

# TRAVELOGUES: CONCEPT AND THE TEXT

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**Abstract :** Travelogues are often considered to be an open house having immense hospitality as it can encompass stories, poems, memories, letters, reports, diary writings and any literary genre of varying craft. Travel is very complex affair that brings under its corpus diverse movements: real or imaginary, physical or mental and so on. Every travel culminates in the organic meeting of the 'Self' and the 'Other' rather than mere shifts of inorganic, linear movements. Individuals as well as alien cultures are intimate participants in such cultural entourage. Travel writings shall be construed as the documentation of these distinct encounters and dialogues which are taken up during travels.

**Key words-** Travel Writing, Self and the Other, Genre, Colonization, Power, Encounter, Narration.

Travels are most supreme as an integral part of human existence. It is not a monolithic process as one may perceive in the realm of generating knowledge. Diversities, complexities and inequalities quite often form a spontaneous portion of travel. The distance of travel, the routes of different journeys, conditions and objectives – all provide us with worthy and noble experiences. Sometimes the journeys may be small or it can be large, often within the boundaries of a country and even surpassing the geographic limits of a nation. One can choose land routes or travel by the sea or he can take air routes. Often individual preferences and sometimes group choice decisively play a role in selecting the objectives of voyages. So far as travels are concerned individualistic and combined priorities can set the tone of travel routes, as they are an integral realm of multiple voices.

The life cycle of man beginning with birth and ending up with the inevitable death and also the external and internal interactions during life are in general described as journeys. A broad definition in this context by the noted Malayalam writer Rajan is rather interesting: "Man's advancement in to future through the time-past and the time present and also the belief regarding 'rebirth' or resurrection and the constant passage of mankind through generations can be referred to as journeys. One's attainment of old age after passing through the phases of childhood and adulthood is also essentially a journey".

The metaphor of a journey often depicts the human tendencies in general. A positive outlook on education can be summed up in this way. It is an incessant strive for knowledge in a ceaseless journey rather than easily achieving a destination point. The journey is highly inevitable for the all round development of man and a continuous indefatigable journey undertaken till the grave yard. Thus the psychic journey of man is actually a sum total of the activities of his conscious and the unconscious states of mind. The mystic philosophy of the Vedas and the Upanishad illustrates the passage of birth and death going beyond materialistic world, thus eventually fusing in to the state of supreme being (Paramatma tatva). The Christian philosophers too in a similar vein define spirituality as a journey in anguish abandoning all the worldly pleasures for attaining the eternal bliss which God alone can give.

## TRAVELOGUES : DEFINITIONS

It is a highly complex job to define with universal acceptance and adopting a technical craft to travelogues in general. The major problem staring at a scholar is the incompatibility of travelogues with regard to the content and technical craft it depends on. Different literary genre fusing in to one another, the blending up of imagination, the reality and the ambiguities of form makes the position of travelogues a more complex affair and thus beyond the scope of mere fixing up of definition in this context is challenging.

Travelogues are often considered to be an open house having indiscriminate hospitality as it can encompass stories, poems, memories, letters, essays, reports, diary writings and any literary genre of varying craft. It is also described as a literary chest having omnivorous appetite for writing of all kinds - facts, fiction, drama, notes and testaments with utter resilience of form in indicated as it has the peculiar characteristic to regain its form. In short every travelogue in its form depicts uniqueness of writing. Also the attitudes and musings of travelogue writer very much resembles with the literary form. Although there may be varying proportions creative writers always resort to the 'Form' of the literary genre in general during the art of creation. But the travelogue writer goes beyond all these conventional norms during writing. During creation he can assume different roles according to the whims as he gets more flexibility and also assimilate various raw materials from different spheres of knowledge for which he can enjoy uncontrollable liberty.

But travelogues cannot be considered as mere imaginative constructs utilizing creative talent of the author coupled with lot of fantasies. On the other hand they are factual representation or rather re-creation of personal and individual anecdotes of travel

experiences. That is to say the literary representation of a real travel with all its enthralling experiences. It can also be an introspection of the journey which had been completed by the author and also an objective documentation of his travel experiences. Needless to say that it should have the content of unexplored nations, its people and cultural ambiances for the audience. On the other hand scribbling everything as it is, shall not be the objective of the travel writing. Rather taking stock of every sight, every experience during travel must be accounted in every detail and generating enormous curiosity of the reader. The individual evaluation and responses of the writer assumes greater space in a travelogue. The travel routes, tour centers and anecdotes when inked in an objective manner the travelogue assumes the very peculiarities of an autobiography. Knowledge which is taken out from the treasure chest of travelogues, ie to say more qualified for literary transactions and discourses after having comparative studies when blended suitably, with ingredients and documented in a literary way transforms as travel Texts.

### **Salient features of travel writing**

Eventhough travel-writings have no commonness in form and technical craft, they have certain, similarities regarding to its generic content and homogenous factors. It's these peculiarities and homogenous characteristics give such writings a common place under the broad banner of literature. The writer's diagressive excursions in to the territories far removed from the physical world he is in, renders it generically indefinable.

### **Encounter with 'self' and 'the other'**

Every travel culminates in the organic meeting of the 'self' and the 'other' rather than mere shifts of inorganic, linear movements. Individuals as well as alien cultures are intimate participants in such cultural entourage. Travel writings shall be construed as the documentation of these distinct encounters and dialogues which are taken up during travels. Hence it enriches the conscious horizon of acquired knowledge and the dream of Vasudhaiva Kudumbakam (the ideology of universal homeliness). Travelogues are basic documents of the travels which have been carried out. A travel account means listing out the experiences while conducting an arduous and long journey in a sequence for the posterity. The real inspirations can be varying. Some travellers with a strong yearning to write actually pen down their reminiscences giving a factual version. Mental satisfaction alone counts in such a scenario. The objective of a travelogue-writer is to quench the curiosity of the reader who is seeking more information as well as interesting pieces of the travel to a thoroughly unexplored land. Other travelogue writers on the contrary make such an attempt to give an objective more factual account of their travel to their superiors after completing a journey intended to achieve certain goals specifically in connection with their responsible positions. Sometimes travelogues are a proper vehicle for conveying possibilities of pleasure trips, location of required tour-centers and the very purpose of transmitting information. Eventhough there can be diverse reasons regarding the objectives as well as the style of narration in the creation of travelogues exist, there can be no denial about the fact that a close encounter of the 'self' and the 'other' happens in such creations. Both identities of the 'self' and the 'other' actually embark on recognizing various elements of information as well as making the hidden more visible through analysis. Writer and the field represented by him is very much familiar to the 'other'. On the reverse side the identity of the 'other' is better understood and assessed by the writer. The meeting of the self and the 'other' shall be expressed in such a way that the hidden points must come out with clarity in a highly interesting style. The mode of presentation must be in a dramatic style and tone.

The encounter of the self and the other occurs after a highly complex process. This is due to the inflexibility in the basic traits of the two identities as it has been mentioned before. The writer taking an exalted position or an elevated sense of his self, the 'other' may get marginalized and becoming less significant due to the scathing critical remarks more often with a prejudiced mindset. The description often goes beyond factuality or real experience while assuming a polarity between the more privileged self and the other being depicted as illiterate, vagabond and unfit in a world of high culture and changing fashions. The information possessed by the traveller is based on a sojourn in a foreign land and or through reading books or the dialogues of the persons in contact. Edward Said points out to the hidden dangers in a classification of knowledge which makes derogatory remarks on the Orient and relegating the people of the Orient as uncivilized and barbaric. The point of major thrust and vital importance during the study of the travelogues is that generalizations made through limited exposure to foreign cultures and thus giving an incomplete and immature observation on their lives and habits will jeopardize the very purpose of writing of travelogues. Moreover misrepresentation of the unknown cultures by the writer will make an antagonistic sense to the authentic knowledge in this context and will affect the broad construction in this sphere of cultural discourses.

Zacharia in his book 'An African Journey' (Oru African Yaatra) truly points to the colonial influence in a sarcastic manner which was instrumental in adding a tag 'the dark continent' to Africa and viewing its inhabitants in a most mocking manner. The remark made by the well known author Zacharia is based on his study of the book 'Through the dark continent' authored by Henry Morton Stanley, a journalist of the British origin. The travelogue really an interesting narrative from other aspects of the 'genre' gives a vivid account of his journey in tracing the path of David Livingston who was a famous missionary who has championed the cause of African inhabitants. Here Stanely with a colored point of view of the dominant white man describes the continent as the darkest portion of land on earth. Strangely enough Mr. S.K. Pottekatt, the well known writer of travelogues also passing through similar ambience of knowledge - creation when making a critical view of the Africa depicts the half naked man of the continent in this way.

There is a description of an African Negro looking at the ship of the newly arrived European travellers - "when the sight of the ship travelled by adventurous Norwegian sailors appeared in the sea, the Negroes might have stood as if bewildered with their eyes fixed on the nearing vessel.

The 'other' is obviously strengthening its side by questioning the value standards put up by its rival and also by giving problem based resistance to the foundation built by the self. It can also take benefit from the cultural, political and economic aspects resulting from the Colonial Self. Here the responses generated by the Self is multifaceted. Sometimes it may abandon its salient characteristics

and get annihilated in the dazzling and all pervasive effect of the indigenous culture. Second possibility is that it may stick to the original position by putting up a brave show, using the colonial mindset through dominance. The third possibility is the mutual acceptance and exchanges between the 'self' and the 'other' in a positive manner. There is no discrimination such as high or low and also no classification of alien cultures on a prejudicial mindset. Here the identity of the self gives proper respect to the 'other' and protect its identity through mutual give and take mechanism which happens in the case of two alien, rival cultures coming in to contact. This is a fine example of sharing of resources and knowledge through friendly relations and bilateral endeavors happening in a healthy manner.

### **Travelogues and construction of identities**

Travelogues offer fine possibilities of identity construction for the author. The common methodology adopted in the selection of creative resources, their analogy and the analytical thinking all visibly point at these enormous possibilities. Ravindran creates the identities of Santharavur in his travelogue 'People of far away land' (Akalangalile Manushyar). The narrative is like this A few ladies had gone to the Renuka's temple in the village in a buffalo-cart. Now they are returning to the village in the evening. I can see their cart slowly travelling through the narrow bunds. Here are three temples which have their histories dating back to the middle ages; their lonely existence as well as the visibly happy ladies returning to the hamlet indicate that their village is not truly entrenched in the ways of Godliness."

Ravindran very interestingly depicts the weekly markets which are a fusion of rituals and different games of rural origin. These open spaces of common interests have an implication of cultural and societal upbringing and may get engulfed by the multinational companies and slowly a process of disappearance. Ravindran points at the diversities being absorbed by the high culture. "there is a close contact or intermingling of two different life styles or methodologies in the village fares of India. You cannot assess the mutual exchanges or spontaneous mingling of different people only through an angle of merchandise." Ravindran adopts a very analytical framework and sense of close observation when he narrates the village fares or melas during the course of his travel. In short the vivid descriptions presented by the author constructs the identities in his travelogue.

Another narrative technique is the logic of differentiation by a travelogue writer for making differences in the attempt of portraying identities. This is a methodology in which the writer depicts anything which is alien and having a different pattern by imposing on it the brand of other and illustrating it with derogatory remarks. Here the writer is able to distinguish one identity from the 'other' by listing out the elements of differentiation or incoherence. Pottekatt truly employs symbols which demonstrate low culture, barbarianism and repulsive colours for making vivid descriptions on the Rhino camp in Uganda – "Negroes don't make use of the fresh meat for the immediate cooking purposes; on the other hand they store the fresh meat for several days, still it emanate stench and then only it is ripened for cooking. The fowl smell in any way annoys the imagination of an African Negroe. The quality and the traits of old meat getting manifold increase through storage".

The veteran writer then describes the negro in a mean way by calling him 'A negro who covers his nakedness using an old ragged black cloth'. (Pottekatt, 1988:33). Simultaneously he showers praises on the white people and the Indians symbolising them as carriers of true culture. But the Indians too exploit the indigenous people for making benefits in merchandise; The reader feels empathetic for the sorry plight of the Negroes who are uprooted from their own culture and living a life of racial segregation.

### **A retrospections of the memories**

The travelogues truly cater to resurrect memories of the narrator and its factual documentation with a creative self. The parallelism constructed through roadside vision, different village fares and experiences mingle to frame a travelogue. Ravindran remarks that a travelogue is a retrospective affair to assess the many wonderful sights and routes of travel by making an inward journey in the regressive manner. The written text is actually a recreation of lingering memories of the travels which had been undertaken. Viewing and the documentation of the viewed places occur in two different times. Proper care and sense of observation are the two required norms of travelogue writing. The authenticity and credibility will be eroded if there is an incompatibility in the factors of viewing and the later documenting activities involved in travelogue-writing. Murphy opines that every traveller shall keep a tour diary for properly maintaining the accounts of travel and its experiences. If anyone thinks that every thing shall be retraced from memories that can hamper the sequencing of events and marking of the minutest details. The organic unity of the travelogue can be ascertained by marking and through proper descriptions of sights and everyday experiences in a disciplined style.

Travellers were used to make routine accounts from a very ancient period of history. Authorities of heads of nations also asked travellers to maintain diaries of their travel routes and accounts in a proper sequence. This would help new explorators to continue research and make discoveries evidently from the point of accumulation of wealth. Diary-writing would benefit to study the sea routes, people of new continents, geography and the religious rituals in a great way. Susan Bassnet states that the travelogues written by those travellers who make everyday account of their journeys have greater authenticity now a days (Bassnet 1999).

### **Conclusion**

Writing of the travelogue is the careful narration of selected unities with a greater sense of authenticity and observing power. The selection means the selection of unknown lands, new routes of travel and the new cultures which have been the objects of travelogue writing. In this process the writer has to objectively correlate the travel routes with the accounts which have been created by himself. Here he has to tread cautiously; otherwise travelogue will be devoid of authenticity and credibility which it requires for an audience who have little knowledge about the new lands and its culture. Nowadays the genre of travelogue writing has assumed unique

technical craft. Here also the writer has to make proper understanding of the topic with a keener sense of craft for the narrative purpose.

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