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The Vision of India: Socio-Cultural Matrix

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Abstract:

All kinds of classic travel literature give detail description about the discoveries by the author whether of places, things, people or himself. India's uniqueness has fascinated the travelers of different countries from prehistory to the present. One of them is V.S. Naipaul, winner of many prestigious prizes, has put up the scathing views on India and low mentality of Indians specially Naipaul's *An Area of darkness* is purely a pessimistic work which focuses his disillusioned experience on his first visit to his native land-India. He has highlighted many negative aspects in Indian culture. Similarly Salman Rushdie found that India is on a miserable stage. He has marked a question on India's existence, "does India exist?" he has blamed politics for the degradation of India and its natives. Anees Jung is another writer who in the search of new images of woman seeks for her own identity in this male dominated world. Like this, there are many authors who have tried to raise some specific issues through their writings what they have found in India, they simply pen down it, in the hope for a better future of India.

Keywords: Travelogue-travelling, India, existence, degradation, identity

Travelling has always been an exercise of great toil and enthusiasm. Travelling and visiting new places have fascinated everyone. The seed of interest in travel and information is sown during the bed time stories narrated by grandparents.

Travelogues whether inspired by pleasure, pilgrimage, official duty and geographical explorations emerge as a prominent genre. In an era of globalization and information technology people from the different corners of the world are getting closer to each other. Against this backdrop, modern travel writing emphasizes more on the individual perception of the place. India is emerging as a super power and as the largest democracy on the Earth. Therefore, travel writing on India's varied aspects is also gaining importance in literary world.

Travel writing is a style of writing that describes a place by the writer in his perspective. People from different backgrounds have enriched the literature of travel writing -- military officers, pilgrims, explorers, missionaries, immigrants etc. Travel literature consists primarily of essays, narratives which focus on author's experience. The emphasis in the travel writing is on the author's subjective experience rather than the factual nitty-gritty of the place. Travel literature can be defined as a narrative account written about an individual's encounter with another place.

Both in east and west, the theme of travel has been used to know and explore the world. Human beings want to be enriched with regard to their experiences and travelling is a powerful means for the same. Nowadays travelogue has emerged as an alternative to fiction. As a genre travel literature is as diverse as the culture, places and people that span the globe.

India is a land of vividness and cultural diversity. Despite having various cultures, the Indians used to respect every religion. But today the time has changed all the definitions. People are getting more self-centered and selfish, fights in the name of religion is prevalent now a days. Earlier, the situation was totally different. Hindus, Muslims and even the British servants also found a bond between Hindus and Muslims. Their mutual dependence and friendship is called as the 'old and cherished tradition', as there is not any history can be found about the religious hatred. If it is so then why riots are taking place every where. The money and power is the reason behind this. They have made the people so cruel and harsh. Many of the writers have penned down about these problems that is spreading like any disease in India. Authors have traveled throughout India and find out some basic problems or the issues caused by socio-cultural, economic or the political scenario of the country.

Due to the help of travel writing which we popularly called as travelogue, authors have focused on the circumstances which have put a bad mark on the society and its virtues. Many prestigious prizes winner, Salman Rushdie has put up a question mark on the India's existence. Though he has praised India on various matters by saying the following lines-

Populated by around a sixth of the human race, home of the largest film industry on earth, spawning festivals the world over, famous as the 'world's biggest democracy.... In all the thousands of years of Indian history, there never was such a creature as a united India. Nobody ever managed to rule the whole place, not the Mughals, not the British.(Moraes 62)

Despite having all the qualities and virtues then why Rushdie has doubts about the India's existence. And all the credit for this goes to communalism, the politics of religious hatred. Rushdie in '*The Riddle of Midnight India, August 1947*' has discussed about the birth of India and many Indians- Rushdie reunited many of his twins. Even though getting the greatest gift of freedom on August 1947, yet many of the midnight's children have suffered due to the weak roots of independence. He has put forth his views on the Ayodhya – the Ramjanmbhomi. He had a talk with Harbanslal, a resident of Delhi and Abdul Ghani. Both were the firm believers of their own religion. One was in the favour of constructing Ram Temple- a Hindu shrine and the other one is a firm believer in Babri Masjid as the property of Muslims. The issue has been one of the most debatable and sensitive topic for the whole country. Not only Indians but also some of the people of British descent have also remarked on the same topic. Sir Mark Tully has found the same disparity between Hindu and Muslims at the time of Ayodhyakand. Mark Tully has accredited the politicians for those riots. "Ayodhya became the fulcrum on which Indian politics hinged; it had never been one of the premier destinations on India's pilgrimage Circuit."(Tully 5)

Rushdie has also highlighted the riots of 1984 which took place after the assassination of Mrs. Indira Gandhi the PM of India. Thousands of innocent Sikhs were brutally killed by mobs of some of the fanatic Hindu, across the country specially Delhi, Kanpur (Uttar Pradesh) and some parts of Madhya Pradesh. The mob literally ripped the beard from the face of many Sikhs and set fire to them. And none has been charged with murdering Sikhs in those fearsome days. The democracy had been failed in India- said by Mr. Bal Thackeray, Shiv Sena Party's leader. Yet during his leadership, the incidents of communal violence happened in the villages of Maharashtra.

Rushdie has also talked about India's existence with his twin brother Robi Chatterjee, a 1947 born who believed- "Inadequacies of society are a cause for deep, permanent, operatic anguish." (Moraes 68) He only had a firm believe to be an Indian. While Rushdie's ideas are different about India he said- "My India has always been based on ideas of multiplicity, pluralism, hybridity: ideas to which the ideologies of the communalists are diametrically opposed." (Moraes 67) Rushdie has given his pessimistic views regarding the future of India because what has happened in India since 1981 is so much darker than anyone can imagine. He has blamed the socio-cultural and political scenario that has raised communalism. Its biggest victim was the feelings of nationalism in the heart of Indians.

On the other hand Kushwant Singh another renowned author has also found the rot in the socio-cultural aspects of India which has made a girl—a bandit. Dacoity in India is as old as history but have anyone thought about it that who has given rises to these evils. Life is not at all easy for everyone but it is very much difficult and unmanageable for those who had lost their way. Phoolan Devi was one of among them—a mallahin by cast and belonged to Gurh-ka-Purwa. She got married at a tender age of twelve with a forty five year old widower. But she was unable to consummate the relationship with him and got back to home. And after this her miserable life began. Her urge of being physical raised and had affair with many people such as the headman's son of the village, Kailash, Vikram Singh-dacoit, Man Singh Yadav- another dacoit and many more. Due to her slutness, she got molested various times.

And during the same span of time, she had covered her journey from a seductive woman to a fierce dacoit, who used such an abusive language that doesn't suit any living being specially a woman. But the question arises- was she herself responsible for the mess or the society or our own culture is responsible for this. At some place our society and culture is wholly and solely responsible for this. At a very small age Phoolan got married and then remarried herself- Why our society and culture permitted this? The social values and custom must not allow such happenings as it destroys the moral values and humanity. Such incidents can be the cause of more Phoolans in the country. But the author has discovered a silver lining in the life of Phoolan. She can be persuaded to live life as a normal citizen by surrendering, mixing by being part of the mainstream.

Naipaul has a different perception about India. He found the capital of India New Delhi, terrible and crowdly. He has put up his experiences about India in *Romancers*, which is an excerpt from *An Area of Darkness* Naipaul narrowed down his view about India as a bustling city with unmanaged and inhuman crowd, beggars, noise and full of monuments. The people and the buildings have no significance. They are just placed to get the pleasure as often architect's drawings. The people have even not spared the nature, the shadow less trees are placed as a piece of decoration. In spite of having various cultures and religions in India Naipaul thought that Indians are still trying to follow the westernized culture. The example which he has given about Mrs. Mahindra proves that Indian mentality is still bounded by the shackles of British Raj and colonialism. Mrs. Mahindra's little English and her "... craze for foreign" (Moraes 13) shows that Indians are still lagging behind what they possess. Indians led a very simple life and eager to learn new things. It is in the Indian culture which teaches us to be different and anxious to help and grasp the new things. It is misunderstood by Mr. Naipaul that Indians don't have their own

mindset. Their coping up with the situation and taking care of the foreigners in the best possible way is not an imitation of foreign culture. It is the Indian culture which tells Atithi Devo Bhava. And in the present scenario, usage of foreign products decides the status of the person in society. Not only Indian but also the natives of many foreign countries are using the technology which China and Japan has provided and vice versa. If the whole world is sharing their possession and discoveries with each other then why always India becomes the bull eye of any issue.

Why the Indian culture is taken so lightly by the world? The Indians found their roots deep inside the culture, whether it is not so with the others. Naipaul found the tradition of taking off the shoes and sandals before entering any religious place quite awkward, the idlers waiting to pounce on those who did not take off their shoes looks so bad. Their delight and idleness infuriated Naipaul a lot. One must have respect towards the shrines but, it can't be shown by keeping shoes out of it. But we Indians believe and follow our tradition culture, customs and values which tell us to go to any holy place with a pure body, soul and heart, while the dirt of the shoes can disturb the serenity of the atmosphere.

Naipaul's annoyance is correct at his place, as corruption and nepotism has destroyed the society, culture and every major and minor issues of India. Naipaul was born as an unbeliever he has explained how caste comes to mean the brutal division of labour and how old customs and rituals have been decayed. He talked about the poverty in India, which is also one of the causes of degradation of culture in India.

Anees Jung is another writer who through her book *Unveiling India: A Woman's Journey* is in the search of new images of woman who seeks her own identity in this male dominated world. Women around the world are speaking out against the old traditions that have kept them silent for so long. According to her, the freedom of women in the country will remain far from reality unless society changes its mindset.

Not long ago a woman who spoke about herself was considered a loose woman. To voice a pain, to divulge a secret, was considered sacrilege, a breach of family trust. Today, voices are raised without fear, and are heard outside the walls of homes that once kept a woman protected, also isolated. Some of the women who speak here have stepped out. Others, who have not, are beginning to be aware, eager to find expression. But let them speak for themselves. (Jung 109).

The Emerald Route is a piece of work extracted from a travel book on Karnataka by R. K. Narayan. The passage is about the travel of the author to the different places in Karnataka. His first destination was a city known as Hassan. He found the city with farmhouses, paddy fields, small road side dhabas, shops and greenery all around. The author lived at Hassan long time back, where his father used to work as a headmaster during British Rule. The town has changed a lot today with new buildings replacing the old colonial style houses. But the old charm is still intact. The city is also famous for the large evidence of the ancient culture in the form of temples in Belur and Halebid. The Hoysala ruler, Bittiga was under the influence of Ramanujacharya built the large number of Temples in early twelfth century. The temples are spacious with good piece of sculpture. The characters and episodes of Ramayana and Mahabharata are beautifully put on in these temples.

Later he moves to another historic city Chikmaglur which is 55 Km from Haasan and is the home of the first generation of coffee plants in India. His travelogue on Chikmaglur introduces us to the rich cultural heritage of India. The Muslim saint Baba Budan after whom the range of mountain surrounding Chikmaglur is named came from Arabia and settled in this part of India. His tomb is sacred to both Hindus and Muslims known as Dattatreya Peetha. He is said to one of the incarnation of Vishnu, which will reappear as Kalki. His next encounter with Indian history and its rich spiritual imprints was found in a new town known as Sringeri. This town gave the propagator of Advaita philosophy 12 centuries ago that is Shankarachrya. Shankarachrya himself described India as—“This is a place! Here is harmony an absence of hatred even among creatures which are natural enemies.” (Moraes 129)

He established some temples and mathas in this small city. R. K. Narayan’s short visit to one of this Math gives us the vision of the great spiritual preacher about India. The tranquility, peace, hospitality and the humane nature was an experience of the Indian society of the past. Travel writing/ travelogue is an integral genre of English literature. Travelogues by foreign writers have enriched the scope of literature in every language. Indian authors are also producing good travel work since long. This research paper is based on the travel writings of Indian authors. Their vision and experiences while traveling in different parts of India, has brought some current streams of Indian social and cultural milieu in front of us.

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