

From Mutiny to Mutinies: A Post-colonial Study of Naipaul's Indian Trinity

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Since 1857, the date of the first official mutiny in India, the nation has perceived various socio-political, cultural, economic and historical upheavals, and the upturns have not only affected the nation and its discourse but at times the globe. Race, moment and milieu have always been the primary source of literature and their glimpse are very much apparent in every field whether it is science, religion or philosophy. India has been the acreage of great men like Lord Ram and Lord Krishna as is ostensible in Hindu mythology but the fact is that they were required in their respective eras. Mahatma Buddha, Mahavir Jain, Swami Vivekananda, M K Gandhi, was born in the period when the very institutions of societies were crumbling and collapsing. They were desperately required since they brought revolutionary and drastic changes in the aura of mythology, religion, science, philosophy or their respective fields. They came forward not only to kindle and enlighten the mind of common folk but also to serve the humanity. This, due to the above-mentioned luminaries and their accomplishments and impacts on the societies, has attracted the world travellers from time to time.

Travel writings are considered as a genre of literature, but the fact is quite different. Travelogues are the reflections and replications of contemporary socio-cultural and ethnic societies in which they were inscribed. However, with the elapses of time their purposes were manoeuvred intentionally. Earlier travelogues were used to be informative but in the colonial period, colonizers distorted and manipulated the very objective of these writings for their own advantages. They were projected in such a way that the settlers could easily prove the 'otherness' of the colonized. The culmination of the West's fictive dramatization of the East begins in travelogue mixed with fantasy, such as those by Marco Polo. Historians of medieval trade now tell us that Marco Polo was not the medieval backpacker as we always thought, but a fellow invented by the West to fulfill its thirst for palatable understanding of the mysterious East. Switching centuries, from him to Naipaul via inescapable filter of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, have beheld that the twentieth century reincarnation of Marco Polo was none other than V S Naipaul, an invention of the West to fulfill its prejudiced and deliberately fantastic understanding of the East. Foreign visitors visited our country at regular intervals, and produced plethora of travelogues¹ on India's contemporary socio-political, cultural, historical, economic, religious and even architectural edifice. Eighteenth and nineteenth century travellers have been successful in not only watching the nation silently and applauding wherever required but also produced the televisual commentary, critique and discourse on it.

I

This paper studies the 'nation' from an emigrant's perspective. By questioning the identity of India, beyond geography and place, the point of view of the emigrant helps to broaden the framework within which India is defined. Through a meticulous reading of V S Naipaul's trilogy on India, it will be argued how his worldview strikes on ambivalent relationship with his experience in India; how emotions of tenderness and pleasure vie with the zeal and short sightedness of a colonialist. In the present paper I intend to explore and explicate V S Naipaul's Indian trinity, comprising *An Area of Darkness* (1964), *India: A Wounded Civilization* (1977) and *India: A Million Mutinies Now* (1990), which gives the odysseys of the nation's postcolonial insurgencies, at times insurmountable, which not only wounded once, twice or thrice but million times and even then India has been washing the blood stains from her delicate *aanchal*.

While the travellers of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, pre-empting colonialism, often found beauty, richness, fertility and virginity, the postcolonial contemporary traveller is quick to spot ugliness, disorder and banality. In the nineteenth century, the bounty of the discovered world was to be praised. Today, the absence of civilization and progress is regarded as a major disappointment and therefore the unruly and unwilling 'Third World' has to be treated with derisiveness. For Naipaul India is a problem not only with his buried past "...when I felt India only as an assault on the senses" (*The Overcrowded* 46), but also with his neurotic feelings of the present "...India as an ache, over for which one has a great tenderness, but from which at length one always wishes to separate oneself" (51). That is why his visits to the country have been attempts as much to get grips over its reality as to come to terms with his own past. In 1962, he feels so cut off from this past that he almost abandons the hope of ever being able to dig it up or make sense of it. That is why he fancies himself as a "colonial without past, without ancestors" (*An Area* 274).

The postcolonial discourse of the nation has brought forth several issues to the fore. The discourse used by the postcolonial travel writer is constantly evolving and is not directly opposed to the colonial discourse. The postcolonial world has been affected by travels in many respects; the countries in question were discovered, explored, conquered, or settled by the people who came there from Europe. Displacement is an experience particularly associated with the postcolonial conditions, which for many individuals, entails a history of transportation, migration, expatriation, diaspora or exile.

Naipaul is a writer of brilliant techniques that he used in transforming the travelogues into texts, especially postcolonial texts. His travelogues are not merely an

almanac of his physical visits but also disseminate its colonial past vibrantly as Barbara Korte opines:

If travel is of special pertinence to Britain's former colonies, the travel writing produced in these parts of the world has been practically ignored by scholars until recently with the prominent exception of V S Naipaul. (*English Travel* 152)

Among the post-independence travellers to India, V S Naipaul has a special place because of his curious love-hate relationship with the country. It is a strange predicament, mainly a tension emanating from Naipaul's desire to remain apart from the mainstream tradition of the country visited. Resultantly, he inscribes some sensitive travel writings that are impressionistic, emotional and erratic and his first book on India, rather controversial. The paper is a candid account of Naipaul's feelings that the vast, mysterious and agonized country has aroused in him and he promulgates his irritating and irksome thoughts in Indian trilogy in a way to discover a postcolonial India—India that is suffering in the hands of its postcolonial leaders who are still in the clutches of colonial tools. The paper studies Naipaul's experiences chronologically as he has expressed in his treatise on India.

II

An Area of Darkness (1964)

Naipaul has been in India a much longer time and travelled much more extensively. Yet, the impressions of his first visit as recorded in *An Area of Darkness* are journalistic and lack depth in some areas of observation. Naipaul journeys India, for the first time, with the professed aim of discovering his Indian identity. It has always been significant for a writer to establish a district identity, especially when s/he is an outsider or wants to be considered one. This leaves a mark on his writings. To quote from his Acceptance Speech at the first David Cohen Literature Prize awarding ceremony:

I have always felt the need...to establish the identity of the writer, the narrator, the gatherer of impressions: To make the point that, whatever association came with the language, this English language traveller in the world was not English but colonial, and carried different pictures in his head. (*SundayObserver*)

His first visit to India in 1962 was undertaken as a quest for his roots in the country from where his grandfather had migrated to Trinidad as an indentured labourer, at the beginning of this century. He first visited Bombay and found that it was not what he had expected. He hated being part of a crowd at Church gate station and craved for preferential treatment, something that he had always got-in Trinidad and England. But here in India he found no special attention from Indians. He kept himself seeing the film posters that seemed to divine from a cooler and luscious world, Naipaul writes:

...Cooler and more luscious than the film poster of England and America, promising greater gaiety, and ampler breast and hip, a more fruitful womb. (*AnArea* 43)

Naipaul's observation is based on his assessment of the Indian characters as romantic, emotional and exotic, which is typical Western orientalist bravura. His comments on most socio-political events of the day were peripheral. The Chinese attack on India in 1962 shook up the entire country. Naipaul was in India at that time but did not feel concerned about it. Nehru's greatest blunder, ill-equipped war against the Chinese, makes Naipaul angry and turns him bitterly satiric in his chapter on Emergency. He was then in India and saw the hollowness everywhere in the land, a total misfit in a modern world. Naipaul was quite upset on the failure of Mr. Nehru. ShriAurobindo had already warned Mr. Nehru regarding Chinese invasion, but Nehru was careless about the land saying that that is 'the waste land.' Naipaul heard many rumours in Calcutta. He writes:

...according to bazaar rumour, Chou-En-lai had promised the Chinese people as a Christmas present. The Indian Marwari merchants, it was said, were already making enquiries about business prospect under Chinese rule; the same rumour had it that, in the south the Madrasis, despite their objection to Hindi were already learning Chinese. (264-65)

But these are peripheral like his comments on the Kashmir. He made no attempt to explore the psyche of a nation jolted out of its post-colonial euphoria, bordering on a sense of invincibility.

Apart from above-mentioned contemporary post-colonial events, the other aspect of India that Naipaul encountered in his visit was the caste system, especially as manifested in professional skills. From the sociological point of view such situation are common in societies undergoing rapid socio-political changes. The rigid hierarchy of the caste system in India, which he condemns, therefore, disturbs Naipaul, "...in India caste was unpleasant; I never wished to know what a man's caste was..." (29) as dissolute and dissipated that propagated a kind of separatism. Naipaul writes, "Class is system of rewards. Caste imprisons a man in his function" (76).

There is some truth in this observation though one notices a strong urge in Naipaul to say something sensational that would appeal to the western reader. His view on reservation of jobs was similarly biased and in the context of sixties, showed a definitely Brahmanic way of thinking that would be considered offensive today, “Reserving government jobs for untouchables helps nobody. It places responsibility in the hands of the unqualified...” (82). The aforesaid views have authenticated Naipaul as a colonial mimic and have been successful in portraying him as a postcolonial predictor who foretells and compares the destiny of India to that of Trinidad saying that “Yesterday the mimicry was Mogul, tomorrow it might be Russian or American; today it is English” (55). The entire experience is deeply personal one and Naipaul himself behaves like a fussy, grudging and tight-fisted foreign returned guy². It is true that today he is English and this is the reason why he looks at India from an occidentalist’s eye in proving its age-long civilization as wounded. *An Area of Darkness*, much inspired by Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, conveys the acute sense of disillusionment of Naipaul, capturing the whole crazy spectrum of India.

III

India: A Wounded Civilization (1977)

The abovementioned book is V S Naipaul’s second thesis on India which documents the political insurgencies of the decade of 1970s. As a post-colonial traveller who was unable to establish an Indian identity and had given up the attempts after his first visit to this country, Naipaul held the view that India should sever all connections with the past, which is understandable. After his first visit to India, Naipaul realized that the country was not and could not be his home. Yet he could not reject it or remain indifferent to it. When Naipaul revisited India in the said decade, he could find that this country takes much time to understand even after the departure of the British. However, Naipaul is not appeared with the independence of India. He expects something else. What he beholds, in post- independence India, he writes in these words:

But Independent India, with its five-year plans, its industrialization, its practice of democracy, has invested in change. There was always a contradiction between the archaism of national pride and the promise of the new; the contradiction has at last cracked the civilization open. (*India* 8)

In the course of his post 1962 visits to India, Naipaul conceived himself with ethnographic analyses of India, at the same time keeping a distance from the ordinary person most of the time, talking mainly to those in authority and power, like an IAS

Officer in Bombay , the commissioner in Rajasthan, among others. He never tried to meet ordinary Indians on an equal footing until recently, always judging them based on standards borrowed from the West. The judgment of Naipaul is not confined to the people only but to culture, civilization, religion and politics also.

However, to Naipaul, India was not a socio-cultural alternative. For him at that point of time, India— a ‘third world’ country, without a sense of history, without a racial sense —had to break off all ties with its past in order to get the best out of its present, which, according to Naipaul, would progress as understood in the Western context. Naipaul criticizes a prince who had travelled outside India. And that prince always wishes to compare India with the western world. Unquestionably, he criticized westerners who consider India an alternative and was quite contemptuous about them. That is why Naipaul says that India should be judged in Indian way:

The world outside India was to be judged by its own standards. India was not to be judged. India was only to be experienced, in the Indian way. (90)

I can surmise that nobody writes like VS Naipaul. His visual descriptions of ordinary people always hit the nail on the head. His central theme is the vibrant, pulsating, intellectual Hindu civilization. After the initial burst of optimism following independence, India has faced one obstacle after another, turning inward, revealing ‘a wounded civilization’, a stilted and stiff culture who does not know herself any more or what made her great. Using his own method of analysis, V S Naipaul may not be an ideal person to do this analysis because like Gandhi and Nehru he studied outside India. But unlike them he seemed to be on the other side of the country. His passive support to Emergency, imposed on the country by Indira Gandhi government: “...Mrs Gandhi, that formidable lady in New Delhi, who had done a de Gaulle on the Congress...nationalized the banks... ‘de-recognised’ the princes... intended to change the constitution” (*The Overcrowded* 110) which was criticized not only by political activists but also by writers, media stalwarts, social reformers and so on. Salman Rushdie too denounces the very act in his *magnum opus Midnight’s Children* (1980) in these words “Emergency heralded the beginning of continuous midnight which would not end for two long years” (*Midnight* 612).

Naipaul further holds that Hindu India invited conquests and finds that this drawing upon the Hindu past in the present times has led to the creation of a new sense of identity. One can, of course, come to an agreement with Naipaul. Mohammad Gajanavi attacked and looted Somnath temple in Gujarat, Bakhtiyar Khilje destroyed and burnt Nalanda University and its library and Babar made Babri Masjid after destroying Rama temple in Ayodhya. Naipaul tries to cope with such movements in India which are trying to take revenge with its past. Naipaul considers the demolition of

Babri Masjid in Ayodhya is true and justified and he declared that his observations in *India: A Wounded Civilization* is valid. He saw the demolition as a very small part of the vast change in the Hindus' idea of themselves and as an attempt to retrieve their identity of the pre-Islamic period. He saw in it the seed for a greater 'Intellectual' of India provided it was kept safe from the hands of the fanatics in an interview with Dilip Pandgaonkar Naipaul confesses:

The people who say that there was no temple there are missing the point. Babar, you must understand, had contempt for the country he had conquered. And his building of that mosque was an act of contempt for the country. In Ayodhya the construction of a mosque on a spot regarded as sacred by the conquered population was meant as an insult. It was meant as an insult to an ancient idea, the idea of Ram, which was two or three thousand years old... (*TimesofIndia*).

The travelogue can be seen as a critique of blindness of Indians to the 'real' world that prefer to live and judge themselves and others through the myopic glass of perceived high culture of 'centuries of rich civilization'. But the problem is that after being settled in the Western country most of the Indians start thinking and comparing the nation on the touchstone of the West. And they, sometimes, seem to be the recalcitrant of India and the country craves and cries for her ungrateful son(s).

IV

India: A Million Mutinies Now (1990)

Naipaul's third book on India, *A Million Mutinies Now* leaves his account of postcolonial impressions. This book stands closest to the idea of home coming for Naipaul. It marks Naipaul's surfacing after a long quest amongst the now diminishing ripples of socio-political and cultural paradoxes of India. He sees a million mutinies breaking out in the margins: mutinies of castes, of class and of gender. Compared to *An Area of Darkness* and *India: A Wounded Civilization*, the title of the latest book is less negative. But the use of word mutinies indicates that Naipaul's writings still have strains of the colonial discourse, though, by and large, they can be considered as the works of a postcolonial writer. To quote from Naipaul:

What the mutinies were also helping to define was the strength of the general intellectual life, and the wholeness and humanism of the values to which all Indians now felt they could appeal. And—strange 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, and part of its restoration. (518)

Naipaul's *India: A Million Mutinies Now* is his great tour de force. And he has very beautifully painted the postcolonial picture of India. While in Bombay, Naipaul visited Muhammad Ali Road with Nikhil Laxman, a journalist, his first impression of the area as described in his book, captures the claustrophobic atmosphere which gives a ghetto insularity that infuses the dwellers with a sense of security. Naipaul sensed it as a very sensitive subject in Bombay. He noticed that everybody should survive in his/her community if he or she is from minor community. After seeing the *modus vivendi* and *modus operandi* of Muslims in Bombay, he reminds his own situation in Trinidad. Naipaul recollects "I felt that if I had been in their position, confined to Bombay, to that area, to that row I too would have been a passionate Muslim." (31)

Political upheavals and separatist movements have perturbed India from time to time in post independence era. Naipaul was also in the mood to paint such movements and upheavals. Though he was not there but he collects all the pieces of information from people, newspapers, and gazetteers and so on. For the first time, when Naipaul visited India in 1962 he was not aware with political setup. But during the course of second visit he depicted the period of Emergency very skillfully. In the third visit he was vigilant and curious and enough about such movements which created digressions in day to day life of Indian people. The chapter 'After the Battle' is Naipaul's documentation of the movement in the Indian social fabric that occurred in the 1960s and 70s. This movement marks intellectual confusion of the times when the old ideologies were set aside and a search was on for a new set of ideologies to live by. This coupled with economic crisis accentuated the confusion of those times.

Thus, Naipaul seems very much on the side of India. His response is totally positive. He talks in support and favour of India and its mutinies. The excess he sees now felt to be excess in India. The mutinies were helping to define the strength of the general intellectual life. Mutinies not to be wished away as were part of the beginning of a new way for many millions a part of India's restoration.

The compassionate narrative vision in this book enables Naipaul to capture the theme of India collapsing, mutinying and reaching after a final integration. It is his ability to look for the sense of life in a mutinous spirit order that is a significant aspect of Naipaul's writing. Even in the midst of apparent chaos, he sees a semblance of continuity, coherence and harmony. Thus, the million mutinies³ come to symbolize the dawn of a post-colonial society for Naipaul. The new attitude expressed in this book brings to light a new Naipaul with 'a central will, a central intellect, a unifying idea' suggesting that the conflicting components of his identity are not to be wished away as they have been responsible for his growth and restoration and achievement of the particular truth he had in his mind all through.

Notes:

1. Since time immemorial, India has attracted many foreigners by its culture and civilization, trend and tradition and its flora and fauna. I would like to mention a few travellers of ancient and medieval India who not only delineated the contemporary events of the country but also provided the base for the researchers and archaeologists of today. The travellers were no less than Megasthenes, visited India in reign of Chandragupta Maurya, threw the light on the contemporary culture and society in his book *Indica*. Fa-hien, a Chinese traveller, visited the reign of Chandragupta II and he penned down about the society and culture of Madhya Pradesh. Huen-Tsang, educated at Nalanda University, visited in the regime of Harshvardhan, wrote a travelogue known as *Si-U-Ki* in which he described 138 countries. Muslim Imperialism in India properly started when the Turks stepped on the scene of history not before. One of the most remarkable episodes of this time was the journey and long sojourn in India of one of Islam's greatest intellects, Al-Beruni, forever known as the master, philosopher, mathematician and astronomer of great repute, had accompanied Mohammed Ghazni down to the Punjab. Having settled there, he proceeded to make a thorough study of Sanskrit and Hindi literature, and has left to us a penetrating description of India in his famous work, *Tahkik-i-Hind* (An Enquiry into India).
2. When Naipaul visited India at that time he was 30 years old who criticises the loss of his 'imagined world' without bothering to delve deeper into the reasons for it. This plundered country was struggling to fight with its colonial past and tackling some enormous problems at hand.
3. 'Ism(s)' in India have played a vital role in wounding its civilization in the contemporary era. However, isms like Naxalism, Maoism, racialism etc. have appropriated themselves claiming their acts as devout but their means are detrimental. Neither school of thought has gained anything except widening the wall of parochialism and instigating communal disturbances. Indian politics is totally accountable for encouraging these mis/deeds.

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Hope and Despair: A Carnavalesque Study of Kurt Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle*

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The main concern of Vonnegut's novels is to attack a set of beliefs that men surrender themselves to, thereby, causing misery to themselves. The significance man attaches to artificial constructs like race, nationality, even national dogma, forces man to snap the common thread that links all people. For a broader readership who felt conventional fiction was inadequate to express the way in which the common man's life had been disrupted by radical social changes of the postwar era, Vonnegut wrote novels structured in more pertinently contemporary terms, bereft of such unifying devices as conclusive characterization or chronologically organized plots. As a counterculture hero of the turbulent 1960's and a best-selling author among readers of popular fiction (in the three decades after), Kurt Vonnegut is at once more traditional and more complicated than his enthusiasts might like to believe.

Kurt Vonnegut Jr. (1922 - 2007) was born to a descendant of a prominent German-American family. His father was an architect and his mother was a noted beauty. Both spoke German fluently but declined to teach Kurt the language in light of widespread anti-German sentiment following World War I. In 1943 Vonnegut enlisted himself in the U.S. Army and took part in the Battle of the Bulge, Belgium, where he was captured by the Germans as a Prisoner of War (POW). Though he has German roots, he was forced to work at a factory in the city of Dresden. On February 13, 1945, when Dresden was firebombed, Vonnegut and the other POWs survived because they were in a meat locker of a slaughterhouse. The scene of senseless misery and mass destruction at Dresden played a key role in Vonnegut's development of pacifist views and his experiences as a soldier had a profound impact on his writings which reflect the helpless human condition through which he emphasizes the role of chance in human actions. All of his fourteen novels are filled with topsy-turvy, carnivalesque images and races of his own invention.

This paper offers a carnivalesque interpretation of *Cat's Cradle* which deal with the human degradation caused by religion and science. The novel has a story-writer and a narrator as characters; and, also has a subtitle, *Cat's Cradle – The Day the World Ended*. Vonnegut conceals a complex texture beneath a deceptively simple surface using the carnival features of parody and the dehumanization projected through war. His use of contradiction and uncertainty as fictional devices represents a significant technical innovation.

Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of "carnavalesque" refers to a source of 'liberation, destruction and renewal'. The origin and meaning of the

carnavalesque can be best understood by analyzing the concept of the carnival. In the carnival, social hierarchies of everyday life are profaned and overturned by normally suppressed voices and energies. Thus fools become wise, kings become beggars; opposites are mingled (fact and fantasy, heaven and hell). Official seriousness quite often is a mask that conceals pious pretensions and false authorities. Carnival tries to secure this freedom by celebrating and valorizing all that is low, in the process subverting all that is high and holy. Bakhtin likens the carnivalesque in literature to the type of activity that often takes place in the carnivals of the popular culture which sought a release, a freedom from all that is official, authoritarian and serious.

Cat's Cradle (1963) was Vonnegut's first novel to draw serious critical attention. This apocalyptic satire on philosophy, religion, and technologic progress centers on a chip of Ice-Nine capable of solidifying all water on earth. The novel exemplifies Vonnegut's blend of scornful and humorous satire and his use of narrative deflections to examine contemporary life by showcasing the state of the world and humanity. Vonnegut introduces a religion called "Bokononism," which parodies all religions and to propagate the belief that well-meaning lies are more helpful to humanity than absolute truths. The novel begins on a typical carnivalesque note:

Nothing in this book is true.

Live by the *foma* (harmless untruths) that make you brave and kind and healthy and happy. (*Cat's Cradle*, 5)

Vonnegut juxtaposes science and religion and characterizes the institutions constructed around them as destructive and dehumanizing. The novel exhibits a realistic world where the lies of religion serve a better purpose than the truth of science. This juxtaposition of truth and lies and their inversion serve the topsy-turvy nature of this carnivalesque world.

According to Vonnegut faith is not rooted in religion, but in man himself. Vonnegut believes that writers can influence people's ideas profoundly. Vonnegut also parallels religion's attempts to explain the origin of the earth with his Creation story. "In the beginning," he writes (referencing the book of Genesis) "God created the earth and looked upon it with his cosmic loneliness" (265). God then "created every living creature that now moveth" (265) out of mud. One of these creatures was Man. Man then inquired what the purpose of this creation was. God's answer is "I leave it to you to think of one for all this" (265). Vonnegut is playing with the human belief that there must be a purpose for everything. This is what leads people to espouse religious beliefs in the first place. Religious people have tried for centuries to determine "the reason for all this" and have developed elaborate answers. Yet, if we are to believe Bokonon, all of it is "foma" and life doesn't require a purpose.

As a direct witness to the bombing of Dresden as a soldier during World War II, Vonnegut was left with haunting memories of the senseless misery and mass destruction of war which get clearly reflected in *Cat's Cradle*. Right at the beginning, the reader is warned: "Anyone unable to understand how a useful religion can be

founded on lies will not understand this book either” (16). Rightly so, Bokononism, the religion Vonnegut introduces in the novel is based on lies which in the carnival lens is unmasking of truth under the veil of false claims and arbitrary ranks.

One of the major themes of the novel is the tension between the community and the individual. The various images of science and religion function as a representation of a shared culture and its values and simultaneously isolate the reader and narrator from these cultural distinctions because the narrator revises the traditional, communal interpretation of the sign. The novel is akin to carnival's element of parody. Mikhail Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World*, looks closely at sixteenth-century parody which conceptualizes the theory of the carnival. Bakhtin's discussion of carnival and parody invites an evolution of parodic texts. Based on which the themes of the individual's isolation and involvement with the community are highlighted.

The narrator in *Cat's Cradle* is John who intends to write a book called *The Day the World Ended* chronicling the events in the lives of well known individuals on August 6, 1945, when the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. In the process the first person he contacts is Newton Hoenikker, the son of Dr. Felix Hoenikker, 'one of the so-called "Fathers" of the first atomic bomb' (16). When Newton - Newt - replies, he reveals information about his past years and his family. Newt's mother had passed away leaving Angela, her unattractive six-foot daughter, in control of the family. As it turned out, his father never paid much attention to the family, and especially held little or no interest in the bomb itself on the day the bomb was dropped. On that day, Newt was standing around his father's study and finds him playing with a loop of string. He sees his father twisting it around his fingers in the shape of a cat's cradle. He approaches little Newt and,

...went down on his knees on the carpet next to me (Newt), and he showed me his teeth, and waved that tangle of string in my face. 'See? See? See? He asked. *Cat's Cradle*. (*Cat's Cradle*, 21)

Newt, having never really received any attention from his father sees his ugly, cigar-reeking face up close and gets scared and runs outside. "...my father was the ugliest thing I had ever seen," (21) writes Newt to John. This particular episode in the novel recalls Bakhtin's concept of the grotesque realism of carnival that presents men,

who are ugly, monstrous, hideous from the point of view of 'classic' aesthetics, that is, the aesthetics of the readymade and the completed ... They are contrary to the classical images of the finished, completed man, cleansed, as it were, of all the scoriac of birth and development. (*Rabelais*, 25)

In *Cat's Cradle* there are three personas at work simultaneously: Vonnegut, the author; Jonah, the narrator; and, Bokonon, who writes books on Bokononism. All three are aware of the fact that 'lies told for the sake of artistic effect...can be, in a higher sense, the most beguiling forms of truth,' and vice versa (Reed, 125) as stated in the editor's note of *Mother's Night* [another of Vonnegut's books]. Lundquist's work

Kurt Vonnegut details that Vonnegut influences the reader to question not only the novel's realism, but reality itself:

This is just the point implied by Vonnegut's cosmic irony with its continuous laughter at systems and philosophies and its paradoxically pragmatic attempts at dealing with the new view of reality. (88)

Vonnegut here comments on the meaninglessness of human pursuits because the world does not learn or benefit from experience from the senseless misery of war and other human constructs.

The cat's cradle also the title of the novel becomes a leitmotif of life in general in the novel. Vonnegut introduces the "cat's cradle" as a metaphor for different interpretations of life. Just as Newt says, "A cat's cradle is nothing more than a bunch of X's between somebody's hands" (165). The story travels from the home turf of Vonnegut's imagination—Ilium, New York—to San Lorenzo where a religion based on 'lies' called Bokononism is practiced, when a sense of doom (in the form of Ice-Nine) overtakes mankind. Newt had an older brother Frank Hoenikker who had left them on the day of his father's funeral and was never heard of again. Newton in a way becomes the protagonist of the novel as his life and actions are discussed throughout the narrative. The three Hoenikker children are each in possession of their father's invention: “

Ice-Nine – It was blue-white. It had a melting point of one-hundred-fourteen-point-four-degrees Fahrenheit. (*Cat's Cradle*, 50)

Felix Hoenikker's invention of Ice-Nine was created to address the military's need for a way to get through mud quickly while on the battlefield. Ice-Nine, effectively freezes any liquid with which it comes in contact, and the invention could be heralded as a great success for Science and a considerable asset to the U.S. military. But the truth is that, this 'creation of science' will destroy a nation's water supply and will ensure its eventual demise. Contrary to the general belief that Science can address itself to all human problems, Felix and Frank Hoenikker's experiences as scientists reveal that scientific knowledge does not provide sufficient answers. Ironically, Science is frequently exploited to create human problems, and scientists like the Hoenikkers usually do little to prevent this because they are too concerned with discovering truths to weigh the consequences of their discoveries. This mingling of the established truths and lies is a subversion of the established norms.

Vonnegut attacks and exposes society's flaws while questioning its intelligence and this is evident in the conversation between John and Dr. Von Koenigswald:

“I agree that all religions, including Bokononism, are nothing but lies.”
...I will do anything to make a human being feel better, even if it's unscientific. (*Cat's Cradle*, 179-180)

Society has placed many impediments like religion and science in man's growth in the name of protecting its members from the unknown. Vonnegut attacks science and religion with equal intensity and counters the established thinking through his counter-religion of Bokononism, a religion of "shameless lies"(16). Newt summarizes religion best when he compares it to the cat's cradle "Religion! . . . See the cat? . . . See the cradle?" (150). Towards the end Bokonon realizes the futility of religion in one's life and thinks of an alternative book he could write discarding the Books of Bokononism:

If I were a younger man, I would write a history of human stupidity; and I would climb to the top of Mount McCabe and lie down on my back with my history for a pillow; and I would take from the ground some of the blue-white poison that makes statues of men; and I would make a statue of myself, lying on my back, grinning horribly, and thumbing my nose at You Know Who. (*Cat's Cradle*, 231)

Vonnegut depicts Bokonon as a holy wanderer finding nothing but junk, lies, and idiocy, he talks about the creations of humanity and their attempts to convince themselves and others of the importance of their pursuits. Bokonon laughs when he thinks of these fools, because human pursuits will never matter, and it will never even matter whether he laughs or cries. Here, the parody of religion represents "forms of the mask" (*Rabelais*, 39-40).

Vonnegut presents religion as more useful and less dangerous than science, despite its paradoxes and shortcomings. In the novel, religion is beneficial not because it conveys some truth about the world, but rather because it gives people elaborate lies in which to believe. Bokonon's lies prove more liberating than the Hoenikkers' truths, because his lies have the means for making men feel better about their lack of purpose and destitute existence. The technological advancement leads to the destruction of human race because of science's frequent disinterest in humanity's survival. Vonnegut attempts to show that humans' temptation to control life, death, and nature has led to advances like the atomic bomb and other novel ways of bringing death in exchange for power.

The multiplicity of searches, utilising either religion or science, brings on the realisation of the complexity of moral and aesthetic experiences. Bokonon's, and eventually John's, answer to this complexity which affects the individual's ability to choose a course of action, is ironic detachment. There is a motivation during carnival time to create a form of human social configuration that 'lies beyond existing social forms' (*Rabelais*, 280). Thus Bakhtin's carnival theory can not be reduced to terms such as anarchic or irresponsible. It is, in fact, a diverse tactic, one that may be implemented and sustained wherever there is a dominant regime. Not only does *Cat's Cradle* cast doubt on the usefulness or wisdom of searching for truths, and our

traditional ways of doing so, but the idea of self determination and the ability of a person to control their destiny is questioned.

Everything happens "as it was supposed to happen", and that no chasing of destiny will ever fulfill our desires, even if we catch what we are chasing (76). This phrase is repeated as a refrain throughout the book. John gets Mona, and is not satisfied; Frank is offered the Presidency, and doesn't want the responsibility that goes with the power; all three Hoenikker children buy what they dream of with Ice Nine, and none are happy. So we might as well live as best as we can in the moment we are in, and laugh. As the book continues, the almost inescapable conclusion is that in Vonnegut's world we must be aware of the lies and truths that we are choosing to accept, that "the primary criterion for choosing a philosophy of life is pragmatic: not whether or not it is 'true,' but whether or not it works" (Mayo, 28).

The nature of the novel gives one a feeling that one is 'reading' rather than immersing oneself unselfconsciously in the text, making us recall Bakhtin's observation that Rabelais set his story in "the immediate foreground of his images is the world he had lived in and the people he closely knew" (*Rabelais*, 445). Just as we become used to the idea that we are reading about the writing of a book *The Day the World Ended* that turned into another book *Cat's Cradle*, we are again introduced to another set of fictional books - *The Books of Bokkonon*. Then Papa Monzano and Frank Hoenikker get a brief look-in with fictional ghost-written statements, and then Philip Castle's fictional book on San Lorenzo. And so it goes typical of the carnival features of "exaggeration, hyperbolism, excessiveness [which] are generally considered fundamental attributes of the grotesque style (*Rabelais*, 303).

Vonnegut appears to be a man very much in touch with what he sees as the basic ridiculousness and meaninglessness of life, the universe, and everything. *Cat's Cradle* dissects many of the institutions that we hold sacred, that give our lives structure and meaning and stability. In many ways, this novel is an exercise in pulling aside the curtain and revealing the Great and Powerful as nothing more than a con man with some gadgets, a man who ultimately has no more useful knowledge about the meaning of it all than do any of the rest of us. The novel completes a full circle with the end connecting to the beginning where the novelist reiterates that nothing in the book is true. Vonnegut's excellent technique and unique style are unbelievably powerful. This thought-provoking text and incredibly-well developed characters are not to be forgotten either.

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AN ECOCRITICAL READING OF ROBERT FROST'S SELECT POEMS

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Literary eco-criticism is motivated by environmental activism and focuses principally on representations of the physical environment, especially of nonhuman nature. The dualistic separation of human from nature, promoted by Western Philosophy and culture as the origin of environmental crisis, demands a return to a monistic, primal identification of human beings and ecosystem. While nature is not a subject, it has a language of its own. It has been talking to us and its natural signs portend danger and perhaps catastrophe. Whatever happens Nature will go on without us. And so, we are the ones who must act wisely to sustain and value the present living ecosystem and our position in it. In my paper "An Ecocritical Reading of Robert Frost's Select Poems", I have made an attempt to read some of the select poems of Frost on the basis of the above mentioned views. Robert Frost, though not a high priest of Nature like Wordsworth or a Pantheist like Emerson or Thoreau, is a person who has a deeper understanding of nature. Being a true realist and a strong advocate of individualism, Frost saw man as learning from nature, the zones of his own limitations. Conversely, Frost saw man becoming more "ego-centric" due to his preoccupation and less "eco-centric". Neither a radical nor conservative, Frost searched for an ideal reconciliation between the opposing claims, of the individual and the group and also between man and nature. Thus nature, to him, was at once harsh and mild and man's relation to nature, as to his fellows, is both "together and apart". His poems have overtones of deep ecology which offers a philosophical basis for environmental advocacy which may, in turn, guide human activity against perceived self-destruction.

Frost's poems create a memorable impression by the overwhelming presence of nature. Mountains rearing high above man's head, valleys curving to man's inquiring eye, roads, open or leaf-strewn, crowded trees, dense dark woods, hills of snow caving in heavily, tufts of flowers and many more – this memorable world of Robert Frost is all-pervasive and constant. But Frost's vision expands beyond its focus upon man and society. He uses nature as a background to reveal his concept of the human relationship to this planet upon which the human race is destined to live out its days. Rural scenes and landscapes, homely farmers and the natural world are used to illustrate a psychological struggle with everyday experience faced by men but met with courage, will and purpose to keep moving on.

The principle champions of nature and interpreters of things natural in the nineteenth century were Emerson and Thoreau and they had been called Frost's "intellectual and spiritual god fathers" (21). "The stars", declared Emerson, "awaken a certain reverence, because though always present, they are inaccessible; but all natural objects make a kindred impression, when the mind is open to their influence" (5). And he also avers that all things are symbolic and the

