CHAPTER 3

NAIPaul’S VIEW OF HINDUISM

The embryonic form of Naipaul’s religious vision developed in the first phase of his literary career is further enlarged by his travels to countries which are important citadels of different religions. His travels to these countries provide him an opportunity not only to put to test his concepts formed earlier but also for having a first hand experience of the religious practices in birth place of these religions. Furthermore, these travels enable him to enlarge his fund of religious knowledge. In this connection we can mention Naipaul’s travels to India, which go a long way to develop his vision especially his vision of Hinduism. The experience of his three tours to India, in 1962, 1975, and 1989, provide him with the material to his three great books, An Area of Darkness (1964), India: A Wounded Civilization (1977), and India: A Million Mutinies Now (1990). In these books Naipaul makes certain remarks which make him one of the most controversial writers of the contemporary literary realm. These observations invite sharp reactions from the scholars compelling them to locate the psychic sources of these remarks.

Naipaul’s first visit to India, by all accounts, is none too pleasant. He feels himself exposed to the dead world of darkness. The journey, he ruminates, must have been avoided as it has caused psychic complications, breaking his life into two parts. Naipaul during the journey is overwhelmed with a sense of engulfment, a fear of losing himself in the philosophical values of India. His psychic fear of
engulfment which makes him a little nervous, can be located, according to Suvir Kaul, in his diasporic anxieties: “The enduring achievement of An Area of Darkness, then, might not be so much its account of India in the early 1960s as its display of the anxieties of the diasporic ‘Indian’, its staging of the derangement that results from a homecoming to a place that is not home.”

According to Lillian Feder, it is Naipaul’s inborn atheism and his conscious rejection of the Hindu rituals which hamphers his vision and which does not allow him to appreciate Hinduism and its myths, rituals, and customs. In spite of his experience of Hindu way of life from his formative years, he comes to India as person who does not know India at all. In An Area of Darkness, “writes Feder, “he feels like a ‘stranger’ in India although his memories of Hindu myth, rituals, customs, and attitudes remain from his formative years. The ancient past of India is merged with his own past. Yet, an unbeliever from birth and, at least consciously, having rejected Hindu ritual, he is unprepared on his first visit for the emotional impact of these memories, which complicate his reactions to the actual life of the society he had envisioned.”

Selwyn R. Cudjoe endeavours to identify Naipaul’s psychic sources in his preconceived notions, which he uses to interpret his Indian experience. Obviously Naipaul comes to India in search for his roots in the Indian past. Interestingly he draws upon the Bhagavad Gita and other Indian religious texts to explain the Indian panorama. It is, therefore, no wonder that he miserably fails in his mission of probing his own self as well as that of his ancestors. Naturally, when he goes to
visit his ancestral home in the village, where once his grandfather lived, he finds it only as “an area of darkness.”

According to R.N. Sarkar, Naipaul’s vision is blurred by his Western modernism. His, “approach to India is basically from the outside, as from an outsider.” It is in sharp contrast to the approach of R.K. Narayan who renders an inner view of Indian society. India remains for Naipaul an outside experience. Likewise his vision of Hindu religion is also defective, since he visualizes it not with the eyes of faith but of scepticism. As Sarkar observes, “Naipaul overviews Indian Hinduism in sharp contrast with Western modernism which does not count even Christianity as the basic infrastructure of their achievement” (Sarkar 213).

Much in the same vein Dr. Ashok Kumar Bachchan writes that Naipaul’s vision is conditioned by his initiation in the European culture. His Hindu sensibility and the Western rationalism produce a dichotomy in his mind resulting into an ambivalent attitude. Naipaul’s life in England enables him, as Dr. Bachchan writes, “to break out of the constricting moulds of both Orthodox Hinduism of India, the land of his ancestors and limited means and opportunities at his home. But this also meant being initiated into the European cultural rhythms of life and we find Naipaul poised between two sharply opposed worlds. He, thus, grew into a consciousness marked by a dichotomy. The Orthodox Hindu faith of his ancestors, who came to Trinidad as indentured labourers and the rationalism of the west both imported and neither was native to Trinidad.”

For Suman Gupta, it is Naipaul’s misconception of Hinduism which colours his vision and persuades him to interpret his Indian experience, the wrong way.
He conceives of, “a pure old world Hinduism, which may be trampled underfoot, rendered passive, stultified, but which is impervious to mixture, miscegenation, hybridity – which moreover preserves itself in some shape and determines the intellectual quality of a nation.” Naipaul uses this notion of Hinduism to interpret the Indian scene, ranging from the explanation of R.K. Narayan’s novel, passiveness of the peasants, peculiarities of Indian sexual attitudes, paucity of arts, architecture, technology, science, intellectual culture, the success and failures of Gandhi, his deification, and the failures of his followers as well as the debacle of Indira Gandhi.

However, Robert Towers visualizes Naipaul’s ambivalence surfacing in form of attraction and repulsion, in terms of his belief in the maternity of India. “For a multiplicity,” writes Towers, “of social, religious, and aesthetic reactions, India, despite the omnipresence of Shiva’s lingam, is associated in both Indian and Western psyches with the symbolism of maternity – a most ambiguous maternity, at once teeming and devouring. Naipaul must have initially approached the grandmother country with expectations that were horribly wounded by what he found. Apparently he cannot stay away; the subsequent visits seem to have been made to see if things could possibly be as bad as he remembered them.” Towers goes on to universalize Naipaul’s expatriate predicaments of homelessness and rootlessness in terms of a legendary voyage, “an odyssey in which he feels doomed – like modern a man himself perhaps – to voyage perpetually in ‘middle passage’, torn away from the security of his ancient home and without hope of landfall.”
Naipaul’s religious vision suffers not only from the limitations a traveller’s vision but also from his brahmin sensibility. In his review of *An Area of Darkness*, Enright exposes the limitations of a travel book and the vision of a traveller. Nevertheless, as another critic Eric Stokes, points out, Naipaul is a different traveller. He comes to India with more knowledge than that of an ordinary traveller. But this knowledge is not sufficient enough to qualify him as a legitimate critic of the Indian scene. He finds that Naipaul’s Brahmin sensibility remains unsupported by Indian beliefs which are necessary to prop up his mentality. It is rather distorted by his so-called Western point of view. Explaining Stokes’s views Sudha Rai writes, “What Naipaul’s writings on India reveal is that a root Brahmin sensibility has been overlaid with a Western vision which is why, in the ultimate ‘analysis there is no home for him’ in India.”

Reacting in a different way Eric Stokes thinks Naipaul’s Brahmin background plays a negative role on his mental make up. It is responsible for his negative judgements on India including his rejection of India. In support of his views Stokes quotes Naipaul on the role of the under-developed ego, responsible for the failure of India:

...it is fundamental to the understanding of India’s intellectual second ratedness, which is generally taken for granted but may be the most startling and depressing fact about the world’s second most populous country, which now has little to offer the world except its Gandhian concept of holy poverty and the recurring crooked comedy of its holy men, and which, while asserting the antiquity of its civilization (and usually simply asserting without knowledge or scholarship) is now dependent in every practical way on other, imperfectly understood civilisations.”
On the basis of this statement Stokes concludes that "[o]nly a total defector only an Indian Brahmin, secure in his caste, his colour, and his unassailable literary stature, would date to speak of India in his fasion" (Stokes n.p). However, Sudha Rai believes that Stokes is wrong in drawing such preposterous conclusions. Naipaul is an Indian Brahmin, not in rejection but in the acceptance of India. He cannot be held guilty of arrogance either.

All these scholarly efforts of locating Naipaul’s psychic centre responsible for his attitude towards India and Hinduism, establish beyond doubt, the complex character of his consciousness. In reality his mind bears the burden of his multi-farious experiences including his Indian ancestry, his Trinidadian upbringing, and his Western education which combine to invest his mind with an elusive character, which cannot be precisely defined. Born in an orthodox Brahmin family of Trinidad, Naipaul imbibed Hinduism or rather Brahminism from his family as well as community. Brought up in multi-racial and multi-religious atmosphere of the Carribians, he came to reinforce his religious consciousness with the nuances of religious and racial pluralism. Educated in London, he became aware of the power of reason, and subsequently learned to find a rational basis of religious experience. Nonetheless, in spite of various pulls and pressures of changing circumstances, Naipaul’s Brahmin roots remained secured. Throughout his life, in same form or the other, he continued to shed the light of his brahmin sensibility to illumine his experiences.

Undoubtedly Naipaul, a born atheist, and unbeliever, displays some sort of belief in his unbelief. Though on the face of it, he takes no pleasure in religious
ceremonies, he shows a sort of concealed interest mixed with curiosity. But he wants rational explanations of the rites, rituals, and ceremonies of his family as well as the Hindu community in the Carribeans. Nevertheless, to his utter dismay nobody comes forward to provide him with the rational behind them. In this way Naipaul begins his understanding of Hinduism in a wrong way, considering only its negative practices of casteism, separatism, and uncleanness.

However, Naipaul’s deep-rooted Brahminical self cannot be held in check for long. Leaving its inside cavern, it comes to the fore, especially in his appreciation of his father’s stories. In his foreword to the collection of these stories, he emphasizes in unequivocal terms the Brahmin standpoint of his father. Probing into the genesis’s of his (father’s) standpoint, he comments, that the stories are marked by the Hindu reverence for learning and religious training. Naipaul mentions his father’s appreciation on of Aurbindo’s commentaries on the Gita as well. In short, as Naipaul bends, the stories have been written from within the Hindu community and are meant for the Hindus only. In the end of the passage, Naipaul goes on to acknowledge, how his father’s point of view becomes his:

This is part of the distinctiveness of the stories. I stress it because this way of looking from being my father’s became mine: my father’s early stories created my background for me.¹⁰

Though a professed atheist, Naipaul never denies the deep roots of Hinduism in his mind. Furthermore, in spite of categorically stating his lack of interest in ceremonies and rituals, he describes them with a genuine feeling which gives a lie to his denial. We can mark the intensity of his feeling in his description
of the Kattha, according to him, an Aryan ritual undertaken by his grandmother. As cited earlier, Naipaul though with a little comic vein, relives the whole experience in his inimitable style. Much later in India: A Wounded Civilization, Naipaul displays the same absorbing interest, while describing the sense of piety, which for him is as important as the beauty of sacrifice.

Likewise, Naipaul deeply loves Hindu rites but only in their pure and pristine form. His love for tradition can be marked in his sense of outrage expressed after coming to know about the use of candles and electric bulbs in place of the traditional clay lamps for the Diwali festival. He does not fail to mention that clay lamps are still in use in Trinidad. His love of Hindu rites surfaces more powerfully, in his desire that the mortal remains of his friend Ramon should cremated according to Hindu rites, since he (Ramon), was a Hindu and had been married according to Hindu rites. Obviously Naipaul’s reactions in the reaction of a typically staunch Hindu:

He was dead now, and I wished to offer him recognition. He was of the religion of my family; we were debased members of that religion, and this very debasement. I felt as a bond. We were a tiny, special part of that featureless, unknown country, meaningful to us, if we thought about it, only in that we were its remote descendants. I wished his body to be handled with reverence, and I wished it to be handled according to the old rites. This alone would spare him final nonentity.¹¹

Naipaul’s Brahminical bent can also be surmised from his ready rapport with people of the Brahmin caste. It has been remarked that Naipaul understands only Hindu Brahmins. It should not be considered merely a coincidence that Naipaul is able to develop sympathetic relations with the people of his own caste.
Even during his childhood, he could mix up only with the members of his family. “Everything beyond our family,” he writes, “had this quality of difference” (Rai 16). This typical quality of Naipaul becomes manifest in his Indian visits as well. In support of our observation, we can cite Naipaul’s encounter with Brahmin family in course of a bus ride from Awantipur to Srinagar. During the journey he comes close to the large family and shares food with them. Naipaul the votary of cleanliness does not mind that the food is being served by a dirty servant with dirty hands. Despite his sense of dirt, he goes on to develop close relations with the members of the family, since they were Brahmans. To quote him:

They were a Brahmin family and their vegetarian food was served according to established form. No one was allowed to touch it except the dirty old servant, who, at the mention of food, had been kindled into such important activity. With the very fingers that a moment before had been rolling a crinkled cigarette and had then seized the dusty Dalda tins from off the dusty bus floor, he now – using only the right hand of course – distributed puris from one tin, scooped out curried potatoes from another, and from a third secured dripping fingerfuls of chutney. He was of the right caste; nothing served by the fingers of his right hand could be unclean; and the eaters ate with relish.

*(An Area of Darkness* 147-148)

Naipaul’s encounter with the family becomes crucial in that it produces a new consciousness in him. Furthermore, his sense of separateness ends and he feels one with the Indians. The understanding which Naipaul develops with the family enables him to overcome not only the difference of space but also of time. He forgets the time gap of three generations, as she states:

The brief visit to the Fort of the Pandavas, the gaiety of the excursion party, the giving of small coins to the begging children, the food, the rough manner of its distribution which yet concealed the observance of so many forms: I might have know that family, I could have
assessed the relationships, could have stopped the powerful, the weak, the intriguing. The three generations which separated me from them shrank to one.

(An Area of Darkness 150)

It is interesting to see that Naipaul fails to develop this sort of relationship with other Indians. He still remains a stranger to the people living in Delhi, and Bombay as also to the people living in the countryside. But Naipaul does not remain a stranger to the people of the village to which his grandfather belonged. He establishes a close rapport with the members of the family of his ancestors. Furthermore, he feels a unique sense of joy for his village, especially for its large mango grove and two spires. Naipaul’s awareness of the poverty of the villagers does not come in his way. He states:

It was set far back from the embankment. It exceeded anything I had expected. A large mango grove gave it a pastoral aspect, and two spires showed white and clean against the dark green foliage. I knew about those spires and was glad to see them. My grandfather had sought to re-establish the family he had left behind in India. He had recovered their land; he had given money for the building of temple. No temple had been built, only three shrines. Poverty, feebleness, we had thought in Trinidad. But now, from the road, how reassuring those spires were!

(An Area of Darkness 267)

Naipaul’s admiration of the Brahmans of all types emphasizes his kinship with Indian Brahmans. He feels captivated even by the beauty of the bathing Brahmin, by the elegance of his posture and by his fineness of his slender body. Likewise, Naipaul is also swept off his feet by the images in the temple, that remind him the images in the prayer room of his grandfather’s house:

They unlocked the grilled doors and showed me the images, freshly washed, freshly dressed, marked with fresh sandalwood paste, the morning’s offerings of flowers not yet faded. My mind leapt years,
my sense of distance and time was shaken; before one were the very replicas of the images in the prayer-room of my grand-father’s house.

(An Area of Darkness 268)

So tremendous is the impact of the visit to his village that Naipaul’s unbelieving rational mind is transported to a super-sensuous world of experience. He feels an exaltation and retreats in the mood of forgetfulness. Awakening in the morning to a song of his childhood days, Naipaul slips into a mood between waking and sleeping:

It was a song of the late thirties I had ceased to hear it years before, and until this moment I had forgotten it. I did not even know the meaning of all the words; but then I never had. It was pure mood, and in that moment between waking and sleeping it had recreated a morning in another world, a recreation of this which continued.

(An Area of Darkness 272)

Reliving the Hindu-India of his childhood, he loses his sense of time:

Again and again I had that sense of dissolving time, that alarming but exhilarating sense of wonder at my physical self.

(An Area of Darkness 272)

Naipaul’s encounter with the present head of his grandfather’s family, Ram Chandra Dube, reaffirms his Brahminical streak. In spite of his dismay, revulsion, and rudeness to his aged relatives, he develops a sympathetic feeling for them. When Ram Chandra Dube tells him (Naipaul) about his economic condition, he is overtaken by a sense of guilt of being partly responsible for his (Ram Chandra’s) fate. Conscious of his blood relationship with him, Naipaul says:

I could scarcely bare to look at his emaciated, brittle body.

(An Area of Darkness 275)
and

"... his body – he turned his long bony back to me... was wasted."

(An Area of Darkness 276)

Brahminical instinct of Naipaul makes its presence felt in his journey or rather pilgrimage to Amarnath. Though, he goes to the holy shrine of Shiva only as a traveller, he is filled with a special joy. It is irrelevant that he attributes this joy to the memories of his early childhood, the memories of the pictures of his mountains. His joy must have a religious aspect as well. It is exemplified by his acceptance of the legend and mystery surrounding the shrine:

Yet a special joy had been with me throughout the pilgrimage and during all my time in Kashmir. It was the joy of being among mountains, it was the special joy of being among the Himalayas. They went together. In so many of the brightly coloured religious pictures in my grandmother’s house. I had seen these mountains, cones of white against simple, cold blue. They had become part of the India of my fantasy.

(An Area of Darkness 176)

Naipaul’s Brahminical nature is visible in his reactions to Indian holymen and their brand of spirituality as well. He criticizes them for the kind of following, they encourage and their sense of cleanliness:

...they had a fantastic capacity for inactivity. Holiness meant simplicity of this sort: cooking on stones, eating off leaves, fetching water from the spring. It also meant casualness and disorder.

(An Area of Darkness 156)

But for sadhus, especially for the old type of sanysis, who are fired by a genuine desire for liberation, Naipaul inculcates a sense of respect and admiration. When he meets the sadhu, he had seen in Srinagar, a few days before, he feels impressed by his personality. Naipaul gives us a fine portrait of the sadhu
“walking barefoot on Himalayan snow.” Naipaul recaptures the “disquieting beauty” of his skin “smeared with white ash,” with great poetic fervour:

At the end of the valley, where the ice, less protected, was partly broken, one remembered picture came to life; a sadhu, wearing only a leopard skin, walking barefooted on Himalayan snow, almost in sight of the god he sought. He held his trident like a spear, and from the trident a gauze-like pennant fluttered. He walked apart, like one to whom the journey was familiar. He was a young man of complete, disquieting beauty. His skin had been burned black and was smeared with white ash; his hair was reddish-blond; but this only made unnatural the perfection of his features, the tilt of head, the fineness of his limbs, the light assurance of his walk, the delicate play of muscles down his back and abdomen. Some days before the pilgrimage I had seen him in Srinagar, resting in the shade of a chenar, languid genitals arrogantly exposed. He had seemed out of place, an idler, an aboriginal come to town. His ash-smeared nudity, implying an indifference to the body, had made his beauty sinister. Now he lent his nobility to all the pilgrims: his goal was theirs.

(An Area of Darkness 177)

Naipaul’s Brahmin proclivities make him love Hindus like Mahatma Gandhi, who possess virtues akin to those cherished by the Brahminical order. He praises Gandhi for his clear vision, cleanliness, and spirit of service. These are precisely the qualities which Brahmins of yore, or of the days of Upanishads possessed. To take some excerpts from An Area of Darkness:

He saw India so clearly because he was in part a colonial.

and

He emerged a colonial blend of East and West, Hindu and Christian.

and

Sanitation was linked to caste, caste to callousness, inefficiency and a hopelessly divided country, division to weakness, weakness to foreign rule. This is what Gandhi saw, and no one purely of India could have seen it.
and

The spirit of service, excrement, bread-labour, the dignity of scavenging, and excrement again: Gandhi’s obsessions – even when we remove nonviolence, when we set aside all that he sought to make of himself, and concentrate on his analysis of India – seem ill-assorted and sometimes unpleasant. But they hang together; they form a logical whole; they answer the directness of his colonial vision.

*(An Area of Darkness)* 78-79

As for the upper class illiterate and the anglicanized Hindus, Naipaul has but contempt. He criticizes Mrs. Mahindra, the wife of a Delhi contractor with whom he lodges as a paying guest. The anglicanized Indians present a ridiculous sight with their manners and a English names. However, Naipaul’s Brahmin attitude is nowhere so well marked as in his dealings with Muslims. He shares a Brahmin prejudice against the followers of Islam. He does not understand them. Naipaul’s prejudice against Muslims begins as early as his childhood, when he was told that Muslims were not to be trusted, since they would always do one down. The source of this prejudice was his family belief or his Muslim neighbour with his typical cap and gray beard. Naipaul carries their prejudice with him when he visits India and interacts with Aziz, his Muslim servant and odd-job man on the houseboat in Srinagar. Even after his warm relationship with Aziz for six months, he cannot trust him.

As Naipaul writes in *An Area of Darkness*, Aziz comes very close to him, working as his mediator in all his transactions and trips. His behaviour is the behaviour of a “sweet-tempered nurse humouring a spoilt and irascible infant.” Aziz understands Naipaul fully, minding his (Naipaul’s) desire for privacy and quiet. He writes:
I was jealous; I wanted the hotel to myself. Aziz understood, and he was like a parent comforting a child.

(An Area of Darkness 117)

Naipaul is touched by Aziz's involvement with him and his involvement with Aziz.

On that small island I had become involved with them all, and with none more so than Aziz. It was an involvement which had taken me by surprise. Up to this time a servant, to me, had been someone who did a job, took his money and went off to his own concerns. But Aziz's work was his life. A childless wife existed somewhere in the lake, but he seldom spoke of her and never appeared to visit her. Service was his world. It was his craft, his trade; it transcended the formalities of uniform and deferential manners; and it was the source of his power.

(An Area of Darkness 121)

In course of time Naipaul comes to understand this multi-dimensional character of Aziz – his moods, his quixotic, sociable, and dignified, quickness in learning, his aristocratic hospitality, and generosity. He behaves in keeping with Naipaul's image of the Muslims:

Aziz gave us dinner one evening at the tall brick house in the lake, padding us there himself (together with a napkin-covered pitcher of tap water from the hotel). Night, a lantern in the shikara, silence, the house approached down a willow-hung water alley, and Aziz behaving with ancient courtesy. Details were obscured; it might have been the beginning of a Venetian entertainment. We are sitting on the floor of an upper room that had been cleaned of all furniture and people, whose presence we could yet detect in close whispers and the sounds of movement; and Aziz knelt before us, talking, no longer a hotel servant but our host; grave, independent, a man of substance, a man of views and, when the women and the babies flooded in, a responsible family man.

(An Area of Darkness 190)

But even after his close intimacy, and deep impression created by his service to him, Naipaul is not able to understand his at all Muslim servant. Most
probably because of childhood Brahmin prejudice against Muslim, he does not allow himself to understand the language of tears in which Aziz speaks to him.

Naipaul’s behaviour is tantalizing. For as Sudha Rai comments, “[n]o ‘temperamental’ explanation can account for Naipaul’s ultimate doubt about Aziz’s genuineness. Only a knowledge of Naipaul’s sociological background can help make sense of his attitude at this point – we go full circle back to his Hindu childhood and the warning voice which sounds: Muslim ‘not to be trusted; they would always do you down’” (Rai 16).

Naipaul’s Brahmin prejudice towards Muslim finds its best expression in the second part of the book (An Area of Darkness). He comes in close contact with Muslims in Srinagar, where he spends more than six months in the company of Sidiq Butt, the proprietor of Hotel Liward in the city. Along with Butt and Aziz, he develops intimacy with Ali Mohammed, the ferry man. Another man who comes close to him is Khansamah. Butt is a man of loving heart and warm sentiments. He continues to write letters to Naipaul after his (Naipaul’s) departure, urging him to remember him. However, Butt is not able to win Naipaul. Likewise, his attitude towards Ali Mohammed and Khansamah is peculiar, sometimes patronizing and indulgent but at other times whimsical. For instance, he loses his temper, when the Khansamah slips up in his service. He asks him to go away; but at the same time he types a testimonial for him and trips him liberally.

Naipaul’s Brahmin inclination can also be identified in his reactions against foreigners, including Hippies and Beatniks who come to India for spiritual pursuits
which at their best can be described pseudo-mysticism or drug-induced mysticism. He criticizes these experiences because they do not conform to the ideals of the Brahminical purity. Naipaul does not like the spirituality introduced by Maharshi Mahesh Yogi either, for it lures individuals away from the world. He is against such pseudo-pursuits, because they do not conform to the Brahminical social order based on four cardinal values of dharma, artha, kama, and moksha. In nutshell we can say that in An Area of Darkness, the defining principle of Naipaul’s mentality is his Brahmin streak or rather instinct. He visualizes everything including Hinduism with the spectacles of Brahminism. His reaction to people he meets in India and to places where he goes highly coloured with his Brahmin proclivities.

Interestingly, Naipaul’s Brahmin streak continues to colour his vision embodied in India: A Wounded Civilization based on his experiences of 1971, and 1975-76 visits to India. Though the book marks a shift in his attitude towards India and treatment of the Indian subjects, it exemplifies his Brahminical way of looking at things. As usual, as Suman Gupta contends, Hinduism remains “a priori in Naipaul’s thinking.” It is in this light that Naipaul visualizes “[t]he complexities of caste, class, religious community, linguistic, regional, historical, economic, political etc. alignments in India need a more complex and sociologically rigorous approach – Naipaul faithfully observes the problems and schisms that arise from these, and wilfully offers a simplistic and superficial explanation for them” (Gupta 85).

Naipaul mentions age old customs and manner with touch of irony. But in doing so, he does not relinquish his Brahminism. He speaks of begging as
“precious to Hindus as religious theatre, a demonstration of the working of karma, a reminder of one’s duty to oneself and one’s future lives (India: A Wounded Civilization 58). This observation, according to Purabi Panwar, ‘[i]t suited him to use Hinduism to disparage begging as a step towards establishing himself as an agnostic for the benefit of the western readers.’ To support her point of view, Panwar quotes the following excerpt from Naipaul:

The beggars themselves, forgetting their Hindu function, also pester tourists; and the tourists misinterpret the whole business, seeing in the beggary of the few the beggary of all. The beggars have become a nuisance and a disgrace. By becoming too numerous they have lost their place in the Hindu system and have no claim on anyone.

(India: A Wounded Civilization 58)

Obviously, Naipaul’s severe indictment of Indian religious scene forms a part of his plan to discover the real India or the purely Hindu India as against the stultified India subdued by the foreigners. In the opinion of Suman Gupta, “[t]he thesis of A Wounded Civilization is twofold: that the essential India, the old world India, is purely Hindu and that a typically Hindu psyche and Hindu attitudes to life are pervasive in modern India; and that the integral and purely Hindu India was conquered and dominated first by Islam and later by the British which has resulted in a stultification of the intellectual development and creativity of the essentially Hindu India” (Gupta 83). She also mentions Naipaul’s sub-thesis in which he attempts to establish that Islamic domination had nothing to contribute except retrogression and damage to the Hindu psyche. The influence of the British domination, according to Naipaul, was also damaging. The foreign domination
made the Indian psyche, “depleted, uncreative, passive and intellectually poor” (Gupta 84).

But in his shifting attitude towards the Indian scene, Naipaul does not spare his own ideas and beliefs. His mind undergoes the process of change. While examining the Hindu concepts of karma and dharma, he goes on to condemn them as the instruments of stagnation and degeneration of Hindu society. But such an attitude does not help him to develop a correct vision of India. Naipaul tries to locate the cause of Indian stagnation in her attachment to Hinduism which is energized by the concepts of dharma and karma, which actually play a negative role. According to Selwyn R. Cudjoe, “Naipaul suggests that the moral malaise of that society inheres in its historical attachment to Hinduism (manifested primarily in the concepts of dharma and karma), which prevents the Indians from actually observing or analyzing their society.”

In his shifting stance, Naipaul does not spare even Gandhi. The Mahatma who once the symbol of desirelessness and public action in his earlier books, loses his status and becomes a symbol of countless failures of India. Very soon he discovers in the Mahatma, fissures of archaism and Hinduism. Gandhi now appears to him as a man, who is more interested in his personal salvation than public service. To substantiate his point Naipaul goes on to cite an excerpt from one of Gandhi’s letters written to his relative:

The real secret of life seems to consist in so living in the world as it is, without being attached to it, that moksha (salvation, absorption into the One, freedom from rebirth) might become easy of attainment
to us and to others. This will include service of self, the family, the community, and the State.

(India: A Wounded Civilization 157)

Analizing the letter, Naipaul comments:

This declaration of faith, apparently a unity, conceals at least four personalities. The Hindu dreams of non-attachment and salvation; the man exposed to Western religious thought thinks that the conduct of the individual should also make salvation easy for others; the South African Indian preaches the widest social loyalty (the community, the Indian community); the political campaigner, with his respect for (and dependence on) British law and institutions, stresses service to the state.

(India: A Wounded Civilization 157)

Indeed, Naipaul is disenchanted with Gandhi but not from the Brahmin virtues which Gandhi once represented for him. In our chapterwise discussion of the book, we would try to show that his Brahminical instinct remains intact throughout his career.

India: A Wounded Civilization is not a novel, but a collection of essays in which he diagnoses the decaying Indian mentality. The wound which the writer refers is not the physical wound but the psychic wound inflicted on the Indian psyche. Explaining the central argument of the book, Timothy F. Weiss states that, “because of its particular religious and philosophic attitudes and its lack of a historical sense, India is unequipped to compete in the twentieth century. Indians prefer to withdraw into the self and into a myth of the ‘Old India.’”

In “An Old Equilibrium” Naipaul focuses his attention on the inner contradictions inherent in Indian psyche, which remains torn between its dual desires of attachment to religion and scientific progress, which Weiss describes as “allegiance to the sacred cow on the one hand and its acquisition of a nuclear
arsenal on the other?” Naipaul finds that India is making an attempt to move forward in economic field, but in the social field, she continues to lag behind because of her ongoing “clash with its religion and philosophy and postindependence identity” (Weiss 123-124). Naipaul ties this Indian identity with the Gandhian philosophy which involves looking backward to the past and to the villages. According to him it does not look towards the urban future:

In the British time, a period of bitter subjection which was yet for India a period of intellectual recruitment, Indian nationalism proclaimed the Indian past; and religion was inextricably mixed with political awakening. But independent India, with its five-year plans, its industrialization, its practice of democracy, has invested in change. There always was a contradiction between the archaism of national pride and the promise of the new; and the contradiction has at last cracked the civilization open.

(India: A Wounded Civilization 18)

However, Gandhian philosophy is only a minor factor. The major factor lies in the Indian mental make up produced by its philosophy. It lies in its fatalistic proclivities, in its, “retreat and quietism in face of distress and failure” (Weiss 124). Naipaul comes heavily on Indian attitude of passivity or surrender, or the spirit of resignation. Since Indians cultivate a spirit of equanimity, they do not feel a necessity for change:

“Life and the world and all this is passing – why bother about anything? The perfect and the imperfect are all the same. Why really bother?”

(India: A Wounded Civilization 22)

Naipaul continues to attack, the Hindu virtues of passivity, surrender, and indifference in his next chapter “The Shattered World.” He embodies his critical evolution of R.K. Narayan’s Mr. Sampath and The Vendor of Sweets. Naipaul’s
criticism comes as a rejoinder or even a retort to Narayan's remark, "India will go on," affirming "his belief in the permanence and profundity of Indian civilization" (Weiss 124). In his opinion, the protagonists of these books fail in their life, because of their staunch belief in and attachment to an unchanging India. The protagonist, Srinivas is a staunch Hindu who has cultivated a spirit of indifference. It is because of this indifference that he is unable to come to the rescue of his friend. Explaining Srinivas's motivation Naipaul writes:

out of the sentimental conviction that India is eternal and forever revives, there comes not a fear of further defeat and destruction, but an indifference to it. India will somehow look after itself; the individual is freed of all responsibility. And within this larger indifference there is the indifference to the fate of a friend: it is madness, Srinivas concludes, for him to think of himself as the artist's keeper.

(India: A Wounded Civilization 24-25)

In Srinivas's failure to help his friend Naipaul reads the failure of Indian religion and civilization. Indian philosophy of resignation and passivity produces in man a negative attitude and hampers a proper vision of history. Furthermore, its belief in karma and non-violence produces a paralysing effect, while its passiveness culminates in a parasitic dependence in the economic field. According to Naipaul, Srinivas's non-doing is a religious response to the worldly defeat. For Naipaul, Srinivas's fate symbolizes the predicament of the whole Indian society. He writes:

I saw in Mr. Sampath a foreshadowing of the tensions that had to come to India, philosophically prepared for defeat and withdrawal (each man an island) rather than independence and action, and torn now between the wish to preserve and be psychologically secure, and the need to undo.

(India: A Wounded Civilization 26)
Likewise, Jagan’s story also etymologies the inadequacy of the Indian religion to come to terms with the changing milieu of the modern world. Jagan a devout Hindu like Srinivas and an embodiment of the virtues of resignation and withdrawal, fails to help his son who is involved in a police case. In dealing with his westernized son who runs a factory, Jagan feels embarrassment after embarrassment. The situation in which he finds his son is too much for him. Subsequently, he retreats into religion with “sweet rituals of... the ordered past.” In the withdrawal of Jagan, Naipaul reads the failure of Hinduism to deal with the modern world. In his opinion Jagan because of his philosophical attitude has no option but only withdrawal. Naipaul states:

Jagan seeks only to maintain the stability of his world; he is capable of nothing else. To be pure in the midst of ‘the grime of this earth’, secure in the midst of distress: that is all he asks. When his world shatters, he cannot fight back; he has nothing to offer.

(India: A Wounded Civilization 43)

Naipaul further adds that Jagan’s non-doing is the ultimate Hindu retreat, a retreat from a world that is known to have broken down. It is a retreat, literally, to a wilderness where “the edge of reality itself was beginning to blur.” It is not in any case, “a return to a purer Aryan past, as Jagan might imagine, but a retreat from civilization and creativity, from rebirth and growth, to magic and incantation, a retrogression to an almost African night, the enduring primitivism of a place like the Congo, where, even after the slave-trading Arabs and the Belgians, the past is yearned for as le bon vieux temps de nos ancêtres. It is the death of a civilization, the final corruption of Hinduism” (India: A Wounded Civilization 43). Naipaul
further adds that Jagan cannot face reality but he can only run away. In his (Naipaul’s) opinion Jagan’s scope symbolizes,

Another Hindu retreat – like the Vijayanagar kingdom in 1336, like the pilgrims worshipping among the ruins of the Vijayanagar capital in 1975, like the mantra being chanted and written fifty million times to give life to the new image of the temple defiled during the last war.

(India: A Wounded Civilization 43)

Jagan’s retreat is not an Aryan retreat but a medieval retreat. Importantly Naipaul equates Aryan culture with Brahmin culture. He criticizes Jagan for his medieval Hinduism which does not reflect a true Brahmin spirit.

Thus both Srinivas and Jagan symbolize barrenness of the medieval Hindu religion and his philosophy of passivity, indifference retreat and non-doing. This philosophy incapacitates the Indian intellect and makes it ill-equipped to face the challenges of the fast developing modern world. Naipaul sums up the outcome of this philosophy in merely three words “vulnerability, defeat, withdrawal” (India: A Wounded Civilization 53). In the next section “The Skycrapers and Chawls” Naipaul repeats his indictment of Indian philosophy and religion which teach the spirit of surrender to one’s fate. This spirit culminates into the acceptance of the dehumanizing living conditions in the cities like Bombay, remarkable for its socio-economic mechanism of the mills and chawls. In this way such a passive philosophy can be only imprisoning.

After attacking R.K. Narayan, Naipaul focuses his attention on Gandhism. In “The House of Gain,” he criticizes the idea of “Old India” which is identified with “beliefs”, “rituals”, “gods”, “code” “behaviour” etc. (Weiss 124). The notion
of “old India” glorifies Indian village life and recovers the myth of the golden age. But, according to Naipaul the nostalgia for rural life is detrimental to the life of intellect. Naipaul states:

Twelve hours of darkness followed twelve hours of light; people rose at dawn and retired at dusk; every day, as from time immemorial, darkness fell on the village like a kind of stultification.

(India: A Wounded Civilization 85)

But in “A Defect of Vision,” Naipaul makes a direct attack on Gandhi. He criticizes Gandhi for his self-absorption which, according to Naipaul, impedes man’s ability to respond to a changing world. It encourages man to develop a false vision, which does not allow man to perceive and analyse reality in a clear and objective way. For Naipaul Indians perceive reality as children do. He writes:

The childlike perception of reality that results does not imply childishness – Gandhi proves the opposite. But it does suggest that Indians are immersed in their experiences in a way that Western people can seldom be. It is less easy for Indians to withdraw and analyze. The difference between the Indian and the Western ways of perceiving comes out most clearly in the sex act. Western man can describe the sex act; even at the moment of orgasm he can observe himself. Kakar says that his Indian patients, men and women, do not have this gift, cannot describe the sex act.

(India: A Wounded Civilization 103)

Indeed Naipaul uses Gandhi, Gandhism, and Hinduism, “to chart the passivity and defeatist sensibilities, he feels he encounters and the ‘depleted intellects’ that have resulted on a national scale. From the peasants in Bihar and Rajastan to the middle-class professionals, as well as workers and activists in cities, and in the pronouncements and platforms of political leaders. Naipaul finds again and again
the same ‘attitudes’ manifesting themselves in the face of civil turmoil and
country-wide economic chaos.”

Interestingly, Naipaul uses the observation of an Indian psyche analyst, Dr.
Sudhir Kakar to substantiate his own conclusions, “attributes the Indian
‘underdeveloped ego’ to the habit of ‘withdrawal’ encouraged by Hinduism’s
meditative practices of negation and inner consolidation” (Mustafa 134). Naipaul
tries to interpret Gandhi’s autobiography in the light of the observations made by
Dr. Kakar.

In the last three chapters, “Synthesis and Mimicry”, “Paradise Lost”, and
“Renaissance or Continuity,” Naipaul goes on to harp on the same ideas, self-
absorption, myth, and metahistory as causes of India’s decline. He also recalls the
perversion of Gandhism as the myth of the golden age which was a time of
innocence and purity. In the chapter “Renaissance or Continuity,” he finds India
as a country “without an ideology,” without the idea of state, without a sense of
history, and without a well defined sense of unity and identity. If there is a sense
of identity it is embodied only in Hinduism. Naipaul writes:

India is without an ideology – and that was the failure of Gandhi and
India together. Its people have no idea of the state, and none of the
attitudes that go with such an idea: no historical notion of the past, no
identity beyond the tenuous ecumenism of Hindu beliefs, and, in
spite of the racial excesses of the British period, not even the
beginnings of a racial sense.

(India: A Wounded Civilization 168)

Naipaul thinks that Indian civilization has lost its vitality. It is fighting only
for its survival. Bereft of creativity and mental life, it is undergoing a process of
decay. Surprisingly it still hangs on its magical practices and customs which enslave society. To quote him:

Through centuries of conquest the civilization declined into an apparatus for survival, turning away from the mind (on which the sacred Gita lays such stress) and creativity (Vinoba Bhave finding in Sanskrit only the language of the gods, and not the language of poets), stripping itself down, like all decaying civilizations, to its magical practices and imprisoning social forms. To enable men to survive, men had to be diminished. And this was a civilization that could narrow and still appear whole. Perhaps because of its unconcealed origins in racial conquest (victorious Aryans, subjugated aborigines), it is shot through with ambiguous beliefs that can either exalt men or abase them.

(India: A Wounded Civilization 168)

After discussing the decaying state of Indian civilization goes on to treat dharma, as the key concept of Hinduism. It can no longer be defined only as a class or caste concept. It is a flexible concept which is a combination of self-fulfilment and action as something spirituality rewarding. Dharma is neither a mysterious idea nor a sectarian ideal. It is a universal ideal, which belongs to all civilizations. To quote Naipaul:

The key Hindu concept of dharma – the right way, the sanctioned way, which all men must follow, according to their natures – is an elastic concept. As its noblest it combines self-fulfilment and truth to the self with the ideas of action as duty, action as its own spiritual reward, man as a holy vessel. And it ceases then to be mysterious; it touches the high ideals of other civilizations. It might be said that it is of dharma that Balzac is writing when, near the end of his creative life, breaking through fatigue and a long blank period to write Cousine Bette in eight weeks, he reflects on the artist’s vocation.

(India: A Wounded Civilization 168-169)

According to Naipaul the idea of dharma may be dynamic as well as static; creative as well as crippling. India cannot be creative, till she follows the religion
of persons like Vinoba Bhave who have nothing to offer but only, “the dust and defeat of the Indian village.” Naipaul urges Indians to encourage not saints but science and scientists for the betterment their life:

Dharma is creative or crippling according to the state of the civilization, according to what is expected of men. It cannot be otherwise. The quality of a faith is not a constant; it depends on the quality of the men who profess it. The religion of a Vinoba Bhave can only express the dust and defeat of the Indian village. Indians have made some contribution to science in this century; but – with a few notable exceptions – their work has been done abroad. And this is more than a matter of equipment and facilities. It is a cause of concern to the Indian scientific community – which feels itself vulnerable in India – that many of those men who are so daring and original abroad should, when they are lured back to India, collapse into ordinariness and yet remain content, become people who seem unaware of their former worth, and seem to have been brilliant by accident. They have been claimed by the lesser civilization, the lesser idea of dharma and self-fulfilment. In a civilization reduced to its forms, they no longer have to strive intellectually to gain spiritual merit in their own eyes; that same merit is now to be had by religious right behaviour correctness.

(India: A Wounded Civilization 169-170)

Condemning intellectual parasitism and dehumanizing poverty, Naipaul mentions the failure of reformist movements like “Arya Samaj,” The Aryan Association, which is opposed to traditional ideas of caste. As for Gandhi, Naipaul does not give him credit for his work:

The civilization of conquest who also the civilization of defeat; it enabled men, obeying an elastic dharma, to dwindle with their land. Gandhi awakened India; but the India he awakened was only the India of defeat, the holy land he needed after South Africa.

(India: A Wounded Civilization 172)
In Naipaul’s opinion, Gandhi is an intellectual angel. His contribution towards Indian civilization is only negative. Naipaul condemns his ideas as fantasies. He states:

No government can survive on Gandhian fantasy; and the spirituality, the solace of a conquered people, which Gandhi turned into a form of national assertion, has soured more obviously into the nihilism that it always was.

(India: A Wounded Civilization 172)

All these outbursts against Gandhi and the decaying Hinduism reflect the restlessness of a diaspora, who wants the country of his forefathers to touch the pinnacle of ancient glory. Though Purabi Panwar notices in the book “the absence of anxiety” (Panwar 113), there are its strong traces which provide a unique intensity to his utterances. Such intensity is missing in his tirade against other religions. Furthermore, Naipaul does not criticize Hinduism as such, but only that aspect of Hinduism which produces inertia. Likewise, he is neither against dharma or karma, but wants its correct interpretation, and uses as the instrument of dynamic action. As for religion, he wants not a timid but a militant Hinduism.

Naipaul’s search for a viable religious vision which started from his Trinidadian experiences and unfolded in The Mystic Masseur, The Suffrage of Elvira, A House for Mr. Biswas, and The Mimic Men, and continued through An Area of Darkness and India: A Wounded Civilization culminates into India: A Million Mutinies Now, perhaps his most ambitious book, which not only examines his religious concepts in a much wider context but also corrects his misconceptions and prejudices developed over the years. Interestingly he enlarges his mental
horizon, as he goes on to cover the entire field of human activity in India, social, political, and religious. Naipaul’s expansion of his vision can be deduced by the title term of the book India: A Million Mutinies Now, which is generally used for 1857 struggle for independence. However, for Naipaul, there is not one but millions of such mutinities or uprisings in different fields active in India after independence. These mutinies of several kinds based on issues ranging from caste-status, religious fundamentalism, and homeland.

As Rob Nixon believes, Naipaul by using the term ‘mutiny’ in a wide connotation, exhausts its meaning to the fullest. “In tracking a myriad mutineers across India,” Nixon writes, “Naipaul may ultimately overtax the term: it covers everything from regional secessionist movements to religious and caste chauvinisms – ex-Naxalite, Dalit, Shiv Sena, Dravidians, Aryan, Muslim, and Sikh – to middle-class individuals (stockbrokers, filmmakers) tinkering with the edges of caste rituals in order, say, to make a commuter life in Bombay more manageable. Naipaul’s perception of all these as mutinies becomes crucial for the book’s central paradox: India has entered a state of regenerative disintegration.”

Naipaul views these mutinies not merely as the forces of disintegration but the symbols of resurgent India. To quote him:

“[S]trange irony – the mutinies were not to be wished away. They were part of the beginning of a new way for many millions, part of India’s growth, part of its restoration” (Nixon 171).

These mutinies are neither limited in number nor in scope. They cover a wide spectrum and are concerned with a number of problems including religious. Obviously all these mutinies point their guns towards the Indian union:
A million mutinies supported by twenty kinds of group excess, sectarian excess, religious excess, regional excess; beginnings of self-awareness a central will, a central intellect, a national idea. The Indian Union as greater than the sum of its parts.17

Naipaul’s treatment of these mutinies refers to the radical changes, taking place within Indian milieu as well as within his own mental make-up and his notions about Hinduism and its rituals. As he himself acknowledges, Naipaul comes to know the truth about India:

That book on India (India: A Million Mutinies Now) is not oral history, it’s an account of a civilization at a hinge moment. It’s done through human experience; there’s a special shape to the book, it’s held together by a thread of inquiry, it’s very carefully composed. The idea came to me that the truth about India wasn’t what I thought about India, it’s what they are living through.18

Even though Naipaul deals with the myriad aspects of Indian life, his focal point is still Hinduism and its rituals. His demand for the rational meaning of rituals is finally realized in the book. With his doubts about rituals removed, Naipaul becomes reassured of his Brahmin identity with his encounter with knowledgeable persons in India “His conversation” writes Purabi Panwar, “with Papu the stockbroker, practising brahmins like Pravas and Deviah were about the ritualistic aspects of religion. This could be read as a postmodernist trait which does not recognize anything which is not physical. One can also connect this preoccupation with rituals to Naipaul’s brahmanic upbringing in Trinidad where rituals linked expatriate Indians to India and gave them a sense of belonging” (Panwar 132).

As in other book, India: A Million Mutinies Now, Hinduism, rather the Brahminic instinct is a priori. Though Naipaul takes up religious and non-
religious issues, raised by different sections of people, his main concern is still religion. Interestingly, he begins with Papu who possess a keen sense of religion. Although Papu belongs to a community of star brokers, he is keen to preserve his sectarian sanctity. Thus, he is a model of honest commercial acumen. After giving a portrait of Papu, Naipaul comes to direct his attention to the Hindu fundamentalism or Hindutava as interpreted by the Shiv Sena. He meets Patil, an active Shiv Sena worker, who blends politics with religion. Naipaul also comes in contact with Raoute the chairman of the Corporation, full of atam-viswas received from religion in a larger sense. Raoute is an exponent of Maharastrian religious tradition, sustained by Gurus (spiritual teachers) like Ramdas and many others. But this Maharastrian tradition has been given a political twist by the Shiv Sena, a political outfit. Naipaul also interviews Ghate, a powerful Sena forefronter. Ghate is a chawl man, fighting for people, living in the chawls, which for him is a version of larger family. In Naipaul’s opinion, “Papu’s sense of service out of a religious overtone and Ghate’s from a political standpoint ultimately converge into an Indian ethical view” (Sarkar 223).

Naipaul has an important conversation with Muslims, especially with the Muslims belonging to the underworld. He also interacts with the Hindu militants who claim themselves to be more principled than their Muslim counterparts. Naipaul is told that the Muslim members of the crime world, offer Namaz five times a day and read the Koran more regularly than ordinary Muslim. He comes to know that by all intents and purposes the Muslim gangsters are the self-styled defenders of Islam. Likewise, the Hindu gangsters are also religious minded, they
offer *Pujas* of Santoshi Mata for protection. The Hindu gangsters are not only religious but also the protectors of the poor. Naipaul brings out the difference between the Hindu and Muslim gangsters through a conversation with the leader of gangsters:

The Muslims turned to crime, Vithal and the others said, because their values were lower. The Muslims had more than one wife and they had very large families. And, in a curious inversion of pride, the men in the room said that while Muslim gangsters were heroes to the Muslim community, Hindu gangsters like themselves were outcasts.

Though outcasts, they were religious. They felt protected by the deity of a temple, Santoshi Mata. She was a version of Durga or Kali, the goddess of power.

The leader said with perfect seriousness, ‘She’s the goddess of the victory of good over bad.’

They were religious people: they wanted that known. It was their policy, for instance, never to harass the poor.

The leader said, ‘If you do that, the poor will curse you. And the curse of the poor is a very damaging thing.’

*(India: A Million Mutinies Now 74)*

Interestingly, Naipaul who had been grotesquely scoffing at the rites and rituals of Hindus, all through his life develops a patient attitude towards them. Now he begins to treat them with appreciation and understanding. Naipaul deliberately comes in touch with the priestly class which is responsible for the proper observation of the rites and rituals. Eventually, he meets a young man of Bombay *pujari* class. Naipaul is favourably inclined to the practices of the young priest for whom *pujas* is not a common profession but a pious profession. It is not merely for earning money. The young priest evinces a keen interest in his use of
the electric devices in performing pujas. Naipaul likes the electric Pujari’s interpretation of Bhabani Shankar and Ganapati. In the company of pujari, Naipaul seems to cultivate a test for Hindu rituals. His attitude towards the pujari becomes respectful. “Naipaul,” as R.N. Sarkar writes, “feels for the young man, pujari though. His professional sincerity reminds him of his Trinidad experience of his early days and restores a bit of appreciation of all these Hindu ritualism in his well-developed modern mind of a feeling artist” (Sarkar 233). Naipaul does not regard the priest a gadfly, as Swagata Ganguly does. Even though Naipaul does not fully appreciate the mode of pujari’s mind, he is certainly interested in his personality, his spiritualism, and devotion to rituals:

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

(India: A Million Mutinies Now 84)

However, the best exemplification of Naipaul’s Brahminical instinct surfaces in his participation in the procession of the prostitutes led by Namdeo Dhassal, the leader of the Dalit Panther. Naipaul writes that the whole spectacle appears obnoxious to him. He writes:

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

(India: A Million Mutinies Now 239-240)
Naipaul’s position is rendered ridiculous. His puritan self finds himself in an odd situation. As Sarkar comments, “Naipaul is so much of a character here that he seems at times shy of his presence, his latent Brahminic instinct must have surfaced when he for a time wishes to fly the scene, an assembly of protest in the brothel area for the social justice of the prostitutes” (Sarkar 240).

Nonetheless the best part of Naipaul’s Brahmin sensibility is displayed in his encounters with Brahmin scientists, Purohits, and Brahmin spiritual leaders. In the characters of these persons, he finds the true spirit of Brahminism and its values. By painting their portraits, Naipaul reveals the truth behind his Brahminical vision. He likes Brahmin not merely for their learning and intellectual pursuits but for their scientific bent of mind. It was this vent which was responsible for the achievements of ancient India. It was the same bent which launched Renaissance in the sub-continent. According to Naipaul, it is only this bent which could take India to dizzy heights. He also seems to express anguish over the treatment being meted to this progressive segment of the Hindu society. Naipaul’s belief in the Brahmin sensibility has been defined by Suman Gupta, as “the essential Hinduism” (Gupta 89), Fawzia Mustafa and Akeel Bilgrami’s also view it as “Hindu essentialism” (Mustafa 201).

Naipaul stands for Indian awakening. By Indian awakening, he means Hindu awakening. Surprisingly, Naipaul does not interpret awakening in a wide connotation. By awakening he simply means the development of science and technology. In his opinion the fittest mind for this awakening is the Brahmin mind. Naipaul does not find any conflict between the Brahmin values and the
scientific values. "He doesn't consider," writes Suman Gupta, "the cultivation of science as a supersession and levelling out of conservative Brahminical values; he sees this as a development and regeneration of Brahmins as such" (Gupta 92).

Naipaul reaches this conclusion on the bases of his conversations with three Brahmin scientists – Dr. Srinivasan, Subramaniam, and Pravas. After his visit to Goa, his meeting with Deviah, and his experience of Hinduized Goan Christianity worshipping the image of Infant Jesus, Naipaul meets Dr. Srinivasan, the Chairman of the Indian Atomic Energy Commission in Bombay. Dr. Srinivasan comes from a family which keeps the Brahmin culture intact. "Dr. Srinivasan, and then his father, could, only change Naipaul's attitude to Hindu India and Hindu cultures a little." After Dr. Srinivasan, Naipaul meets two other scientists Subramaniam and Pravas in Banglore belonging to different parts of India and to different disciplines. Both of them are instrumental in defining Naipaul's religious vision. Subramaniam and Pravas, "present him with the contour of cultural contribution that India is still capable of, and thereby could nearly convert him to their views. Naipaul is now a patient listener, a true inquirer and a little changed man" (Sarkar 249).

Subramaniam tells Naipaul about Alberuni, the Arab historian of about 1000 A.D. at the court of Ghazni and the Hindu habit of remembering its great scientist:

'Up to a point that is why Hindus are a-historical. If you look at what Indian culture remembers – we preserve our books on mathematics, astronomy, grammar. We preserve Bhashkara and Charaka,' Seventh-century scientists. 'Among the things which are preserved are not the names of kings or their battles – that is not part
of our tradition. We know Bhaskara and Shankaracharya. Shankaracharya, a ninth-century philosopher who traveled all over India, revitalized Hindu philosophy, set up religious foundations (which still exist) in certain places, and is thought to have died at the age of thirty-two. ‘But if you ask, “Who ruled this part of the country in 1700?” people wouldn’t know, and basically they wouldn’t care.

(India: A Million Mutinies Now 160)

Earlier Subramaniam has told Naipaul the Indian tradition of pursuing knowledge in which science is an important part. He also states that this tradition still continues. Hence one should not be surprised to find old treatises on Astronomy, Mathematics, and Medical Science still popular. To reproduce Subramaniam’s statement:

‘I don’t know what led my father to science. I personally feel that the scientific tradition is not alien to India. I think that science comes naturally to Indians. Many Indians like to think of themselves as having a tradition of pursuing knowledge, and science is knowledge as it was understood by Bhaskara, one of our old or ancient scientists. Today in India you can buy Bhaskara’s treatise on astronomy of 600 or 700 AD, and there is extant a famous medical treatise of about the same time. I must make it clear that I don’t for a moment believe all these other people who run around saying that everything – atom bombs, rockets, aeroplanes – was invented by ancient Indians.

(India: A Million Mutinies Now 153)

Subramaniam goes on to mention the names of modern scientists like Visweswaraih. He goes on to tell him (Naipaul) that in the opinion of his father rituals and caste barriers were outdated. He (father) made a tremendous effort to modernize them:

He tried to reconcile the two. He developed a certain outlook of his own – Hindu or brahminical, as he saw it, rooted in a certain respect for ancient Indian scholarship and philosophy. But it tried to be free of all the things he associated with prejudice.

(India: A Million Mutinies Now 156)
Explaining his father’s attitude towards rituals, Subramaniam tells Naipaul:

‘About rituals, I think my father went through a stage when he rejected them, and then finally he accepted them in a certain modified form. So, in his later years, he used to perform puja, but in a very unobtrusive way. I remember arguing with him about the puja he performed, and he said it was sufficient that it gave him a certain mental peace and privacy for a part of the day. He can be described without paradox as a man who was conservative in one way and liberal in another. In matters of caste, etc., he was liberal. But he was not westernized at all.’

(India: A Million Mutinies Now 156)

After telling an eager Naipaul about his own performance of rituals and pujas and about an English medium school run by the orthodox Hindus and his Brahmin teacher who gave him a book on the great scientists, Subramaniam mentions the contributions made by Brahmins in the independence movement, and the promotion of science. He also tells Naipaul the marginalization of Brahmins in the present Indian scenario.

Subramaniam’s statement invokes Naipaul’s Trinidadian memories and helps him to appreciate the hidden meanings of rituals. As he tells the writer,

I found myself at an early age looking inwards, and wondering whether the culture – the difficult but personal religion, the taboos, the social ideas – which in any way supported and enriched some of us, and gave us solidarity, wasn’t perhaps the very thing that had exposed us to defeat.

(India: A Million Mutinies Now 159)

If Subramaniam convinces Naipaul of the scientific temperament of the Brahmin mind, Pravas ensures him of the Brahmin spirit of dynamism and adaptability. He reassures him (Naipaul) that the Brahminism for that matter
Hinduism, is adequate and well-equipped to tackle the fast chaining socio-political world. Pravas begins by telling Naipaul the essential nature of Hinduism based on its belief in the *gunas*, *sattva*, *ragas*, and *tamas*, as the constituents of human personality. These *gunas* or essential qualities also define the food structure of the community. To quote him:

‘Hinduism is a trinity-based religion – there are three options for everything. So food was of three kinds – *sattvik*, *rajasik*, *tamasik*. Sattvik foods encouraged intellectual pursuits, clarity of mind, purer thoughts. Sattvik foods were very light – most grains, a certain amount of clarified butter, the lighter vegetables. Rajasik food is work-oriented.’

*(India: A Million Mutinies Now 165)*

According to Pravas, Brahminism represents the *sattvik* tendencies of Hinduism. Naturally, it is a virtuous sect of Hinduism, which pleads for moderation and ritualism. Brahmin ritualism is based on the assumption that one does not, “necessarily understand the deeper meanings of everything” *(India: A Million Mutinies Now 166)*. Pravas goes on to elaborate how the Brahmin rituals, philosophical speculation, and Brahmin values are undergoing through a process of change. He mentions with interest that Gandhism is nothing but the simplified version of the ancient Brahmin values. As Pravas tells Naipaul,

And there was something else. In addition to the old Puranic values, my father had the diffusion from nationalistic values, essentially Gandhian. Gandhianism was almost a mass hysteria in India, but of a healthy kind. It was the good old values, but packaged in a modern-looking way, very mass-based. The old values looked intellectual and were intellectual, and therefore maintained a distance from the masses. Gandhi found a way of making old truths appear simple. And I grew up with quite a few of those Gandhian slogans. “Work more, talk less.”

*(India: A Million Mutinies Now 167)*
Pravas goes on to elaborate the changes that take place during three generations of his family, in matters of ideas, food, habits, philosophy, and other beliefs. He expresses his conviction and the process of change will go on:

Change is a continuous process. You can discern a change only once in a generation. Because once you discern it, you are already there. So in these last 50 years I can discern only two changes, but they are large because a continuing process is being focussed at two or three points. The next big change will come with my son. There are spans of transition. There are much bigger spans with the succeeding generations.

(India: A Million Mutinies Now 168)

Naipaul is so convinced by the arguments of Pravas that he is reminded of this process of change in the Indian community in Trinidad as well. He concludes that this process of change in Trinidad is similar to that of India. Naipaul describes how the Hindu rituals acquired a new form and a new meaning:

I thought that the changes he was talking about might have been in some way like the changes that had come a generation or two earlier to the Indian community in Trinidad, the peasant India that my grandparents had taken with them, an apparently complete world, with language and rituals and social organization: an India that had, in its New-World setting, even during my childhood, begun to disintegrate: first the language going, then the reverence for the rituals and the need for them (the rituals going on long after they had ceased to be understood), leaving only a group sense, a knowledge of family and clan, and an idea of India in the background, an idea of India quite different (more historical, more political) from the India that had appeared to come with one’s ancestors.

(India: A Million Mutinies Now 169)

With Pravas, Naipaul also learns the frustrations of modern Indian life and the difficulties of the Brahmin community in a hostile anti-Brahmin atmosphere in India especially in the South. He goes on to describe the stories of Kala belonging
to the Tamil Brahmin family. The story gives an account of her progressive journey from ritual to romance. Then Naipaul tells us about the pundit astrologer in the service of the Maharaja of Mysore. Ultimately he comes to Madras for a fuller view of Brahmins in the South and their victimization by anti-Brahmin elements. Naipaul’s account of Sugar, a local saint is exhilarating. Sugar is an epitome of Hindu spiritualism. He is a source of peace of the mind. People from different levels and areas come him to seek his advice to solve their problems. Naipaul writes:

I went to see Sugar again one morning. He was always in his little ground – floor apartment in the Raghavans’ house when he wasn’t asleep. He was always available. He received people all the time, except for a period in the middle of the day. He was a local seer; he counselled; and sometimes he just listened.

(India: A Million Mutinies Now 235)

With Kakusthan, another Brahmin Naipaul comes to realize the predicaments of modern Brahmins who want to preserve their Brahmin ways of life. To quote him:

When at the beginning of my stay in Madras I met Kakusthan, and heard that he was a brahmin who was trying to live as a full brahmin, I didn’t understand how unusual and even heroic this resolve of his was.

(India: A Million Mutinies Now 243)

Naipaul charts the wavering mind of Kakusthan, caught between love and revulsion against it. In his struggle, Naipaul identifies the way of reconciliation between ritualism and racialism, “For sometime,” writes R.N. Sarkar, “Kakusthan oscillated between conviction and compromise, now returned to conviction in
traditional culture. Naipaul’s Brahminic ritualism, now to compromise with the modern rationalization, the crude from of which had already raised its raw head in the South under the Periyar policy and his followers blind, sometimes violent in pursuit of anti-Brahmin outcry (Sarkar 268).

In the career of Kakusthan, Naipaul visualizes the Brahmin ability to preserve the old heritage in the midst of sweeping changes all around the community. Naipaul realizes that the Brahmin community is not dead but living and full of nascent spirit:

When I had first gone to the colony, I had thought, from the way Kakusthan spoke, that the community was fading away, making too many accommodations with the world outside. I realized now that he meant the opposite. The community was learning to adapt: that was its strength.

*(India: A Million Mutinies Now 267)*

In his encounter with children in Shantiniketan, Naipaul comes in contact with the modern form of Hinduism. Naipaul is fascinated by Brahma Samaj, developed from the ideas of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, and elaborated by the father of Rabindranath. Brahma Samaj was an attempt to synthesize the New Learning of Britain and Europe with the old speculative Hindu faith of the Vedas and the Upanishads” *(India: A Million Mutinies Now 286).* The most interesting feature of this religion is its spiritualism which has no connection with religion. Naipaul’s acquaintance with such a religious form should have reassured him of the vitality and power of Hinduism to imbibe modern spirit. Though Naipaul continues to meet people belonging to different religions like Christianity and Islam, his religious vision suffers no change. He finds that the fundamentalist tendencies in
Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity have nothing religious about them. These tendencies are political in their tone and temper. They have nothing to contribute to religion except bigotry.

To sum up, Naipaul’s view of Hinduism which originated in his Trinidadian experience, attains its full-fledged form during his visits to India. He unfolds this vision in his books of fiction and non-fiction alike, specially in An Area of Darkness, India: A Wounded Civilization, and India: A Million Mutinies Now. However, his religious vision is built by two things, his diasporic anxieties and his rational pre-occupations. Naipaul comes to India as a Trinidadian Brahmin in search of his roots in his ancestral home. But he comes with prejudices received from his Western education, prejudices which eventually influence his vision.

Naipaul’s experiences of abortive first trip are incorporated in An Area of Darkness (1964). He comes to India in search for his identity and for enlightenment, but he is dismayed to find his homeland, not the land of enlightenment but the area of darkness, poverty, and ignorance. As a professed atheist, he finds Hinduism and its rituals outdated. He does not approve of Indians other than Brahmins and the sadus in whom he finds a ray of hope. Though unable to establish his identity with Indians, he still finds some points of similarity between his Indian and Trinidadian experience.

In his next book India: A Wounded Civilization (1977) based on his visits of 1971, and 1975, Naipaul describes his disillusionment with Gandhi as well as Gandhism and for that matter with Hinduism. He holds Hinduism responsible for the downfall of India and Indians. However, for Naipaul there are two India, the
ancient India which has touched the pinnacle of glory and the second, vanquished by the foreigners and seduced by the Muslim invaders and British colonizers. Naipaul praises the first and denigrates the second, for the abject conditions of the modern Indian society. Naipaul accuses Gandhism and his values. For some time, he criticizes the Brahmin mind for its so-called anti-scientific temper and outdated values. While criticizing the two novels of R.K. Narayan Mr. Sampath and The Vendor of Sweets for him. Naipaul condemns the Hindu values of passivity, retreat, and disinterestedness. For him Srinivas and Jagan epitomize the failure of Hindu philosophy to deal with the complications of modern society. However, in the end of the book, he reinterprets the Indian values of dharma and karma and urges Indians to prepare an atmosphere scientific advancement.

However, in his third book, India: A Million Mutinies Now (1990) based on his 1989 Indian visit, Naipaul arrives at his true Hindu vision or to be precise Brahmin vision. With this book the dust of his misconceptions about Brahminism and its values is finally removed. He can now visualize in crystal terms the roles of Brahmins and Brahminism in Indian history. Through his acquaintances of the modern Brahmin scientists, Dr. Srinivasan, Subramaniam, and Pravas. Naipaul comes to understand the truth about Brahmin rites and rituals, their way of life, their intellectual and scientific bent of mind, and their dynamism and acclimatization of their religion to the demands of the modern world. He comes to know about their difficulties and their courageous spirit to exist in hostile circumstances, a spirit which enables them to face ordeals and to preserve their
heritage and spiritualism. With the three scientists he discovers his Brahmin identity, fusing his two experiences, the Trinidadian and the Indian.
Chapter 3 - Endnotes


