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Picturization of India in *A Million Mutinies*

Now by V S Naipaul: A Study

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Abstract:

India is portrayed as Naipaul depicts it in *A Million Mutinies Now*, the third volume of his trilogy on India. Following the publication of two polemical books on his views and analyses of India, Naipaul returned to the country in 1988, resulting in his third trip narrative about the country. Naipaul witnessed changes on a variety of levels in India during this journey, and he scrupulously documented the varied experiences of persons undergoing transition. He focused particularly on the country's numerous social, political, and religious upheavals and movements. This essay goes into the individual struggles and societal struggles for identity and empowerment that Naipaul documented across the country. This time, he took a different approach to understanding India, softening his harsh judgments and caustic critiques. The extent to which Naipaul's portrayal of India has developed over time will be examined. Additionally, it would determine whether the work contains any personal prejudices or Eurocentric prejudices as a result of his complicated relationship with India and the Western worldview.

Keywords: Diaspora, India, Identity, Empowerment



Introduction:

The third novel, *A Million Mutinies Now*, is similar to the previous two, but radically different in terms of narrative structure, tone, and attitude toward India. It is both one of his most ambitious and longest works. However, the shift in Naipaul's perspective on India and his method of study is not exceptional. He noted a shift in his perspective while touring the southern states of the United States and writing *A Turn in the South* (1989). Immediately following the publication of his autobiographical memoir *An Enigma of Arrival*. Andrew Robinson addresses Naipaul, noting that no other travel novels are predicted from him, although Naipaul went on to write two additional travel books, *A Turn in the South* and *India: A Million Mutinies Now*. According to Naipaul, there are two reasons for this. To begin, the electronic typewriter simplified his writing, and to continue, he learnt "how to travel in a new manner" while in the American South. The "new" method he stated is a distinct form of data collection. Rather than developing ideas for his works by observing society from afar as a detached social critic, as he had previously done, he grew to believe that the people he met could assist him in this attempt.

“And so in this book on India I thought it was better to let India be defined by the experience of the people, rather than writing one’s reaction to one's feelings about being an Indian and going back” (“Going Back”18)¹.

Due to the fact that he portrayed the viewpoint and voice of regular people, this new form of storytelling may be described as populist. It is also a work that demonstrates Naipaul's postcolonial perspective, since he depicted India through the eyes of insiders rather than through the eyes of the West. According to Rob Nixon, the book offers a "middle ground between oral history and travel writing." After writing multiple novels portraying the former colonies in the most negative light possible, he recognised that simply recounting their stories from the perspective of outsiders is insufficient. He provided a means of expression for the voiceless, faceless, and faceless.



Naipaul's depiction of India in his *A Million Mutinies Now*

By allowing the underclass to speak, Naipaul lends greater realism and credibility to his portrayal of India. He was no longer the angry and worried traveller who maintained a safe distance from the crowd. Naipaul saw India for the first time through the eyes of a native. Rather than focusing on poverty and filth, he concentrated on people and their desires. He visited slums, worker tenements, ghettos, prostitution districts, mansions, modest residences, villages, and conflict-affected places in order to meet people. Among those he met and interviewed were businessmen, social activists, journalists, Brahmin priests, former Naxalite workers, the Dalit Panthers' leader, local gangsters, local Shiv Sena leaders, ministers and politicians, former princes, scientists, Muslims, Sikhs, and others who work in offices and the film industry. As Nixon described it, he was "in the thick of things." Throughout the majority of the interviews, he remained a patient listener, interrupting only when necessary, paying close attention to every word they said as well as their surroundings, and making only brief comments following each encounter. Since he receded into the background, enabling individuals to tell their stories and experiences in the first person, authorial interference or intervention is uncommon. He not only permitted himself to develop feelings for others, but he also grasped their plight. Individuals develop into individuals with distinct personalities, rather than caricatures or simply book characters.

As much as the book is about India's portrayal, it is also about him. After 26 years, from his initial visit in 1962 to his most recent in 1988, his outlook on life has shifted. At the age of 56, he had become more mellow, more compassionate, and more accepting of other people's perspectives and beliefs. Restraint and openness supplanted youthful bluster and rawness. He detailed his turbulent relationship with India in the first two volumes. He claimed once more in the preface to the third volume that he was always divided on India and found it difficult to offer the final word on the subject. He explained why he had been unable to establish a meaningful relationship with India in the past. It began with his anxiety. When he first visited India, he was reminded of his forefathers who had left India as indentured servants for Trinidad, a fact that made him feel embarrassed. "I carried an appalling sense of failure, humiliation, and shame in my bones. That idea of abjectness, defeat, and shame had been ingrained in my bones.



It was the concept I brought to India on my slow train and ship journey in 1962; it was the source of my anxiety". Second, his inherited image of a writer was the reason he was unable to approach others and inquire about their life. "Possibly shyness; a desire not to intrude; but also perhaps stemmed from the image of the writer that I had inherited: the image of the writer as a man with an internal life, a man drawing it all out of his innards and magically interpreting the externals of things," he admitted. He returned to India with renewed zeal and a new perspective on the country. The book is an engrossing journey narrative due to the author's combination of personal and external events, as well as his representation of India.

This time, Naipaul was composed and patient not only because he had developed a new perspective on India or had grown older, but also because he had discovered fulfilment in his professional life. He desired affiliation with India, a country famed for its old civilization and exquisite classical legacy, in 1962, when he was dubious of his literary standing despite having published multiple works. However, the proudly borne Indian identity was met with visible poverty and a dearth of "racial consciousness," which he described in *India: A Wounded Civilization* as "a sense of belonging to a people particular to the Indian subcontinent." His initial surprise and disenchantment with India were met with rejection and a severe response. By the late 1980s, he had travelled extensively, produced multiple novels, travel narratives, and other non-fiction books, and earned widespread recognition and respect in the Western world. He was no longer worried with his identity or distressed by his homelessness, having established himself as a renowned writer. He felt at peace with himself and the world since he was no longer under any obligation to write in order to maintain his job or build his identity as a writer. He was composed, patient, and accommodating, receptive to listening and hopeful enough to discover meaning and creative energy amidst chaos and upheavals.

As the title of the book implies, India is in chaos, which he believes is preferable to stasis. It is no longer constrained by obsolete and ancient modes of thought and behaviour. Community and caste members who had been subjected to outmoded constraints, various cruelties, and societal problems began to battle for justice and liberty. Rather than accept their fate, individuals have begun to exhibit previously suppressed personalities and uniqueness. Rather than being considered as fated victims, as "children of God, people for whom good



things might be done, objects of emotion and transient devotion," oppressed and poor people throughout India have began "stressing their particularity." With a certain amount of money and knowledge, they have developed a "group sense and political consciousness". Individuals previously constrained by caste standards, obsolete traditions and rituals; have broken away from their parents' and grandparents' restricting ways and expectations. The country's economic growth facilitates and accelerates this process. He expressed his gratitude for the people's efforts by saying:

Thousands, if not millions, of individuals, had labored like that throughout the years, with little feeling of personal drama; it had built up to a massive national effort in the 40 years since independence. The fruits of such work could now be seen. What seemed to be a surprise had been planned for a long time. The increasing wealth was evident, as was the restored confidence of individuals who had before been impoverished.^[2]

The 1857 revolt, named the Sepoy Mutiny by the British and the First War of Independence by the Indians, was the first coordinated attempt to depose the British. Naipaul was startled to find the genuine concept of liberty and self-assertion spreading throughout India and permeating all strata of society 40 years after India's independence and 130 years after the uprising. As Naipaul phrased it, the "Million Mutinies" are the seeds of self-awareness and individual and community attempts at recognition and growth. As so, he stated,

Independence had come to India in the form of a revolution; now, inside that revolution, there were multiple revolutions. What was true in Bombay was also true in other regions of India: Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Assam, and Punjab. Across India, a slew of unique characteristics that had been stifled by foreign control, poverty, a lack of opportunity, or abjectness has resurfaced.^[3]

There are now "A Million Mutinies, fueled by twenty different types of group excess, sectarian excess, religious excess, and regional excess," and these million little mutinies present themselves in the form of fury and rebellion, which are expressions of people's displeasure.



Unlike the 1857 mutiny, Naipaul believed that India's modern mutinies provide a "more real and universal road forward."

When dealing with the various revolutions and movements occurring in the country, he sought "someone's lived experience that would illuminate some aspect, some new turn, in the old country's unceasing adjustment to new thought, new politics, and new business ideas," rather than "someone's lived experience that would illuminate some aspect, some new turn, in the old country's unceasing adjustment to new thought, new politics, and new business ideas." Rather of focusing on his own feelings about India or on the concerns, he focused on the people he saw as "the most vital thing about India," the thing that needed to be "gone into and understood, not viewed from the outside." Rather than revolutionary ideas, Naipaul focused on those who have worked diligently and devotedly to improve themselves, their families, and society, as well as those who have been influenced by it. He began in Bombay and proceeded south to Goa, Karnataka, and Madras, before continuing north to Calcutta, Lucknow, Punjab, and eventually Kashmir. The various personal and familial stories and experiences collected by Naipaul in the following paragraphs shed light on the positive changes that have occurred in India and the various types of movements that are currently taking place in the country, including the Dalit Panthers, the Shiv Sena, the Self-Respect Movement, the Naxalite Movement, the Sikh Identity Movement, the Maoist Uprising, and scientific revisionism.

Conclusion

As Naipaul himself admitted, he had a complicated relationship with India. He struggled to accept India for the first time due to his memories of India as an expatriate and member of a diasporic group, his Western education and sensibilities, and India's overwhelming reality. Nonetheless, he stated in the first book that he did not wish for India to "sink." It pained him to see India still bear the scars of colonialism and struggle with the same issues that newly independent nations do. As a result, he arrived on his second visit to investigate the issues. Despite his frustration with India's failure to heal from successive invasion wounds, he did not abandon the country. He returned after 13 years with a renewed vision and vigour. It was reassuring to meet people with new viewpoints, as opposed to the



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passive, fatalistic, and defeatist attitudes he had previously encountered. His India had fully healed from its wounds and was on the path to progress and development, as depicted by him. In the mutinies, Naipaul saw new beginnings and beams of hope, while others saw chaos and calamity. *India: A Million Mutinies Now* may be regarded as a re-evaluation and review of all he had seen and written about India prior. It aided in the restoration of India's image, as well as Naipaul's. Due to its unusual style and milder tone, this story may be viewed as a counterbalance to the preceding two novels.



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