Chapter III

The Indian Trilogy: Soaring Over the ‘Wounds’ and ‘Darkness’

This chapter focuses on Naipaul’s attempt to comprehend and critique the socio-political and historical issues of India being dealt with in his three books on India and how far he has succeeded in distancing himself from the objects of observation with objectivity. An attempt is made to examine Naipaul as a writer with an ambivalence of perspective and to trace the development of his responses to India from a strong colonial bias to a mellow tone. It also sheds light on how Naipaul is guided and influenced by the Western Knowledge of the Orientals in the delineation of India’s culture, history and philosophy.

An Area of Darkness is Naipaul’s first book on India written during his journey in quest of his roots in a land from where his grandfather had migrated to Trinidad as an indentured labourer at the beginning of the last century. His account of India as recorded in this book woefully lacks understanding and empathy. He appears to be very much hostile to the people he writes about. He writes on India to provide an authentic ‘guide’ to India for the West. One may genuinely doubt whether his observations of
the facts about India are related to the ‘civilizing mission’ of Imperial England. Though the book is hailed in the literary world for its gripping narrative, lucid descriptions and eloquent prose, one wonders how it could be so hypercritical, and negative, so cynical, and irritating about a land, and its people of a great past and glory. As a traveller in the cultural spaces of India, he anatomises the customs, traditions and social mannerism of India with the eye of a Westerner.

Naipaul visited India for the first time in his thirties with a preconceived notion and prejudiced mind to depict only the dirt and squalor of India devoid of any cultural values and glory. The first city that he visited was Bombay which he felt ‘faceless’. He writes:

Now in Bombay I entered a shop or a restaurant and awaited a special quality of response. And there was nothing. It was like being denied part of my reality. Again and again I was caught. I was faceless. I might sink without a face into that Indian crowd. I had been made by Trinidad and England; recognition of my difference was necessary to me. I felt the need to impose myself and didn’t know how. (43)
He refused to be part of a faceless crowd and expressed the fear and horror of being part of such a crowd. Naipaul puts it as follows: “And for the first time in my life I was one of the crowd. There was nothing in my appearance or dress to distinguish me from the crowd eternally hurrying into Churchgate station. In Trinidad to be an Indian was to be distinctive” (43). But he soon admits that he has come to terms with the vast physicality of India on his second visit ten months later and wonders at his earlier phobia and hysteria about it.

Naipaul records the phenomenon of Indian defecation in public with his masterly contempt, lofty scorn and noble disdain in the chapter titled ‘The Colonial’. What he is trying to do is to take detestable note of people’s living condition and unhygienic life. He writes:

Shankaracharya Hill, overlooking the Dal Lake is one of the beauty spots of Srinagar. It has to be climbed with care, for large areas of its lower slopes are used as latrines by Indian tourists. If you surprise a group of three women, companionably defecating they will giggle: the shame is yours, for exposing yourself to such a scene. (69)

Naipaul’s strategy is to pretend to be non-attached to the nations he visits and make the readers believe that his writings are absolutely clear-eyed and
honest. Some of the observations on India and Indian life might be partly true but it is not the whole truth. He gives the picture of the Indian habit of public defecation in such a way as if to imply that the whole of India defecates publicly. Thus he adds:

Indians defecate everywhere. They defecate, mostly, beside the railway tracks. But they also defecate on the beaches; they defecate on the hills; they defecate on the river banks; they defecate on the streets; they never look for cover. (70)

Of course, there was a good deal of truth in it. But what is shocking to the Indian readers is the way he attempts to make a partial truth as the whole truth. He has endured harsh criticism from the Third World for this kind of scathing portrayals of India. Most Indian critics feel that Naipaul said unpleasant things about India. His characteristic tendency to pick out selective details and wrap them with over-generalisation is more offensive. The way he chooses selective details for his own conveniences reflects a Eurocentric view of the colonial experience. Naipaul’s anti-Indian stance pronounced in this book invites sharp criticism from the renowned Punjabi writer and critic Darshan Singh Maini who writes as follows: “Of course the thing which made Naipaul’s book ultimately famous was Naipaul’s
discovery of defecation in India. The long wry ode has justly brought his dividends in the West” (100).

Nissim Ezekiel, one of the leading Indian writers in English, is highly critical of Naipaul’s book though he concedes Naipaul’s many ‘condemnatory judgments’ and appreciates the art of telling the details. Ezekiel sees Naipaul’s delineation as ludicrous exaggeration and reckless generalisations based on his prejudices. One wonders how such a gifted writer could be so dark and gloomy in his reporting of his ancestral land which he visited in search of his identity. Ezekiel observes:

Let me pause to explain that I see India in most ways as Naipaul sees her. All he says against the grossness and squalor of Indian life, the routine ritualism, the lip-service to high ideals, the petrified and distorted sense of cleanliness and a thousand other things, all this is true. My dissatisfaction is with his mode of argument, his falsifying examples. (95)

C.D. Narasimhaiah also takes Naipaul to task for his unsympathetic attitude to Indian society. He makes a pertinent observation on Naipaul’s delineation of India’s way of life as follows:
If I may permit myself a little levity, Naipaul’s writing is the sophisticated equivalent of the cumulative image of bullfighting, bear-baiting and gladiatorial contests with which European society entertained its steak-fed, sensation-seeking spectator. The medium has changed, the message remains. And Naipaul has undertaken the civilizing task of laying bare the defecations, the smells, the darkness, the festering wounds and the misplaced beliefs of the backward societies as if to invite the attention of the white man to resume the burden he has shed. (222)

Naipaul creates an impression that he is opposed to the division of caste and makes a conscious effort to subvert his brahmanic upbringing. He writes: “I came from a family that abounded with Pandits. But I had been born an unbeliever. I took no pleasure in religious ceremonies” (32). He goes on to say that all of Hinduism that remained with him was: “a vaguer sense of caste and the horror of the unclean” (32-33). But a close reading of the same chapter reveals some traces of the brahmanic outlook in the author when he was a student at school. He puts it thus:

In the science class at school one day we were doing an experiment with siphons, to an end which I have now
forgotten. At one stage a beaker and a length of the tube were passed from boy to boy, so that we might suck and observe the effects. I let the beaker pass me. I thought I hadn’t been seen, but an Indian boy in the row behind, a Port of Spain boy, a recognized class tough, whispered, “Real brahmin! His tone was approving”. (34)

This can be taken as a fine example of the ambivalent perspectives of Naipaul on religion. In his refusal to go through the Janaywa or thread ceremony, he tries to convince his readers that he is against religious rituals. As a born atheist, he is very sceptical of the Hindu ceremonies and rituals from his early days. But on further reading the reader gets a very obvious picture of two contradictory strains in the book- Naipaul’s denial of religious faith and his deep-rooted Brahmanism which clings to rituals and tradition. He elucidates how he was infuriated when traditional and old customs were not revered during the Diwali festival in Bombay. See how he puts it:

I had rejected tradition; yet how can I explain my feeling of outrage when I heard that in Bombay they used candles and electric bulbs for Diwali festival and not the rustic clay
lamps, of immemorial design, which in Trinidad we still used? I had been born an unbeliever. Yet the thought of the decay of the old customs and reverences saddened me. (36)

He expresses his view that India’s wretched caste system was a classification based on descent and occupation. He is perturbed by the rigid hierarchy of the caste system in India which implies a barbaric division of labour and condemns it as a decadent and heinous practice of treating some people as untouchables. He writes that: “In India it implied a brutal division of labour; and at its centre, as I had never realized, lay the degradation of the latrine cleaner. In India caste was unpleasant; I never wished to know what a man’s caste was” (34). But it would be interesting to note that a writer like Naipaul, portrayed in the literary world as one who writes about greater things like caste, community, race and the marginalised people in the Third World, shows an offensive way of thinking. In an interview published in the Literary Review, he justifies the existence of caste system which he has denounced earlier and talks to Farrukh Dhondy: “I think differently about caste now. I understand the clan feeling, the necessity of that in a big country” (8).

Naipaul’s disgust and disdain for the deprived can be noticed again in his biased view on reservation of jobs for the untouchable. He writes thus:
“Reserving government jobs for the untouchables helps nobody. It places responsibility in the hands of the unqualified; and the position of untouchable civil servants, whose reputations always go before them, is intolerable” (80). His high origin and colonial background gave him a caste certainty and high sense of the self. It was not easy for him to get rid of the conditioning of the Trinidad society of his upbringing where caste and religion had become an institution that would protect the identity of the people who had migrated to an alien world. The ambivalence he creates in his perspective on religion and caste identity is very obvious in the text and there is a conscious effort on his part to convince the readers that he is strongly opposed to the division of caste, since it is based on the degradation of human beings. He has expressed his views on caste and clan in an article appeared in India Today. He writes: “Old caste and clan boundaries can’t disappear. They are people’s support system and I think they will be with us for a long time (24).

Naipaul always finds opportunity to invent novel arguments to discredit great Indian figures like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru in the text. He also makes more subjective and biased observations in his second text on India, India A Wounded Civilisation, which is examined in the same chapter. It is very pertinent to examine here the colonial mindset
of Naipaul who migrated to the West and used his Western education and knowledge to lambast the great leaders of the Third World countries and disparage their contribution to the national movements and rebuilding of the nations.

In the chapter titled *The Colonial*, Naipaul tries to identify himself with Gandhiji’s colonial blend of east and west. It presents Naipaul’s much disputed hypothesis on Gandhiji. He writes:

He (Gandhi) saw India very clearly because he was in part a colonial. He settled finally in India when he was forty-six, after spending twenty years in South Africa. There he had seen an Indian community removed from the setting of India; contrast made for clarity and discrimination for self-analysis. He emerged a colonial blend of East and West, Hindu and Christian. (73)

He says that Gandhiji’s vision was colonial and explains further that it was Gandhiji’s ‘colonial’ vision and his critical ‘South African Eye’ that made him different from other Indians. He links the sanitation in India to caste system which filled the country with filth. But Gandhiji could see the maladies of India and delink the caste moulds from a man’s function in
society, says Naipaul. He was deified but his message was lost. He writes: “India undid him. He became a Mahatma. He was to be reverenced for what he was; his message was irrelevant” (80). He seems to believe that the ordinary native Indians lack the clarity of vision that Gandhiji had because they ignore the obvious. An Indian reader may not agree with his observations that Gandhiji’s message was ‘irrelevant’ and his was a ‘colonial’ vision. But Gandhiji is, for all Indians, an emblem of Indianness that Naipaul denies. He was an ardent patriot who made exhortations for correction of a habit, which he felt spoilt the atmosphere and was a source of social malady. But Naipaul, a pure colonial, viewing India from a perch through the Western eye, is more concerned with satirically categorising the stereotypes among the natives than with finding a solution for this malaise. Gandhian thoughts are now very relevant and have come under heavy scrutiny in the postcolonial discourse as pointed out by Robert J. C. Young:

The Subaltern Studies historians are in many ways sympathetic to Gandhi’s anti-elitist position, his espousal of the cause of the peasantry, his identification with the poor, the Dalits and all those pushed to the extreme margin of Indian society-subaltern-in a word. (352)
Naipaul continues his bizarre assessment of Gandhiji’s philosophy and achievements. He avers that symbolic action is the curse of the Indians and Gandhiji remains a ‘tragic paradox’.

Symbolic action was the curse of India. Yet Gandhi was Indian enough to deal in symbols. So, latrine-cleaning became an occasional ritual, virtuous because sanctioned by the great-souled; the degradation of the latrine-cleaner continued. The spinning wheel did not dignify labour; it was only observed into the great Indian symbolism, its significance rapidly fading. He remains a tragic paradox. Indian nationalism grew out of Hindu revivalism; this revivalism which he so largely encouraged made his final failure certain. (80)

But George Woodcock writes about Gandhi’s symbolic action as follows: “In his superb sense of timing, in his quick intuitive grasp of the balance of forces, in his instinct for effective symbolic action and in his grasp of the strategy of struggle, Gandhi was one of the most able politicians of his time” (45).

Naipaul’s myopic assessment of the great soul of India is quite unacceptable to the Gandhian followers who pooh-pooh his theory that
Gandhi was a revolutionary who became a god. Though rooted in Hinduism, Gandhiji stood for a synthesis of religious traditions. His Hinduism was not sectarian. It included all that he knew to be best in Islam, Christianity, Budhism and Zoroastrianism. He approached politics as everything else, in a religious sprit. But truth was his religion and ahimsa was the only way of its realization. Naipaul appears to be influenced by foreign press reports on India and Indian leaders and attempts to render a standard Western interpretation of things, of which he has no inside knowledge. He has disowned his place of birth (Trinidad) and the place of his origin (India).

Rashmee.Z.Ahmed has quoted the words of Edward Said who regards Naipaul as: “a master novelist and an important witness to the disintegration and hypocrisy of the Third, but in postcolonial world, he is a marked man as a purveyor of stereotypes and disgust for the world that produced him (21).

Naipaul, having expressed an Orientalist’s view and having completely identified himself with the West, presents the European idea of the Orient in his works on India. He consciously makes an effort to parade his intellectual authority over the Orient when he depicts the Indians as a people basically irrational, and having no sense of history. Thus he writes:

It is well that Indians are unable to look at their country directly, for the distress they would see would drive them
mad. And it is well that they have no sense of history, for how then would they be able to continue to squat amid their ruins, and which Indian would be able to read the history of his country for the last thousand years without anger and pain?

(201)

He immediately seems to be legitimizing and endorsing the British rule in India and urging the people to be obliged to Europe, despite the cultural and psychological damage wrought by long period of colonization. He adds: “And it was Europe that revealed India’s past to India and made its veneration part of Indian nationalism. It is still through European eyes that India looks at her ruins and her art” (206). Naipaul speaks in a tone of authority to express his disgust against the people of the land of his ancestry whom he considers to be inferior.

The most important factor that emerges while making a comparative study of Naipaul’s writings with other writers of Indian diaspora like Salman Rushdie and Bharati Mukherjee is a striking difference in tone, language and treatment of Indian themes and characters. Post-independence narrative establishes new metaphors of nationhood with an objective not only to rewrite history but also to create defining symbols for the purposes of imagining the nation. The most significant and iconic among such
narratives is Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, which comprises a medley of images, symbols and stories drawn from Indian myth, legend, history, Bombay talkies, street culture etc. These images are made to correlate with national self-perceptions. The novel makes it clear that India, itself is an excess and it develops into a complex figure for the plenitude of India. But Naipaul criticises everything that comes on his way in a language of derision and satire, criticises the great Indian leaders, the poverty of the country, the language, literature and art. Natwar Singh puts it succinctly:

> It is Mr. Naipaul’s unique achievement to have passed that amount of time in India without meeting a single worthwhile human being. He finds fault in almost everything he sees; the cities, villages, bureaucracy, railway, army. Even the Taj Mahal is not spared. (35)

Kashmir does not appeal to him and he is not interested in its complex historical past. The most beautiful and enticing monument, the Taj Mahal is ill-suited to India, according to him. It is very interesting to see how he puts it:

> The Taj Mahal is exquisite. Transported slab by slab to the United States and re-erected, it might be wholly admirable.
But in India it is a building wastefully without a function; it is only a despot’s monument to a woman, not of India, who bore a child every year for fifteen years. (206)

The Village of the Dubes is the last chapter in the book which records his visit to the ancestral village of his maternal grandparents with an IAS officer, might be in search of an Indian Identity. The name of the village is not mentioned except for a reference that it is a town in eastern Uttar Pradesh: “not even graced by a ruin, celebrated only for its connections with the Buddha and its backwardness” (252). It is not a satisfying experience for him and he is ready to reject his roots. He writes: “In a year I had not learned acceptance. I had learned my separateness from India, and was content to be a colonial, without a past, without ancestors” (252). He is dejected with Ramachandra, the head of the family who leaves him impatient and admits his own callousness and indifference to accept the poor, ill-clad man as his relative. He might have expected his ancestors to be prosperous and affluent like others in the village. But the stark reality he encounters there wipes out his wish to be identified with this family in anyway. Being a foreigner, he fails to understand the sentiments of his relatives and ends the chapter with a note of dejection that: “it ended, in futility and impatience, a gratuitous act of cruelty, self reproach and flight”
So at the end of the first visit, Naipaul seems to have an impression that India, the country of his origin, is only a world of myth and an ‘area of darkness’. In the same interview with Farrukh Dhondy already mentioned earlier, Naipaul explains the circumstances in which the book was written. He says:

Well, the truth was that I was shattered by India, by what I saw. The things I saw just seemed to be repetitive, and I didn’t think there was a book there. I felt there wasn’t a book in my travels. And for three months afterwards I did nothing. I was faced with the possibility of having to give the 500 Pound.(10)

His words make it very clear that he did not have any genuine interest to visit India and write about the land of his origin. He was left with no other option than returning the money to the publishers which he might have felt a bitter job. So he wrote the book.

Naipaul’s second travel book on India titled *India A Wounded Civilization* is a vivisection of the impressions he had gathered about India based on his travel experiences during his revisit from August 1975 to October 1976. An attempt is made here to analyze and critique his views
and representations of the socio-cultural, historical and political problems of India in a postcolonial context. Naipaul focuses on the intellectual depletion, socio-cultural inferiority and a lack of proper historical awareness of Indians, and the style he adopts makes him different from his contemporary postcolonial writers.

The 1980s, noted as a literary period of engagement with history and historiography, are enriched by a host of eminent writers like Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Shashi Tharoor, Kamaleshwor, Khushwant Singh and Bharati Mukherjee who have been part of a historical reviewing aimed at establishing an Indian cultural identity and historical heritage to assert an Indian self. Their writings interrogated the many myths implanted by the colonial rulers and the narratives that popularised these myths. But the same period witnessed writers like Naipaul who produced a large amount of work aiming at the Western audience and interpreted the Third World’s history in tune with the interest and satisfaction of the West. Naipaul’s position as an Indian diasporic writer is very much controversial in the literary world today and his love-hate relationship to India has been criticised as biased and parochial. C. D. Narasimhaiah lashes at him in an essay in *The Indian Critical Scene: Controversial Essays:*
The theme being India, does Mr. Naipaul make genuine effort to explore it by, what T.S. Eliot calls, surrendering himself to the object in front of him, or is he not, to invoke Eliot again, overpowered by an excess of his own emotions? (99)

It is a matter, beyond dispute that Naipaul is a successful and pioneering artist, who explores the new literary genre, with unmatched techniques, and narrative skill. But he appears to be blind and indifferent to an understanding of the people and their socio-cultural history that he represents in travel writings. His authorial voice, attitude and treatment of Indian themes and characters may not be acceptable to an Indian reader since they are very grotesque and unsympathetic to Indian society. The stance taken by Naipaul in *An Area of Darkness* with regard to his impressions of India and the ethnographic - political analysis remains unchanged in *India A Wounded Civilization* also. In the foreword of the book, Naipaul puts it as follows:

India is for me a different country. It isn’t my home and cannot be my home, and yet I cannot reject it or be indifferent to it; I cannot travel only for the sights. I am at once too close and too far. My ancestors migrated from the Gangetic plane hundred years ago; and the Indian community
they and others established in Trinidad, on the other side of the world, the community in which I grew up, was more homogenous than the Indian community Gandhi met in South Africa in 1893, and more isolated from India. (X)

This is a technique he adopts in the narration to mislead the reader that he cannot be indifferent to this country though it does not belong to him. The way the book begins is similar to that of the first book: a chaotic acceptance and rejection of India from a diasporic perspective.

The first part of the book titled ‘An old Equilibrium’ unravels the history of Vijayanagar, an old Hindu city founded in the fourteenth century. Naipaul believes that the destruction of the kingdom led to a permanent loss of human talent and intellectual capacity, which in turn, finally led to a loss of historical sense. He also expresses the concern that historical amnesia impedes the development of a healthy self-consciousness and sees Indian culture endlessly repeating its own truism. His chief concern is the ‘intellectual depletion’ caused by centuries of conquests. He is highly critical of the myth of Hinduism, which according to him, teaches only withdrawal, equilibrium and tolerance. He writes: “The crisis of India is not only political or economic. The larger crisis is of a wounded old
civilization that has at last become aware of its inadequacies and is without the intellectual means to move ahead” (8). His argument that the crisis faced by India is neither political nor economic, but that of being shackled to the dead past, shows his ideological preferences and conscious effort to distance himself from India.

Talking about Hinduism in the context of the ruins of Vijayanagar, Naipaul makes a more scathing and scarifying remark. He writes that: “the Hinduism Vijayanagar proclaimed had already reached a dead end, in some ways had decayed, as popular Hinduism so easily decays, into barbarism” (6). This naive attitude of considering Hinduism as decadent and barbaric shows an authoritative tone and Western superiority which hold the Orientals as uncivilized and devoid of any trace of culture. Naipaul shot into fame in the Western World chiefly for his controversial views on India and the other Third World countries. He presents the European idea of the Orient in his books as if he is in an infallible intellectual authority over the Orient. It is quiet relevant to note the words of Edward Said in this context: Orientalism is premised upon exteriority, that is on the fact that the Orientalist, poet or scholar, makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its mysterious plain for and to
the West. He is never concerned with the Orient except as the first cause of what he says. What he says and writes, by virtue of the fact that it is said or written, is meant to indicate that the Orientalist is outside the Orient, both as an existential and as a moral fact. (21)

Swami Vivekananda, the Hindu monk and a major force in the revival of Hinduism in India in the 19th century, is best known for his inspiring speech at the World’s Parliament of Religions, Chicago in 1893. He addressed the parliament and spoke that he was proud of belonging to a religion which had taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. Indians believed not only in universal tolerance, but also accepted all religions as true. He said he was proud of such a nation which had sheltered the persecuted and the refugees of all religions and nations of the earth. But Naipaul sees this generosity of India and its religion as a sign of weakness and decadence.

Naipaul appears to have little respect for India’s great history and glorious past when he shows his lopsided approach to and prejudice against India and its religion. He says that withdrawal, retreat, balance and equilibrium, the values taught by Hinduism, have crippled the whole nation and paved the way for foreign aggression. He puts it thus:
Hinduism hasn’t been good enough for the millions. It has exposed us to a thousand years of defeat and stagnation. It has given men no idea of a contract with other men, no idea of the state. It has enslaved one quarter of the population and always left the whole fragmented and vulnerable. Its philosophy of withdrawal has diminished men intellectually and not equipped them to respond to challenge; it has stiffled growth. So that again and again in India, history has repeated itself; vulnerability, defeat, withdrawal. (43)

Such a kind of negation is incredibly appalling to a reader who sees him deliberately turning blind to the history of India which has survived many aggressions and conquests. The adversity taught the country and its people bitter lessons but toughened its fibre. An altogether new, better moulded nation was born out of the myriad of problems that engulfed India after all these invasions and aggressions. As ShashiTharoor rightly points out:

India has survived the Aryans, The Mughals, The British; it has taken from each-language, art, food, learning-and grown with all of them. To be Indian is to be part of an elusive
dream we all share, a dream that fills our minds with sounds, words, flavours from many sources that we cannot easily identify. Muslim invaders may indeed have destroyed Hindu temples putting mosque in their place, but this did not—could not—destroy the Indian dream. Nor did Hinduism suffer a fatal blow. (57)

Naipaul’s reluctance to establish an Indian identity is the reason for his abject rejection of India’s history. He seems to be blind to the Indian mind shaped by diverse forces like the ancient Hindu tradition supported by many myths and scriptures, the impact of Islam and Christianity and finally the British colonial rule. We know that the colonial historiographers had started to give a communal interpretation to history. The fact that history is about the victors (stronger people or ideas) and the vanquished (weaker people or ideas) is consciously forgotten. Viewed from this point one finds Naipaul a victim of the colonial mindset.

Naipaul attempts to analyse the current political issues in India and profile some politicians in the context of the Emergency clamped on the country by Mrs. Indira Gandhi. Before going into the details, it would be interesting to see how Naipaul talks to Farrukh Dhondy about the book:
“Yes, the book is different. The result of an American commission. The publisher asked me to go and look at the Emergency that had been imposed on the country by Indira Gandhi’s government” (10). The larger question that looms on us is how far such a writer can be truthful and faithful in the portrayal and analysis of the political scenario of a nation when he is doing it for a foreign commission. He writes about the Emergency that: “after the unrest and drift of the preceding years, it brought peace to India” (35). This is an attempt to legitimise the Emergency considered by the whole nation as a political disaster. Every student of India’s political history knows well the real picture of the country before and after the Emergency. But Naipaul exonerates Indira Gandhi though he admits that there were excesses during the Emergency and loss of democracy and freedom. He puts it in the concluding part of the book as follows: “All the arguments about the Emergency, all the references to his (Gandhi’s) name reveal India’s intellectual vacuum, and the emptiness of the civilizations to which he seemed to give new life” (160).

This attitude of Naipaul is in sharp contrast to the views of Rushdie who depicted the Indian scenes, situations and characters in the postcolonial period and vehemently criticised Indira Gandhi and the
Emergency in his *Midnight’s Children*. To him, Emergency portended: “the beginning of a continuous midnight which would not end for two long years” (499-500). The proposal to dilute democracy came from no less a statesman than Indira Gandhi, the Prime Minister of India. The firmness with which the Indian electorate rejected the proposed move had a salutary effect in deterring other temptations in that direction. After being voted out of office and having dropped her plans to prune political and civil rights, Indira Gandhi reasserted her commitment to democracy later. Naipaul seems to appreciate Mrs. Gandhi and gives a passive support to Emergency and the controversies that followed. It cannot be taken for granted that it was born out of his adulations for Mrs. Gandhi. It can be related to his cynical concept about the land of his ancestors that he puts it in the end of the book:

> The crisis of India is not political: this is only the view from Delhi. Dictatorship or rule by the army will change nothing. Nor is the crisis only economic. These are only aspects of the larger crisis, which is that of a decaying civilization, where the only hope lies in further swift decay. (161)

Naipaul’s vivisection of Gandhiji in the third part of the book titled ‘Not Ideas, But Obsessions’ once again unveils how shabby and biased he is
in delineating great Indian leaders and inventing arguments to discredit them. He furthers the analysis of Gandhi that he had made in *An Area of Darkness*. His untoward and unpalatable remarks on Gandhi can be seen only as an attempt of a colonial writer to satisfy his Western readers. The first section begins with a lament that Gandhi’s autobiography, *The Story of My Experiments With Truth* lacks an objective view of the world. Though he spent three years in England, there is nothing in his autobiography about the English landscape, climate or season and: “no London building is described, no street, no room, no crowd, no public conveyance” (86).

Gandhi is accused of being too much concerned with internal life and not registering any response to external things. His failure to see this work only as an artless but faithful portrayal of Gandhi’s experiences is something conscious. Naipaul makes a casual remark, that, what is true of Gandhi’s autobiography is true of many other Indian autobiographies. But he does not show the intellectual honesty to mention the well-acclaimed autobiography of Nehru. Naipaul critically observes that Gandhian ideas lack objectivity and are highly personal. He quotes Tolstoy in this context to castigate Gandhi and writes:
Far away, at Yasnaya Polyana in Russia, Tolstoy, in the last year of his life, said of Gandhi, whose work he followed and with whom he exchanged letters: ‘His Hindu nationalism spoils everything’. It was a fair comment. Gandhi had called his South African commune Tolstoy Farm; Tolstoy saw more clearly than Gandhi’s English and Jewish associates in South Africa, fellow seekers after the truth. (88)

He stigmatizes Gandhi as a narrow Hindu nationalist whose philosophy, according to him, did not have a universal appeal and could not sustain the Indians. He puts it thus: “Gandhi had really little to offer these people. His experiments and discoveries and vows answered his own needs as a Hindu, the need constantly to define and fortify the self in the midst of hostility; they were not of universal application” (88).

Naipaul’s failure to comprehend the great contributions of Gandhi and Nehru in the Indian national movement and acknowledge their experiments, discoveries and vows can be attributed to his colonial mindset induced by colonial upbringing and education in Trinidad. He fails to see them as Third World nationalists who mistrusted and disdained imperialism that had subjugated their people as an extension of International capitalism. Gandhi saw India as pluralist, diverse and all inclusive. Indian nationalism grew like
a huge tree under Gandhi and Nehru; a nationalism not based on any of the
classical indices of national unity like religion, language, ethnicity,
geo-political or territory. It emerged from an ancient civilization sustained by
a pluralist democracy. It envisaged a secular nationhood and never
projected the concept of a Hindu Rashtra at any stage. As Anil Nauriya has
pointed in an article in *The Times of India*:

> Over emphasis, especially in Anglo-centric writings, on
> Gandhi’s religiosity has sometimes blinded scholars to the
> fact that Gandhi’s definition of nation is emphatically non-
> religious, non-denominational and secular in every sense of
> the term....and is shared by millions of Muslims, Hindus,
> Sikhs, Christians and others. (12)

C.D. Narasimhaiah writes that: “both Gandhi and Nehru have always
tried to integrate the outer with the inner life and not shut themselves up in
separate compartments—the bane of the West—which has led to neurosis”
(227). The worldview of the Gandhi – Nehru dynasty was moulded by a
strong opposition to British Imperialism. Nehru, like many Third World
nationalists, mistrusted and rejected imperialism that had subjugated the
people as an extension of international capitalism.
Naipaul continues arguing about India’s negative way of perceiving things and its ‘intellectual second-rateness’. In a typical Eurocentric perspective about the Third World, he says that India: “has little to offer the world except its Gandhian concept of holy poverty” and “is now dependent on every practical way on other, imperfectly understood civilization” (92).

He articulates the ‘inferiority’ of Indian writers both in *An Area of Darkness* and *India A Wounded Civilization* and sees India functioning on borrowed institutions from the West—the press, the education system, the judiciary etc. He writes:

> The Indian past can longer provide inspiration for the India present. In this matter of artistic vision the West is too dominant, and too varied; and India continues imitative and insecure, as a glance at the advertisements and illustrations of any Indian magazines will show. (113)

To him, India is incomplete and the creative side has died. He asserts that India blindly swallows its past and is indebted to Europe for whatever it can claim as its own. He puts it thus:

> India is old, and India continues. But all the disciplines and skills that India now seeks to exercise are borrowed. Even
the ideas Indians have of the achievements of their civilizations are essentially the ideas given to them by European scholars in the nineteenth century. (116)

The other great Indian leaders subjected to scanning are Vinoba Bhave, Morarji Desai and Jayaprakash Narayan whose ideologies and political actions are probed into. Naipaul finds none of them capable of providing India with an ideology of regeneration. He makes Vinoba Bhave appear like a character in a full scale comedy who failed to perform any role of creative change. He comments that Bhave: “is not a particularly intelligent man and, as a perfect disciple of the Mahatma, not original; his political views come close to nonsense” (146-147). He finds Morarji Desai’s Gandhianism as: “exhibitionist and hollow as the Gandhianism of the men he opposed; it offered nothing” (128). He cannot agree with Jayaprakash Narayan, since his appeal ‘Swaraj means Ramraj’ appears contradictory to him.

Naipaul’s queer mind continues underestimating and discrediting a leader like Nehru, a staunch anti-imperialist, determined to safeguard the country against foreign domination. Being an ardent democrat who always warned against the pernicious effects of Imperialism and autocracy, Nehru always fought against Western Imperialism. Resistance to colonial culture
came from the elite class when they realized the social and cultural facts of colonization. Fanon, Nehru, Gandhi and Cabral are examples of intellectual elites from the upper strata of the colonized nations who mobilized the subjugated people to rise up against and overthrow colonial domination, mainly through the medium of literature. In another interview to Dileep Padgaonkar in the ‘The Sunday Times Of India’, Naipaul says:

*India A Wounded Civilization* is what we have been talking about. It is about a conquered people. It is the refusal to accept this fact that explains the instinctive reaction to the book. This was a devastated people who felt smaller and smaller. (13)

Naipaul seems to have little respect for the land of his ancestors many years after the book was written. He has less understanding of the drastic changes that swept India between 1960’s and 80’s. His lopsided approach to the nation’s problems during the course of writing travelogues after travelogues remains static. Darshan Singh Maini is absolutely right when he says:

If the governing metaphor of the first book on India is that of ‘darkness’, reflected in its unflattering title, the metaphor of
‘wound’ extends Naipaul’s thesis in the sequel, written during the troubled and twilight period of “the Emergency”. For, *India A Wounded Civilization* (1997) is simply an example of the ‘neurotic’ in Naipaul, a compulsive return to a ‘strumpet’ that will not let him alone. (103)

*India A Million Mutinies Now* (1990) is Naipaul’s third book in the series of Indian Trilogy in which he appears to be a writer whose attitude towards this country has changed a little. Compared to his early books on India, the title of the book is less negative. It reveals a mellower tone of the author who has somersaulted a little bit. The various voices recorded from all walks of life tell him that India has changed and he confides that his own lack of understanding generated his earlier reactions:

> What I hadn’t understood in 1962, or had taken too much for granted, had been remade; and even the extent to which India had been restored to itself, after its own equivalent to the Dark Ages- after the Muslim invasions and the detailed, repeated vandalising of the North, the shifting empires, the wars, the 18th century anarchy. (602-603)

This change in vision after a gap of twenty seven years since his first visit shows Naipaul’s shift of perception from the *An Area of Darkness* and
India A Wounded Civilization. What he had found shocking and provocative now seems positive. He experiences a million mutinies breaking out in the margins: mutinies of caste, class and gender progressing towards the restoration of India. To him, leaders like Periyor, Thakare, Ambedkar and Bhindranwale have become icons of many assertions of identity by various socio-ethnic, religious and political groups in India. India appears to be awakened to vivacious and hectic activities and he writes thus:

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 skyscraper 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. (5)

But an ordinary Indian reader of this book may not agree with his attitude to the organizations like the Shiv Sena and the Sikh Movement, which, according to him, awakened India to a new spirit. He found Shiv Sena inevitable in the present Indian context. The separatist movement headed by
Shiv Sena in the name of Maratis (Maharashtrians) is one of the million mutinies referred to in the title of the book. He sees it as a positive movement towards the restoration of India and writes:

    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: of the state of Andhra, of Tamil Nadu, Assam, the Punjab. All over India scores of particularities that had been frozen by foreign rule, or by poverty or lack of opportunities or objections, had begun to flow again. (7)

This view of Naipaul is well reflected in one of his newspaper interviews with L. K. Sharma: “The Shiv Sena is a middle class movement and not that of downtrodden people. It is part of a larger self-making process. This process will take a long time. In India, you will have to live with movements like that for the next hundred years” (19). Any secularist who believes in the diverse history and social fabric of India will not agree with this view which is in sharp contrast to his earlier remarks in

*India A Wounded Civilization* on the Sena and its leader Bal Thackray. He puts it thus:
The Government feels that any one who has lived in Bombay or Maharashtra for fifteen years ought to be considered a Maharashtrian. But the Sena says no: a Maharashtrian is someone born of Maharashtrian parents. Because of its Xenophobia, its persecution in its early days of South Indian settlers in Bombay, and because of the theatricality of its leader, a failed cartoonist who is said to admire Hitler, the Sena is often described as fascist. (52)

It is to be genuinely doubted whether Naipaul’s soft-pedalling in the description of Shiv Sena, a political party which thrives on its anti-Islam prejudices, is part of his own anti-Islam stance for which he is always criticised in the literary world. If we look into his earlier writings, it is seen that he first digs up his Hindu past. Then he declares that Muslim invaders are responsible for destroying all that was good and great in India. Of course there is half truth in his exploration and investigation. In ‘IMMN’ also he expresses his dislike for the Muslim conquerors of India, who for centuries dominated and trampled over the country. But what baffles a reader is the way he ignores a more fierce havoc wrought by the British colonial rule which he often endorses as a positive gesture. He comments:
The British peace after the 1857 Mutiny can be seen as a kind of luck. It was a time of intellectual recruitment. India was set on the way of a new kind of intellectual life; it was given new ideas about its history and civilization. The freedom movement reflected all of this and turned out to be the truest kind of liberation. In the 130 years or so since the Mutiny— the last 90 years of the British Raj and the first 40 of independence begin increasingly to appear as part of the same historical period— the idea of freedom has gone everywhere in India. (603)

Naipaul always seems to be legitimizing and approving of the British colonial rule in India as a process of progress. He regards the unification of India under the British as the beginning of a national revival which led the country to the modern world with a knowledge of history and nationalism. But he never seems to have taken into account the great socio-political and cultural loss incurred on the country by the British Imperialism. It would be very pertinent to note the words of Shashi Tharoor in this context:

It is true that the British brought in the railways, the posts and telegraphs, a national administrative system with a well-
planned capital city, libraries, museums, and the English language; but all were instruments of British Imperialism, intended in the first place to facilitate and perpetuate British rule, and only secondarily to benefit those among whom these were introduced. It is also true that British rule gave India a political unity it had not enjoyed for centuries; but the British also sowed a variety of political disunity India had never experienced before in its long and tumultuous history, a disunity rooted in sectarianism. (14)

Naipaul’s disparaging remarks and attitude to India, the non-Arab Islam nations of the East and the African countries which he has visited should be studied in the context and background of his colonial preconceptions and prejudices. The post colonial theory voices the cultural identity of the colonized. The colonizer takes the stance that his countrymen brought law and stopped the primitive colonized from fighting among themselves. Edward Said writes that: “To have said as Curzon once did, that “the East is a University in which the scholar never takes his degree” was another way of saying that the East required one’s presence there more or less forever” (215). Naipaul too can be seen taking a similar stance in his analysis of the Eastern countries with views coloured by the
Western Knowledge of Orientalism. *India A Million Mutinies Now* is a fine example in which he quotes Sir William Jones, the founder of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784 and the British Judge of the Bengal Supreme Court in 1786. Being an Orientalist keeping in line with the Imperialists of the time, he opined:

> But your observation on the Hindu is too just: they are incapable of civil liberty; few of them have an idea of it, and those, who have, do not wish it. They must (I deplore the evil, but know the necessity of it) they must be ruled by an absolute power; and I feel my pain much alleviated by knowing the natives themselves... are happier under us than they were or could have been under the Sultans of Delhi or petty Rajas. (462-63)

The colonial historians always attempted to subvert the history of the colonized to suit their temperaments and interests and retain their hold on the colonies and their administration. The Whiteman’s superiority made the indigenous people conscious of their inferiority and the indispensability of dependence on him. George Otto Trevelyan, the 20th-century English historian and statesman makes this point clear and writes: “Is it difficult to
imagine how any business was done before we came into the country - how anyone ever made a road, or a boat or a journey” (258).

Naipaul is, of course, a great writer with immense literary achievements. But what distinguishes him from other writers of Indian diaspora like Bharati Mukherjee, Salman Rushdie, Anita Desai, Shashi Tharoor and others is his abject sense of rejection, negation and condemnation of his cultural background. In sharp contrast to Naipaul, Mukherjee is more accommodative and involved in understanding the Indian way of life and Indian situations. Rushdie can easily accommodate the pain and squalor of India without rage. Desai writes with an insider’s vision and Tharoor accepts the Indian plurality as a truth. But Naipaul is perhaps the only postcolonial diaspora writer treading a different path and expressing his views in tune with the imperialists who rule and subjugate the East with an Oriental Knowledge. George Lamming, the West Indian critic, cannot be disputed when he calls Naipaul: “a colonial ashamed of his cultural background” (225).