Chapter IV

On Wounds: A Wounded Civilization
"Dream of the society ruled purely by faith... that dream of the society of believers excluded me."
CHAPTER – IV

ON WOUNDS: A WOUNDED CIVILIZATION

V. S. Naipaul’s second book on India, *India: A Wounded Civilization*, marks the second stage in the development of his diasporic concerns. This book attempts to find answers to questions that raged all over in *An Area of Darkness*. It tries to gauge what is the “something” that has snapped, and where, and how, and why (*AAD* 207). When compared to *An Area of Darkness*, this book is more analytical in tone. The chaotic alteration between acceptance and rejection of India depicted in the earlier book is replaced by an ordered and organized search through history, sociology, politics and literature. However, it is similar to *An Area of Darkness* as concerns its starting point. This book too begins with the author and his mental makeup. That is how the perspective is defined as a diasporic one:

> India is for me a difficult country. It isn’t my home and cannot be my home; and yet I cannot reject it or be indifferent to it; I cannot only for the sights. I am at once too close and too far... A hundred years had been enough to wash me clear of many Indian religious attitudes; and without these attitudes the distress of India was- and is- almost insupportable. It has taken me much time ... to define what separates me from the country; and to understand how far the ‘Indian’ attitudes of someone like myself... have diverged from the attitudes of people to whom India is still whole. (*IWC* 9)

This book is based on his second visit to the Indian sub-continent in 1975 during the Emergency. This is a sustained diatribe against what he calls the
‘wounded civilization’ that the author painfully observed of his ancestral homeland. The India that he visited in 1975 was the India of the Emergency. His purpose this time does not seem to be one of a tourist’s interest but also one of a more serious critical enquiry. He observes, “An inquiry about India, even an inquiry about the emergency- has quickly to go beyond the political. It has to be an inquiry about Indian attitudes; it has to be an inquiry about the civilization itself” (IWC 9). Naipaul is engaged in an epistemological exercise, an inquiry, an analysis, a searching into the very foundations of Indian culture and civilization.

Naipaul looks at the history of India and observes that the numerous foreign assaults on the Indian civilization have only resulted in a number of wounds and thus India has become a wounded civilization. India is a country of ruins which accumulated year after year as the foreign attacks continued. The result has been that there are layers and layers of ruin everywhere-temple upon a mosque and a mosque upon a temple and so on.

In India: A Wounded Civilization Naipaul continues to explore his distance from and affliction with the land he had imagined, visited and revisited. Naipaul recalls his days in Trinidad and the rites and rituals performed by his family members,

My grandmother’s house was full of religion; there were many ceremonies and readings, some of which went on for days. But no one explained or translated for us who could no longer follow the language. So our ancestral faith receded, became mysterious, not pertinent to our day-to-day life. (Two Worlds)
His focus in this book is the extent to which ‘Indian attitudes’ based on Hindu philosophy and religion have determined the country’s political and cultural history. Naipaul tries to emphasize that the real emergency of India is not political, but psychological, since the stumbling block which prevents progress in post independence India is the fatalistic acceptance induced by the Hindu doctrine of Karma: “...the Hindu killer, the Hindu calm, which tell us that we pay in this life for what we have done in our past lives...” (IWC 15)

After Naipaul’s seemingly final rejection of India in An Area of Darkness, his second book comes as a surprise. His argument in India: A Wounded Civilization focuses on many points only fleetingly examined in his first book and in particular centers around an evaluation of Hinduism-historically, socially, intellectually, and politically. However, Naipaul’s concentration on Hindu India and total neglect of India’s Islamic heritage, not to mention the other religious minorities which continue to play an important role in all spheres of Indian life, makes the book less comprehensive than it might have been. Perhaps it might have been more appropriately titled “Hindu India: A Wounded Civilization”.

An Area of Darkness appears to underlie a great deal of Indian behavior. And Naipaul finds its influence everywhere in the complacency of a Rajasthani prince, in the perpetuation of beggary, in the Indian attitude to history and the past, and in literary works as diverse as the novels of R. K. Narayan, the plays of the Marathi dramatist, Vijay Tendulkar, U. R. Anantha Murthy’s Kannada novel Samskara. The concept of Karma is, therefore, the femme fatale of India and destroying it – “the turbulence in India this time has not come from foreign invasion
or conquest; it has been generated from within. India can't respond in her old way, by a further retreat into archaism." (IWC 8)

It is proved true in his analysis of Anantha Murthy's *Samskara*. Here Naipaul raises the crucial question analogous to the individual Calvinists' dilemma for the believer in Karma: 'Men are what they are, what they have been made by their previous lives' (IWC 15). But how does a man know his true nature, his form. Murthy's hero, the Acharya, the leader of a group of Brahmins, has always believed himself to be a man of goodness, but a sexual lapse forces him to revise his opinion of Karma. During a period of picturesque wandering, he undergoes a series of pollutions before deciding to return to the Brahminical brotherhood and confess his sins. In this connection Akhtar J. Khan's remark in *V. S. Naipaul: A Critical Study* deserves attention:

The Acharya's journey is of a spiritual growth and self discovery which remains within the Hindu tradition it is as surely a spiritual allegory as Defoe's account of Crusoe's regeneration and equally well suited to the novel. (27)

Besides Naipaul also analyses two novels of R. K. Narayan — *Mr. Sampath* (1940) and *The Vendor of Sweets* (1967). The ultimate aim of Naipaul in viewing these novels is in his own words: "the novel I had read as a novel was also a fable, a classic exposition of the Hindu equilibrium" (17). In the later novel, Jagan, the protagonist, is seen as a reflection of the bewilderment of post – independence India, where the old equilibrium has collapsed. He too encounters the active world and he too eventually beats a retreat. There is however, as Naipaul sees it, a fundamental difference between his withdrawal from the world and that of
Srinivas’s. His retreat is a travesty of the renunciation which ushers in the Vanprastha, the third ashram of the ideal Hindu life:

Jagan’s flight is not like Srinivas’s withdrawal, and is the opposite of the calm renunciation which Hinduism prescribes, when the householders, his duties done, makes way for his successors and turns to a life of meditation. The act of renunciation, implies an ordered, continuing world, chaos has come to Jagan’s world; his act is an act of despair; he runs away in tears. (IWC 30)

Gandhi ji appears again in this book and there are certain indictments which are simply the result of Naipaul’s confinement to Gandhiji’s autobiography only. Naipaul forgets that Gandhiji has many other writings to his credit where he has shown his aesthetic sense about nature, scene and scenery. It appears clear that he distorts Gandhi to suit his theory about the characteristic Indian identity by placing misguided emphasis on just one book by Gandhi, My Experiments with Truth. Erik Erikson rightly comes to defend Gandhi on this ground when he observes,

We face the general questions as to when in Gandhi’s life the Autobiography was written; why it was written at that time what sense it made in the context of Gandhi’s previous life; what community it was written for and what sense such communication made in the history of that community. (5-11)

Naipaul brings another allegation against Gandhi when he says that Gandhi had no sense of India as a nation. Here Naipaul appears very narrow and seems to misunderstand the real mission of Gandhi. He doesn’t take into account the personal psychology of Gandhi. He separates the sexual, religious and political realms in
Gandhi, and by denying or not choosing to examine their interdependence, he attempts to make Gandhi a crank, who accidentally led India to its freedom, in the context of his personality type. Erikson and Richard Spratt offer psycho-analytic analysis of Gandhi which explains the unique combination of Gandhi’s methods with politics.

Naipaul concludes that all Gandhi’s politics were for a private, religious end. He sees a split between Gandhi’s sexual, religious and political selves. Naipaul grants Gandhi activism only to reduce it to root self-absorption. Naipaul while considering Gandhi as a Mahatma in the old Hindu style derives that Gandhi made a transition essentially from an Indian value system to a new one.

Commenting on Naipaul’s criticism of Gandhiji’s personality and Gandhianism, C. D. Narsimhaiah in his article V. S. Naipaul: A Case of Bizarre Reputation reacts scathingly to Naipaul’s remark on Gandhiji, particularly against Naipaul’s accusation of Gandhi not being responsive to external things, of being a cranky theosophist and a proselytizing vegetarian and also being very prosaic in his autobiography. Narsimhaiah aptly disagrees with Naipaul’s view:

Gandhi was not a writer: he recorded with artless simplicity the story of his experiments with truth, which is the title of his book, not a literary autobiography. In any case Gandhi refused to be impressed by the things which Naipaul and the market place seem to value most. Mr. Naipaul is careful, such is his intellectual honesty; not to mention that incomparably better autobiography of J.L. Nehru which can stand the severest scrutiny of readers better endowed than Naipaul. 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. (113)

Naipaul makes another observation on Indian personality by relating it to what he calls the “underdeveloped ego” of an Indian. Naipaul quotes the views of Dr. Sudhir Kakar, a psychotherapist at Jawahar Lal Nehru University, New Delhi, and agrees with him that this underdeveloped ego is created by the “detailed social organization” of Indian life, and fits into that life. Naipaul’s attention is drawn to the peculiarly Indian way of perception. Kakar had characterized the Indian ego as “underdeveloped” and further propounded that the world of magic and animistic ways of thinking lie close to the surface, and the Indian grasp of reality is relatively tenuous. For Kakar, according to Naipaul,

...there seems to be a different relationship to outside reality, compared to one met within the west. In India it is closer to a certain stage in childhood when outer objects did not have a separate independent existence but were intimately related to the self and its effective states. They were not something in their own right, but were good or bad, threatening or rewarding, helpful or cruel, all depending on the person’s feelings of the moment. (IWC 102)

Naipaul approvingly mentions that Kakar further thinks that we Indians use reality to preserve the continuity of the self amidst an ever-changing flux of outer events and things. The Indian mode of perception is determined, for Kakar, by the mother, who

functions as an external ego of the child for much longer period than is customary in the west, and many of the ego functions concerned
with reality are later transferred from mother to the family and other social institutions... Each detail of behavior is regulated—the bowels to be cleared before breakfast and never after, for instance, the left hand and not the right hand is to be used for intimate sexual contact and so on. (IWC 102)

Naipaul’s observation that the chief defect of the underdeveloped ego is “defect of vision” is based on his complete misinterpretation of Kakar’s views. Naipaul should have waited for Kakar’s book The Inner World, which far from castigating the Indian ego in the fashion Naipaul does, is extremely sympathetic to it, and his views are widely divergent from those of Naipaul:

...without any push from his mother or other members of the family, the Indian toddlers take his own time learning to control his bowels and proceeds at his own pace to master other skills such as walking, talking and dressing himself. As far as the mother’s and family’s mean permit, a young child’s wishes are fully gratified and his enfolding capacities and activities accepted, if not with manifest delight, at least, with affectionate tolerance. (TIW 81)

All Naipaul’s ideas about Gandhiji are as baseless as his observation of Indian personality. He calls it the underdeveloped ego of an Indian taking the views of Dr. Sudhir Kakar, a psychotherapist at J. N. U., New Delhi, for supporting him. He believes that the detailed social organization of Indian life does not allow an individual to use his discretion as well as his liberty to survive in this world.

Naipaul opines:
Caste and clan are more than brotherhoods; they define the individual complexity. The individual is never on his own; he is always fundamentally a member of his group with a complex apparatus of rules, rituals, taboos.... (IWC 90)

Naipaul is completely wrong when he concludes on the basis of Kakar's hypothesis and his own belief: "The outer world matters only in so far as it affects the inner. It is the Indian way of experiencing..." (101)

Naipaul further analyses U. R. Anantha Murthy's novel Samskara to substantiate his thesis regarding the negative perception which is both the cause and result of an underdeveloped ego. The chief defect of Naipaul's estimate of India is that he looks at the country of his origin through foreign (western) glasses which present numerous unreal shapes when directed at lighted areas. His imperfect vision incapacitates him to properly comprehend the possible patterns inside and he is tragically deprived of a genuine and real view of Indian life outside his narrow vision. Naipaul's complete exercise to develop a theory of underdeveloped ego becomes null and void by its misplaced western model and its rigidity.

Like Nirad C. Chaudhary, Naipaul is of the opinion that Indians lack depth and there is no original and powerful thinking in their works. He holds that all the disciplines and skills that India now seeks to exercise are borrowed and they have no native tradition of critically analyzing their achievements or failures. Even the ideas of the achievements of their civilization, which the Indians hold in high regard, are in fact given to them by the nineteenth century European scholars.

Commenting on India's past, Naipaul writes:
India by itself could not have rediscovered or assessed its past. Its past was too much with it, was still being lived out in the rituals, the laws, the magic-complex instinctive life that muffles responses and buries even the idea of inquiry. (IWC 129)

Naipaul very truthfully describes the process by which real problem hazes out into superstition. He says that very often in India, rational conversation about the country's problem trails away into talk of magic, of the successful prophecies of astrologers, of the wisdom of auspicious hours, of telephonic communications, and actions taken in responses to some inner voice.

Naipaul writes:

It seems to be always there in India: magic, the past, the death of the intellect, spiritually annulling the civilization out of which it issues, India swallowing its own tail. (IWC 167)

This again is an evidence of what is meant by Naipaul possessing a 'traveller's vision'. His terrible generalization that sweep the Indian psyche, is too dangerous to be ignored. This tallies with Kipling's image of India, so dearly nurtured by the west. It is of India being a land of magic, snake-charmers and insufferable superstitions. The image that he projects is far-fetched and does not tally with reality. Naipaul is not hopeful about democratic institution in India. He believes that any attempt at modernization by Indians clearly reveals the confusions that India is caught in. In his opinion, India fails to democratize its institutions on the western model because it is still bound by "Dharma of caste" which infects politics, new and old. The law too is, in the final analysis, "underdeveloped" like the Indian ego and therefore, insensitive to reality and suffering. For Naipaul, therefore, the underdeveloped ego reveals itself
in every area of Indian activities. India strongly needs to undermine itself in some ways and lose its old security to cope with the new pressures. He is of the opinion that centuries of their subjugation to foreign rule made them intellectually parasitic on other civilizations:

To survive in subjection, they have preserved their sanctuary of the instinctive, uncreative life, converting that into a religious ideal; at a more worldly level, they have depended on others for the ideas and institutions that make a country work. The emergency—coming so soon after independence—dramatizes India's creative incapacity, its intellectual depletion, its defencelessness, the inadequacy of every Indian's idea of India. (IWC 134)

Naipaul further comments that Indians do not care to make 'political self-examination' and they cannot perceive that the faults lie within the civilization itself. Naipaul forgets the fact that the Indians whom Naipaul accused of incapability rejected the emergency and enthroned the opposition party, and further dethroned the opposition when they were found wanting in the ruling capability.

Not only this, Naipaul analyses Anantha Murthy's Samskaras to substantiate his views. Appallingly enough, but, Naipaul projects the wrong meaning of the novel. For him the theme of this novel is a 'loss of identity' but for A. K. Ramanujan, the translator of the novel from the original Kannada, the theme is 'the loss and the gaining of identity'. Naipaul's views on religion have been severely criticized by Narsimhaiah who points out Naipaul's disregard for religion:

He has consistently rejected religion. He is pleased in A Wounded Civilization that a hundred years (from India) had been enough to
wash me clean of my religious attitudes. I hadn’t thought that religion was such a filthy thing that he could dismiss it with relief while what he really needs to do is to expiate a pettiness. He is not in need of reminding that washing will not clean memories anymore than it did poor Lady Macbeth. Was he unaware of the irony of such a remark what with its unmistakably Shakespearean overtones the image ‘clean’ conveys? (CBR 66)

In A Wounded Civilization he dwells on the ‘Forgotten Empire’ of Vijaynagar at length only to assert “Religion has decayed, popular Hinduism has decayed into barbarism”. Mr. Anantha Murthy provides the stick for Naipaul in his widely known novel Samskara, where a meat eating Brahmin living with his untouchable mistress was denied the rite of cremation by his caste. Narsimhaiah continues:

While I have known of such men being censured and even excommunicated by swamis and village headmen, I haven’t heard of such inhumanity as denial of cremation to a dead man, and the body allowed rotting for three days in a small village community in South India. Naipaul was looking out for just this kind of material. He has a newspaper man’s nose for stench. (CBR 66)

The artistic accomplishment of Samskara is clearly beside the point for Naipaul and Anantha Murthy cannot feel placated by the emphasis Naipaul places on the theme.

This scathing criticism will naturally offend the admirers of V. S. Naipaul. Naipaul gives some brilliant insights into the Indian life. This book was received
with tremendous applause and a great sense of appreciation when it was first published.

Nevertheless a different perception that could have been made by eminent scholars or critics or even by Naipaul himself can be made about this book. Naipaul accepts that India has been wounded by intermittent assaults of foreigners and while he concedes that it has not found an ideology of regeneration, he negates his own, unconsciously made, conviction in a different concern. Talking about an old temple that had been defiled and destroyed by the British soldiers during war time, in ‘An Old Equilibrium’, he writes, “a thousand year old temple will live again: India, Hindu India, is eternal conquests and defilements are but instants in time.” (IWC 4)

These lines encapsulate the essence, the spirit of Indian civilization and culture. Though wounded repeatedly, being recuperative and resilient, India heals itself up and stands, willful and proud.

From the ‘Foreword’ two things are very clear. First, the perspective is a diasporic one and the book ought to be examined in that light. Second, the method of enquiry should also center round the author and his understanding of the history, society and literature of India, which would be different from the way rooted Indians look at these. The book is divided into eight chapters that are classified under three major parts which in turn mark the three major movements in the writer’s development of a prognosis about the maladies that ail India.

The first part titled ‘An Old Equilibrium’ is an analysis of the psychology behind the eternal “continuity” of India. Taking the example of the ancient kingdom of Vijaynagar, Naipaul unravels the systematic destruction of the kingdom that led to a permanent loss of human talent and intellectual capacity. This in turn also led
to a loss of historical sense. In this way the destruction was rendered complete and irreversible. A flourishing civilization contracted with each conquest and in the end, having no more reality to survive on, it drew on legend for sustenance. All the memories of terrible violence were forgotten and the only memories that survived were fabulous renderings of the glory of the past, before the arrival of the conquerors.

What happened in Vijayanagar happened in varying degrees, in other parts of the country. In the north, ruin lies on ruin: Moslem ruin on Hindu ruin, Moslem on Moslem. In the history books, in the accounts of war and conquests and plunder, the intellectual depletion passes unnoticed... (IWC 8)

The remnants of monuments which survived were the irrigation canals, palaces, a temple with rows of musical stones, columns that could be played, a broken aqueduct, and the ruins of a bridge, but the talent that had designed and built these had been wiped out. The kingdom of Vijaynagar was an area officially declared “backward”, with plans for its development. Life continued, pilgrims still thronged the ancient temples and in that, the continuity of India seemed to maintain itself, but this continuity was just a façade, a covering for the terrible rupture that had occurred with the loss of history, of creative expertise and of human energy.

Naipaul sees this contradiction repeating itself through out the country. Each time India was attacked, it lost its intellectual life and survived on legends of the past. A repeated process like this made India “archaic” because knowledge and talent was continually lost (18). As in Vijaynagar, in the rest of India too, this resulted in a big gap between the talent behind its ancient monuments and cities and
the deficiencies of the people who now inhabited these once flourishing areas. For ages, these gaps lay covered by the outward "continuity", but with the coming of independence, with the coming of five year plans, with the programmes for development of "backward" areas, this façade was blown off and the cracks and fissures showed. Indian nationalism had evoked the Indian past but post-independence development schemes were forward looking. National pride was directly linked to the glorious past. The glory of the present was yet to be built. This contradiction "cracked the civilization open" (18). The institutions for growth and development were borrowed ones and were therefore not bringing about desired results. The past, once so revered, was unable to provide an alternative for borrowed institutions and this was the crisis of India. Referring to the Emergency, Naipaul says:

The turbulence in India this time hasn't come from foreign invasion or conquest; it has been generated from within...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. (IWC 8)

Naipaul sees the crisis of India as the beginning of the loss of an old equilibrium. Earlier he had identified this equilibrium as being a mere façade to cover up a great imbalance. Although Naipaul does not say it, the disruption of this equilibrium and the consequent crisis can only be the beginning of a positive development. Another example of the old equilibrium is drawn from literature. Naipaul sees R. K. Narayan's unexamined sense of continuity as being a typically Hindu "simplification of reality" (21).

Is there, then, a political reason for interest in books from other countries? Does it depend on the size and power of the country one writes about? If this be so, Narayan may yet have a best-selling future. And I will if I continue to write about Trinidad.

He had earlier read Narayan's novels as social comedies. He now sees Narayan's work to be more akin to Hindu religious fables. A detailed analysis of Mr. Sampath follows. Here Naipaul sees in the character of its hero, Srinivas a misinterpretation of the ideas of karma and non-violence. Srinivas, a reader of the Upanishads has read the same meaning into the Hindu idea of Nishkaam Karma as the equivalent of non-doing. The Hindu idea advocates that a person must perform his karma without thinking or yearning for benefits, which are only illusions. It does not mean that a person should withdraw from all action. The dividing line is very thin and elastic, and so Srinivas slips conveniently into non-action. When Gandhiji declared non co-operation movement in 1921 and civil disobedience movement in 1929, he never intended this movement to be considered as non-doing.

Just twenty years have passed between Gandhi's first call for civil disobedience, and the events of the novel. But already, in Srinivas, Gandhian nonviolence has degenerated into something very like the opposite of what Gandhi intended. For Srinivas nonviolence isn't a form of action... (IWC 15)
The Gandhian idea of nonviolence was not passivity it was a form of action. This too is misread by Srinivas as “non-doing, non-interference, social indifference” (25). He resorts to a “form of self-cherishing” which is totally dependent on the action of others. “It depends on the continuing activity of others...the rupees arriving from somewhere” (23). Naipaul finds such an idea of religious surrender as being parasitic and degenerative. In the fate of Srinivas, Naipaul sees the fate of the vast Indian populace that had interpreted its religious philosophy in such a way that the equilibrium of their idea of themselves was maintained. They accepted distress as the divinely ordained predicament of humankind.

In the same vein, Naipaul records his impressions of the farm workers and labourers of North Bihar and Rajasthan. Bihar, which was once “the cultural heartland” of India, remained filled with cruelty and poverty more than two decades after independence. The people did not question. They had a resigned acceptance of suffering and poverty. Such total resignation left little ground for thoughts of change. In Rajasthan, Naipaul saw two different example of how ‘development’ had come to the state. He saw dams and irrigation schemes being worked on to remove their technical faults. In a model village, he saw peasantry involved in acquiring latest agricultural expertise. There was electricity in the village and all other outward signs of development, but the women were excluded from all this. They withdrew under their veils when the commissioner started one of his important discussions. In Bundi, which was once a center of art and had its own school of painting, Naipaul found that all its vitality had vanished. The Bundi castle was in a state of decay; the people of Bundi saw themselves as being completely dependent on the power of the authority and did nothing more than putting up an elaborate
show of their deference to authority. They were "less amenable to the commissioner's idea" (31). They were secure in their condition and the only passion that could move them was a passion for honour. Apart from this, they could not be moved to any form of action. Their world was lost and in order to maintain that old equilibrium, they had "retreated to their last, impregnable defenses: their knowledge of who they were, their caste, their karma, their unshakable place in the scheme of things" (32).

This was universally true for all Indians. For the Prince, who had lost his privy purse, for the woman who had married a foreigner, and for the vast majority that lived in villages and in towns. To them, India was a truth. Whatever happened to them happened in compliance to some divine master plan beyond human comprehension. India was not to be judged. It was beyond that. In this idea lay the foundations of the age-old equilibrium, which Indians conceived as the proof of the eternal continuity of India.

Naipaul attacks this idea in 'The Shattering World'. He begins by quoting R. K. Narayan- "India will go on"; and finds that even in the face of a crisis like the Emergency, the illusion of the old equilibrium survived, but there had been a change. Naipaul identifies this change in R. K. Narayan journey from Mr. Sampath to The Vendor of Sweets. The sweet-vendor Jagan is a Gandhian, a pious Hindu, who has worked for the independence of India, but he does not pay his sales tax. In the first place, Jagan has no idea of what independence or self-governance means. He cheats the very same government for whose sake he has bravely taken police beatings during the British rule. His idea of the nation is limited to his idea of Gandhi. Narayan jokes that if Gandhi had asked people to pay their sales tax, Jagan
would have surely done so. Naipaul sees in this double consciousness of Jagan a decadent idea of Hindu morality: “how many Jagans exist who, conscious only of their Gandhian piety, their personal virtue, have mocked and undermined the Independence for which they say they have worked!” (39).

Naipaul’s thesis is that the old equilibrium has shattered with the world opening up (entry of Jagan’s son with his foreign girlfriend). Independent India calls for a different kind of devotion in order to bring about progress. The old pastoral world cannot be re-established. Jagan’s world and ideologies could only spell more Emergencies for India. India needed to invest in science and industry. The “satire on ‘modern’ civilization” in The Vendor of Sweets is a proof of the violation, the shattering of the unity of the world in the fragile lives of people like Jagan (42). Jagan’s only purpose in his life was to maintain his own idea of purity, his own idea of Gandhianism. His fairness to his customers arose out of his idea of himself being pure and true and not because of any concern to the society, to the people. His idea of his world was restricted and fragile and so it broke. Jagan fled the world in anguish. His renunciation was not the calm, composed and self-willed renunciation advocated by Hindu philosophy. He found himself at a point of no return. He fled. This was the final shattering of the old world.

Naipaul has rightly evaluated the past of India, in matters of culture and heritage. The starting point of Indian civilization is still a matter of debate for historians. Some says 2500 B.C., others say 4500 B.C., whatever is the starting point it is well known that India has never attacked any country since thousands of years. Indian civilization never taught the lesson of unity. It is the land of saints, but
would have surely done so. Naipaul sees in this double consciousness of Jagan a decadent idea of Hindu morality: “how many Jagans exist who, conscious only of their Gandhian piety, their personal virtue, have mocked and undermined the Independence for which they say they have worked!” (39).

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these saints never contributed to the welfare of the country; never served in freedom fighting movements. Naipaul asserts:

Hinduism has not 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...its philosophy of withdrawal has diminished men intellectually and not equipped them to respond to challenge; it has stifled growth so that again and again in India history has repeated itself: vulnerability, defeat, withdrawal. (IWC 43)

The Emergency was also a symptom of the problem of the dismantling of the old world. It was a proof that the society had broken down. Unfortunately, in India it was seen as a mere political crisis “which it was in the power of Mrs. Gandhi or the opposition to resolve” (45). The newspapers, already censored, mainly concerned themselves with news of raids and arrests of people charged with economic offences. However, the emergency did not attempt to set things right. It showed off terror but “established no new moral frame...it held out no promise for a better regulated future. It reinforced if anything...the need to hide and hoard” (45). The problem needed a deeper resolution. Naipaul traces the chaos of the Emergency to the blunders that had followed Independence. The Jagans whose commitment to a kind of a “holy war” under Gandhi had won India its independence, were rendered directionless after independence. They had no idea of responsibility to the state and in the absence of any other means to include them in the process of growth, they had returned to their old world which was self-centered. Like Jagan, they thought that the government would function in some magical way
with no contribution or involvement from them. They had no idea of what
democracy required of them as citizens. The very idea was alien; they thought that
as always, “India would go on” (37), but when it did not, they did not know what to
do. However, the shattering of the old equilibrium was not to be seen as negative. It
was a positive beginning:

With independence and growth, chaos and a loss of faith, India was
awakening to its distress and the cruelties that had always lain below
its apparent stability, its capacity simply for going on... The old
equilibrium had gone... But out of this chaos, out of the crumbling
of the old Hindu system, and the spirit of rejection, India was
learning new ways of seeing and feeling. (IWC 38)

Naipaul reflects on the spirit of rejection. He finds Vijay Tendulkar’s play The
Vultures dealing with this theme. The Vultures is about the end of all reverences.
With the new opportunity of making money, the old values are lost and people
become more individualistic. There is “no pure past, and religion can provide no
retreat” (49). Tendulkar’s play marks a change in the Indian sensibility. The hero of
Sakharam Binder is a low caste man who works as a binder for a living. He has
rejected all those things which an Indian society holds dear. He has rejected caste,
religion, clan and family. He has not married but lives with “other men’s discarded
wives, whom he rescues from temples or streets” (50). His only faith lies in
honesty. At the end of the play he is destroyed but Tendulkar has portrayed him as a
hero. Sakharam Binder’s rebellion is thus a big leap from the rebellion of Jagan’s
son in The Vendor of Sweets. Naipaul describes his meeting with Tendulkar and in
it he finds another example of the fact that, for India, there could be no more
retreats. Tendulkar while working on a book on violence in India had traveled to various parts of the country. In Bihar, he had seen things, which "he had never believed existed" (50). But in his conversation, he talked of the beauty of the Ganga and did not refer to the tragic sights on its bank, in the villages and towns through which it flowed. Even Tendulkar with his new sensibility wanted to escape the horrors. He too yearned for retreat into the calmness of the old order in which these horrors did not show up. This past could not be claimed now. The past in itself had not been an egalitarian one. It "enslaved one quarter of the population" as low caste or untouchables (53). By doing this, it fragmented the society. These fragmented parts were as directionless as the rest of the people and India was in chaos. This is how the first section of the book defines India- as a land repeatedly wounded; now facing a revolt from the very same forces that once held it together.

Hinduism and the caste system are often thought as inseparable. The division of society into main four categories- Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Shudras- further divided into thousands of sub-castes, culminated in the establishment of yet another category, the Untouchables, who were considered outside the caste system altogether and were relegated to perform the most unpleasant tasks in the community, i.e., sweeping, skinning of carcasses and so on.

Taya Zinkin comments on the social importance of caste and feels that "the system provides the same stability, security and warmth as there was in Europe when men still thought of their station as God-given". Naipaul, too, acknowledges the importance of caste in the social fabric of India in his comment on the Indian girl's marriage to a foreigner:
But for the Indian woman a foreign marriage is seldom a positive act; it is, more usually, an act of despair or confusion. It leads to castelessness, the loss of community, the loss of place in the world. (IWC 36)

Naipaul has again a story concerned with the untouchable and his foreign benefactor:

Five years ago in Delhi I heard this story. A foreign businessman saw that his untouchable servant was intelligent, and decided to give the young man an education. He did so, and before he left the country he placed the man in a better job. Some years later the businessman returned to India. He found that his untouchable was a latrine cleaner again. He had been boycotted by his clan for breaking away from them; he was barred from the evening smoking group. There was no other group he could join, no woman he could marry. His solitariness was insupportable, and he returned to his duty, his dharma; he had learned to obey. (171-172)

The tale is related with appropriate pathos and supports Naipaul’s remark, “when the prop of family, clan and caste go, chaos and darkness come”. (103)

In ‘A New Claim on Land’ Naipaul records the undercurrent of movement in the middle and lower middle classes of India. It deals with the movement of the village population towards the metropolises and the creation of the new working class. ‘The Skyscrapers and the Chawls’ draws a contrast between the advancement of industrialized Bombay and the contradiction of un-accommodated workforce that makes its industries run. On one hand are the industries that need labour. On the
other is the problem of accommodation. The workforce that comes from nearby villages spills on the streets and pavements at night. "The poor are needed as hands, as labour. But the city was not built to accommodate them" (58). Glamorous skyscrapers provide a majestic sight at night. In their shadows live the chawl and pavement dwellers. Chawls were originally meant to accommodate the workers in the numerous textile mills in Bombay. Whatever be the constricting effects of chawl life, to own a chawl was to be established. There were other, poorer class of workers who did not even have access to the constricted chawl life. These people made their own colonies- squatters' settlement. Over the years, their settlements had grown into more organized residential areas and they had attached themselves to the Shiv Sena - the army named after the Maratha leader Shivaji. Naipaul notices a kind of movement here. At the very grass root level there was an attempt at a more organized community living. The interests of the individual in particular and the community in general were taken care of.

The settlements had Shiv Sena’s committee offices which were “dedicated as much to municipal self-regulation as to the Sena's politics: industrial workers beginning to apply something of the discipline of the factory floor to the areas where they lived” (64). Sena politics worked at different levels. Apart from political power, it inspired in the people at the bottom of the social ladder a sense of self-respect and belonging. The Sena committees, which were mostly run by enthusiastic young men, worked at improving the quality of life of the chawl and settlement dwellers and thereby also consolidated political goodwill and loyalty. Amidst all this movement towards a better life, Naipaul has noticed that the static rigidity of the relation between caste and work had remained as such. Although the
settlements were provided with municipal washing area and community lavatories, the task of cleaning up was left to the municipal sweeper. When the sweeper did not turn up, people just closed their eyes to the filth and continued with their life.

The Shiv Sena had its own political complications. "The Sena's army is xenophobic" (62), says Naipaul. On its agenda was a Maharashtra only for those born in Maharashtrian parents. On account of its great popularity with the masses, the Sena wielded tremendous political power. Its leader had revived the cult of Shivaji and had thus evoked in the masses, feelings of self-respect and power:

...the Sena is a great contracting out, not from India but from a Hindu system, which in the conditions of today, in the conditions of industrial Bombay, has at last been felt to be inadequate. It is in part a reworking of the Hindu system. Men do not accept chaos; they ceaselessly seek to remake their world; they reach out for such ideas as are accessible and fit their need. (63)

The Sena had built for itself a very large base because it aligned itself with the cause of the vast masses of the urban poor, which doubled and redoubled continuously. Naipaul observed that although the major movement in Bombay seemed to be urbanization—the coming up of skyscrapers and industries, the actual movement was taking place at a lower level. The dimensions of this grass-root movement were tremendous because it had begun to give the people an idea of themselves:

For the Sena man, and the people they led, the world was new; they saw themselves at the beginning of things: unaccommodated men
making a claim on their land for the first time, and out of chaos

evolving their own philosophy of community and self-help. (72)

Here one notices a sharp shift in Naipaul’s earlier observations of Bombay those he
had made in _An Area of Darkness_. In the character of the engineer who had taken
him to the squatters’ settlement, he saw a genuine vision, foresight and dedication.

“*The House of Grain*” also depicts a positive movement. This movement was
evident in the new development of Poona and also in the co-operative irrigation
scheme being laid down in a nearby village. Movement was to be seen in the
’vegraduate’ daughter-in-law in the Patel’s house, in people waiting for the morning
bus, in the zeal of the enterprising but shortsighted restaurateur turned water
supplier who accepted chapattis in lieu of cash. There was movement here, in the
co-operative digging of the canal and in the restaurateur’s water supply, but this
movement was less than productive. The efforts of this man digging his part of the
trench, or of the veiled Rajasthani woman brushing the dust with a rag could have
easily been rendered more effective and more productive by the application of
simple mechanical skills.

Naipaul’s visit to a village and his meeting with the village sarpanch and the
Patel laid bare a major reason in the unequal development of India. In this part of
the chapter, Naipaul takes a close look at the social mechanism of the rural Indian
society. The Patel, the biggest landowner in the village continued to be the
traditional symbol of power. The elected sarpanch, who ought to have been the head
of the village, was a mere puppet. The traditional loyalty to the Patel continued. He
was the actual master. Independence had not brought in many changes. His house
had all the amenities “Electric light, ready water, an outhouse: the Patel was the
only man in the village to possess them all…” (86). He owned land and he nearly owned the labourers that he employed to work on his land. Villagers were resigned to the fact that “what was for the Patel could not be for them” (85). That the Patel was progressive and not opposed to cooperative projects such as the irrigation scheme that was a bonus, a mark of his charitable and benign nature for which the villagers were thankful:

It was necessary to be in the village, to see the Patel and his attendants, to understand the nature of power of that simple man, to see how easily such a man could, if he wished, frustrate the talk from Delhi about minimum wages, the abolition of untouchability, the abolition of rural indebtedness. How could the laws be enforced?

Who could be the policeman in this village? (86)

Independence had brought development but that development had touched people unequally. The old pattern of the landed masters and landless labourers continued. Democracy and Panchayati Raj became toys in the hands of traditional power wielders. Officials, politicians and administrators were sucked into the pattern of the ruler and the ruled. Worse still, the instruments of democracy could easily be turned into instruments of a more organized oppression. Naipaul has explained the incessant flow of people towards the cities in this context. The people coming to cities were “fleeing not only from landlessness but also from tyranny, the rule in thousand villages of men like the Patel and the sarpanch” (89).

Another form of escape from oppression was to be found in the origin of communities of dacoits in central and North-western India. Naipaul does not explain this phenomenon in detail, but moves on to yet another attempt at an escape
from oppression—the Naxalbari movement in Bengal and Andhra. He calls it a
“tragic attempt at a revolution” (89). The tragedy of the Naxalbari movement was
that it could not explain its ideology to a people so used to “reverencing a master
and used for centuries to the idea of karma” (92). The ideology inevitably
degenerated into the “idea of the enemy” and was lost:

Naxalism was an intellectual tragedy, a tragedy of idealism,
ignorance and mimicry: middle class India, after the Gandhian
upheaval, incapable of generating ideas and institutions of its own,
needed constantly in the modern world to be inducted into the art,
science, and ideas of other civilizations, not always understanding
the consequences, and this time borrowing something deadly,
somebody else’s idea of revolution. (93)

‘A New Claim on the Land’ sees India on the move. The movement came into
being because the cities and the industries gave people an alternative to escape the
predicament of a humiliating and oppressed existence as landless poor in the Patel-
centric agrarian set up. Naipaul holds that any study of India that does not take into
account this movement at the grass-roots is “worthless”. This movement marked a
great shift from the ideas that ruled the country immediately after independence:
“The poor are no longer the occasion for sentiment or holy almsgiving; land reform
no longer a matter for the religious conscience” (93).

The last section titled ‘Not Ideas, but Obsessions’ deals with conflicting
ideas. The common thread that holds the last four chapters together is the idea of
India as a people struggling amidst their ambivalences, as victims of mimicry, as
people incapacitated by borrowed institutions for so long that any original action
could not be possible. Naipaul begins with Gandhi. Naipaul presents an original interpretation of the victories and failures of Gandhi. He attempts to find out the reason behind Gandhi’s great success in pre-independence times, his shattering failure immediately afterwards and subsequent degeneration of his ideas and ideals. Naipaul’s quarrel with Gandhi is that he energized people in an unprecedented manner and created a form of struggle to which the Indian psyche could easily relate, but having done that, he had left the energized nation to itself. He had shaken up a sleeping civilization but had not taught it to observe, analyze and understand itself. He had built a nation of followers with no leadership. All that remained in the name of leadership was endless mimicry.

Gandhi’s inward looking philosophy sustained him, but it could not sustain India. What would happen to a nation? What would happen to a nation of inward looking men to whom the outer world mattered only up to that extent to which it affected the inner? This, says Naipaul, was Gandhi’s defect of vision. Naipaul traces the seeds of this short-sightedness in Gandhi’s selective “blindness” to those external incidents or landscapes, which were not directly connected to his inner sphere of experiences, understanding or development:

Gandhi’s self-absorption was part of his strength. Without it he would have done nothing and might even have been destroyed. But with this self-absorption there was, as always, a kind of blindness. (100)

Quoting Sudhir Kakar, Naipaul concludes that the relationship of Indians to their outside world is more akin to a childhood stage when the person relates to the world through the mother. Similarly, Indians always turn inwards, seeking the security of a life ordered by society. Left on his own, the individual is lost because he has no
idea of himself. He can project himself only through the security of an ordered society with its lists of rules and rituals. Gandhi harnessed this unquestioning faith in truth and religion and baffled the British, but he did not know how to carry on. Independence was won, the enemy was defeated and the nation sat itself down in anticipation of a Ramrajya— a rule by Ram. To a people so used to being governed, the idea of Swaraj, self-governance did not strike home. So post-independence India withdrew into itself waiting for things to take care of themselves, waiting for Ramrajya to descend on the country. Taking the example of the character of the Acharya from U. R. Ananthamurthy’s novel *Samskara*, Naipaul expresses the great Indian reliance on non-action. The Acharya, a learned man, had not learned to analyze situations and offer solutions. He was content to scan books for answers. He had a great belief in God’s decision that would, through mystical falling of the flower, make itself known to him. Meeting failure in both cases, the Acharya is lost. People like the Acharya lead “instinctive lives, crippled by rules...they make up a society without a head” (109).

It was Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, better known as Mahatma Gandhi, who made it his life’s task to plead for religious tolerance, the eradication of untouchability and a change in the Hindu attitude towards excreta and sanitation. That Naipaul deems Gandhi’s endeavour unsuccessful is documented in *An Area of Darkness* in ‘The Colonial’ where the young, impatient, critical Gandhi, “a colonial blend of East and West, Hindu and Christian”, becomes Naipaul’s guide to a picture of India which “still holds” after thirty years. Naipaul opines, “this is the measure of his (Gandhi’s) failure” (AAD 73).
In *India: A Wounded Civilization* Naipaul finds faults in Gandhi for being “against untouchability, but not against the caste system” (IWC 155). It may be argued, however, that Gandhi knew only too well the insurmountable obstacles which would have faced him in undertaking the dismantling of the ancient caste system. By focusing on the most deprived group, the untouchables or Harijans (children of God) as he renamed them, he attacked the social evil at its roots.

It may be noted that the practice of untouchability has been outlawed by the Indian government and that special privileges have been constitutionally enshrined to further the educational, economic and social advance of the so-called untouchables. Thus it is surely shortsighted to dismiss these governmental efforts in the way Naipaul does: on the one hand he is adamant that “the psychology of caste has to be destroyed” if India is to progress, on the other hand he rants:

> Reserving government jobs for 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. (AAD 80)

Naipaul’s negative assessment of Gandhi in *India: A Wounded Civilization* goes even further. He blames Gandhi for his failure in importing into India the racial consciousness that marked his South African campaign; he blames him for having failed to provide an ideology for an independent India, for turning against the modern industrial world in favour of cottage crafts and village rule, and, above all, for subsiding into mahatmamhood:

> The difficult lessons of South Africa were simplified...in India; ending as a holy man’s fad for doing latrine-cleaning work of
untouchables, seen only as an exercise in humility, ending as a holy man’s plea for brotherhood and love, ending as nothing. (IWC 156)

It seems that Naipaul brutally oversimplifies Gandhi’s role in the shaping of modern India. Percival Spear sums up Gandhi’s objectives thus:

...in politics it was freedom from foreign domination, the welding of a united nation; in Hindu society it was the breaking down of barriers raised by caste and age-old custom. In society at large it was living as close to nature as possible. Gandhi envisaged a peasant society of self-supporting workers, with simplicity as its ideal and purity as its hallmark; the state would be a loose federation of village republics. He rejected the mechanics of the West along with its glitter and preached the necessity of hand spinning and weaving.

(History of India 199)

One doubts the wisdom of Gandhi’s rejection of industrialization or the political viability of his “Village republics”. Gandhi was not so much an astute politician but an idealistic social reformer who strove to weld the divergent social and religious fractions of India into a nation. That he did not succeed is now part of history: as an old man, isolated from political colleagues in Congress, he had to witness the undoing of his life’s work as India moved inexorably towards partition and the genocidal conflict between Hindus and Muslims.

Had Naipaul been content to dismiss Gandhi and critique the Acharya, he could have been written off as a casual observer who had no knowledge or understanding of India or of Gandhi. Naipaul attempts a study and an analysis of what differentiated Gandhi from the teeming millions that he led:
But there is an important difference. The Acharya is imprisoned in his dead civilization; he can only define himself within it. He has not, like Gandhi in England, had to work out his faith and decide where in the wider world he stands. (110)

Unlike the Acharya, Gandhi believed in action. Amidst the chaotic turbulence of energies released by him, that he could no longer control, Gandhi in Noakhali realized that he had “nothing to offer except his presence” (111). He realized that his philosophy was not equipped to deal with this new turn of events, but unlike the Acharya, Gandhi did not seek escape in non-action, in passivity:

...Noakhali. Sad last pilgrimage: embittered people scatter broken glass on the roads he is to walk... he has nothing to offer except his presence, and he knows it. Yet he is heard to say to himself again and again, ‘Kya Karun? Kya Karun? What shall I do?’ at this terrible moment his thoughts are of action, and he is magnificent. (111)

Naipaul holds that Gandhi, on account of his sensitivity to external experience, saw India very objectively. He knew how the Indian qualities of complacency, tolerance and faith in religion could be positively used. It spelt immediate success, but Gandhi could not foresee the shortcomings of his methods. He had taken people out of their traditional decadent world of caste, class, clan and religion, and had shown them a goal: independence. People followed in his wake and substituted their old-world unity with ‘Gandhianism’. Newer ones like the spinning -wheels, replaced their old rituals. The pattern continued, the symbols changed. Gandhi’s defect of vision was that he took the people out of their world but did not teach them to look at themselves as individuals:
When men cannot observe, they don't have ideas: they have obsessions. When people live instinctive lives, something like a collective amnesia steadily blurs the past. (112)

Sudha Rai provides one of the most consistent and detailed studies of Naipaul's engagement with India. She has analyzed in great detail Naipaul's understanding of Gandhi and Gandhianism as the interaction of "a Hindu self and a Western self in Naipaul". However, even Rai begins her analysis of Naipaul's perception of Gandhi thus: "what astounds us is Naipaul's near total lack of self-consciousness in the comments on Gandhi..." (50). One man's short sightedness led a nation astray because it was this man's vision that had set it in motion. Emergency was the logical fallout of rampant confusion, of "individual obsessions" turning into "political movements" (114).

In 'Synthesis and Mimicry' Naipaul questions the classic Indian claim that India, over the years, has always successfully assimilated diverse influences. Naipaul asserts:

> 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 civilization are essentially the ideas given them by European scholars in the nineteenth century.

(IWC 116)

Naipaul condemns India by arguing that the achievements of India are borrowed. Here Naipaul's contempt needs a revision and revaluation. It is good if a country borrows any good ideas to enrich the prevailing conditions, to stop the malfunction
of societal system and so on, it is good on the part of the whole universal civilization.

Naipaul’s first attack is on “intermediate technology”, which was supposed to provide a link between the advanced scientific method and the conventional agrarian methods employed in India. This ‘intermediated technology’ had turned itself into futile experiments edging on absurdity – the wired up bull, the harvesting shoes, foot operated harvesting shears and so on. It was a needless complication of otherwise simple agricultural tools and served no productive purpose. It was not synthesis but an intellectual confusion and that too in an institution that was meant to contribute to national development. The only direct evidence of cultural synthesis was to be found in the pre-British schools of painting. Naipaul asserts:

New postures in India, attitudes that imply new ways of seeing, often turn out to be a matter of words alone. In their attempts to go beyond the old sentimental abstractions about the poverty of India, and to come to terms with the poor, Indians have to reach outside their civilization… the intellectual confusion is greater now than in the days of the British. (IWC 105)

The wounds of Indian civilization can be seen since time immemorial. Former President Shri A. P. J. Abdul Kalam has rightly raised a question as to why India had never attacked any country since the last 2500 years? India was attacked a number of times, slaughtered, plundered and had suffered the yoke of slavery for 1300 years. Our civilization was wounded during this time of slavery. Several ancient universities such as Takshila University, Nalanda University and so on were destroyed by invaders. Immeasurable wealth of India was looted and several pieces
of invaluable literature were burnt down. These wounds can be seen clearly in social deformities and degenerated social activities. Naipaul has mentioned:

Somebody's moustache was shaved off; many people were beaten with shoes and made to walk the public streets with shoes on their heads; ... these are not what are usually thought of as tortures; they are caste pollutions, more permanently wounding, and a greater cause for hysteria, than any beating up ... democracy, the rule of law, and humanitarianism merge in caste outrage. Men are so easily thrown back into the self, so easily lose the wider view. (IWC 103)

With the coming of the British, the break with the past was final. Old wisdom, old knowledge, traditional craftsmanship and architecture died out. There was no synthesis, no assimilation, but a complete incongruous replacement. The proof is there in the climatically ill-suited tourist guesthouse of Jaisalmer, in the thoughtlessly designed roof of the modern airport building in Ahmedabad. The East-West encounter that occurred after the coming of the British was superficial because there was no Indian tradition to receive the new influences. The Indian tradition, the basic medium to accept new influences, did not exist and the influences themselves stuck out absurdly. Synthesis was reduced to mimicry:

The Indian past can no longer provide inspiration for the Indian present ... the west is too dominant, and too varied; and India continues imitative and insecure ... India, without its own living traditions, has lost the ability to incorporate and adapt; what it borrows it seeks to swallow whole. For all its appearance of cultural continuity, for all the liveliness of its arts of dance, music, and
cinema, India is incomplete: a whole creative side has died. It is the price India has had to pay for its British period. (126)

Naipaul sees India functioning on borrowed institutions. The press, the education system, the judiciary are all borrowed and stand as obstacles in the people’s perception of themselves and their idea of India. The Indian press did not seek to put India “in touch with itself”, the Indian judicial system designed by the British could not perform “the law’s constant reassessing, reforming role” (132). The law steers clear of the numerous misinterpretation of dharma that is in circulation: “The law avoids the collision with dharma. Yet it is this dharma that the law must grapple with if the law is to have a ‘dynamic role’. ” (134) India needs to step out of its comfort zone of explaining its incongruities and contradictions as “synthesis”. It has to abandon its imported ideas and ideologies, it has to question and arrive at an understanding of itself. And for that, India needs to shed its policy of total acceptance and complacency.

‘Paradise Lost’ records people’s reaction to the emergency imposed by Indira Gandhi. It also records the confused agenda of the opposition and its even more confused line of action. Political sterility was complete. There was neither Swaraj nor Ramrajya. “The revolution had turned out to be no revolution. And India, which only a few weeks before had seemed capable of renewed Gandhian fervour, had become like a zoo” (123). Gandhianism was reduced to a show of khadi and long impassioned speeches, and the people simply waited for things to take care of themselves. Naipaul records:

But it was also easy to understand why the revolution had evaporated. The leaders, offering what they saw as unassailable
Gandhian truths, offering themselves as so many Gandhis, were misled by the apparent answering fervour of the crowds... The needs of 1975 were more worldly and difficult... the very fierceness of the Emergency answered the public mood, assuaged old frustration. The crowd went home in peace. (IWC 128)

The last chapter is a question mark. Titled 'Renaissance or Continuity', it once again examines the reasons behind the failure of Gandhianism and its caricatured version being upheld through a series of acts of mimicry. In Vinoba Bhave, Naipaul sees a "mimic mahatma" whose actions had not served India in anyway. The living evidence of the futility of such mimicry is Bihar where Bhave had performed much of his land-gift walk schemes:

Once, on the march, he said that untouchables did work human beings should not do; for that reason they should be given land, to become tillers... The whole point of Gandhi’s message was lost. (166)

Bhave’s life was thus a parody of Gandhi without actual involvement or vision for the causes at hand. Bhave believed that walks and fasts would solve all problems. He did not know the practical reason behind Gandhi’s walks and marches. Gandhi’s marches connected people to ideas at a time when communication and commutation were both difficult. Bhave’s marches overlooked that. The concept of dharma degenerated. Through years of conquest and oppression, it came to be associated with unquestioning servitude and patient suffering. The only way to claim past glory was to be found in intellectual development. India must shed its longing for a
past that it hardly understands. The past is just a glorious abstraction because with the amnesias that followed each conquest, India lost touch with itself:

While India tries to go back to an idea of its past, it will not possess that past or be enriched by it. The past can now be possessed only by enquiry and scholarship, by intellectual rather than spiritual discipline. The past has to be seen to be dead; or the past will kill.

Naipaul has, in this book attempted an analysis of the problems and complications of India and has in the process, once again stirred up a hornet’s nest. The reactions are typical and follow the same pattern as those that were evoked by An Area of Darkness. As stated at the beginning of the chapter, the perspective of the writer as diasporic is emphasized and the method of enquiry centers round his perception which is obviously very different from the rooted Indian perspective.

Fawzia Mustafa holds in V. S. Naipaul that “Naipaul’s habits of evaluation still rely upon the historically unreliable synecdochal narrative techniques of reporting random interviews...clippings from newspaper accounts...local novels...political biographies” (32). The validity of Naipaul’s evidence can be questioned on the basis of truth of historical fact, but the question here is not of the truth or validity of a fact or an ideology. Naipaul is recording contemporary India and is therefore using as his base material, contemporary versions of fact. The speeches of politicians, the articles in newspapers are all contemporary versions of facts and can lay bare the gap between the original idea and the currency that it has come to acquire. For example, Naipaul quotes from the Times of India, a speech by the then Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi in which she equates law with dharma.
and urges people to uphold dharma (IWC 132). Naipaul here uses the current connotation of the term dharma and not its vedantic original meaning.

Naipaul’s final verdict is that “the Indian past can no 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” (IWC 126).

Nissim Ezekiel writes that Naipaul “argues too exclusively from revulsion and anger,” while H. H. Anniah Gowda declares that the visitor “has chosen to shut his eyes to the India which is not defecating”, a sentiment which is shared by Raja Rao too. Naipaul is a global trotter, but these minor details obsess him and he cannot get rid of them. This visit too does not bring about any reconciliation; it does not resolve any problem; it results only in further alienation. D. J Enright says in his article “In a Free State: ‘Readings in Commonwealth Literature’”:

When *An Area of Darkness* came out in 1964, though it contained some marvelous writing, I felt it was open to two unrelated objections. Naipaul’s account of India came so nakedly out of his own nervous system, his prickly, susceptible nature, his thinness of skin. Thus the horrified obsession with public defecation: it seemed that as soon as anyone within five-miles radius squatted down, the author’s radar alerted him to the misdemeanor. (337)

Dr. B. Sudipta defends the allegations against Naipaul in this way:

The reformer’s zeal of Naipaul is based on his intimate visualization of India, resulting in despondency. He knew that Hinduism is less aggressive and more enlightening than the European culture, but in a
motivated manner the British colonial rulers declared everything Indian as "primitive and ignorant"...(15)

He talks of a civilization rich in its history but wounded by conquests, by confusions, by its own burdens of civilization and history. He portrays India's wounds- red, gaping, festering, painful in his real perception of India. The India of his imagination is blown into smithereens when the shock of reality, the truth hits him. His eyes fly open and the image of modern India hits him in a gush of words.

The title screams out its aptness- everywhere through India, the wounded civilization slaps him in the face. He sees the wounds against the backdrop of a rich civilization. He is disillusioned and pained seeing the civilization gone waste. India presents pictures of past civilization and present ruin.

The wounds need to be healed. India has to fight. Throwing caution to the winds Naipaul challenges modern India to face its ugliness. He ruthlessly underlines the inadequacies of the India before his eyes. His love of India makes him sound unkind but one can see that he winces as though the wounds inflicted on India have been inflicted on his soul.

What is required by the intelligentia, his readers is that they diagnose the wounds, study and analyze their depth and width and prescribe a remedy, a cure, and follow the treatment through till the end. The remedy needs to be pursued till all the wounds have been completely cured.
Works Cited


