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## A Mala in Obeisance: Hinduism in Select Texts by V.S. Naipaul

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Naipaul declares in *An Area of Darkness*, “that, though growing up in an orthodox family, I remained almost totally ignorant of Hinduism” (32). This sweeping generalization is, however, undermined immediately by the self-questioning that follows: “What, then, survived of Hinduism in me? Perhaps I had received a certain supporting philosophy. I cannot say; my uncle often put it to me that my denial was an admissible type of Hinduism” (32). That the thought of philosophical support should have come to him at all and that a conversation of this nature should have taken place between uncle and nephew are indications of the writer’s embeddedness in Hindu tradition. The sceptic and the seeker-of-clarification are the two categories of interrogators to whom all the *Shastras*, or Hindu scriptural texts, are addressed.<sup>1</sup> As his uncle may have well been capable of explaining, the deliberate installation, constant questioning and referencing of his Hindu background in his writing place him squarely within one or the other of these categories at various times. He may have told him that the pursuit of faith and knowledge are seen in the *Bhagavad-Gita* as two sides of the same coin: the first blossoms in acquiescence and the second in self-doubt, criticism, discussion and questioning. They lead one into the other.

This Hindu influence in Naipaul’s work is recognized.<sup>2</sup> However, postcolonial theory, which is often applied to texts written by people from the fringes of imperial centers, privileges interpretation of the texts as responses to imperial culture. This is a debilitating approach to Caribbean literary texts because it tends to forestall and devalue interpretations that explore the texts’ relationships with the often fragmented, dislocated cultures the authors inherit from their ancestral groups or their relationships with the often equally fragmented and dislocated cultures of the populations among which the groups have settled.<sup>3</sup> Exploring this aspect of postcolonial literary studies is a task in itself. This paper therefore problematizes postcolonial theory by reading Naipaul in relation to a local Hindu tradition, the *katha*. The underlying contention is that Naipaul’s work is not just influenced by his Hindu background but is part of a long Hindu tradition of religious and philosophical speculation intrinsic to the Caribbean *katha* tradition.

I argue that Naipaul’s oeuvre speculates about a number of key Hindu philosophical concepts and is a form of the Caribbean *katha*. The folk *katha* is a practice of reading or reciting and interpretation of religious texts in relation to social texts of all varieties for the purpose of bringing meaning to events in people’s day-to-day lives. In so doing, it provides spaces and techniques for self-examination, self-fashioning and re-fashioning. But, the Caribbean *katha* is not a reproduction of an Indian practice; it is a reinvention specifically tailored to the contingencies of the lives of the indentured and their descendants.<sup>4</sup> Naipaul continues the process of reinvention for the same purpose for a wider audience, to make meaning and suggest ways of self-construction. Indeed, this attribute of his oeuvre can be seen also as an act of self-assertion and self-preservation. The embedded *katha* is obvious if one follows Naipaul’s dictum that “part of the point of a novel [comes] from half rejecting the fiction, or looking through it to reality” (*Reading & Writing* 23). To look through Naipaul’s writing is to find traces and sub-texts of Hinduism as the germ plasm around which the narratives grow.<sup>5</sup> This essay explores some of his

work to uncover the germ plasm and identify Naipaul's position in the tradition and his synthesis of elements of the tradition with the requirements of literary discourse.

Despite Naipaul's youthful boast in *An Area of Darkness* that "I was without belief or interest in belief; I was incapable of worship" (41), as he admits in later texts such as *Finding a Centre* and *Reading and Writing*, his involvement with Hindu tradition is undeniable. This statement in *An Area of Darkness* is in fact immediately preceded by the recognition of the need for belief and worship in times of adversity, and of the more specific need for them to be within the traditions of Hinduism. When his friend, Ramon, dies, he notes:

We were a tiny, special part of that featureless, unknown country, [India] 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. (Naipaul, *An Area*40-41)

Separated from the sub-continent by time and distance, the need for its religions and philosophy remains, if only as a bulwark against nonentity. This is compounded by the need to sanctify as Naipaul's observations in *The Enigma of Arrival* demonstrate: "But at her death there was in her family a wish to give sanctity to the occasion, a wish for old rites, for things that were felt specifically to represent us and our past" (351). The presence of an Indian heritage and people's need for it are the central pivot on which Naipaul's speculations revolve and it is evident from his first published work, *The Mystic Masseur*, onwards, even when the signs of religious and philosophical speculations are coded to make them palatable or invisible to the primary international audience.

This encoding leads John Thieme to talk about allusions. He asserts that "the most significant body of allusions in the novel is to the various aspects of Hinduism" (43), but he sees these allusions relating to Naipaul's documentation of the acculturation of Indians in Trinidad. It can be argued, however, that *The Mystic Masseur* not only alludes to aspects of Hinduism to document acculturation, but it is also an embodiment of a Hindu concept of the human condition. It achieves this by performing a beautifully coordinated doubled triple movement. The text is an act of social criticism and it establishes an authorial perspective that becomes Naipaul's hallmark. Naipaul constructs his protagonist in such a way that he can as easily be read within the European tradition of the picaroon hero, or the Caribbean tradition of Anansi, as he can be read within Hindu traditions. In the latter regard, the text can be seen as performing an act of religious worship. The coup d'état of the joining of these disparate elements is that one does not hear the grinding echoes of different cultures meeting because Naipaul's aesthetics involves a blurring of the boundaries between the three categories. Naipaul's *katha* is, thus, exactly like the folk *katha*, which pulls together diverse discourses in a synthesizing action that is relatively smooth and soundless. This approach becomes progressively stronger as Naipaul continues to write.

In *The Overcrowded Barracoon*, Naipaul refers to this act of blurring when he notes that, “[l]ike the medieval sculptor of the North interpreting the Old Testament stories in terms of the life he knew, I needed to be able to adapt” (25). He adapts Hindu philosophy to the demands of the literary text and to the representation of the lives and circumstances of his characters. In *The Mystic Masseur*, he adapts the iconography of *Ganesh*, the God, to construct Ganesh, the protagonist. The God, *Ganesh*, represents the human being in Hinduism. Gan-esh in fact means lord/master/leader (esh) of created beings (gan). He is depicted as a mighty elephant, the *paramatman*, who sits on a mouse, the *jivatman*. The image is meant to show that the individual is *paramatman*, the Creator, God, but in embodied form the person is severely limited in demonstrating god-like qualities because of corporeal confinement represented in the mouse.<sup>6</sup> Confinement of the spirit is the most immediately obvious element of the iconography that is unveiled in *The Mystic Masseur*. Ganesh, the protagonist, like his father, has a great deal of potential. Within the confines of the colonial condition, however, this potential is severely curtailed. Every area of their lives is filled with difficulties and Ganesh must play the role of *Ganesh*, the God, in many of his aspects, in order to assert himself and carve a place in the social structure of the Caribbean. He does this by displaying that aspect of *Ganesh* called *Lambodar*, he-of-enormous-appetite-for-all-things-of-this-world, symbolized by the great belly of the elephant. Like *Lambodar*, Ganesh consumes everything that comes his way, appropriating them, making them his own, using them to his own purposes. Ganesh is constructed in such a way as to show that he possesses the attribute of *Ekadant*, the single-minded, totally committed, and focused one. Ganesh intends to be successful, at what he does not know, but he expends undivided effort on the idea of success, of victory. The single-mindedness is Ekadantian.

Apart from developing these overt similarities between God and the human being, with a light touch in a celebratory, comic tone, *The Mystic Masseur* also displays a perspective that the author embraces throughout his career. Thieme notes that: “Nowhere is there any suggestion that Ganesh could be other than he is” (43). The deeper philosophical ground of this statement lies in Hinduism’s refusal to label the things of this world as either good or evil. In Hinduism, unsullied good and evil are confined to the realm of the *devtas* and the *asuras*, for want of a better translation, the gods and the devils. In the realm of the human, there is no unadulterated good or evil. Naipaul is careful to demonstrate this in *The Mystic Masseur* and continues to demonstrate it in his thirty-three subsequent works. He generally insists that systems, institutions, and other social constructions impact on the individual so that s/he is unable to be other than s/he is. There is no book in which Naipaul can be said to blame the individual for what may be called his/her evil. In this regard, his attitude is Hindu.

Apart from playfully representing God and man as akin, in an optimistic and convivial fashion that steers clear of judgement, the text can also be seen as performing an offhanded gesture of worship. Every child brought up in a Hindu environment learns that it is important to pray to *Ganesh* in the form of *Vigneshwar*, the remover of obstacles, before any enterprise is undertaken, for the removal of intellectual and other difficulties. Naipaul would have grown up

with this idea of *Ganesh* as *Vigneshwar* and as *Vinayak*, the guardian of the doorway and of movement from one area of life to another and this book with its point-by-point adaptation of the attributes of the god to the Hindu in the Caribbean can be seen as such an act of worship.<sup>7</sup> It does not seem unrealistic or far-fetched to me, to think that in his difficulties with finding his voice, his material, and a publisher for his works, Naipaul would have gestured towards obeisance to the god, *Ganesh*, however obliquely. Whether one sees this as a “propitiatory technique” common to writers is irrelevant.<sup>8</sup> It is no less “touching and attractive” than the “ancient drama” of ritual performances, “absurdly surviving in a Trinidad yard” (Naipaul, *An Area* 34).

In the works that follow *The Mystic Masseur*, Naipaul also engages in iconographic adaptations. This is apparent, for example, in *A House for Mr. Biswas*, in the fictional name, Hanuman House, given to the house called Lion House as a symbol of resistance and courage in real life. Naipaul’s objective in this act of re-naming is to critique the traditional Hindu social structure that denies individuality and enterprise. *Hanuman*, the Hindu deity, is worshipped for the protection he bestows against illnesses, natural and other calamities, accidents and problems of all types. Similar expectations are set up in the novel for the fictional house and the idea of community it represents. But the text demonstrates that in its new setting, the house cannot last and its protection cannot be extended beyond its shadow. Beyond this is a world where individual enterprise is of utmost importance and the house does not equip its denizens with the tools for survival and prosperity in that environment. The community thus eventually disintegrates under the pressure of changes over which no one has control. In effect Naipaul seems to be making a Nietzschean statement by naming the house Hanuman: God is dead! *Hanuman* is dead! He cannot protect in these new surroundings! This is not an untoward act in Hinduism since the scriptural texts are replete with ideas about changing systems of worship and new and more efficacious manifestations of the *paramatman*. Within the context of a dead *Hanuman*, Naipaul also appears to be making a Nietzschean declaration about the superman: the person who transcends the need for the herd, who can use the resources of his own spirit to survive.

This idea is dramatized in Mr. Biswas’ quest in which the idea of confinement of the human spirit re-emerges. Mr. Biswas is confined not just by Hanuman House but also by his own body. This is vividly depicted for example in one of many descriptions: “He didn’t feel a small man, but clothes which hung so despairingly from the nail on the mud wall were definitely the clothes of a small man” (Naipaul, *A House* 157). Mr. Biswas must fight to maintain an idea of self, of his own value, of his own bigness despite the evidence of smallness with which he is confronted. His battles finally win him an accommodation in which he can be at peace with the world. The spirit is larger than the body in which it is housed and to identify with the former, even to sense it to the minute extent that Biswas does, is to be able to act to fulfil oneself and to transcend the lure of the herd.

However, the gap between the spirit and body is also a chasm into which the individual can plummet. Naipaul demonstrates that it is the space through which *Maya* or the illusion of

omnipotence can enter consciousness. This is the chasm into which Ralph Kripalsingh falls in *The Mimic Men*. Imbued with a sense of destiny, of personal greatness that he has mentally conjured out of vestiges of the discourse of the Indian national movement and from his ill-fitting colonial education, as an escape from the trivialities and confusions of his own life, Ralph becomes entrapped in a world of fantasy. At one moment he is, in his fantasies, an Aryan horseman on the Asiatic plain and at another a knight performing penance on behalf of all. Through Ralph, Naipaul questions a national subjectivity that finds a sense of self worth and dignity only through romanticised notions and clichéd claims of rich, glorious and ancient heritages that belie the realities of the claimants. Singh, like Hok and Brown and the other young men who seek leadership roles in the national independence movement “live in a private hemisphere of fantasy” (Naipaul, *Mimic* 11), and are as a result psychologically challenged. Naipaul posits the reliance on constructions of heritage as a false consciousness, to use a Marxian turn of phrase, an abdication of responsibility and dissociation from reality.<sup>9</sup> Singh admits: “I did not feel responsible for what had befallen me; I always felt separate from what I did” (Naipaul, *Mimic* 71). What Naipaul demonstrates in this way, in *The Mimic Men* and *A House for Mr. Biswas*, is that the balancing act between the elephant and the mouse is a delicate one that can tilt dangerously in one or the other direction; both are unacceptable.

But it is another kind of balancing act that is of far greater importance to Naipaul in his later books. In these, his concern, as critics have observed, is the individual’s fundamental ensnarement by aspects of Hindu philosophy, particularly the idea of *karma*. However, contrary to the common critical claims that Naipaul rejects *karma*, it can be shown that this is not so. He interrogates the concept as “the Hindu killer, the Hindu calm, which tells us that we pay in this life for what we have done in past lives,” but he also notes that it is an injunction about “our duty to ourselves [and] our future lives” (Naipaul, *India* 25). *Karma* is a mandate for acceptance of life’s events but it is not fatalism. It is also a call to action since it is only through action taken now that one re-pays the debts incurred in the past, ensures a quality life in the present and a better life in the future. His books demonstrate that the problem of misunderstanding the concept of *karma* causes people to accept but not act and thus facilitates a lack of personal responsibility. Naipaul’s greatest concern is that the *karma* killer results in “the smugness. ... the imperviousness to criticism, the refusal to *see*, double-talk and double-think” (*An Area* 35), and thus to a denial of life, commitment and responsibility. To counter this, his writing engages in intense repeated speculations about *karma* that consider, from many angles, the tension between the idea of predestination and free will on which it rests.

These are the aspects of *karma* that he vehemently critiques in *A House for Mr Biswas*. The vehemence can be seen as the author’s inheritance from his father as a direct outgrowth of his rejection of the community’s passivity and consequent poverty of mind and spirit. It is lucidly conveyed in the condemnation of the grandfather in the opening pages of *A House for Mr. Biswas*. “Bipti’s father, futile with asthma, propped himself up on his string bed and said, as he always did on unhappy occasions, ‘Fate. There is nothing we can do about it’” (15). Many

aspects of this brief scene negate the principle of action in the term *karma* that the grandfather would have used. First of all, he is likely to be suffering with asthma because of working on the plantations but he has never taken a stand on this. Secondly, he is on a string bed that cannot add comfort to his breathing. He has abdicated personal responsibility for his own health and Naipaul suggests by the tone of the narrative that financial poverty is not the only problem. There is a greater problem of poverty of mind and spirit. Finally, his daughter need not have been condemned by *karma* to continue to live with Raghu's miserliness. Her father could have acted on her behalf as could she, but they do not. Biswas' life, set against this background, presents a perfect foil. Against difficulties that are far more complex than those the old man faces, he takes a stand, no matter how haltingly. Naipaul thus posits in opposition to the fatalism that *karma* has become, a concept of *karma* that demands the full possession of the moment and the place that one is in at any given time, coupled with detachment or distance from the time and space that prevents possessiveness. Possession without possessiveness however demands constant self-reflexivity and an ensuing historical consciousness and it is to these that Naipaul begins to turn his attention from *Finding the Centre* onwards.

In *Finding the Centre*, Naipaul revisits Hanuman House and acknowledges that it had, for all its shortcomings, bestowed on him and its other inhabitants "a high sense of self" (57). He also revisits many other pronouncements and assertions that he had previously made in order to undo them. Previous prejudices are turned upside down, former assertions are revised and their substance and assumptions are queried. In this text and in others after there is always this recursivity. The writer is constantly involved in a process of divesting himself of previous judgements and conceptions in order to fully grasp the significance of the moment. The narratives after *Finding the Centre* are thus increasingly acts of reflection. In the process of reflection, the self becomes both subject and object the subject of reflection and the object of re-fashioning. This approach achieves literary fruition in *Enigma of Arrival* and *A Way in the World*.

These two texts have been criticized by some who try to identify them as belonging to a particular genre. The kind of problem that ensues is evident in Walcott's observation, for example, that *The Enigma of Arrival* "is negligible as a novel and crucial as autobiography or vice versa" (123). The same charge may well also be made of *A Way in the World*. Given the trajectory of development in Naipaul's oeuvre traced in this essay, however, such observations are a moot point. Naipaul has walked a path that rejects categories before this, and in these two narratives there is a flagrant refusal of the categories of theory, history, fiction and autobiography as exclusive. Together, *The Enigma of Arrival* and *A Way in the World* comprise an autobiographical duo but the narratives are specifically constructed to continue the epistemological interrogation set up in *Finding the Centre*. However, whereas *Enigma* is an interpretive introspection on the writer's life and is thus self-centered and self-absorbed, *A Way in the World* is concerned with the role of the other in self-formation. The latter begins where the former ends, with the narrator's acceptance that the highest pursuit of the artist's vocation is the

conceptualisation of “life and man as mystery, the true religion of men, the grief and the glory” (Naipaul, *Enigma* 354). In addition, although *Enigma* is more openly declarative of Naipaul’s quarrel with Indian “smugness” and “refusal to see” and with shoddy Brahminical practices that are performed without due reflection or care, it is in *A Way in the World* that his own speculation coincides with and reflects the strongest but most carefully concealed element of Hindu philosophy.

Naipaul calls *A Way in the World* “the magnum opus of my maturity,” an appellation with which one must concur because of the text’s richness, depth and complexity.<sup>10</sup> In this work, he re-presents the Vedic concept of *Nirguna Brahman*, the formless conjoined creator and creation before it becomes separated into *purusha* and *prakriti*, creator and created, self and other. The Vedas have no way of describing this because it is prior to and in excess of description. The term that is therefore most frequently used to refer to *Nirguna Brahman* is *Neti Neti*—not this, not that, not any thing, unnameable, indefinable. In the central fictional core of the narrative, Naipaul presents the human confrontation with this essential core of the self through the unheimlich experience of a revolutionary who visits the Guyanese interior. This man goes to Guyana to involve the Native Americans in a revolutionary uprising. On his arrival in their village, he is taken to a pool to bathe, but the pool in its extreme clarity is completely black. When he is submerged in this black water, he finds that although his eyes are open, he can see nothing. Suddenly he does not know where his body begins and where the water ends and all his senses of perception cease to function. He finds that he can formulate no thoughts and loses his grip on reality entirely. His being is suffused with terror. This is not an experience of Thanatos, of Death; it is an experience of sheer unadulterated nothingness. It is an experience that is alluded to in the declaration in the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, “Non-existent does one become if one knows Brahman as Non-Being.”<sup>11</sup> The revolutionary comes out of the experience of *Nirguna Brahman*, or Self as Non-Being, a changed person. He suddenly understands that there is no self-in-the-world if there is no other. He begins, therefore to experience the people of the forest as individuals, to know each one singly in a complete reversal of the way he conceived of them en-masse within the framework of his revolutionary ideology.

This experience is used to demonstrate that critical element of Hindu philosophy that insists, unless the individual is capable of recognising his fragile positioning between his selfhood as a manifestation of paramatma, and his oneness and differences from other such manifestations then he will live wrongly. It is on this understanding of the self and the value of the individual that Naipaul develops his re-construction of history which is an unravelling of Kripalsingh’s Conradian vision of history that,

give[s] expression to the restlessness, the deep disorder, which the great explorations, the overthrow in three continents of established social organization, the unnatural bringing together of peoples who could achieve fulfilment only within the security of their won societies and the landscapes hymned by their ancestors. (Naipaul, *Mimic* 38)

In its place Naipaul delineates a world in which the human condition is a condition of being “strangers to ourselves.” The genetic inheritance of each “stranger” stretches far back into an unfathomable past that has always involved self-construction based on interaction with an other who is no less a stranger to him or her self than one is. Self-construction has therefore always occurred through a process of mixing, of creolisation, if you will. The self that Naipaul conceives here is not unlike Glissant’s idea of the opacity of the self; but whereas Glissant suggests that one at least knows one’s own self, Naipaul conjectures that even that is opaque. The two however are similarly proposing that the individual is unique, and that a certain tentativeness, a willingness to suspend judgement and the willingness to draw only provisional conclusions about the other are the bases on which interactions of the future must occur. It is the way of countering the colonial subjectivity which Naipaul first defined non-fictionally in *The Middle Passage*: “In the colonial society every man had to be for himself; every man had to grasp whatever dignity and power he was allowed; he owed no loyalty to the island and scarcely any to his group” (78). It is a new basis for community that is being suggested here, a more respectful and gentle way of being that counters a long and seemingly never-ending history of violence. The foremost aesthetic feature of *A Way in the World* in this context is its quintessentially Hindu attribute of non-proselytism and non-conversion. Although it contains a message with the potential to revolutionize culture and bring about the universal civilization that Naipaul speaks about, “where it was necessary to be an individual and responsible; where people developed vocations and were stirred by ambition and achievement, and believed in perfectibility” (“Our Universal Civilization” n. p.), there is no attempt to convert.

What emerges from this exploration is the fact that Naipaul’s oeuvre is in effect a literary, philosophical and ideological enterprise (in the sense of self-consciously articulating a world vision) that deploys Hindu philosophical concepts to address critical questions about the meaning of the self, ways of self-construction, ways of being-in-the-world, the nature of the relation between self and other and ways of living with the other. It illustrates the locatedness of the writing subject and the fact that self-representation is deeply rooted in spatial and historical legacies. I have argued, in fact, that Naipaul’s work is a series of *kathas* on the nature of *paramatman*, *karma* and *nirguna* and *saguna Brahma*, which establishes a complex relationship with the writer’s Hindu heritage.

However, if one contrasts the *katha* as it is practiced in the Hindu folk tradition in the Caribbean and Naipaul’s practice of it, differences are obvious even if these are differences of form and context only, not of purpose. Naipaul left Trinidad with the sole aim of becoming a writer. He wanted to carve his name into the Western literary tradition, as it has been conceptualised by T.S. Eliot and others. In this, he was, like many other young Caribbean people, reared for export, for setting out into the world to claim a craft or profession and so to claim the world and be forever removed from the petty concerns of the region that had produced him. He was to find, like so many others, then and now, that knowing home and self was the critical stepping-stone to knowing and claiming the world. The telltale marks of this undertaking

make Naipaul's *kathas* clearly distinguishable from the folk *katha*; yet in many fundamental respects, the two overlap and are intent on a similar purpose, meaning, making, and self-construction.

However, Naipaul's work is distinguished from the *katha*, in that like all modern art it attempts to be conscious of its own being or its art-ness and self-consciously manipulates the media it uses and the discourses it engages. The folk *katha*, on the other hand, is largely unconscious and unconcerned about its use of various media and discourses and crosses boundaries unthinkingly. While the folk *katha* self-confidently proclaims its relation and relevance to reality, Naipaul's art says that it is an act of representation or reflection in a particular genre and in a particular form that the writer has worked hard to discover as most appropriate to his material. Naipaul's *kathas* are thus self-conscious in its use of its media for desired artistic effects. In addition, whereas the folk *katha* is immediately concerned with the moment and with an overt statement on the reality which confronts the community to which it speaks, Naipaul's art is always concerned to maintain a certain distance from 'reality' and its immediate concerns in order to make a statement that has a wider resonance than the immediate needs of any singular community. Unlike the exponent of the traditional *katha* Naipaul's target audience is not a Hindu audience but an international one whose extratextual references may be many but may rarely include Hindu scriptures. The messages that are imbued with the inheritance of his Hindu background are thus covertly embedded and their links to the *katha* tradition may be obscured but they are there nevertheless. In addition, whereas the comments about reality in the *katha* are of paramount importance, in Naipaul's works the 'art' and the comments are of equal significance.

Moreover, in literary discourse the artist is an individual whose responsibility is to produce objects that can be considered art and better yet great art. It was to this goal that Naipaul dedicated his efforts. In the religious arena in which the pundit's *katha* is expounded his/her individuality is of minimal importance. His/her responsibility is to help people to better understand the problems that face them in their day-to-day lives. The *katha* is important, not its exponent. The listener is interested in and remembers the *katha*, not its exponent. The reality that is captured in a folk *katha* is more important than the artistry with which it is rendered. The situation in Naipaul's work is reversed. In addition, unlike the pundit whose relationship to the scriptural texts is usually one that accepts the texts' authority, Naipaul adopts a critical position. His discourses are nonetheless a *mala* or garland of obeisance to his Hindu heritage.

The closing concern of this essay, however, is that Naipaul's *kathas* have the potential to be as important to the community as the folk *katha*, but in order for this to be realised the narratives need to be shared by the community as familiar texts to which reference can be made in all situations. To read Naipaul in the way this paper has done is to remove his work from the area of "litriche and poultry" to which it has been confined, which excludes Elias (Naipaul, *Miguel Street* 41), and by extension other young Caribbean people, and to bring it into the realm

of a discourse with immediate impact on the quotidian Caribbean. Making this happen should be a priority of Naipaulian scholarship especially that emanating from the Caribbean.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Further information on all the elements of Hinduism discussed in this paper can be easily accessed on the web at <http://hinduwebsite.com>. It is of course also available in many specialist academic texts.

<sup>2</sup>See for example Landeg White, *V. S. Naipaul: A Critical Introduction*; John Thieme, *The Web of Tradition: Uses of Allusion in V. S. Naipaul's Fiction*; and Selwyn Cudjoe, *V. S. Naipaul: A Materialist Reading*.

<sup>3</sup>See Jennifer Rahim's essay, "'A Quartet of Daffodils' Only: Negotiating the Specific and the Relational in the Context of Multiculturalism and Globalisation," for a more extensive discussion of this threat that postcolonialism presents to Caribbean literary criticism. In the essay, Rahim contends that: "The region's discourses are therefore repositioned on the margins of a postcolonial agenda institutionalized in the West, even as conceptual use is made of them" (43). See also Rowland Smith, ed. *Postcolonizing the Commonwealth: Studies in Literature and Culture* which contains similar critiques of postcolonial studies.

<sup>4</sup>See Aisha Khan, *Callaloo Nation: Metaphors of Race and Religious Identity among South Asians in Trinidad* for an extensive description of the performance of the *katha*, which she spells *kuttha*, in Trinidad and Tobago.

<sup>5</sup>This thesis may seem quite simple and obvious to some readers who have never been in doubt about Naipaul's Hinduism but it involves a number of complicated issues concerning the relationship between the first diaspora Indians and their cultural baggage as well as problems of representing religious and philosophical speculation in modern and postmodern art.

<sup>6</sup>See Paul Courtright, *Ganesh: Lord of Obstacles, Lord of Beginnings*.

<sup>7</sup>In the Lion House in Chaguanas, Trinidad, where he grew up, there was a statue of *Ganesh* guarding the doorway, a statue that he would have passed on countless occasions, a statue whose significance would have been known to him.

<sup>8</sup>See Edward Hoagland, "Staking His Life on One Grand Vision." In addition, in an interview with Mel Gussow, Naipaul observes: "All my titles for the last 12 or 13 years have had slightly triumphant suggestions—not so much triumphant as good luck suggestions." He also notes that he used "BBC non-rustle paper and numbered only every fifth page in a similar gesture."

<sup>9</sup>I agree with the way that Thieme (135) discusses the absurdity of Ralph's conclusion that he is living the four stages of life outlined in the Hindu texts and will not rehash it here. It should be noted though that Naipaul's representation is directed at calling attention to not just Ralph's absurdity but to nationalism's.

<sup>10</sup>Mel Gussow, "Naipaul in Search of Himself: A Conversation."

<sup>11</sup>*Taittiriya Upanishad II.6.1.*

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