Chapter - V

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Cultural exchange has always enriched nations. Travel and the rich corpus of travel writing about the home and the world has been a vehicle of this process of exchange. Perceived in at least two perspectives, travelling both within and outside the country for pilgrimage as well as leisure, the journeys are the rites of passage into more realms of experience. In today’s world travel is not only limited to some purpose but economic affluence has also allowed people to take journeys which their ancestors might have just thought of during their young age. In the world of technology even the modern virtual tours through internet have also made the foreign lands more approachable for anyone to whom travel interests, whether or not they are able to travel physically.

When time comes to record these travel experiences, which can also be the source for the succeeding generations to trace their ancestry and culture, one has to think of the medium which can best convey this life to the mass. For that matter travelogue is the best option as it is written after seeing and living those lives with people on different lands. In that case, travel and documentation of that journey becomes the most useful source for anyone to refer. Travel is such an act through which a traveller meets number of people, visits different lands and accumulates knowledge of life through these experiences. Hence travel becomes a mode of knowledge for the traveller and readers as well.

Interdisciplinarity is an integral part of any knowledge system. Seeking and dissemination of knowledge need multiple approaches including those gathered from literary works. Every literary piece is a tale in itself and any good tale creates universal appeal to the readers even if it is out of an individual experience and evokes
a local essence. Travel writing is one such genre which portrays experiences of an individual but when they are put on paper they blend into observations and perceptions of lived lives in one culture or the other.

A study involving more than one work for comparison indeed calls for two different or opposite variables. However, it only serves to underscore the common or the unifying in those two. Such a study paves the way in linking the cultural, social, historical and spiritual facets among the various world communities and strengthening inter-cultural relationship. The intersection of these variants provides a wider scope of knowing more cultures and languages. Thus, when under the rubric of comparative literature a study of travel writing is taken up, it gives a chance to study the newly emerging genre and its place amongst the other existing genres of literature. Travelogue is a genre that intersects other genres like fiction, autobiography, etc. at a vantage point and this ‘family resemblance’ of generic conventions needs reading and understanding of the process of writing in the first place and subsequently how this genre becomes a vehicle of cultural affinity and transmission.

The attempt has been made in the preceding chapters to make a study of how the travelogues and fictional works written on the rivers portray the lives of individuals and society and culture as a whole. It is also observed that these narratives possess more than just ‘literary’ value. Deliberately the genres selected for the study are two opposites in which one is a minor genre and another a well established one. While tracing the history of the genre of travelogue, it is seen that both Western and Eastern literatures have rich corpus written in this genre, yet much in circulation and academic-intellectual discussion though. In the 20th century, academicians and travel industry have brought travelogue into currency and gradually made it both culturally popular and commercially attractive. Starting from jotting down the experiences in
diaries or sending letters back home, the genre of travelogue has got its formal shape through these years in the hands of great travellers and writers. They have started using different styles in narrating their experiences as well as imbuing them with concurrent literary-critical theories that in themselves have also been used by the readers to analyse these writings more rigorously. The critical study of both travelogues and novels has given a clearer conceptual understanding of both these genres vis-à-vis their portrayal of reality – one through reflective-discursive and the other through imaginative-ruminative manners. Fiction has always been a very popular form of literature starting from oral literature to the newest version of interactive novels made available on the world-wide-web. The juxtaposition of both these genres bring out the fact that quite a large number of writers and, increasingly, not a small number of readers are interested in these genres out of which one was considered till recently a minor type of literary writing.

Travelogues encomapss all nature-scapes and fiction encompasses a variety in themes, travel being one of the most prominent among them. Rivers have been the fascinating force for the living beings as they have made their existence possible. The journey on the rivers had begun as necessity for livelihood but now exploration and wandering have become the added dimensions of the travel on and around the rivers. Travellers, Tourists, pilgrims, adventurers and migrants have been exploring river banks. It was therefore hoped to enquire into the matrix of fiction and travelogue so as to examine holy Indian rivers, viz., the Ganga and the Narmada as sites of civilization and culture and in turn to gain insights – through primarily literary texts – into what constitutes the dynamics of one of the most ancient societies – India.

The search for the literary sources in this research brought out a remarkable fact that no well researched history book is available on the trajectory of the Gujarati
travel writing except one or two doctoral theses which are published by University Board or privately for their own interest. Even the number of novels available on both the rivers either in Gujarati or in English is less even if there are numerous stories woven around the rivers. Even, there are not more than two travelogues which are written in detail and easily known to the people on the Narmada that too in regional language, Gujarati. Few other works are found but they are not about the complete journey on the banks of the river for which the river is famous and content is also not very appealing, whereas in case of the Ganga, there is a similar dearth of novels. Either novellas are available in regional languages or originally written in a foreign language and then translated into English. For travelogues, one has to make a choice out of a range of travelogues available by various foreign writers in English and few in different Indian languages. But in today’s global world, one cannot ignore the foreign writers. It is also important to note that not many travelogues or novels are written on the rivers today in general except keeping them as a background but much is written in the coffee-table book format or journalistic fashion on the pollution factor and protection of the river valley which can create much hue and cry in the media but goes in vain without bringing much of a change in the situation.

Travelogues and tourist guides are important because they present the picture of a land and that picturesque narration help receivers to decide the image of any country. Like the Ganga is a symbol of spirituality for the world, time and again travel guides peddle the myth that death is omnipresent on the ghats of this river and Varanasi is the place for attaining moksha becoming the city where every Hindu goes to die. It is true that pilgrims regard Varanasi, probably the oldest continuously inhabited city in India and the world, as a metaphysical site par excellence; but, in reality, the people of Varanasi themselves are remarkable for their joie de vivre.
Lakhs of looms of the city do not weave shrouds, but artfully ornamented silk saris for weddings and other joyous occasions. The weavers are all Muslims, who also take a bath in the Ganga but certainly are not cremated. The city’s many music schools do not rehearse Indian requiems, but the – *sargam* – tune of life-affirmation. Yet the local people certainly have no objection to profiting from the morbid image of their city – almost three-quarters of the population lives off the pilgrim and tourism industry. Life dominates death at all levels. So the actual picture is quite different than what is portrayed on the calendars and movies. These pictures certainly bring foreign attraction towards the East but many a times they are disappointed seeing the real flavour of life.

Foreign travellers have visited India with the curiosity of knowing the land which is considered as the land of snake charmers and country of myths. These travellers always try to tease out the meaning in each event ‘orientalising’ them according to their preconceived notions. On the other hand, some sincerely try to study the ritual and belief system and the lives of the people in India, including those on the river banks and on a larger scale attempt to know the culture of the nation in general. Considering rivers as the routes for merchandise, foreigners have exploited these sources for various commercial purposes. A smaller segment of them have also been really curious as to why such a large population of India since times immemorial have been venerating the rivers of India in general and the Ganga in particular as mother deities. Foreign travellers have tried to trace the social, political, religious and ecological issues related to the rivers and how they are integral part in the lives of the people. They have modified the way travel writing as a genre generally deals with information and reality and attempted to provide insights into the issues of their life. The harshness of problems, the unrest beneath the layer of so called restoration and
resettlements are brought to the surface. The essence of bond between an individual and the society and cultural aspects are also reflected upon by these authors.

A natural human attraction towards water bodies must have been the real reason for any traveller to take up the journey around the river and in fact all the travel writers considered here have accepted the fact that at some point of time in their life, river has been a source for joy and inspiration. This instinct for the travel around the river makes these travellers take the journey – for few foreign travellers in a far off place like India and for local travellers cutting the distance across to a nearby or a far-off place and making the unknown topography a familiar scape. When foreign travel writers visit the banks of the Ganga and the Narmada they come with the curiosity as to how the people in this country regard a water body as both secular and sacred at the same time. They have observed this dual relationship with the rivers in India. The functional relationship allows people to become selfish and disregard the deity whom they revere at other times in the second relation as a goddess to whom they pray for nurturing and keeping their life safe even after their ill-treatment to her. These travellers have remarked that the relation of the people with the river determines their behaviour, attitude and dealing with the river.

Travellers visiting the Ganga, are found mostly from the West. They have travelled to the banks to visit this mythical river and to solve the mystery or their own curiosity about the factor why a river is revered to such a great extent. Westerners have always travelled to India with the fascination for the spirituality of ancient India as a contrast to Western materialism and the great Hellenic Greek civilization – which could boast of profound philosophy if not spirituality besides great art and literature – that is no longer available to them to narrate. As such no hierarchy or superiority of West is discussed overtly but there is a constant wonder about the Indian way of
living and religious life, yet at times these foreign travellers express their disgust or discomfort about certain conditions and practices and one can glean from the narration of their experience a touch of colonial or first-world superiority over the natives. On the other hand local travellers have attempted to provide picturesque descriptions of the places which are generally not explored much on the river-banks and tried to capture the local daily life.

Travelogues not only take stock of the current situation of the journeyed land, they juxtapose the present with the past too. All the novels discuss the past and the present situation of the two rivers and all four travelogues discuss the past glory and express future concerns for the rivers. Travelogues are thus not mere descriptions of rivers as geographical or topographical elements but the entire life-system is connected with this natural force deciding the behaviour, traditions and culture of the society around.

Travelogues are a kind of study of a culture. When India is explored, it is mainly done with the expectation of seeing a sub-continent in one place. Eric Newby, Dennison Berwick, Ilija Trojanaw, and Julian Crandall Hollick had a desire to satisfy their curiosity about the reason behind the famous nectar-like purity of the water, veneration of the river and also knowing the riverine culture by meeting people and recording their conditions. They made a mini-research before they started their travel. Their descriptions are minute and questions are pinpointed. Trojanow and Hollick indeed took the pains to probe into the socio – politico – religious – cultural and environmental issues of the river banks. They did try to meet local NGOs and sensitize people by revealing the scientific facts about water as a natural element parallel to the belief of the people about the holy Ganga. asking questions about their daily practices and relation with the river. They tried to make people aware about the
gap in their belief about the sacredness of the river and their actual behaviour leading to make the river profane. But at the end of their journey they remain only observant travellers. They could not provide any concrete solutions but probably they became famous and even commercially successful after their documentation of this journey about an ancient culture and its health as their names are counted as prominent travel writers on the Ganga in various references.

In case of the Narmada, few foreigners who got interested into the tradition of the *parikrama* have provided well researched books or documents on the entire tradition and life-style of people on the river banks. Like Marietta Maddrell, now Miraben who had come to India with a curiosity of knowing the Indian society, and stayed over for many years in India after her *parikrama* of the Naramda. Even if she stays in the Himalayas, she has never visited the Ganga except a few spots. It is only the tradition of *parikrama* that made her interested in the river Naramda and even today, she is concerned about its health and life of people on its banks. She has translated travelogues on the Narmada into English which has provided a chance to foreign readers to know about the river and its tradition of the *parikrama* in an easier way. Geoffrey Maw has written a short book on his travel experiences of Hoshangabad around the Narmada. Even few adventurers from Madhya Pradesh have taken *parikrama* of the river by covering most of the distance – wherever is possible – of the river by swimming and have documented their experiences as a travelogue. But in case of Indian authors, only those who make *parikrama* or those who are interested in Narmada Bachao Aandolan are aware about the river and its significance. Rest of the mass is interested in consuming more and more water from the Narmada canal be it at the cost of the life of the river or inhabitants who are directly connected and affected by the river. However, Amritlal Vegad with his travelogues on the Narmada
which are now available in translation in English – through his poetic descriptions and riveting sketches of the river has been able to bring some kind of awareness and interest in the people for pilgrims and mendicants and such marginal lives on this river. Vegad rightly says that there was a time when he had to request people to join him for his Narmada trips but after publication of his books many have been coming to undertake journey on foot with him voluntarily. It is quite possible that this rush to be with the writer is the outcome of his fame as an author which was not available to him earlier when he was just a teacher and used to undertake this journey on foot with few of his students.

Foreign travellers have remarked that there is no divorce between religion and daily life in India and it is quite easy to see the divine in everything. Mythology’s hold on popular imagination in India too is very strong because it is a way of teaching illiterate Indians to respect the natural world. But it is equally true that those who have kept this country and culture alive have not considered ritualistic religion as the foundation of life. Instead, there is a strong tradition on Adhyatma – spiritual knowledge woven into a larger cultural life to make it good and peaceful. But moulders of this culture have given much thought in making rules which would keep these people living at two extreme intellectual levels, together. They must have closely observed life and travelled far and wide. Theologians, philosophers and monks from Adi Shankaracharya (8th century AD) to Swami Vivekananda in the early 20th century immediately come to mind as those who have consolidated Hinduism as a way of life amenable to people of all strata achieving the balancing between the highly learned and totally ignorant and illiterate people in a way that ultimately keeps the faith alive in spite of material and behavioural differences. But this latter has surprised foreign travellers to see the same Indians polluting the deity which has
religious and practical importance in their lives. What they have gathered from their meeting with the people and living with them is that many Indians repeat rituals without any knowledge or sensitivity to their context as they say that they do it because their religion tells them so. For them only custom is important. Not too many of them really think about forgiveness when they bathe in the river. It is just something they do as a daily chore. Foreign travellers wonder about the accumulation of sins in the large number of people taking a holy dip in the Ganga every day. Does that mean that the observant Hindu sins more than Indians who never pray, fast or bathe? It is seen that people are more problematized if their rituals have to be changed no matter if the river is choked with pollution in this process. Sensitizing about the preservation of the natural life can happen only thorough action and such writings not anymore through the understanding of good and evil. But writers like Amritlal Vegad are rightly worried about travelogues not getting sufficiently good readers ready to understand the centrality and urgency of such issues related to the interaction between humans and natural resources. Vegad is even critical of reading habit in Gujaratis in comparison to Bengalis or Marathis and feels developing a good reading habit is not only a challenge for writers but a prerequisite for people to enter into some kind of positive action.

A traveller explores the foreign land and at times his own land becomes the subject of exploration because distances are created in mind more than the physical proximity. People might know more about foreign countries rather than the places which easily come in the vicinity of their locale. Probably that is why Nishant in Jaya Ganga and the anonymous protagonist in Tatvamasi who thought they already knew their culture got baffled during their visit to India seeing the life lived on the banks of the rivers and in Deep River, foreigners had started with the doubts about India and its
customs, but for most of them, their journey ends with solutions to their doubts and peace to their souls.

Novels give the picture of unrestricted world of human emotions. Japanese characters in Deep River surprisingly opened up with each other without thinking of the awkwardness of such an act with unknown co-passengers. Tatvamasi and A River Sutra discuss the basic emotions of people on the banks of the river Narmada who do not hide them under the garb of formality. They love people and also fix the responsibility of people for particular deeds. These stories are all about how human relations create a web of emotions.

All four fictions are like travelogues. Writers have tried to capture the feel of the culture and surrounding picturesquely. The riverine cultures are accommodative. People coming from different nationalities and travelling for different personal reasons become one with the river and life around. Like the protagonist in Tatvamasi had come to India with the confidence on his training of Human Resource Management but he could not control his emotions or restrict himself from becoming affectionate towards poor tribal people whose lives and their peculiarities were so different from his own. He too, like them, started believing that the river removes fear and gives serenity.

The river is constantly present in the story but the writers have put their protagonists on the river banks with a specific purpose and search. Each novel is a tale of the search for the self through the means of journey. Entire journey is a larger parikrama for each character who knowingly or unknowingly gets in touch with people and becomes a part of their lives, as their lives become a part of the protagonist’s, whereas actually he/she had come to the river to forsake the material
world. It is true that travel provides a better knowledge of the world which was perceived in a different way previously.

All four novels have an eternal ontological question – what am I. Each character journeys in search of the self. In the process of this search, one tries to find one’s roots and identity. All the characters in the novels during their journey start believing in the divinity of the river find themselves quite attached to it. Nishant finds peace and serendipity by the Ganga, a state of being which he had to this extent never felt before. The anonymous protagonist in *Tatvamasi* also opens up to himself in the form of a diary to the river and decides to stay back near it.

Give-and-take is an essential characteristic of a river and people on the river banks in India follow this tradition. The Ganga takes away all the sins and gives liberation from this material world and the Narmada teaches renunciation to the extent of giving up even this world-given personal identity. The tradition especially of the local people on the Narmada of giving away things to unknown *parikramavasis* is quite remarkable even if they themselves are not economically sound. These values on the river banks build the chain of mutual trust and co-existence between humans and between them and the natural world including animals. River and the life of the people around who live with the basic amenities make the travellers realize that there is a difference between comfort and happiness because all the travellers record that people on the river banks live happily even if they are tangibly living on the bare minimum. The novels under consideration in this research work have captured this idea quite effectively.

All the novelists have given vital roles to women characters. The enigmatic lady Jaya in *Jaya Ganga* inspires the entire journey for the protagonist. Keiko, a minor character in *Deep River* is actually the reason for Mr. Isobe’s travel to India and
another lady Mitsuko in the same novel, a leading character, is shown to have selfishly controlled the lives of many men and is travelling to India in search of one whom she had particularly wronged. Supariya in Tatvamasi is an educated and confident girl who selflessly works in the dense forest for the betterment of the tribal people and manages issues of their lives very tactfully as a family member would. She decides to work at such a place and for such people in a bid to work for the nation inspired by a public lecture and call to the youth by one Professor Rudolf. It is pertinent to note here that for her the concept of national culture and tradition includes the lives of the tribals, a section of the population often neglected by the mainstream of the society.

In four out of the six travelogues considered here, the wives have been the companions almost throughout the journey with the travel writers. There are fewer descriptions of women in the travelogues on the Ganga as these journeys are made by the boat and there are less chances of visiting local people but travelogues by Narmadanand and Amritlal Vegad do mention women folk on the banks of the Narmada. Mostly these women are described as shy and reticent but the same women are shown to be very warm when travellers visit their homes during their parikrama. Both these travellers have mentioned few women saints on the banks of the Narmada and also smaller groups of women travellers who are otherwise rarely seen taking the parikrama. The travel by Miraben is a rarity in itself because a lone lady traveller, that too a foreigner, taking the entire parikrama all alone and adhering to all the stipulations is a pleasant shock for many people and readers as well. As rivers in India are inevitably considered as feminine, in a way, both the rivers – the Ganga and the Narmada – are shown to have a significant place and importance in the lives of people as a mother entity and hence revered.
A travel around the river is a journey of penance. People visit the Ganga to attain salvation and the Narmada with the thought of renunciation. These journeys are quite difficult and especially the rules of the Narmada parikrama are very tough to observe but the tradition of circumambulation is continuously being followed since ages. But sheer faith and commitment towards the river make this difficult journey possible. On the journey, loneliness also allows to be with one’s self as the traveller is not indulging into any worldly affair, rather he gets connected with nature and such a time spent makes this penitential journey worthwhile. Travel allows inward journey. However, few opportunists try to take the advantage of being a traveller seeing it as a way to get fame or make money out of their journey through an exotic land.

All travellers comment on the worsening situation of the nation due to political parties and their futile tasks. Sites for travel and temples or ashrams are not being taken care as they were maintained during the times of the kings. Primary health services and life-related facilities are still not available to the interior villages and tribal areas in spite of massive communication and technological progress. Moreover, under the guise of political development, the government is taking away the assets of nature from the natives by building dams and barrages on the rivers – whose benefits are diverted to selected urban masses – and compensation to the affected is paltry and riddled with corruption. Amritlal Vegad expresses his concern in 1994 that the dams will wash away many scenic places on the Narmada like the area around Shoolpaneshwar Zadi within the coming 25 years and in 2016, because of the Sardar Sarovar Dam the area around the Shoolpaneshwar Zadi, a famous temple in Gujarat, the Manibeli Temple on the border of Gujarat and Maharashtra and because of the Omkareshwar Pariyojna, Dhavdikund in Madhya Pradesh are actually submerged. Even if conditions have not worsened totally, developmental politics has affected the
rural frontiers and natural resources. Looking at the situation, it may happen that by the time more travellers and readers come to know about such places of wandering, those places might have disappeared under water or turned into ruins. ‘Global warming’ actually often is a guise to camouflage the destruction of nature for immediate political and economic gains. But the texts considered for this research all echo the same message that one must respect nature in order to protect it, and the respect comes out of a true understanding of life-giving / life-sustaining qualities of natural resources like a river or a forest. And if not as pagan deities, but for the factual truth that nature sustains life, it ought to be considered sacred. The dissemination of the understanding that nature and humans are symbiotically linked and this symbiosis is integral to the larger ecological climate ought to become a mission in these environmentally beleaguered times.

To sum up it can be said that the genre of travel writing takes a close look at the culture and life of a foreign land. Ruminations and concerns noted during the journey, contribute to the larger thought for the nation and the health of its culture and environment. And the travel writer not only records the facts or documents information but also adds his own opinions gleaned out of the experience of journey undertaken. Similarly, the novelist portrays life with the imagination which comes from the real travel and experiences. Both these genres add a significant dimension in understanding the entire gamut of literature and interdisciplinarity of the genres and themes.

There are some prominent aspects which are unique and worthy of a serious research that the present study has discovered but they are out of the scope of this work. Indian and Eastern literature has a rich corpus of travelogues and fictions written on the theme of travel which need exploration by the readers and researchers
to bring them out into literary discussion. There are a number of Indian and specially Gujarati travelogues which are simply lying in the archives and libraries. They need to be reprinted and translated to reach them to a global readership. Such writings need to be discussed by the generations of academicians and researchers. India has got a huge number of travelogues written during the British Raj, and after Independence that number has increased with the keen interest and readiness of travellers and their readiness to put their thoughts to paper. Such travel books have now become visible on the shelves. Traces of colonialism, hunger for the ‘new’ and ushering in reformation in one’s own land after travelling abroad are the areas open for further study for researchers.

Another possible direction for further research is the travel writing and the issue of gender. As such women are twice marginalised. Since ages, they have been merely the companions of male travellers but a few women travellers have taken to hitch-hiking across the world – which was considered as a man’s forte – for different reasons and as a challenge and very effectively have narrated their experiences through their works. Along with their destinations of travel, narrations by the women travellers can also be the area of study because it is assumed that when they put their experiences on the page, they cannot avoid their femininity in writing. So checking if there is indeed any *écriture feminine* in the travel writings by women is really a potential area for research.

Both these above-mentioned areas have a great opportunity of research into (neo)colonialism. Strategies of ‘othering’ can be analysed through discourses reflected in the travelogues and travel-cum-fictions. How travelogues are a source of knowledge, and of what, can also be a potential area of research. Similarly, an interdisciplinary research into the lives of the marginal communities, not in the sense of
‘othering’ but as an epistemological and multi-cultural endeavour can be an interesting research topic. Viewing travel writing through the newly developed theories of environmental criticism ought to be an exciting area of further study.

Thus, in the global world, travel is an important medium, which can cement the fractured relations through cultural interactions. Thanks to the urge to see ‘new places’ that has given a much needed boost to tourism industry and thus more opportunities to interact with ‘the others’. But consciously or unconsciously every traveller compares and contrasts both the cultures by learning new values, traditions and knowledge about a different culture. One analyses and also realizes what one’s own place is within the multicultural matrix. Introduction to the newness of the other culture by a travel writer, invites more visits to the foreign locations with better planning for seeking the unexplored by his readers. The traveller vis-à-vis his own culture leaves an impression on the land and people he is travelling. This impression fills the people with curiosity about a place – of which they might have just heard – increases the potentiality of visits and furthers the dialogue with each other. This observation of ‘the others’ might lead to creation of either a bridge of inter-cultural communication enriching both the societies, or might create homophobia resulting into violence and disruption between societies. A travel document will play a decisive role in this creation or destruction through its subjective/objective narrations. Moreover, the reality of the 21st century, as scientific planners for the earth foresee, is a certain possibility of travelling to the other planets like the Mars and setting up human colonies there. In such a situation, one can only expect both travel and fictional writings on travel to exponentially increase.