AN INNOVATIVE STUDY OF TRAVEL WRITING AND COLONIALISM
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ABSTRACT

Literature, history, cultural studies, geography, anthropology, gender and postcolonial studies have engaged with the study and analysis of travel. In reality, not many decades in the past, travel has reached massive scale. Faraz Anjum describes in his articles Travel Writing, History and Colonialism: An Analytical Study as Bill Buford contributes it to its “wonderful ambiguity” lying “between fact and fiction” (39). It could able to be measured as “postmodern collage” encircling and intersecting varied pieces. Different educational disciplines have engaged travel for different reasons. Almost those scholars who are functioning on colonialism, cultural relations and race have observed those travel narratives which accompanied, described, extended, even made possible, the development of capital and colonialism. “Feminist scholars, working on women travelers, have focused on their ‘texts’ relationship to male-authored accounts” (45). While some biographers and literary critics have determined on the writings of travel authors who are famous for their other works in order to get a glance of their lives and motives. In the similar vein, cultural geographers working on spatiality have found travel an interesting area of attention. And post-modern theorists have heading for their concentration to travel “for its expression of the themes and condition of exile, migration and boundary-crossings.” Thus as a multidisciplinary genre, travel has been subjected to varied uses and purposes. However, it has developed close relationship with history and colonialism. The paper explores the interrelationship of these concepts: travel and colonialism. It points out that, though travelogues and travel writing have been used as sources of history in the earlier times, particularly for reconstructing the ancient and medieval past, more and more attention has been drawn in modern times towards their mutual relationship. Same is the case with colonial studies. As (post)colonial studies developed as a region of inquiry in the last moments of the twentieth century, the academics focused on the nexus between travels in the early modern and later periods and coming out of colonialism. However, the connection of travel with history and colonialism, the paper argues, is fairly complex and problematic and entails a detailed enquiry.

Travel writing is “enigmatic and influential” as well as “fluid and versatile” and its intricacy has excluded its accurate defining of contours and boundaries. According to one author, it is “a broad and ever-shifting genre.” One scholar has believes that travel writing, as a literary figure, is a “notoriously raffish open house where different genres are likely to end up in the same bed. It accommodates the private diary, the essay, the short story, the prose poem, the rough note and polished table talk with indiscriminate hospitality. It freely mixes narrative and discursive writing” (Raban 254-55).

One author traces its etymological origin and suggests that travel in modern English has draw closer from the Middle English word, travailen (which means to make a toilsome journey), which is borrowed from the Old French travaillier (to labor or to work at arduous physical activities).

One scholar defines travel book as “any narrative characterized by a non-fiction dominant that relates (almost always) in the first person a journey or journeys that the reader supposes to have taken place in reality while assuming or presupposing that author, narrator and main character are but one or identical” (Jauss 18). Another academic focuses on travel literature and defines it as “those texts that recount the journey of a person from one place to a significantly different place and
that have enduring qualities—be they formal or content-based—that resonate with readers from different eras with different interests and backgrounds” (Brown 54). Some scholars believe travel “as a broadly defined practice featuring human movement through culturally conceived space, normally undertaken with at least some expectation of an eventual return to the place of origin” (Gilbert and Johnston 5). According to another author, travel writing has unlimited forms and he mentions the examples of guide books, itineraries and even maps accounting of journeys over land or by water, or imaging of experiences. He states that such writings can appear both in poetry and prose, and often include part of (auto) biographical and historical works. Travel writings can include of simple notes and observations and sometimes letters are written for the period of the journey itself, or collected long afterwards with literary skill. Thus travel writing is “unlimited in its forms of expression,” and it is “generally understood what it contains.”

As one can see, scholars are employing wide range of terms for travel writing. These include travel book, travel memoir, travel narrative, journey work, travelogue, travel story, meta-travelogue, travel journal, traveler’s account, and the literature of travel, simply travel genre. Despite the plenty of different labels, one is consigned to agree with Jan Born that travel writing is “a collective term for a variety of texts both predominantly fictional and non-fictional whose main theme is travel” (Born 13). Despite the elation of travel writing in academia, one can still say that analytical works on travel are quite few and far between. There are, therefore, a number of issues which still “haunt” any discussion of travel writing. As Tim Youngs says, “in academic terms travel writing has travelled. As an object of study it has crossed disciplines” (Youngs 17). Travel writing also corresponds to and overlaps with many other disciplines. That is the reason that according to Hulme, travel writing has Four near neighbours, in generic terms: the novel (literature), ethnography (anthropology), the document (history), and reportage (sociology) . . . Despite the variety of material under consideration, key themes emerge. Like autobiography, with which travel writing shares some features, travel narrative is always controlled by the first-person singular. Predictably, therefore, questions of identity are frequently to the fore, suggesting the degree to which physical travel often tends, in its writing, to become symbolic of interior journeys of the mind or soul: the first person in question. But travelers have also often been important witnesses, reporting on other cultures or distant places, and the first person is also therefore always under question: the matter of authority is rarely far from the surface in travel writing. (27)

Some scholars believe that travel writing is a multiple genre in itself that consists of other genres. This is a genre travel literature collected of other genres, as well as one that prominently contributed to the genesis of the modern novel and the renaissance of autobiography. It is a genre that hostiles, at their intense limit, representative tasks appropriate to a number of fictional kinds: the translation of experience into narrative and description, of the bizarre into the noticeable, of examination into the oral construct of fact; the employment of personal voice in the service of transmitting information (or of creating devotional texts); the exploitation of metaphorical figures for ends other than ornaments.

Many scholars consider that any “good travel” which is “heroic, educational, scientific, adventurous, ennobling” as a “distinctively Western activity.” However, many scholars have contested this Eurocentric view and claim that travel is a universal phenomenon. Sanjay Subrahmanyan contests this viewpoint and thinks that European era of investigation in the modern period “witnesses the expansion in a number of cultures of travel, as well as the associated development of travel-literature as a literary genre, whether the routes explored are overland (trans-Saharan, trans-Central Asian) or maritime. The notion of ‘discovery’ thus applies as much to
[Chinese] Zheng He’s Indian Ocean voyages in the early fifteenth century as those of Cabral or Magellan a century later.”

**Travel Writing and Colonialism**

During the past few decades, as colonialism emerged as the focus of many disciplines, and postcolonial studies developed as a multidisciplinary field, interest in the position of travel and investigation literature in contributing to and reflecting the colonial past has increased steadily. It is normally recognized that travel writing is directly or indirectly associated with the European project of colonialism. As the traveler makes cultural comparisons, there emerges a judgmental hierarchy. Such apparently innocent comments as ‘We do it this way, they do it that way’ may sound neutral but may also contain a “subtext” of advantages and disadvantages. And thus travel writing has been accepted as “one of the ideological apparatuses of empire” (Pratt 117). It is apparent that the travelers and travel writing was influential in the institutionalization of new science throughout books and reviews, at the universities, and learned academics and journals. The Royal Society of London was interested in travel accounts in order to support natural knowledge. The travelers, though, generally undertook to travel mainly to satisfy intellectual urge and curiosity, often also took abroad precise intellectual aims backed by systematic readings and carefully drawn instructions.

Pramod K. Nayar believes that the European come across by India repeatedly occurred as a three part process. First, the traveler was arranged in his imagination for India during the cultural fantasy of previously circulating fables and narratives such as travel information of wealth, enjoyment, profit and danger. Second, as he travelled during India he recorded his experience of the actual ‘discovery’ of the East and compiled it into a clear personal account. Third, he proceeded to demand about, explain and document what he observed these writings thus mark a descriptive possession—we could think of it as “colonization”—of India.

One has to accept that travel writing is as well inextricably associated with the subject of individuality development. According to Indira Ghose, travel “serves as an ideal paradigm to study the intersection of different axes that construct identity” (55). One basic inquiry in any travel account is how the traveler has constituted the other. Ghose has indicated two conflicting forms of constructing the identity of the other: “the construction of the other as negation of the self, as completely other” which was mainly the case in the travel accounts pertaining to the Americas; and “the assimilation of the other as same (but lacking)” which was the case in the travel writing pertaining to the East, including India. However, the ordinary element in these Travel Writing and Colonialism: An Innovative Study construction is that “they are molded in the image of the self and serve the function of self-definition.”

Thus, one of the noteworthy fundamentals in the come across between the West and the non-West in the early modern period was the making of the binaries of self and other. The travel accounts at that time, although not directly concerned in colonial imperatives, traditional a base of knowledge in which Europe performed the normative function. As pointed out by Bernard S. Cohn, these accounts “established an enduring structural relationship” between the East and the West which considered Europe as “progressive and changing”, while the East as “static.” For Europeans, East was “a kind of living fossil bed of the European past, a museum which was to provide Europeans for the next two hundred years a vast field on which to impose their own visions of history” (79). It was a land of oriental repression, with its cycles of strong but lawless rules, which shaped political order only by “unbridled power”.

This does not indicate to recommend that European travel accounts in the early modern period in any straight way brought regarding Imperialism or colonization. However, this come across between the East and the West did set up some of the Oriental stereotypes and clichés that became important throughout the colonial period. This is the cause why colonial writers of the eighteenth
and nineteenth centuries reverberate some of the same images which were in the beginning provided by the pre-colonial European travelers. William Dalrymple calls them “unwitting contributors to later colonialism” (45). It is, no doubt, accepted that these accounts are far more intricate and defy a simple tag of Orientalist writings. The textual representations are “not monolithic or univocal” and these “create a network of intersecting and contending discourses about India.” However, it could not be deprived of that these “competing discourses” lead to a discursive frame that is particularly agreeable to later on colonial use.

References