

Travel Literature: Metaphor of Critical Sensibility

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ABSTRACT:

This paper aims at studying travel writings in terms of metaphorical expression. An attempt has been made of analysing and interpreting some contemporary non fiction writing based on travel experiences. Summarising popular themes of travel Literature from then and now, the study has concluded that contemporary travel Literature better communicates themes of enhancing critical sensibility of both readers and writers towards the state of affairs around. The study centres on qualitative research.

Key words: travel, literature, metaphor, critical sensibility, communication

INTRODUCTION:

From the remote antiquity, men and women have travelled due to diverse reasons: curiosity, pleasure. Diplomacy, political pursuit, military campaign, trade, business contract, migration, search for business and educational opportunities, research and so on. This is perhaps the reason that travel writing has emerged as one of the most popular disciplines in the discourse of modern world literature. Travel writing is also called as travelogue. Oxford Dictionary defines “travelogue” as a film, book, or illustrated lecture about a place, visited or experiences of the travellers'. In the contemporary narratives, travel is taken not only description, sights, and experiences, but it also serves the better purpose of familiarizing one with local customs and cultures. The encounter with locals offers opportunities to make comparison and contrast. Travel Literature as a genre includes outdoor literature, exploration literature, mountain literature, nature writing, guidebooks to tourism, and accounts of visits to foreign countries. The style of writing may be in the form of narrative, prose, diaries, and verse. In fact, travel Literature provides a platform of creative interaction, and the interaction gives a meaning to life. Robert Frost is often recognized as the travel poet whose poems primarily focuses on the importance of travelling as the human interaction with the nature. In this context, few lines from the poem, “*The Road Not Taken*” highlight travelling as an inquiry: **This road diverged in a wood, and I, I took the road less travelled by, And that has made all the difference (Traveland leisure.com)** Travelling is more about critical and creative insights of the traveller into nature and travel writing is metaphor of that sensibility. Some

critics argue that travel writing is guided by the principles of cultural domination of the travellers' in the locals. Edward Said views that travel writing contains “critical inquiries into discursive representation of power, difference and desire in a globalising world (Said). It throws light on how we define ourselves and how we identify others. The debate arises on motives behind composing travel Literature either utilitarian or non-utilitarian (aesthetics).

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study is to locate travel Literature as metaphor of critical sensibility of both readers and the writers. The specific objectives are:

- To review briefly approaches to travel Literature in English society
- To locate contemporary trend in travel writing
- To analyse works of three contemporary travel writers

Brief Review of English Travel Literature:

The shifting paradigm in reasons of travelling has motivated new perspectives in approaching to travel Literature. In the past, people travelled in order to fulfil various missions of politics, religion, and exercise of literary colonialism. Travel writings of those period communicated utilitarian messages. In the 13th century, an Italian poet, Petrarch wrote a poem about climbing up the mountain with rhythmical mental progress in his life. Geoffrey Chaucer's “The Canterbury Tales” as a travel literature of the Middle English Period has recorded people's sensibility of the time. In the 16th century, travel literature was a powerful tool of

geographical exploration, expansion of power. 'The Voyage' was published by Richard Hakluyt as the fundamental travel book. In the 18th century, people travelled Europe to learn art and architecture of the past. English Romantic poets visited Greece for the purpose of learning. In the 19th century, it became a popular genre for recreational activities. Now, it has been placed as narrative of knowledge exploration, and a metaphor of practising critical sensibility of both readers and writers.

METHOD AND DISCUSSION:

The study is limited to the analysis of the works published by Jon Krakauer, Edward Abbey, and Ann Jones. These writers have initiated new approaches to responding travel literature. As methodology, the arguments and experiences of the writers mentioned in the works have been analysed and interpreted. The study has followed qualitative research method.

Jon Krakauer published a book titled, 'In To Thin Air: A Personal Account of the Mt. Everest Disaster' in 1997. This is a best-selling non-fiction book which surface is the description of the experiences felt by the writer climbing Mt. Everest in 1996. But in reality, the writer is showing mental conflict as debate of ideas. The depiction of contradictory experiences as ecstasy and pain justify that he is not merely narrating the adventure, rather he is trying to persuade the readers to look event from multiple perspectives. During the journey, he expresses sheer happiness through these lines: *I was finally here, actually standing on the summit of Mt. Everest, I just could not summon the energy to care* (Krakauer). In this similar journey, he writes: "in....by the end of that long day, every minute would matter" (Krakauer). The given statements communicate travel writing transfers mental picture of the travellers'. It is metaphor of personality transformation as Jon Krakauer tested himself before and after the climbing. The journey unfolds several trials to evaluate oneself and writing about travelling appeals the readers to review themselves. *The Journey Home* is a book written by an American environmentalist, Edward Abbey. In the book, the nightmarish like description about death valley questions to human conscience and their attitude to nature. As Edward Abbey informs that Death Valley is considered one of the most inhospitable place on Earth located in American South. Death Valley metaphorically refers to human insensitivity to ecology. Though the writer seems to narrate experience of visiting Death Valley in different months and date, the motive is to evaluate overall ecosystem of Death Valley. The observation leads him to conclude that earth is slowly showing her agony. He writes: *the air through which I walk, it vibrates on the canyon walls, revealing to me, all*

at once a vision of the earth's agony, the convulsive grinding violence of a hundred thousand year (Abbey). In this writing, Edward Abbey is making an inquiry into human sensibility and insights towards environmental issues. *Kanga on Horseback* by Ann Jones is a description of hiking experience of a woman. More than that, Ann Jones is making an inquiry into traditional gender roles and an observation of male female relation in Masai Mara village of Kenya. The writing seems to be a fascinating experience of horse riding. Metaphorically, she criticises traditional gender roles. Some psychologists react to women's interest of horse riding as "transient phallic illusion" (Jones). Responding to this comment, she suggests women to march as "you and your horse can roam forever among the creatures of the great Savanna's" (Jones). Here, horse is metaphor for freedom.

CONCLUSION:

The art of travel writing has a long history. The writing style may vary, and reasons to write can be several. Over the historical period of time, people have written travelogue to carry out mission that has been set before the travel. The research shows that the missions of English society could be political, religious, cultural. In fact, travel writing was considered as a strategy to expand colonization. The analysis of travel literature by contemporary writers reveals out the fact that trend of writing travel literature is slowly moving from utilitarian motive to aesthetic mode. In researching reasons of travel, and purposes of travel writing, it became evident that travel literature basically is a tool used to make inquiry into writer's critical insight toward the visited place, and readers sensibility. It is thus suggested that future studies on travel literature should be conducted to examine the effects that travel writing has on growth of critical skill on individual, family and social relation and awareness to global issues.

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