



UNVEILING THE VISIONS: A STUDY OF MODERN TRAVEL LITERATURE

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Abstract:

With the progress and advancement of reasonable, economical and reliable means of mass transport, the twentieth century witnessed explosions both in the frequency of long distance travel and in the travel writing dimensions and volume. Now the discipline of science has provided things very easy for man. He can easily avail the means of transportation like automobiles, railways and aeroplanes. The destinations that took him long years to reach have now become reachable within a few hours. While most of the travelling is done for various reasons such as business, organizing events, international relations for peacekeeping, excursion, pilgrimage, and campaign work.

The effective means of transport made it easy for new varieties of travelling. It became more than a necessary evil; a burden to be borne by, for pilgrims, merchants and explorers, it rather came to be constructed as an end in itself, in a method of pure pleasure. Travel was not extended anymore a solely aristocratic preserve. Subsequently in 19th century it was increasingly interpreted as the most important bourgeois experience that had its origins in romanticism and industrialism.

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Introduction:

Now the discipline of science has provided things very easy for man. He can easily avail the means of transportation like automobiles, railways and aeroplanes. The destinations that took him long years to reach have now become reachable within a few hours. The journey also has become comfortable, and the writer feels as if he has both, the luxurious comforts and journey at the same time, since the time of Megasthenese, the Greek Traveler and Fahien the Chinese Traveler who approached India after crossing the torrential rivers, the impregnable mountains and the impenetrable jungles. In this context Vikram Singh explains:

How can one, curious to be familiar with what lies at the other end of the globe and what lies at this end of the earth, give up his inquisitiveness to explore what lies on the domain of the globe. Spurred by this inquisitiveness, man traversed the entire earth at the risk of his life, continuing his journey riding a horse or a camel or sailing by a boat. (ix)

Megasthenese and Fahien in their book *Indica* gives a beautiful description of India through his word pictures. Today the development and advancement of technology of still and movie cameras, television and internet has made the 'travelogue' more lively and delightful. These inventions have benefited most travellers and also some travel writers feel that it has diminished the significance of travelogue. The genre of travelogue is considered as novels in this modern period. The novel *Dinotopia* by James Gurney, is one such example which gives evidence about a spiritual and supernatural terrestrial survive in virtual agreement and



coordination. The narrator of the story not only chronicles his events of travel attractively but also provides images and photos to highlight the different features of beliefs.

Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* is one among the most fascinating works of 20th century travelogues. A fascinating 1998 work which captured the imagination of many is Bill Bryson's *A Walk in the Woods*, a description of Bryson's walk along the Appalachian Trail with supplemental historical details.

Pico Iyer's *Tropical Classical: Essays from Several Directions*, an excellent collection of essays on the post modern experience of travel and William Dalrymple's *City of Djinn: A Year in Delhi*, a remarkable historical narrative on the neglected aspect of British, a foreign rule in India. The Last and final eras of 20th century have witnessed a double explosion of interest in travel writing.

The style of travel literature varies dramatically from lavish and romantic to comical and mischievous, evoking a 19th century convention of survey, ordaining the satirical attitude of late twentieth century postmodernism. Bruce Chatwin, Pico Iyer, William Dalrymple or Redmond O'Hanlon have driven travel writing beyond itself and re-invented travel writing, giving it both a new popularity and a new respectability by finding a platform for other cultures and other natures.

This sense of re-imagining the world through its re-presentation, describing spiraling circles between home and away, here and there, and re-working the connective between 'travel' and 'historical narrative' gives much of this work a decidedly critical edge. It enquires important and critical questions about the politics of representation. It also interrogates on sets of transculturation, about the permanencies between a colonial past and a post-colonial present and about ecological, economic and cultural implication of globalizing projects of modernity. Appiah presents the disconcerting feature of O'Hanlon's description of his voyage with James Fenton, *Into the Heart of Borneo* (1984):

The real secret of O'Hanlon's success is that he subverts the conventions of this [history] genre of imperial travel-writing by refusing utterly to take himself seriously. The imperial travellers - the explorers and naturalists - announced the difficulties of their journeys in order to record their triumphs over them. What they saw with their omnivorous eyes, they named 'properly' for the first time, in the grand Linnacan manner. And the human indigenes off the forests - the native fauna of the genus *Homo Sapiens* - could be interesting, loyal, helpful, brave, even noble... In O'Hanlon's world, however, the narratives are always amused. (20)

Travel writing is not conducted under the discipline of 'science'. However, travelling and its cultural beliefs have been found surrounded by greater establishments and developments. The impressions and engraving of supremacy and joy are observed clearly and thus begin to understand much more about the beliefs and traditions of universal history. Travel writing has been examined as a collection of documented and written performances. It can be prepared to unveil the typical features of an 'imperial stylistics' (Pratt 1992). Therefore it is more theoretical in its inclinations and draws from both post-structuralism and post-colonialism.



Records of travel writing and some incomplete travel accounts are seen in both Mesopotamia and Egypt in prehistoric period. Travel writing has become a significant literary genre in many places after the establishment of huge royal states in the conventional world. They possessed high demand for sovereigns craving valuable information about their empires.

During the nineteenth century, European travelers made their way to the interior regions of Africa and the Americas, generating a fresh area of writing travelogues. Devoting abundant writings about the societies of foreign subjects European colonial administrators were among Asian and African lands. Travel and travel writing meshed with secularization yielded to an ample and more complex classification of cultural difference and natural history.

Within the geographical imagination of post-Enlightenment Europe, Asia, Africa, America and Australia were each discursively set up by relations of contradiction and opposition that not only confirmed 'Europe' as sovereign but also marked out a differentiated and difficult space of alteration. With the progress and advancement of reasonable, economical and reliable means of mass transport, the twentieth century witnessed explosions both in the frequency of long distance travel and in the travel writing dimensions and volume.

While most of the travelling is done for various reasons such as business, organizing events, international relations for peacekeeping, excursion, pilgrimage, and campaign work. The effective means of transport made it easy for new varieties of travelling. It became more than a necessary evil; a burden to be borne by, for pilgrims, merchants and explorers, it rather came to be constructed as an end in itself, in a method of pure pleasure. Travel was not extended anymore a solely aristocratic preserve.

Subsequently, in 19th century it was increasingly interpreted as the most important bourgeois experience that had its origins in romanticism and industrialism. The shifting mundanity of the bourgeois world: tourism, says Hans Magnus Enzensburger, 'is thus nothing other than the attempt to realize the dream that Romanticism proposed to the distant and the far away.'

Enzensburger sees this as the central dialectic of modern tourism: "Tourism is always outrun by its refutation... [yet] far from resigning and giving up the struggle at the cost of freedom, tourism redoubles its efforts after each defeat" (125). The confusion was double edged. Most modern travellers prepared for their journey by reading the accounts of other travellers and noting recommendations from the guidebooks.

The image of a world overrun by industrialism replaced and romantic's idea of an unsullied world. For some romantics the world had been so spoiled that it was best to travel only in one's imagination. In his *Voyage en Orient* (1857) Nerval writes:

O my dear friend, how perfectly we have enacted the fable of the two men, of whom one scurries to the ends of the earth in search of his good fortune, while the other quietly awaits it in his own domestic bed!... Only once, out of imprudency, did you change your idea of Spain by going to see it ... But already I have lost kingdom by kingdom, province by province, the most beautiful half of the universe, and soon I shall no longer know where to seek a refuge for my dreams (qtd. In Cardinal 151)

Recent times have seen unprecedented waves of voyage and improvement of ethnic



consciousness, and many are the intellectuals and writers in diaspora who have visited homes of their ancestors to comprehend in what way much of their forefathers' values and cultural traditions they themselves have inherited.

Like many other documents of history, travel writings are extremely challenging source of knowledge. Incredibly, there are many numbers of reasons to agree to witness on travel writings as a source of history. Moreover, it is unusual that researchers have dedicated very less consideration to the exploration of travel writing.

Insightful studies have been provided by historians for individual travellers. Many researchers have analysed travel writing as a literary genre. Later, travelogues are viewed as accounts that reflect their authors' uncertainties and interests for representing the colonial lands and people. The actual purpose of this kind of insightful studies is the work of Said's *Orientalism* which is basically a controversial study.

He argued that European and Euro – American researchers and travellers misrepresented Muslims and societies by characterizing them as irrational, immobilized, exotic and mired in tradition. He also argued with an abstract approach rather than objective observation that Muslims are misrepresented by the European and Euro – American experts. This is to make a distinction that they are foreigner and exemplify themselves as more masculine and fully modernized.

Mary Campbell, in her work, *The Witness and the Other World*, not only explores medieval European travel writings but also put forth the works of scholars, pilgrims and businessmen. Interpretation of these works is done in the light of Crusades. She elucidates the expansion of Europe in the contemporary period and the domination of Europe on the world in modern era. Due to her representations, expeditions, pilgrimage and search for trade directly indicated a cause of campaign, so Campbell viewed medieval traveller themselves as agents of European imperialism.

Similarly, Mary Louise Pratt offered her study on European Travellers in *The Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. She had been to Africa and South America during the 18th and 19th centuries. She examines that the writings of these European travellers bestowed upon imperialism and by making imperialist readers a world that was ready for the domination of Europe.

Conclusion:

Mary W. Helms, an anthropologist presented a different analysis in *Ulysses' Sail: An Ethnographic Odyssey of Power, Knowledge, and Geographical Distance*. It clearly identifies the relations and associations among travel, travel writing, and imperialism. On the other hand, she sets the travel writings of Europe in broader space and universal positions. It is also observed that travellers' cultural and political backgrounds are acquired to examine foreign travel accounts and information. Travellers' position and the influence in their own societies would certainly be served the interests of imperialist and experience of travel.

A kind of interest of travellers is reflected in their travel accounts by travelling to different parts of the world. It may be due to political, economic, social or any kind of interest. Human desires and cravings to travel for communication and exchange depend largely in his



interests. But it is clear that imperialism or imperialist propaganda cannot be reduced simply by travelling and travel writing. So, even at the end of the 20th century we are still in the age of 'industrialized' romanticism. It means that though the bureaucratization of travel has increased since the turn of the century; the romantic frame through which places are viewed remains much the same. Through the post-colonial theorists write of 'travelling cultures', travel is still popularly understood as the immersion in picturesque, distinct, and colourful cultures.

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