, of people who were raising themselves and their communities from difficult beginnings. What is important is that the author is present in the text, enquiring on behalf of the reader. He resorts to an elaborated interview method of practical enquiry, and again, as in his other travelogues, we are experiencing Naipaul's personal style: we have characters – real, though they look fictional – picked up by the writer from the rich diversity of the “Bombay Theatre”: Papu, Patil, Anwar, Raote, Ghate; they are representatives of different strata of the Bombay society, suburbs and suburban hinterland. Their stories – acquired through Naipaul's guides and translators – are both sketches of character and portraits which, when put together, offer a panoramic picture of a certain social segment of the metropolis, controlled by Shiv Sena. [2] Let us deal in more detail with these characters.

PAPU is a Bombay stockbroker of a Jain family who, in five years, had made more money than his father had made in his whole life. He is worried about the aggressiveness of Indian business, and observes the traditions, and he goes to the temple every morning to pray to different Hindu deities – Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, or Saraswati, the goddess of wisdom – to help him control the feelings of greed and fear, both associated with doing business. And, more important, he delineates a modern, contemporary and more pragmatic approach to Jainism, and he doesn't reject the idea of a revolution:

“The earlier generations of Jains, when they thought of social work, used to build marble temples. We find that to be not very right, maybe because there are already so many

temples. We think of orphanages and hospitals. Our generation thinks more of social work than of religion.”

“[...] with the growing frustrations, even if people are religious there is going to be a revolution. The tolerance is being stretched too far.”

“What form do you think the revolution will take?”

“It won’t be anything. It will be total chaos.”

PATIL, the Shiv Sena activist, with his deep contempt for Mahatma Gandhi, openly against the Gandhian idea of non-violence, represents a well-organized army on the model of their seventeenth-century Maratha warrior Shivaji. This is where we can talk about India’s innumerable mutinies: Patil is a practical man, a political Sena leader, and an active organizer. He represents an example of mutiny – one supported by a well-organized army – which is a clear departure from the Gandhian path. Leaving aside Patil’s display of the cult of mutiny, he remains an Indian Hindu, and a worshipper of Ganapati (or Ganesh), the Hindu elephant god. It is Naipaul who patiently listens to Patil’s story of the grace of the god (Ganapati), granted to him personally and to his family. It seems that Naipaul has attained a sort of dispassionate observer’s attitude, that of a purposeful inquirer – an inquiry which later turned into a book quite different from the other two. Patil’s stronghold – his office – has the outward appearance of a fort. After having seen handcuffed and roped-up young men for the offence of not paying their railway tickets, Naipaul concludes:

“The Sena fort; the slender young men in their nice shirts handcuffed and roped up; the cricket, the gentlemanly, stylish game from halfway across the world – everything was open for inspection here. And so much more was innocently on view: just below the surface, human emotions and needs, and ideas of mystery and glory, run riot.”

This is a picture of twentieth-century India: handcuffed young men for not being able to pay for their railway tickets, and the “mimic men”, playing cricket, thus indulging into the mimicry game that the British colonists did their best to perpetuate.

But Patil is not the only Shiv Sena leader whom Naipaul meets. Mr. RAOTE is one in the eighteen participants to the first Sena meeting in 1966. Naipaul depicts Raote as an emblem of the Shiv Sena, and of all India: “This devotion to the Shiv Sena and its leader was like an aspect of Mr. Raote’s religion. He had always had courage, and confidence, and the gift of religion, the atma-vishwas of which Mr. Patil of Thane had spoken.” If Patil was guided by his devotion to Ganapati, Raote got his confidence from religion in a much larger sense, not only from Ganapati in particular:

“He [Ganapati] is not a special deity. Everything in India begins with Ganapati or Ganesh. No Hindu puja starts without him. The religion we have is from childhood. It is part and parcel of our life. No Hindu family will give up the morning puja. We have a special garment for the puja. Religion definitely gave us confidence. It built our character.”

Naipaul does not react to this account, nor does he suggest its weaknesses or inconsistency by an ironical remark, as he used to; instead, he patiently listens to Raote’s explanations of the Maharastrian turn of the Indian religious tradition as the source of his power and policy in life. Shivaji had Ramdas, and Raote has now an unnamed deity of the land for his living source of inspiration. Here are Raote’s comments on his Guru:

“I used to go to see him for his blessing. I never asked anything of him. I went to him only for his blessing, to serve him because he was a saint, and I feel he changed my entire life. He died in 1968. But I feel he is still blessing me whenever I need his blessing. Though he is not here physically, in the actual body, he always gives me and my family his

presence. Look,’ Mr. Raote said, taking me to the teak front door of his flat. ‘My door has no latch. It is always open.’”

Nevertheless, Raote’s always open door cannot prevent outside intrusion into private family matters. One of them is the Indian traditional arranged marriage vs. love marriage, and the woman’s family life in her husband’s family, and the relationship with her mother-in-law. In Raote’s case, it had been a ‘love-match’, he and his wife belonging to different castes. But his was a working, salaried wife, who had to give up her studies to support her new family. How about the proverbial relationship with her mother-in law? The answer is provided by Naipaul:

“Whether arising out of a love marriage or an arranged marriage, it was the eternal conflict of Hindu family life, a ritualized aspect of the fate of women, like marriage itself or childbirth or widowhood. To be tormented by a mother-in-law was part of a young woman’s testing, part, almost, of growing up. Somehow the young woman survived; and then one day she became a mother-in-law herself, and had her own daughter-in-law to torment, to round off a life, to balance pain and joy.”

One remark is necessary: the Shiv Sena movement has essentially a regional character; it is the Maharashtrian Hindu tradition with a political twist, with the purpose of resisting the influx of outsiders into local interest. The Sena mouthpiece, the Weekly Marmik, preached extreme regionalism first, and then it broadened the Hindu base, to a nationalist Hindu outlook. But people like Raote, as its active member, continued to remain an essentially Indian representation. Here is Naipaul’s conclusion on Raote: “The worldly man who wanted to be an officer and an engineer, the Sena worker, the devout Hindu: there were three layers to him, making for a chain of belief and action”.

GHATE is another Sena prominent activist, perhaps more powerful than Raote, more in the sense he exercises power, which Raote does not unless necessary for the good of the people he intends to serve. Devoid of any particular religious inclination, Ghate is entirely a man of action – the puja-box Naipaul discovers in one corner of his apartment is for his wife’s use. Ghate is entirely devoted to his party, and to the chawls. He is a chawl man, born and brought up in the chawls, and as a Sena leader he became a powerful representative of the chawl immense community. As early as 1975 Naipaul visited the Shiv Sena organized slums, when their work was confined to a limited area within the city, hardly acquiring stat dimensions. In 1988, Naipaul finds the same trend, more intensified and broad-based, with more efficient and experienced activists, led by men like Ghate.

What is interesting about Ghate is his family life: Ghate’s love marriage could have been easily dramatized by Naipaul. The young couple had to be sheltered in his uncle’s house one night to spare her the wrath of her family. But Naipaul deliberately let it pass as a matter of course, evoking rather more intently the Indian life style, not only in the Bombay chawl area, where accommodation is extremely scarce, but in general. The writer’s journalist friend, guide and interpreter, Charu, corroborates Ghate’s claim by a reference to his own wife’s formed habit of community interaction for better effect of her studies:

“Charu said his own wife, who was doing a M.Sc. Degree in child development, couldn’t read if she was alone; she preferred to read when there was someone talking nearby. Even now, his wife liked staying with her family in their old flat, for the company, the warmth, the constant reassurance of human voices.”

With ANWAR we enter the Bombay Muslim community. The Muslim Community in Bombay, and in the whole of India, is a substantial force, not to be overlooked, the result

of centuries of Muslim rule of the country. Naipaul appears interested in dramatic delineation, perhaps the original of his character must have served him well to warm up his essential fictional craftsmanship. The place itself where Anwar lives is dramatically presented. It is an apparently secluded area, belonging to the followers of the former Islamic conquerors of India where, to the writer's surprise, the first sign he sees is written not in Arabic or any other of the Indian languages, but in English: "On a white wall somewhere near Mohammed Ali Road in downtown Bombay I had seen this slogan painted in tall black letters: LIBERATE HUMANITY THROUGH ISLAM." The white wall, with the slogan written on it, is a gate to another segment of the varied Bombay society: the Muslim area of downtown Bombay, officially declared a ghetto: "it was where communal riots could begin and, having begun, could spread like fire". Anwar's physical aspect and the background of his life, and more explicitly his communal extremism could not provoke Naipaul to turn ironical, with a marked difference from his attitude in his two earlier two books on India. The writer's sympathies are unambiguous, so much sincere as to arouse self-criticism, as in the following excerpt:

"I feel that if I had been in their position, confined to Bombay, to that area, to that roe, I too would have been a passionate Muslim. I had grown up in Trinidad as a member of the Indian community, a member of a minority, and I knew that if you felt your community was small, you could never walk away from it: the grimmer things became, the more you insisted on being what you were."

Anwar is a dramatic character, only a little less than Aziz of *An Area of Darkness*, yet he is not deprived of Naipaul's understanding: he feels that Anwar cannot be free, that something serves as a brake to his free impulses, and therefore he too must needs play a cunning part, however subtle his purpose might be. Anwar fully agrees with the Islamic slogan; he has close contacts with the organized "underground", and confirms that the dons of Bombay are all loyal adherents of Islam and, despite their criminal activities, they will fight for Islam, observe the rules, and behave properly as Muslims. He cannot see himself living without Islam. It is a very unusual situation: it seems that Anwar and Naipaul seem to share a kind of clandestine complicity – a sort of dramatic aside for one to know the other's meaning. Nikhil, the author's guide and translator, is left in the position of an official aide-de-camp, supposed not to hear, not to see anything. The secret of complicity, as it were, is not out even when Naipaul addresses his audience in English:

"His orthodox faith was the one pure thing he had to hold on to. He could not imagine life without it. It was a stringent faith. It shut out television: it had no room for heretics. All the many rules and celebrations and proscriptions were part of the completeness of Anwar's world. Take away one practice, and everything was threatened; everything might start to unravel."

One more revealing example is Naipaul's visit to the underworld of Bombay, the world of crime, for which Naipaul uses the word 'underground'. When he visits the underworld he expects crimes, meets the professionals, and expects they will avoid, even conceal the truth, and this is what they do professionally. The gangster leader conceals, Naipaul expects and notes, but while concealing, he reveals. Anwar, with his connections in the underworld, was exactly the opposite: he revealed, but while revealing, he concealed. Naipaul did not expect but knew. But the issues have something essentially dramatic in their own particular ways. The professional gangsters are a little more theatrical in their interaction with an outsider like Naipaul. The setting stresses the theatricality of the moment:

“It was a new apartment house. The ground-floor apartment we went into was well furnished in an Indian bourgeois, furniture-shop way. And it was strange, there, among those feminine furnishings, and in a very dim electric ceiling light, in an atmosphere still of Indian decorousness (shoes taken off at the entrance and left inside the front door), to be looking at Indian faces expressing Indian welcome and civility, and to hear in Indian-English voices, relishing the moment of theatre, that I was among gangsters.”

[...]

“The leader was sitting alone on a fat, over-stuffed sofa. Like a prince showing favour, he asked me to sit beside him. He was dark, with a well-formed mouth with a full and curved lower lip, and with prominent eyes with well-defined eyelids – the kind of features that were stressed by the artists of some Rajput courts.”

Their stories are stories of gang rivalries for territory, in which the leader and his audience are happy to take part; they are mostly young men, whom Naipaul initially mistook for Muslim boys, to finally find out they were Hindus who claimed they were religious and protected by Santoshi Mata, the late version of Mother Durga, the Goddess of power. They claimed themselves more principled than their Muslim counterparts, who, they think, are from the lower station, and worshipped by their community as warriors, while they are hated by the Hindus as outcasts. Concealment is their calculated purpose, and studied display is to bring them in the limelight of the proverbial role-model of the benevolent bandits. Whatever roles they act, in their role-acting they expose themselves to Naipaul’s keen eyes.

But Naipaul knows India remains India, with all those diversities. The Muslim members of the crime world, according to Anwar, offer namaz-e-tawbah five times a day, and read the Koran more regularly than the ordinary Muslims. They act eventually as the defenders of Islam, their faith. The Hindu gangsters offer puja of Santoshi Mata for protection. Indians in general are religious minded, and their daily existence is full of rites and rituals. The ritualistic side of the Hindu religion requires a class of priests to perform it. While describing Bombay Pujari class, Naipaul does not insist on the general traits and temperament of the class, but introduces us to individuals who look like characters in a novel. The experienced pujari’s success story is his speed in chanting the holy verses at a wedding ceremony – three hours only, instead of six – which accounts for his nickname, “Electric Pujari”. He also made money by recording the pujas and selling the tapes abroad. But the younger pujari, to whom Naipaul devotes almost ten pages of his book, prefers the traditional way of reciting the puja and of observing the religious teachings he had received in the ashram:

“He looked inwards always. But – we were in Bombay, a city of many faiths, and races, and conflicts. How did he see the city? What did he feel when, for instance, he saw the tourists around the Gateway of India and the Taj Mahal Hotel? What did he feel about the crowds, the people among whom he – in the pujari’s garb – would almost certainly stand out?

I’m indifferent to it...

He looked inwards and was serene; he shut out the rest of the world. Or, as might be said, he allowed other people to keep the world going. It wasn’t a way of looking which his fellows in the community had (some of them in the Gulf, among Muslims). But it made him a good pujari.”

And the succession of characters continues, this time with two writers: the former is a once-successful screen-writer, and the latter is an unusual blend of writer, politician, Dalit, and Dalit leader. Naipaul has not done away with his usual humour, sometimes verging on irony. His mockery is more than often a nice stroke of his art, such as it is in his story of the failed screen-writer. This unnamed script writer entered the arena with a preconceived idea of the great artistic excellence of the writing itself, and got entrapped into the intricacies of the commercial movie industry; his first story offered to a great actor, was about the Punjabi emigrants. It was not overtly rejected, but the dream factory wanted something different. At the end of the visit, Naipaul makes a surprising connection between the screen-writer's refined artistic taste, and the posters advertising a new product of the Bombay film industry, on the background of the long line of chawl people, patiently waiting to worship Dr Ambedkar:

“[...] I thought of the writer in his apartment: such a setting for a man who talked of his craft with so full a heart and mind, such refining of his artistic experience: such a mismatch between dreams and setting. It was what had struck me on that first morning in Bombay when, on one side of the road, I had seen the long, patient line of people waiting to honour Dr Ambedkar, and, on the lamp standards on the other side of the road, the small, repeating posters for a new film, a product of the Bombay commercial cinema.”

Last but not least, Namdeo Dhasal, founder of the Dalit Panthers, and poet writing in Marathi, one of the official languages of India, took Naipaul by surprise: it was surprising to find out that there existed a living Marathi literature, “with all the high social organization that such a literature implied: the existence of publishers, printers, distributors, critics, buyers”. Malika, Namdeo's wife, was also an author – she had published her autobiography, a bestseller which offended the caste sensibilities of many of her readers. Almost thirty pages are devoted to this controversial couple: the woman, with her lack of inhibitions who had broken all the barriers to write about to write about her personal life, and the man, the poet-politician who had attempted to reform the Dalits. Namdeo and Malika are definitely no less than the usual characters of a picaresque novel, and Naipaul's interest in their life and activities is the interest of a novelist who wants to enjoy life around him by reordering his knowledge into a meaningful whole. Thus he attends an assembly in the brothel area, joining Namdeo whose sympathy for the prostitutes is understandable: he is practically a leader of the untouchables, the Dalits. Here is Naipaul's account of this unusual procession which only reminds of the pilgrimage to the ice lingam in the Himalayas, in *An Area of Darkness*:

“We went walking in the narrow lanes: the lights, the signboards, the booths, the people sitting out, some on string beds, in the shadows at the side of the lanes; the piles of wet rubbish, the smell of drains; prostitutes and their ‘mistresses’ and money lenders and prostitutes’ clients all part of the same display, the mixture of sex and innocence and degradation as undermining as in the poems of Namdeo's that the area had inspired.”

His presence should have added to the prestige of the event, though his Brahminic instinct might have surfaced when he simply wanted to run away from the scene. It is a strange pageant of the destitute of the Bombay society, people who, once treated like animals, now were treated like human beings. And again, this is all due to Ambedkar:

“[...] a greater understanding became possible of the long, patient line of dark men and women on one side of the road on the morning I had arrived: not just the poor of India, but an expression of the old internal cruelty of that poverty: people at the bottom, full of emotion, with no politics at that moment, just rejecting rejection.”



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In this book, Naipaul is hardly carried by his personal feeling about India as his ancestors' home, as he was during his first trip to the country in 1962. From 1962 down to almost the end of the century, his perception of India had changed, just as India too had changed. Wherever Naipaul pays his visit, he takes interest in the revealing particularities of life, mainly of the people he meets, people who reveal themselves, and therefore reveal the society they live in. Thus Rajan, whom he meets in Bombay, could supply him with exhaustive details of the three-generation history of his family – essentially a three-generation evolution of culture, from orthodox rigidity to latitudinarian flexibility, and socio-political crisis and cumulative forces of change over the years.

From Bombay Naipaul passes on to Goa for an entirely different experience – the remote colonial consequences for independent India – where he has contact with the unusual phenomenon of the complete Indianizing of the Christian cult of Infant Jesus who had been turned into a Hindu god with the endowed power of healing if properly approached. It is in Goa where Naipaul has the revelation of the powerful Portuguese influence half a millennium before:

“Haters of idolatry, haters of all that was not the true faith, establishers in Goa of the Inquisition and the burning of heretics, levelers of Hindu temples, the Portuguese had created in Goa something of a New-World emptiness, like the Spaniards in Mexico. They had created in India something not of India, a simplicity, something where the Indian past had been abolished. And after 450 years all they had left behind in this emptiness and simplicity was their religion, their language (without a literature), their names, a Latin-like colonial population, and this cult, from their cathedral, of the Image of the Infant Jesus.”

Naipaul does not hesitate to comment on the absorption of everything Portuguese in the long “colonial emptiness.” The statue of Camoens, the author of the *Lusiads* (1572), the epic of the expansion of Portugal and Christianity overseas, had been replaced with that of Mahatma Gandhi after the Independence. To the writer, there was nothing complicated in the history of Goa: “the 450 years of Portuguese rule was like a single idea that anyone could carry about with him. To leave Goa, to go south and west along the narrow, winding mountain road into the state of Karnataka, was to enter India and its complicated history again”. Goa is part of the history of India before the coming of the British, and – as so often happens with Naipaul – his remarks have the appearance of final verdicts:

“To read of events in India before the coming of the British is like reading of many pieces of unfinished business; it is to read of a condition of flux, of things partly done and rather partly undone, matters more properly the subject of annals rather than narrative history, which works best when it deals with great things being built up or pulled down.”

Goa remains for Naipaul a simple history of colonial rule, redeemed long after and restored to the mainstream of Indian culture with only a scar upon it of foreign invasion. Camoens is for Naipaul the Portuguese counterpart of Spanish Cervantes, an adventurer, the first European to write about India, as early as 1572, seven years after the fall of Vijayanagar. The Portuguese invasion of Goa was then a rare non-Islamic external force encroaching upon the already expanding areas of influence of Muslim rulers. According to Naipaul, “Hindu India was on the verge of extinction, something to be divided between the Christian Europe and the Muslim world.” But Naipaul's apprehension has not come true because,

“[...] through all the twists and turns of history, through all the imperial venturing in this part of the world, which that Portuguese arrival in India portended, and finally through the

unlikely British presence in India, a Hindu India had grown again, more complete and unified than any India in the past.”

Naipaul proceeds according to a plan in his attempt to form an idea of true India, particularly as it is shaping itself now. Christianized Goa is experiencing a Hinduite metamorphosis – the worship of the image of the Infant Jesus is just one step towards Hindu idolatry and mysticism. There is only one explanation to it:

“The land was sacred, but it wasn’t political history that made it so. Religious myths touched every part of the land outside colonial Goa. Story within story, fable within fable: that was what people saw and felt in their bones. Those were the myths, about gods and the heroes of the epics, that gave antiquity and wonder to the earth people lived on.”

From Goa down South through Karnataka to Kerala the journey is not only physical, but a sort of Pilgrim’s Progress. He cannot but acknowledge a visible change in the people’s material situation, in the better look of the fields, which looked rich and well-tended, in the tidy look of the village houses, quite opposed to the destitution he had seen 26 years before. Even the farmers looked a little better than the “walking skeletons” he used to meet in 1962, and increased supply of food was undeniable. Obviously, “Hundreds of thousands of people all over India, perhaps millions of people, had worked for this for four decades, in the best way: very few of them with an idea of drama or sacrifice or mission, nearly all of them simply doing jobs”. Accompanied by his guide and friend Deviah, Naipaul embarks himself in a pilgrimage of discovery, but the ‘deities’ he visits are the people he meets and their households; one of them at least has turned it into his own, private temple.

One by one, Naipaul’s characters continue to reveal themselves: Dr. Srinivasan is the chairman of the Indian Atomic Energy Commission was the son of a Brahmin priest, a purohit; Subramaniam was also from a Brahmin, science-oriented family, whose grandmother divided the world into three parts: Raja’s Land, Raja Seemay (Mysore State, where everything was good and pleasant); Kumpani Seemay, the Company’s Land (East India Company); and the rest of the world. Subramaniam tells him from his family history, marked by the Indian philosophical turn of mind, and his father’s research mentality that to him closer to leading scientists. Here is Naipaul’s comment on what he termed ‘Hindu awakening’:

“My thoughts, as I had driven down from Goa, through the untidy but energetic towns, full of the signs of growth, and then through the well-tilled fields at harvest time, had been of the Indian, and more specifically, Hindu awakening. If Subramaniam was right, there was a hidden irony in that awakening: that the group or caste who had contributed so much to that awakening should now find itself under threat.

Another man of science, Pravas, describes the wind of change more explicitly; his is a more scholarly approach, he is more penetrative and more metaphoric. He presents a picture of his family in such a philosophical way that it assumes the effectiveness of acknowledged universal truth. The excellence of Pravas’s language matches the excellence of his interpretation of Hinduism which he calls “a trinity-based religion”, which offers three options for everything, even for the food: sattvik (mind-oriented), rajasik (work-oriented), and tamasik (no orientation). The analytical and at the same time, visionary Pravas senses the changes in the Indian society, which he attributes to education:

“Education and ambition by themselves would have taken people nowhere without an expanding economy. Perhaps, even, the expanding economy explained the shift in Indian education. For Pravas, an engineer, the expansion had started some time before

independence, when the old British emphasis on law and order (especially after the Indian Mutiny of 1857) had been modified by the idea of development.”

This encounter with Pravas takes Naipaul back to his native Trinidad, for whom Hindu theology had become alien and obsolete, half-possessed or totally abandoned, “part of a more general cultural loss, which had left many with no strong idea of who they were. That wouldn’t happen in India, however much ritualism was left behind, and however much the externals changed”.

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And Naipaul marvelled at the newness of the new world, of the speed with which people travelled – everything happened so fast that many of them had a success story to tell, sometimes their own, and more than often that of a member of their family. The pageant continues, with the characters revealing themselves under Naipaul’s scrutinizing eye.

Kala – a diligent and methodical woman – was grave, self-possessed and educated. Her story was that of her grandfather’s who, as a boy in a Brahmin colony in Madras, would read his book below the street lamp, “acting out ambition, and struggle, and self-denial, doing the virtuous thing he and his parents had heard about”. He would later rise to power and wealth. To Naipaul, her story was a proof to Pravas’s words, that with the development of the Indian economy, people had been sucked in and taken upwards. Kala’s portrait is the portrait of the modern woman in the conservative Hindu society, then on the march. Her account of her family life and the hardships her mother had encountered, with a touch of cruelty in it, reminded Naipaul of his own life in native Trinidad:

“Cruelty, yes: it was in the nature of Indian family life. The clan that gave protection and identity, and saved people from the void, was itself a little state, and it could be a hard place, full of politics, full of hatreds and changing alliances and moral denunciations. It was the kind of family life I had known for much of my childhood: an early introduction to the ways of the world, and to the nature of cruelty. It had given me, as I suspected it had given Kala, a taste for the other kind of life, the solitary or less crowded life, where one had space around oneself”.

Under the circumstances of the ritualized Hindu family life, “mothers-in-law were required to discipline the child brides of their sons, to train the unbroken and childish girls in their new duties as child-bearers and household workers, to teach them new habits of respect, to introduce them to the almost philosophical idea of the toil and tears of the real world: to introduce them, in this chain of tradition, to the kind of life and ideas they had been introduced to by their own mothers-in-law.”

Prakash, a minister in the non-Congress state government of Karnataka has another success story to tell. In India as elsewhere, a political position is a power position, and he who holds this position becomes a dramatic actor. And Prakash is no exception. He acts to hold his position and enjoy the privileges thereof. But democracy has considerably changed the common people’s position, and role in society: they have become voters who cannot be ignored by the politicians looking for power. This where, in the game of power, the matter of caste wins prominence again:

“Caste [...] was the first thing of importance. A man looking for office or a political career would have to be of a suitable caste. That meant belonging to the dominant caste of the area. He would also, of course, have to be someone who could get the support of his caste; that meant he would have to be of some standing in the community, well connected

and well known. And since it seldom happened that the votes of a single caste could win a man an election, a candidate needed a political party; he needed that to get the votes of the other castes”.

Whoever he is, whatever his caste – in a land of acute caste-discrimination, particularly in the South – Prakash is a power-centre, fully pampered by the state-machinery at a tremendous cost. His six years’ ministerial position has altogether changed his style of life, to such an extent that his children could hardly know what the earlier standard of living was. The pre-independence pious vanguards of Indian politics had a track-record of self-sacrifice and privation. The post-Independence politics has gradually and steadily U-turned towards selfishness and self-indulgence and finally to corruption of all kinds.

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Then there is the story of a real Maharaja of Mysore, as told by one of his closest employees, a pundit and an expert in Sanskrit Scriptures and astrology. Both the pundit and the Maharaja are striking figures reminiscent of pious state principles of Indian origin. The pundit lives a life of devoted, arduous discipline, and the maharaja a life of opulence, yet they meet at a point of sacred culture. The Maharaja’s power and the pundit’s piety thoroughly synchronized in a sort of mutual understanding. Naipaul’s interview with the surviving palace pundit revealed to him only one side of the personality of the Mysore Maharaja; the other side, very tragic, is picked up from various local sources, and contribute to the writer’s personal scrutiny of the changes the Mysore palace has gone through.

The encounter with Sugar, an old friend he had met during his first voyage to India, is a revelation: gentle Sugar has become a Holy man and, when he wants to take Naipaul to the Mylapore temple where he worshipped, Naipaul finds the invitation a little unsettling. His personal knowledge of Hinduism acquired in Trinidad contained some of the basic elements: the pujas, ceremonial readings from the ancient Indian epics and the scriptures, the shrine and the sacred fire, the sound of a bell and a brass gong, but “The idea of the temple to which Sugar tried to introduce me – the idea of the sanctum, and the special temple deity at its centre – was very far away, even a little unsettling”. Sugar’s attitude towards his friend is unequivocally Hindu: he is sure that in another life – in his “last birth” – they both had met. Naipaul might have been his brother, friend and father – an unexpected remark, to which the writer has no comments.

All in all, his encounter with Madras is entirely revealing: the evidence of Indian culture surrounding him – the pyramidal towers of the Mylapore temple – gave him the feeling that “the culture was still whole and inviolate; that I was seeing what the earliest travellers had seen.” Nevertheless, there is a political, more radical side to his experience:

“After my introduction to the brahmin culture of the South, this was my introduction to the revolt of the South: the revolt of South against North, non-brahmin against brahmin, the racial revolt of dark against fair, Dravidian against Aryan. The revolt had begun long before; the brahmin world I had come upon in 1962 was one that had already been undermined”.

The unchanged Sugar gives way to all those obvious changes around him. Besides the political turmoil, Naipaul directs his irony towards a new type of hero, a nameless character known as ‘Periyar’ – the Tamil word for sage – and as the “Prophet of the South”, whose portrait Naipaul draws in heavy, satirical strokes. Periyar was anti-Gandhian, just as he was anti-Congress, yet he totally departed himself from Gandhi’s path

of reformation. Gandhi remained a pious Hindu to the end of his life; he only wanted to introduce Catholicism in the arid uncharitable Hindu rigidity without inciting hatred for any other religious community, the Muslims included. The Periyar was a Hindu iconoclast, a rationalist and an atheist who ridiculed Hindu Gods and who began a hate-campaign against Hindu discipline in the name of fighting Hindu rigidity. This is how Naipaul describes him:

“Gandhi was a vegetarian. Periyar made a point of eating beef. Gandhi struggled to control the senses. Periyar ate enormous quantities of food, and was enormously fat. One of Periyar’s admirers told me, ‘He was a glutton.’ And, in this reversal of values, the word was intended as praise. ‘He always had a biriyani – rice and mutton, beef, pork. He was never fussy about food. Gandhi was always fussy about his food’”.

Periyar’s memorial in Madras gives the visitor the full title of the Prophet of the South: Periyar the Prophet of the New Age, the Socrates of South East Asia, Father of the Social Movement and Arch Enemy of Ignorance, Superstitions, Meaningless Customs and Baseless Manners. There is also a famous incantation with which he began all his discourses: “There is no God. There is no God. There is no God at all. He who invented God is a fool. He who propagates God is a scoundrel. He who worships God is a barbarian”. On a more practical level, the Self-Respect Marriage introduced by the Periyar is essentially a non-negotiated, mutual selection type of marriage; the ceremony is not conducted by a Brahmin priest, but non-Brahmin elite of their choice. It is after all a raw kind of rationalization of human conduct and social ethics in a total disregard of the established order and principles. At the end of the Madras chapter, with all its ‘Little Wars’ going on, Naipaul pays a farewell visit to his old friend Sugar who, exercising his gift of prophecy on himself, invites Naipaul to come and see him again in two years, before it is too late:

“He shook his head and, slumped in his chair, his illness and solitude now like pure burdens, he let his glance take in the little space that he had made his own – the drawing-sleeping, without the furniture jumble I had first seen there, with the holy pictures on the wall and the hanging shelves with his headache tablets, the adjoining hall between the kitchen, which he couldn’t clean himself and which he could allow no one else to clean, and the temple room with its forbidding images – the little space he was soon to vacate”.

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It is all in the title of the book, and Naipaul did not make it a secret: this third voyage to India was meant to cover all the main spots of social and political unrest in the country, the locations of the ‘million mutinies’ – both religious or caste conflicts, and regional secessionist movements. We have already seen the Shiv Sena movement of Bombay, with its Dalit supporters, and the Maharashtra chauvinists, the open anti-Brahmin, Periyar attitude so visible in Madras, the Maoist movement in the South, with their fierce battle against caste hatred and class hegemony – one of the million mutinies on the go. As regards Calcutta (now, Kolkata), in his earlier tours of India Naipaul did not penetrate too deep into the Calcutta scene; this time, he returns to Calcutta for an inner view of the city and its socio-political cultural surroundings.

In “After the Battle” he re-encounters two of his previous contacts, such as Chidananda, a former ‘boxwallah’ – an executive of a British tobacco company. Now, the two meet in Shantiniketan, the home of peace, founded by Tagore’s father and turned later by the poet into a Universal University – Viswa Bharati – trying to revive India’s ancient heritage of knowledge and culture in the closest contact with nature. Naipaul is very much

interested in the Rammohan Roy, the founder of the Brahma Samaj Cult, and harbinger of the Bengali Renaissance.

His other contact in the area is Dipanjan, an ex-Naxalite [3] during his student days. From Dipanjan's accounts – but also from those of his wife, Arati – Naipaul can form an idea of the very quick sweep of revolutionary Left-wing activities that could easily draw into the upsurge bright young students like Dipanjan, only to drop them aside when no longer necessary to the movement. Another Leftist contact, and an insider to the movement, is Debu, an executive and a high party official fifteen years or so after the Naxalite revolution. Debu contributes with fresh memories of his role in the Communist Party, of his actions among poor rural people, but also of vandalism and destruction. Both Dipanjan and Debu are selfless revolutionaries, ready to sacrifice much of their self-interest, spurred by a high idealism in their wish to contribute to an oppression-free humanity, only to be ultimately disillusioned by the movement. Naipaul's attention is focused on the steady deterioration of the city of Calcutta, and the political disorder of the already partition-fractured Bengal. The Leftist rule, as he views it, has augmented Bengal's socio-economic problems, and a long rule has done more harm to the once British-planned second city of the British Empire. He acutely feels that the crisis of culture and civilization, which Tagore had visualized, has come to Calcutta. Naipaul reaches a rather pessimistic conclusion: Bengal earlier led India into a great cultural and intellectual engagement; now, Bengal is the leader in acute class conflicts of Maoist extract. Naxalbari of Bengal infects the South and the West of India in different forms of secessionist and nihilist misadventure, and the Bengali bhadrakok [4] culture has completely ceased to exist.

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Naipaul entitled his next chapter “The End of the Line”, by which he means the end of the line for Muslim India. It deals with a different kind of degradation of an old culture in another part of the country – Lucknow – where Rashid, one of the contacts, and his family know very well the history of the Nawab's rule of the state of Oudh, and have seen the failure of the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. Naipaul is not so much interested in finding characters, but in discovering India in one of its unique phases of its political and cultural development. The result of the partition of the subcontinent into India and the two wings of Pakistan practically destroyed the unity of the Indian Muslims; many of the middle class Muslims migrated to West Pakistan, where they lost their distinct Lucknow culture, while those who remained, now live a ghetto life. The present Muslim population – the transvestites included – conveys a sense of degeneration, their education limited to rudiments of Koranic learning. Naipaul cannot but follow the change after change in the history on Indian revolutionary movement. He seems all acquainted with the realities of India, and the creation of the Muslim state of Pakistan:

“Pakistan came into being ten years later. And then – as though he hadn't fully worked out the consequences of the creation of Pakistan: Lucknow was in India, and many hundreds of miles away from Pakistan – the Raja found that he had made himself a wanderer. It wasn't until 1957 that he committed himself to the state for which he campaigned. In that year he became a Pakistani citizen; with the result that, during the Indo-Pakistan War of 1965, all the Raja's property in Lucknow, the palaces and land, were taken over by the Indian government as enemy property.”

Apparently, Naipaul's Lucknow tour strikes a personal, sensitive chord in the writer. Rashid, his guide to Lucknow, does not remain a mere impersonal guide, he has something of Conrad's Marlow, turning personally emotional when he takes Naipaul

around the ruins of the British Residency and the Palace in the old city. And Naipaul reacts correspondingly:

“What was pain for Rashid was also pain for me. I couldn’t read with detachment of the history of this part of India. My emotions ran congruent for a while with those of Rashid; but we grieved for different things. Rashid grieved for the wholeness of the Lucknow world he had been born into, the world before partition. This world would have had elements of old Muslim glory: the glory of the Kings or Nawabs of Oude, and before them the glory of the Moguls. There was no such glory in my past. Russell’s journey from Calcutta to Lucknow lay in part through the districts from which, almost 20 or 25 years later, my ancestors migrated to Trinidad, to work on the plantation there. That was the India I was looking for in Russell’s book.”

The book Naipaul refers to is William Howard Russell’s *My Diary in India in the Year 1858-9*. Russell was the special correspondent of *The Times* sent to India on the special mission of covering the 1858 Lucknow Mutiny. Reading the book again after his third Indian voyage, Naipaul had a much deeper understanding of the events described in the book, which suited the accounts of Rashid and, then, Amir – whose ancestors had been given the Kaiserbagh Palace nine years after the looting done by the British soldiers. What Naipaul tries to find in Russell’s book is not the glory of the Nawabs of Oude, and of the Moguls before them; he is looking for what he calls “the lesser India” – that India which, during the war, went on working in the fields, building fortifications, and looking for positions as servants to the conquerors, “an India engaged, without ever knowing it, subduing itself”. Russell’s book is, for Naipaul, a difficult book, but also another example of a travel book on India written by someone before him:

“The trouble I had with the book was a trouble with history, a trouble with the externals of things he described so well. There was such a difference between the writer and the people of the country he was writing about, such a difference between the writer’s country and the country he had travelled to. The correspondent’s job for *The Times*; the British army telegraph, which he used to send his ‘letters’ to the paper; the talk of railways and steamers – Russell’s world is already quite modern”.

Before Russell, the eighteenth-century scholar Sir William Jones had translated *Shakuntala*, the Sanskrit play, into English, and brought it to the knowledge of the world. It is one of the ambiguities of the British rule in India, and Naipaul does not hesitate to comment on his own family past of migration from the Gangetic plain, a quarter of a century after William Howard Russell had crossed it in imperial style:

“It fills me with old nerves to contemplate Indian history, to see (perhaps with a depressive’s exaggeration, or a far-away colonial’s exaggeration) how close we were to cultural destitution, and to wander at the many accidents which have brought us to the point where we can in a way meet William Howard Russell, even in those ‘impressions made on my senses by the externals of things’, not with equality – time cannot be bent in that way- but with something like lucidity”.

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“Woman’s Era” is both the title of the chapter and the title of a magazine for women and an opportunity for Naipaul to develop on the unique evolution of Indian periodicals for women. There was no women’s magazine in India before Independence. In his inquiry, Naipaul manifests an obvious Indian sympathy: at first he could not really appreciate the Women’s Era, for its apparent banality then, he had second thoughts about

it. A careful reading revealed to him an appealing quality of the magazine, which never disgraced an existing custom, unless it proved too offensive, and taught its readers how to make the best use of it. Naipaul's appreciation of this manner of approaching everyday problems the Indian women were facing evinces his own changed tolerant attitude to Indian culture and a bit of understanding too.

With Vishwa Nath, the editor of *Women's Era*, he discusses one of the basic problems of Indian family life: women getting married with dignity and preserving their dignity afterwards. He is a different kind of an iconoclast – very much different from the Periyar – raging against the Brahmins who have so long nursed a weak-kneed imbecile culture of rigid parochial self-purification to the awful neglect of a strong nationhood. Gandhi-ji had been his idol who first awakened a sense of Indianness, a kind of patriotic sense that could at once undo the caste barrier for a united stand against the foreign oppressors. The rage of the editor turns to a reformist's mission, at least for Indian women. His seemingly revolting outlook has a softening touch – a deep respect and consideration for the sanctity of the Indian family, for India as a nation, and for Indian culture. *Women's Era* alone settles the matter of his essential Indianness: “And so the magazine which had at first appeared so characterless to me, so dull, began to say more, began to create a whole new world of India, a whole new section of urban Indian society which wouldn't have been easy for me to get to know”.

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In “The Shadow of the Guru” Naipaul makes a further incursion into modern Indian history:

“To awaken to history was to cease to live instinctively. It was to begin to see oneself and one's group the way the outside world saw one; and it was to know a kind of rage. India was now full of this rage. There had been a general awakening. But everyone awakened first to his own group or community; every group thought itself unique in its awakening; and every group sought to separate its rage from the rage of other groups”.

Naipaul's power of synthesis is again at its best. Back in New Delhi, he comments on the pre- and post-Independence India; in the background, the capital-city of the nation seems under siege. Another mutiny – one of the million mutinies – is going on. The Sikh community, by force of their uncommon resilience, survived the shock of Partition, and still more rigidly than ever claimed their separate identity. While interviewing people like Gurtej from amongst the Sikh community, Naipaul could hardly miss the main point – the Sikh grievance against the Hindu community and Indian government, an acute sense of persecution, the old pattern of persecution from the Moguls made into a new form in the present times: the Gurus had suffered from Mogul hegemony, the modern Sikhs after Independence suffer from Hindu hegemony.

As always, Naipaul interviews different members of the community from different layers of the society, almost in the spirit of a creative writer, creating his world and filling it with characters. He begins with Gurtej, a man oddly under the influence of a wrong mentor like Sardar Kapur Singh who could be definitely considered an interesting character in a novel. Naipaul interlinks scraps of interviewed accounts and patient reading for a realistically integrated character image of Kapur Singh – the intellectual villain – and Gurtej, the dupe. Gurtej serves as Kapur's spiritual heir and both reveal a significant trend of Sikh fundamentalism in post-Independence India.

It is not our purpose to go into all the details of Sikh history and fundamentalism. Naipaul takes his time to enter into details, and concludes that the Naxalite terror in Bengal



and elsewhere is not at all a fundamentalist, separatist movement, but a movement directed against social injustice. To the contrary, the Sikh movement is separatist in its essence; it is a movement started from a sense of persecution, real or misconceived, and carried on in a sort of retaliatory vendetta. It very much resembles the Islamic jihad – there is no Prophet after Mohammad, and no Guru after the 10th Guru.

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In November 2012, while in India, Naipaul shocked the audience of a literature festival by declaring that he would not write about India any longer, for the reason that he had already written enough. It is a statement which partially explains his final chapter of *India: A Million Mutinies Now* which he decided to call “The House on the Lake: A Return to India”. In a way, such a statement rounds up the Indian trilogy which Naipaul, the “fearful traveller”, wrote over a span of over two decades. We are back in Kashmir, where he had spent four months and a half in 1962, which remains for him a memorable experience, not because of the place itself, and not because of the grand scenery of the Himalayas, but mainly because of his association with a number of interesting people. It is an opportunity for Naipaul to travel back in time, and connect his previous Indian experience with the present one, with his own family past and history:

“The India I had gone to in 1962 had been like a place far away, a place worth a long journey. And – almost like William Howard Russell a century before – I had gone by rail and ship from London; rail to Venice; ship to Athens; ship to Alexandria; ship to Karachi and Bombay. Twelve years before, I had travelled to London from the island of Trinidad. There, as the grandson and great-grandson of agricultural immigrants from India, I had grown up with my own ideas of the distance that separated me from India. I was far enough away from it to cease to be of it. I knew the rituals but couldn’t participate in them; I heard the language, but followed only the simpler words. But I was near enough to understand the passions; and near enough to feel that my own fate was bound up with the fate of the people of the country. The India of my fantasy and heart was something lost and irrecoverable.

The physical country existed. I could travel to that; I had always wanted to. But on that first journey I was a fearful traveller.”

### **Conclusions:**

How about the million mutinies? They are there, they have been there, supported by all possible kinds of excesses: group, sectarian, religious, regional. It seemed to Naipaul that the beginnings of self-awareness and of an intellectual life were already negated by old anarchy and disorder. Because,

“What the mutinies were also helping to define was the strength of the general intellectual life, and the wholeness and humanism of the values to which all Indians now felt they could appeal. And – strange irony – the mutinies were not to be wished away. They were part of the beginning of a new way for many millions, part of India’s growth, part of its restoration”.

When the book was published in late 1990, it was received with general acclaim: good reviews, excellent sales. The London Sunday Telegraph reprinted large extracts of the book; Naipaul went on paid lecture tours in the USA, and was awarded the Premio Nonino and the British Book Awards prize for the best travel book of the year. From the impressive number of favourable reviewers, I will only quote Auberon Waugh who found that the cruelty – which marked his previous Indian travelogues – had disappeared from

Naipaul's wit: "He has become a gentler, kinder, infinitely more tolerant person. His sympathies extended to everyone, the religious and the anti-religious, even to the Muslims."

On Nov. 5 2012, The Times of India surprised its readers by bluntly stating that Naipaul is not going to write about India and the Indians any longer. Naipaul, at the venerable age of eighty, had attended The Mumbai LitFest, where he was offered the prestigious award for Lifetime Achievement.

Here is a longer excerpt from this article:

"Naipaul engaged in a moving discussion on the challenges of travel writing, his early struggle as a budding author, his experiences and exploration of India, and the death of his pet cat Augustus, presented by Dhondy last year.

"My background is Indian and I have always been interested in it (India)," he said on his decision to travel in India in 1962 for his next book "An Area of Darkness".

"When I started writing, I wanted my experiences to stay with me... I didn't want the time to pass... the book was based on my internal discovery of India," he said.

"Naipaul then shocked and saddened the audience with his next remark. Saying he has written three books on India – two novels and one essay "as thick as a book", he declared he would not write on it any longer."

"I have written enough," he said.

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[<sup>1</sup>] (According to the complex Indian caste system, the Dalits are the untouchables, people who were doing "impure jobs". Mahatma Gandhi decided the term "Hajiran" – Children of God" – should be used instead. Nowadays, Gandhi's term is considered derogatory.)

[<sup>2</sup>] (Patrick French, in his Authorized Biography, mentions the interviewees' reactions to Naipaul's note-taking technique. One example is that of a writer from Madras, who was answering Naipaul's questions. Only one sentence of one of his answers was written down by Naipaul. When the book was published, there were "ten or twelve pages [...] so accurate, every full stop and comma" (French, p. 450). Actually, Naipaul was frequently asked about his note-taking technique: it looks like an amazing ability combined with a prestigious memory. None of Naipaul's interviews were recorded by magnetic means.)

[<sup>3</sup>] ("Naxalite" refers to different Communist groups of Maoist extraction. The name of the movement comes from the Naxalbari village in West Bengal, where the movement originated as a section of the Communist Party of India (Marxist).)

[<sup>4</sup>] (It is a Bengali term which literally means 'gentleman', or 'well-mannered person.' It gradually came to designate a new class of 'gentlefolk' who achieved prominence mostly during colonial times in Bengal (1757-1949).)

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