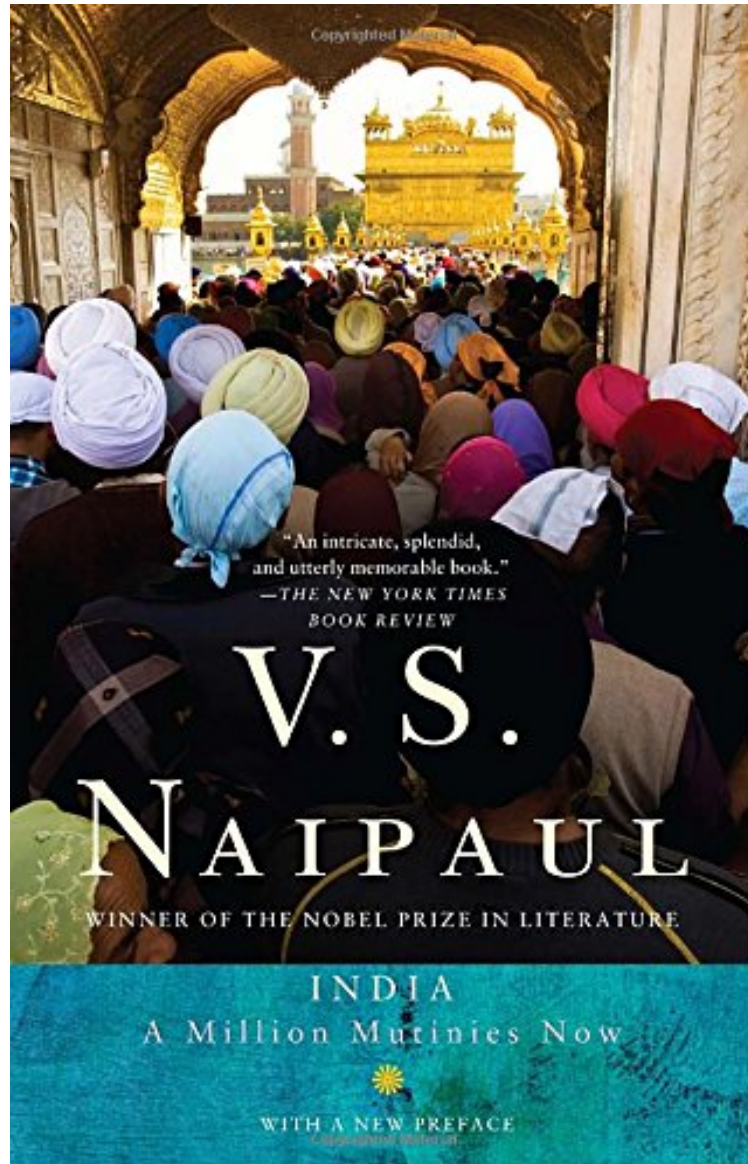


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## India: A Million Mutinies Now

V.S. Naipaul

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**V.S. Naipaul : India: A Million Mutinies Now** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised India: A Million Mutinies Now:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Not amongst his best works -By KolareI picked this book because I liked Naipaul's Beyond Belief and also because I like his prose.The work does not do justice to the tremendous task that Naipaul has set for himself, if that task is to make sense of India's present from its historical path of where it

comes from. Naipaul seems to impute that the religious beliefs of Hinduism are responsible for Indians' easy acceptance of foreign rule, defeat and subjugation, if I got his point right through this well-written narrative of post-independent India's predications. Hindus, in Naipaul's view are only too willing to 'spiritualise' the experience of abject poverty. This analysis of Naipaul is of course very different from the usual diagnosis of difficulties of running world's largest democracy in which more than half the people were illiterate for most of its existence as an independent nation. The aspect of Hinduism that is debilitating in author's view is a certain obsession with the self and withdrawal from outer social world. This made Indians complicit in easy acceptance of foreign rulers and accept defeat spiritually. Naipaul sees this debilitating Hindu thought in none other than Gandhi and his adherents - Gandhi being presented as a self-obsessed man who is ever conscious of his inner workings and impulses while missing to observe or narrate a lot of what happens around him. Naipaul is relentless in critically examining India's father of nation. Also a certain lack of historic sense among Indians, and pride yielding long years of subjugation means Indians interpret themselves through ideas of their colonial masters rather than through their own illustrious past. Naipaul has a point here, no doubt. What Naipaul's penetrating observation misses is much more than what it catches - for instance, to say Hinduism is self-centered is a jaundiced view. Any society that has a notion of good and evil has some concept of society and social norms and obligations, and concept of Dharma is just that. Likewise, this land was not always poor and in fact pursuit of wealth, so called Artha among four purusharthas, is one of the goals of Hindu life - wise men as alms-seeking mendicants seeking enlightenment through suffering is a perhaps much later addition to Hindu thought, may be more Buddhist than Hindu in origin. Likewise, while Naipaul bemoans India's loss of a part of cultural heritage in areas such as painting, architecture he has ignored the successful continuation of dance and music. All in all, a laboured and contrived explanation to explain a complex civilisation through a single simplistic idea. Lastly, it needs to be mentioned though Naipaul's prose is as good as I have found it in his other non-fiction works. That to many of his fans makes anything he writes worth reading, even if that writing is only dimly illuminating.

4 of 5 people found the following review helpful. India will go on  
By Vincent Poirier  
In 1975, India was not finished, it was wounded. It would recover and go on, as it had gone on for thousands of years. This sentence, India will go on, must have impressed Naipaul. In fact he opens not one but two chapters with this quote from a novel by R.K. Narayan. This is typical of Naipaul's prose. Starting with someone else's words, he superimposes his own voice on theirs and creates what, to my mind, must be the finest contemporary English prose around. Through it, we experience not one person after another, but a whole cast of characters all in layers. Naipaul interviews an engineer who takes him to a village where he is introduced to a money lending landlord and his tenants. In one paragraph we are exposed to many relationships. Naipaul's and the engineer's, then the engineer's relationship with the powerful landlord who could forbid his tenants to talk to him thus making him unable to carry out his land improvement projects. There's the relationship between the tenants and the landlord, between Naipaul and the tenants, and so on. It is almost like an opera which, unlike theater, remains coherent even if everyone is talking all at once. Economy is a mark of great art. The title makes this point too. India was wounded, not dead. But during Indira Gandhi's Emergency, it was in critical condition. And the point is made in four words. India has a long history of art and culture but their natural development was largely interrupted during the British Raj. The forms have remained but the conscious sense of continuity was lost. What remains is the here and the now. The people no longer remember their past but at any moment they feel its presence around them. I've never been to India so cannot say if Naipaul's picture of it is true or faithful. I suspect it is, but that is immaterial. It is certainly an accurate presentation of what he himself thought and felt as a foreign-born Indian returning to the land of his ancestors, and that is how we ought to measure an artist's achievement, by his ability to make us feel precisely what he wishes us to feel.

Vincent Poirier, Tokyo  
4 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Very good overview of modern India  
By Phil (not) in Magnolia  
The country of India is of sufficient importance to all of us today that there is a real need for resources to help us develop a greater understanding, whether we are a traveler, business person working with India, or simply one interested in becoming more informed, such as myself. I don't expect that to be accomplished by only one book, so the challenge is to select a couple of volumes which together can do the job. For myself, this book is one that I have selected to help my own understanding of India.

India: A Million Mutinies Now was originally published in 1990, and this edition brings it back into availability, with a new preface by the author. It is the third volume of a trilogy written by Naipaul on India, the first two being *An Area of Darkness*, and *India: A Wounded Civilization*. It does date back 20 years, and for that reason does not take into account the many developments and changes in India since that time, so if you must have something that reflects today's India in all respects, this may fall short in some ways.

Author V. S. Naipaul (2001 Nobel Prize in Literature) is acclaimed both for his fiction and non-fiction. He was born in Chaguanas, Trinidad and Tobago, to parents of Indian descent. In this book, he describes India through a series of stories covering people from many castes and different backgrounds. As these various individuals' stories are told, and as you begin to grasp how they deal with the day-to-day problems of living in an overcrowded country, and surviving within the caste system still in place, you find that your understanding of India is beginning to come together. It is a long book (500+ pages), full of interesting vignettes and covering a very wide variety of individuals from all walks of Indian life. If you are considering purchase of this book, then I would also refer you to the comments to the earlier 1990 edition (*India: A Million Mutinies Now*), which

remain valid for this new printing. As alternates or supplements to this book, I would also suggest *India: A Portrait*, recently issued, and I am sure that there are many others. I will continue to add to this review if I do come across other books that I feel should also be mentioned.

A New York Times Notable Book Nobel laureate V. S. Naipauls impassioned and prescient travelogue of his journeys through his ancestral homeland, with a new preface by the author. Arising out of Naipauls lifelong obsession and passion for a country that is at once his and totally alien, *India: A Million Mutinies Now* relates the stories of many of the people he met traveling there more than fifty years ago. He explores how they have been steered by the innumerable frictions present in Indian society—the contradictions and compromises of religious faith, the whim and chaos of random political forces. This book represents Naipauls last word on his homeland, complementing his two other India travelogues, *An Area of Darkness* and *India: A Wounded Civilization*.

From Publishers Weekly Trinidadian journalist-novelist Naipaul stresses that much has changed since his 1962 trip to India, which yielded his darkly pessimistic book *India: A Wounded Civilization*. In this kaleidoscopic, layered travelogue, he portrays "a country of a million little mutinies," reeling with "rage and revolt," as percolating ideas of freedom shake loose the old moral ethos rooted in caste and class. Despite what he terms regional, religious and sectarian excesses, Naipaul sees possibilities for regeneration in the new freedoms, yet this skewed essay is fraught with bewilderment and sorrow as he reels off a familiar litany of problems—terrible poverty, shoddy manufactured goods, ugly neo-modern architecture, etc.—and comes to terms with his own past: his ancestors were indentured servants of Indian descent. Most interesting here are the dozens of first-person stories by Indians themselves, ranging from a wealthy young stockbroker to anti-religionists to a publisher of women's magazines. 50,000 first printing; \$50,000 ad/promo; author tour. Copyright 1990 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal This book by the Trinidad-born Indian author of *A Turn in the South* (LJ 3/1/89) elicits pity, anger, disgust, and a sense of betrayal at India's development since Independence. It tells of an India gone wrong, filled with economic and political corruption. Violence between conflicting religions and a greedy society obsessed with self-interest has smashed the idealism and hope of Nehru's developing secular India. Unfortunately, Naipaul concentrates on urban life, interviewing business, religious, and mob leaders in Bombay, Madras, Calcutta, and Delhi while ignoring the rural villages where the majority of India's people live. The result is an unfocused work of social-political commentary that is fine for public libraries but adds nothing new to more specialized collections. Previewed in Prepub Alert, LJ 9/15/90-- John F. Riddick, Central Michigan Univ. Lib., Mt. Pleasant Copyright 1990 Reed Business Information, Inc. An intricate, splendid, and utterly memorable book. The New York Times Book Warm, human, rich with a cacophony of Indian voices, *India: A Million Mutinies Now* is about the passions and tragedies of a nation caught between the rush of modernity and the power of tradition. . . . An indispensable book for understanding India at the end of the 20th century. The Washington Post Brilliantly penetrating and shrewd. . . . Each story, evoked by Naipauls sensitive and nuanced probing, reflects complexities and contradictions and gives us a glimpse, however tiny, of the mosaic totality that comprises India. The Chicago Tribune Beautifully written, intellectually satisfying. . . . Naipaul is a rare combination of born narrator, who brings to life the places and people he encounters. Foreign Affairs Compassionate. . . . Leaves the reader with a powerful sense of [a] peoples dedication, perseverance and passion. The New York Times Travel writing, history, novel, lyric Naipauls book partakes of the excellence of every category and fulfills itself in one of the oldest and rarest of forms prophecy. It bears witness, in unforgettable language, to the best of hopes in the worst of times. The Christian Science Monitor Naipaul has retired the familiar, infuriating, immobile face of India and painted a fresh one of human spirit and dramatic change. Time A shifting kaleidoscope of images of a country almost impossible to imagine, but made more comprehensible due to Naipauls formidable intelligence and prodigious narrative gifts. Boston Sunday Herald Naipaul creates his India slowly, through whole life-stories told in the characters own voices. . . . The detail is wonderful, built up with impeccable care. The Economist [Naipaul] has invaluable revealed the brink on which India now stands, the sources of all that rage and all those little mutinies. . . . There is a powerful feeling of change in this book. Los Angeles Times Compelling, almost hypnotic. . . . A rich, multilayered portrait of a nation we know far too little about in the West. You will feel you have learned much about India, yet you will sense how much more how very much more remains to be learned. Seattle Times Authentic. . . . These narratives record, in human terms, the rich and disturbing diversity of contemporary India. . . . Extraordinary. Newsday There is a great temptation to quote too much of Naipaul, for in reading the novelist, essayist and travel writer we realize the accuracy of those who consider him one of the finest writers in the language; a man with intense intellectual curiosity, as well as an inherited sympathy for inhabitants of the Third World. The Oregonian A superb raga of a book, a raga of morning curiosity and evening meditation. . . . This may be [Naipauls] most generous work, and his best non-fiction. The San Diego Union-Tribune An absorbing journey through the mind of India. . . . Mutinies will surprise those who have read and ranted at Naipauls earlier books on India. St. Petersburg Times Brilliant. The Spectator (London) In-depth. . . . Beautifully written, this book gives a personal look at the societal and political forces pushing for change in the country. Minneapolis Star Tribune Prescient. . . . Naipauls intuitions and indefatigable on-the-spot research were

well ahead of the academic reaction. . . . [He is] a writer who will always be read and not just by academics for his intelligence and insight and for the clarity and elegance of his style. *The Times Higher Education Supplement* One of the most intelligent writers of our time. . . . Naipaul's word-pictures of India are lyrical, spare, precise and vivid. . . . He succeeds brilliantly in integrating India's individual truths with a larger picture of the country. *The Toronto Star*