Chapter-V

Narrative Technique
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NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE

This chapter deals with the non-fiction narrative technique as it materializes in Naipaul’s three books on India: *An Area of Darkness*, *India: A Wounded Civilization* and *India: A Million Mutinies Now*. A close study of the text is made in terms of dialogue, descriptive passages and narrative that drill these three books. These are Naipaul’s individual reaction to the Indian state of affairs, and his citations of fact and circumstance. Both these encircle in the narrative from memory and experience which in turn are drawn from two living documents of human existence: history and literature. Apart from this, Naipaul has also endeavoured to offer an integrated form to the narrative by putting up a proper framework in terms of heedfully prearranged chapters. Naipaul is a craftsman and clever, too. He expresses himself easily and clearly (though his skill also allows him to manipulate the reader, as he perhaps too readily does).

The use of historical reference in *An Area of Darkness* is incidental. Naipaul commences with Indian community in Trinidad
which, actually had slipped into history as he grew up. In India, he contemplates on the history of the Kashmir valley before the takeover of the Mughal conquerors. He makes use of this to draw attention towards the lack of historical sense in the contemporary masses that have no reminiscence of their history before the invasions. In Shimla, he dwells on the British rule and the culture that it imparted to the people. In the South, he contemplates on the ruin of Vijaynagar and sees the death of ancient India. In Shimla, he settles on the British rule and the culture that it passes on to the people. In the South, he mulls over on the ruin of Vijaynagar and sees the demise of historical India. In *India: A Wounded Civilization* Naipaul stays at great length on the history of India. Through history, he endeavours to trace the reason behind India’s problem that he had delineated in *An Area of Darkness*. The book discusses the history of Vijayanagar Kingdom and the history of Maratha warfare led by Shivaji against the Mughal Empire. From these two analyses, Naipaul cautiously draws the contemporary predicament of Indian society and politics. As compared to the social and political history used in the first two books on India, Naipaul’s use of history in his third book, *India: A Million Mutinies Now* is very different. Here, stress is on personal and family history: histories of
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individuals within the matrices of social and political change. Therefore, the book is full of the lives and times of grandparents and parents. This examination of personal history of individuals builds up to give a lucid and comprehensive depiction of social change. Very usual narrative style, mainly collection of interviews, but there is some underlying flow or thread that holds the text together. One can learn a lot about India in early 90’s.

An Area of Darkness converses Manohar Malgonkar’s The Prince to forward Naipaul’s thesis of the role of ‘degree’ in India. Brief references of the Gita and Kama Sutra are also given. Rudyard Kipling, E.M. Forster, Jane Austen, Charles Dickens and William Hazlitt are discussed to distinguish between the European and the Indian sensibility. Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore, Jawaharlal Nehru and Nirad C. Chaudhuri are discussed on the part of India.

Two novels, Mr.Sampath and The Vendor of Sweets authored by R.K.Narayan, occupy nearly half of India: A Wounded Civilization’s first and second chapter. These two novels explain the ‘Old Equilibrium’ and the ‘Shattering World’ U.R. Anantamurti’s Samskara are used to draw out Naipaul’s analysis of the role of Karma in shaping the Indian sensibility. The book discusses the life,
writings and ideologies of Mahatma Gandhi extensively. In keeping with its use of personal histories of individuals, *India: A Million Mutinies Now* does not place great reliance on any major literary work of the past. Present-day writing in terms of magazine content adds up to the body of literature used in this book. Apart from the steady transformation in the use of literature and history as the warp and weft of narration, Naipaul has also made a steady change in his approach of narration from *An Area of Darkness* to *India: A Million Mutinies Now*. The change is analyzed in terms of dialogue, descriptive passages and narrative passages.

The use of narrative passages provides different purposes in the above mentioned books. Therefore, the narrative passages in each book are dissimilar in structure and content. In *An Area of Darkness*, the narrative passages are made of long compound sentences. There is along string of clauses which tries to put down in world the notions that seem to overcrowd the mind of the writer, clamoring for abrupt and concurrent release:

"Bunty comes of a good family, army, ICS; he might even have princely connexions. He is two or three generations removed from purely Indian India; he, possibly, like his father, has been to an Indian or English
public school and one of the two English universities, whose accent, through all the encircling hazards of Indian intonation, he strenuously maintains. Freed of one set of caste rules, he obeys another, and these are as nice: to introduce jimmy, whose air-conditioned office is shared and has hard furnishing, into the home of Andy, who has an office to himself with soft, furnishings, is to commit a blunder."

There are several such instances all over the book. These take place mostly when people and places are examined and discussed without having aroused much emotion from the author. In circumstances that trigger off instantaneous fury or disenchantment the sentences that constitute narrative passages are straight and the number of clauses fewer:

"Mosque on temple: ruin on ruin. This is in the North. In the South there is the great city of Vijayanagar. In the early sixteenth century it was twenty-four miles round."2

"He was reacting for me, as he had done on the train. But now I knew my hysteria for what it was. The words were his, not mine. They broke the spell."3
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"The country had been pillaged before. But continuity had been maintained. With the British, continuity was broken."^4

To represent the internal landscape of the writer's intellect, narrative passages are profusely used. The sentences are visibly author-centred and run into a series of clauses held together by diverse connectives:

"Fear made me passionate; it also, I realized latter, made me unnaturally convincing. My annoyance was real; when I turned to walk away I was really walking away; when I was prevailed upon to return-easy, since the boatman refused to ferry me back to the road-my fatigue was genuine."^5

"As India had drawn near, I had felt more than the usual fear of arrival. In spite of myself, in spite of lucidity and London and my year, and over and above every other fear, and the memory of the Alexandrian cab-deriver, some little feeling for India as the mythical land of my childhood was awakened."^6

"It had never rung true to me in Kipling and other writers; and it did not ring true now. Was it the mixture of England and India? Was it my colonial, Trinidad-American, English speaking prejudice which could not
quite accept as real this imposition, without apparent competition, of culture on another?"^{7}

In this way the intellect of the author, infested with ideas of reaction to India, locates its narration. Such narrative passages are extended all over the book. Therefore, the voice that comes into sight is majorly, the voice of the writer declaring his own response to India. The observation is focused not so much on India as on the reaction it draws out in the writer.

*India: A Wounded Civilization* is entirely prepared on narrative passage with dialogue and descriptive passages concentrated to the barest minimum. A variety of narrative passages give the book its constitution. Narrative passages enclose the author’s commentaries on the literature, society and politics of India. The technique used is empirical: observation, analysis, and conclusion:

“To the pilgrims Vijayanagar is its surviving temple. The surrounding destruction is like proof of the virtue of old magic; just as the fantasy of past splendour is accommodated within an acceptance of present squalor.”^{8}

“About two hundred miles away, still in the south, on a brown plateau of rock and gigantic boulder, are the ruins
of the capital city of what was once the great Hindu kingdom of Vijayanagar.”

"Life goes on, the past continues. After conquest and destruction, the past simply reasserts itself.”

The identical prototype is pursued in the narrative passages that deal with people and their ideas. Unlike in An Area of Darkness, here Naipaul does not hurry into a reaction or a personal response. The circumstances are laid out before the reader and discussed before Naipaul advances his thesis:

“But it was a middle class burden, the burden of those whose nationalism...required them to have an idea of India. Lower down in the chawls..... needs were more elemental: food, shelter, water, a latrine....Identity there was no problem; it was a discovery.”

“For the journalist-though he was an economist and had travelled, and was professionally concerned with change-Indian identity was not something developing or changing but something fixed, and idealization of his own background, the past he felt he had just lost.”

“At dinner that evening- high up in one of those towers-a journalist, speaking frenetically of many thing....touched the subject of identity. Indian was a word that was now without a meaning; he said.”
Naipaul assumes the similar approach, while analyzing Gandhi and Gandhianism. By making use of various exemplars from present-day India, Naipaul puts down his theory for the failure of Gandhianism in India after freedom had been succeeded. One of the instances is Naipaul’s use of a statement made by the widow of Jamnalal Bajaj, a devoted Gandhian:

"Gandhi swept through India, but he has left it without an ideology. He awakened the holy land; his Mahatmahood returned it to archaism; he made his worshippers vain."\(^{14}\)

"Mrs. Bajaj said, she had transferred her loyalty to Vinoba Bhave, the man recognized as Gandhi’s successor. I walked with Vinobaji for year, Mrs. Bajaj told Mehta. Ten or fifteen miles a day, begging land for the poor. It was very hard......because I never eat anything I haven’t prepared with my own hands. Everyone knows that Moslems and Harijans have dirty habits."\(^{15}\)

Unlike his first two books on India, the use of narrative passages in *India: A Million Mutinies Now* is intense only in the last chapter, ‘The House on the Lake: A Return to India.’ Other narrative passages are employed as commencements for new ideas or as
commentaries on the ideas articulated by the people Naipaul meets or as a commemoration of his first visit to India in 1962. The passages that accompany innovative ideas mostly deal with accurate details and hardly ever reveal the personality of the author or the predominant 'I' of *An Area of Darkness*:

"Culture upon culture now: because the boy who went to La Martiniere felt, after his time in Iraq, that part of him was Arab of Iranian. After his classes at La Martiniere there were special religious lessons at home everyday...."\(^{16}\)

"Calcutta, more then new Delhi, is the British-built city of India. It was one of the early centers of British India; it grew with British power, and was steadily embellished; it was the capital of British India until 1930."\(^{17}\)

The narrative passages that cope with the reminiscences of 1962 reappear throughout the novel. The entire experience of 1962 in retrospect is crystallized in the last chapter:

"It was an extraordinary piece of luck for me. The liward, my time in Kashmir, became a point of rest in my Indian year, a point of rest in my fearful travelling;
and perhaps it enabled me to go through with my Indian venture."18

"The hotel was like a little house. It was called the Hotel Liward....It had two storeys and a pitched corrugated-iron roof. It stood in its own garden in the lake, not one of the floating gardens...but a fixed plot of earth."19

The narrative passages towards the conclusion of the book include Naipaul’s distorted commentary on India and are an amendment of his former visions:

"What I hadn’t understood in 1962. Or had taken too much for granted, was the extent to which India had been restored to itself....

In the 130 years or so since the Mutiny- the last 90 years of the British Raj and the first 40 year of independence begin increasingly to appear as part of the same historical period- the idea of freedom had gone everywhere in India... The liberation of spirit that has come to India could not come as release alone. In India, with its layer below layer of distress and cruelty, it had to come as disturbance. It had to come as rage and revolt. India was now a country of million little mutinies."20
Naipaul’s exercise of narrative passages has steadily changed through the course of his three books on India. The narrative passages in *An Area of Darkness* supplies essentially to recount the contemplations and reactions that take place in the mind of the writer. The passages in *India: A Wounded Civilization* swaps between factual and analytical content whereas those in *India: A Million Mutinies Now* is mostly insightful. Naipaul has therefore, developed the narrative passages to provide as eager manifestations on the situation at hand. The narrative passages that pursue the dialogue are also annoyed thoughts and are completely different from the indignant erupts in *An Area of Darkness*.

The descriptive passages in the three books taken into picture are the only regions in Naipaul’s varying method that have remained unaffected across his journey from *An Area of Darkness* to *India: A Million Mutinies Now*. Although the objects of description keep changing, Naipaul’s keen eye for detail does not:

“.....a pair of reaping shoes. At the front of the left shoe was a narrow cutting blade; on the right side of the right shoe was a longer curved blade. So the peasant, advancing through his ripe corn, would kick with his left
foot and cut while with his right he would describe a wide are and cut: a harvest dance."\textsuperscript{21}

"Beyond the Bund it was a medieval town, and it might have been of medieval Europe. It was a town, damp or dusty, of smell: of bodies and picturesque costumes discolored and acrid with grime, of black, open drains...a town of prolific pariah dogs of disregarded beauty...of starved puppies shivering in the damp caked blackness of butchers' stall..... a town of narrow lanes and dark shops and choked courtyards."\textsuperscript{22}

"Apart from this garden, the fort was built up, all paved, no earth showing. Passages, courtyards, terraces, roofs: crumbling brick and plaster, more perishable than wood. Here and there were small, oppressive, over-decorated, dark rooms, with dark mirrors on the walls and carved ceilings."\textsuperscript{23}

\textit{An Area of Darkness} has very limited use of dialogues. It has very short and brief lines. Dialogues are very few and are perpetually followed by long narrative passages:

‘Open. But Why?’

‘isn’t that the law?’

‘Hide them.’
'Put it flat.'

'I don’t trust the cork...'

'I don’t know, I don’t know...'

'He clapped his hands and at once a barefooted man, stunted and bony, appeared...’

To recount the tales of a variety of people that he meets, dialogue is used. But here too, the sentences are short and limited and only serve to intensify the tension in the situation at hand. The longer sentences are very less. The longest speech in the Ramnath-Malhotra episode is Malhotra’s, wherein he communicates his intentions to the head: 'If that is your attitude, sir, then I am sorry to say...’

All other dialogues are short:

'Where is that letter you took this morning?'

'It is with Hiralal, Sir.'

'And yesterday’s letter....'

Silence.

'Where is my letter?'

'It is not my job, Sir.’
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There are few examples where dialogue has been used, be it his interaction with the Railway Inspector of Forms and Stationery or his conversation with Ramchandra Dubey. An IAS officer served as an interpreter in the latter case so the language employed is duly sophisticated. Dialogue is used in the book in a very limited magnitude. It is mostly used to set out the writer’s own reactions or his insight of a situation. The dialogues do not mix together in the continuity or the text which largely consists of narrated passages. This is in accordance with Naipaul’s reactions to India as documented in the book. *An Area of Darkness* is a personal book. The traits and response of the writer are predominant. The use of dialogue is made in such a way that it augments the viewpoint of the author. At any stage, the dialogue does not reveal the speaker’s reactions. It is always made to stimulate the reaction of the author.

The usage of dialogue in *India: A Wounded Civilization* differs significantly from that in *An Area of Darkness*. Primarily, the book reflects analytical tone and the use of dialogue was very cautious. The only occasion where direct speech is documented at some length is in the case of the Prince:

“What keeps a country together? Not economic. Love. Love and affection. That’s our Indian way.........you can

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feed my dog. But he won’t obey you. He’ll obey me. Where’s the economics in that?...Are they happy where you come from? Are they happy in England?"\(^{27}\)

In *An Area of Darkness* dialogues are used in many ways, one of them is by alternating it with descriptive one-line sentences. The dialogue becomes one-side and doles out to emphasize the inner contemplation process of the writer and documents his reaction:

‘You don’t want me. You that officer.....’

I went to him

‘You have your liquor permit?’

I showed him the stamped and signed foolscap sheaf.

‘You have your transport permit?’

‘It was the first I had heard of this permit.’

‘You must have a transport permit.’

I was exhausted, sweating....\(^{28}\)

Naipaul has also given space to the way of speaking English by the Kashmiri people. To cite an example, the case of Mrs. Mahindra can be taken into account:
'Duffer, that Bihari boy.'

'I am craze for foreign, Mrs. Mahindra said.'

'Just craze for foreign,'

'Two minutes,' he said. 'Three minutes. I fix.'

'Can you swim, Aziz?'

'O yes, sahib, I swim.'

'Where do you swim?'

'Right here on lake'

'It must be very cold.'

'O no, sahib. Every morning Ali Mohammed and I take off clothes and swim'

Naipaul has presented an analysis in the book which is extended by narrative and descriptive passages. This technique is completely reversed in *India: A Million Mutinies Now*. The book thrives in dialogue and dialogue is also used as commentary on a given situation. The writer is completely eliminated from the reader's view. There are entire sections that are built up on direct speech. A remarkable example of this is the section in the first chapter that deals with the Bengali film writer. The section starts
with a descriptive passage that explains the setting - the one room apartment. This is followed by two pages of direct speech from the Bengali film writer. Thereafter, the author puts in one line questions which draw more direct speech from the Bengali film writer which runs into another four pages. Without any omission, right the way through the book, the same prototype is pursued:

“When I first came I had great notion of what a film writer should be. I was wrong then. I thought that a screenplay was close to a novel or a play.... We write visual- that’s what a screen writer is supposed to do......”

“So now I’ve been back for a year. The first six month were hard. People were indifferent, because I’d left the club.”

“Looking back now...don’t you think that something might be said for talking a film-as used to do?”

The writer was unforgiving. ‘That is the enemy. That complacent attitude- that is the enemy...’

‘Who are the nice people in the film business?

‘Everybody and nobody. It’s totally success-oriented...’

A relative study of the use of dialogue in Naipaul’s three books on India corresponds to the steady shift in his sensibility and the mounting lucidity of his Indian experience. The dialogue in An
Area of Darkness is not conversational. It bears a stroke of confrontation. The almost total absence of dialogue in India: A Wounded Civilization adds to its analytical tone. The dialogue in India: A Million Mutinies Now is primarily conversational. The accent of the author emerges with the solitary intention of engaging the people in extensive conversations. The accents of the people upsurge over the chapters. Each person unveils his/her life and family history. Their stories, handed out in conversation, build up the story of India across generation.

As observed in Naipaul’s three books on India, his narrative technique is straightly associated to Naipaul’s response to India. In An Area of Darkness, the accent of the writer is apparent. It is a voice overflowing with anger and strong response. The people Naipaul meets are also engrossed into his larger personal response. The narrative is linear, in the sense that all experiences involve the writer and on the basis of his experiences he promotes a hypothesis on India. The author’s personal response is present In India: A Wounded Civilization, but it has been transformed into a more analytical and organized form. Naipaul tries to comprehend India and discovers the woes that trouble this once magnificent country. Therefore, it is largely history that speaks in Naipaul’s analysis. The
narrative is linear here also as Naipaul comes across literature, history and society one after the other. A sole accent is leading in both these books. The use of the voice of the author is similar in both the books.

In *India: A Million Mutinies Now*, the narrative is multifaceted. There are several narrators and they recite their own tales. Only to systematize the numerous narratives, the voice of the author is used. Naipaul has been able to institute a kind of relationship with India in this book. Naipaul realized the plurality and paradox of India due to this coming to terms with India. That is why he puts his voice take backseat and allows the narrators converse for them. Thus, a million voices articulate a million mutinies. The voice of the author seems to have multiplied itself into numerous narrators. Each narrator divulges a special struggle that had led to a special development. The narrators describe the process of change and all these numerous voice from different parts of the country give a complete picture of India. With *India: A Million Mutinies Now*, Naipaul conquers his obsession with his response to India and looks at the country through the eyes of its people. Thus, the Naipaulian budge from the self to the country across twenty-seven years locates its narrative equivalent in his books on India.
Just like Salman Rushdie, Naipaul's writing sometimes goes very abstract that comprehending them becomes very difficult. Rushdie writes fiction but Naipaul's writing isn't a fiction. V. S. Naipaul appears to be a leading supporter of non-fiction novels. In the Middle Passage, Naipaul first used this form, and as the time passed, he made it more sophisticated to produce its narratives. Middle Passage, is a travel book about the Caribbean islands. In it, Naipaul discovered his true talent: writing about decolonized third-world countries. He honed a special vision for the X-ray gaze into the ills of these newly emerging societies. Passage, the first in the genre, sets the general pattern Naipaul's travel writing was to follow. Indeed, readers familiar with Passage have a distinct premonition what to expect in Darkness. The two books are alike in many ways but also dissimilar in that Naipaul uses two different criteria in treating the two societies. In the West Indies, his standard is modernity and the way it manifests itself in the formation of the nation-state. In India, on the other hand, his vision is stereotypically orientalist: i.e., India is depicted as irremediably static and as quite incapable of modernity.

Brandon Robshaw gave following comments while reviewing *India: A Million Mutinies Now*:
"Naipaul's writing is crisp, masculine, authoritative and highly visual. One is sometimes reminded of the George Orwell of "Shooting an Elephant" or "A Hanging". But Naipaul doesn't go in for Orwell's engagement and indignation. He merely records. He interviews a former terrorist responsible for at least 10 murders, and listens without offering judgement. Most of the book is told in the words of the Indians he meets: pundits, politicians, Brahmins, Dravidians, devout Hindus and Muslims, people of all castes and classes. It's really a huge slice of oral history.

There are times when the monologues seem rambling and unfocused, and the book could have been edited without losing its flavour. When Naipaul offers comments of his own, they are illuminating, such as his notion that the caste system (despite iniquities) functioned as a way of organising a complex society and preventing chaos, like the Elizabethan idea of degree."

He feels free to project numerous outlooks and contrasting visions while writing in a non-fiction form. Naipaul's world vision is correlated to his inclination towards the non-fictional writing and his steady reallocation from fiction to non-fiction. It also facilitates Naipaul to present those intricate strands of response that amounts to

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our present day reality. As Naipaul progressed towards his meditations on our world, he steadily reallocated from fiction to non-fiction. Advocating the non-fiction form in ‘Finding the Centre’, Naipaul says:

"I would have liked to begin at the very beginning, with the blankness and anxiety of arrival. But it didn’t work as narrative. And narrative was my aim. Within that, my travelling method was intended to be transparent. The reader will see how the material was gathered; he will also see how the material could have served fiction or political journalism or a travelogue. But the material here serves itself alone."34

The basic technique adopted by a supporter of non-fictional form is analogous to that of journalism. But the role of a writer of non-fiction is dissimilar from that of a journalist. Journalistic method is used by the non-fiction writer to facilitate the first person narrative voice, with the help of which he articulates his thoughts and intercessions on a given situation. The writer appears as a philosopher-thinker who gives an account of the present day world. Non-fictional writing places a great reliance on historical material, on reminiscence and on experience which is its exceptional aspect. The writer thoroughly inquires into these sources and arrives with
experiences that build up on each other to produce the narrative of non-fictional writing. However, the non-fictional writing is not only about data collection. Each experience is deeply extended and has been put up close to each other so that there surfaces a kind of unity. Facts are quickly transformed into connection in the chain of memory and experience.
NOTES AND REFERENCES

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5. Ibid, p 106
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