Chapter Two

Travel

Travel is one of the earliest lasting themes that finds adequate delineation in literature. Its popularity has made it so obiquitously interesting to its sustenance resulting in its unique form, namely travel literature. Travel implies an act of journeying from one place to another for any purpose including journey to work, to go sightseeing and also to take up residence. From time immemorial travel has fascinated man. From earliest times until today, humans have always been on the move for a wide variety of purpose. The origin of the practice of travel and tourism could be traced back to the origin of man’s faculty of walking and his inherent urge of curiosity about things in the other worlds. Man has been a confirmed traveller since antiquity- a nomad- as travelling has been a characteristic feature of human society and lifestyle. Every human settlement has a long tradition of visits by traders, travellers and missionaries. The recorded history in Old Testament is full of numerous citations of caravans and traders. From ancient times people travelled for the most part impelled and propelled by hunger or to avoid jeopardy.

Travel in different forms came off since the beginning of the recorded history. It is made for trade, commerce, religious purposes, health designs or education motive. Commuting for religious purposes was witnessed in the form of pilgrimages to holy
places of worship such as the oracle at Delphi, Jerusalem, Rome, Canturbury, Mecca and Benares. Explorers from Morco Polo to the discoverers of the New World travelled extensively for fun and adventure. Adventurers undertook voyages in pursuit of experience, esteem and opulence. They liked to try new experience and meet new people. Even now travel plays a central role in their lives.

Trade and commerce were the strongest force in the ancient times. History thus reveals that trade and commerce remained a strong force for numerous travellers to undertake long journeys to distant lands. Traders travelled extensively with a view to do business with other races and tribes and also for new business openings. Early travel in India and China was also largely based on trade and commerce. Travel to India was undertaken by travellers from all over the world. India and China enjoyed the reputation of being countries of fabulous wealth. Long before the Christian era, travellers visited India in search of fortune. This trend continued and became more marked in course of time with Europeans heading towards the Indian shores for the sole purpose of trade and commerce. Besides, attracting a series of invasion great travellers like Vasco da Gama, many foreigners, Arabs and Europeans came to India to establish trading posts. The great explorer, Christopher Columbus, set not to find a new route to India and in the process he discovered the New World.

History thus reveals that trade and commerce remained a strong force for many a traveller to undertake long journeys to distant lands. This was followed by an urge to explore new lands and to seek knowledge in ancient and faraway places. The exploration
of Alexander the Great and Marco Polo are really fascinating. They can be credited with the distinction of being the pioneers who subsequently paved the way for modern travel.

Another stream consisted of students travelling to centres of learning such as Bologna, Paris and Oxford. Many people have travelled with a quest for knowledge. Travel offers an opportunity to satisfy the urge to learn. The Romans are considered as the first pleasure travellers. They travelled and enjoyed attraction associated with natural beauty, art, music and games. The Roman citizens had the resources and time for travel. They had the easy and safe access in Greece, Egypt, Asia and many parts of present day Europe and Africa.

The fabled Silk Route was the creation of this period. Along this highway, cities and towns grew prosperously. Their ruler built spectacular palaces, mosques, etc. There existed a fine network of road. Travel literature was published extensively. The Romans were able to travel over a hundred miles in a day by using horses. They travelled primarily to see famous temples in the Mediterranean areas and the famous pyramids of Egypt. They also journeyed during holidays especially during the Olympic Games.

Medicinal baths and seaside resorts named Spas, were very popular with the Romans. Gradually the Spa resorts added facilities and entertainment to other medicinal facilities. The visitors now enjoyed both the medicinal baths as well as various other forms of entertainment. The spas had become extremely popular with travellers. Subsequent to the development of Spas, Romans played a vital role in the development
of pleasure travel in many countries in Europe. Various seaside resorts were also linked with it. By the year 1865 there were major seaside resorts in Britain, France and few more countries in France. Both the Spas and seaside resorts paved the way for modern pleasure travel all over the world. The fall of Roman Empire between AD 400 and AD 500 had great set back for pleasure travel in Europe for many centuries. In the absence of a prosperous community, travelling ceased to exist. Travel almost disappeared due to the luxury of vacation.

By the end of the middle age a large number of pilgrims were travelling to the main shrine in Europe. The travel again assumed a significant importance. The adoption and spread of Christianity subsequently led to the numerous pilgrims making their way to the Holy Land. The ritual of pilgrimage flourished over the centuries. Pilgrimages strengthened religious bond. It exposed people to new manners and customs, different kinds of food and modes of dress. It encouraged exchange of ideas and also encouraged trade. It served a powerful means of making unity and understanding among people. The powerful influence of a crusading religion passed into a foreign land. For example, Christianity in Europe and later in America, and Buddhism, Islam and Hinduism in Asia. Consequently distinctive languages, literature, music, art, architecture, philosophy and forms of government became one with the system. Thus, religion played a crucial part in travel. By the fourteenth century pilgrimage became a mass phenomenon as large number of people were participating in pilgrimage. Subsequently, the people began to show their interest towards education, arts, science
and culture. This period was called Renaissance. During this period many poets, authors and intellectuals visited Italy and other countries with a view to broaden their knowledge and learn new arts and crafts.

By the eighteenth century, travel had become very popular. Travel became an important part of a person’s education. One needed to travel to accumulate more knowledge. Fussell writes:

In order to acquire culture and sophistication, many young men of the upper classes took what was called “The Grand Tour” of Europe, especially between 1660 and 1825. Most tours lasted at least one year. Young men straight from a University education and often accompanied by a tutor would cross the English Channel, and travel to Paris, then to Versailles, Geneva, Florence, Venice, Rome, Naples, Pompeii, the Alps, parts of Germany, Holland, Flanders, and then back to England”. (The Norton Book of Travel 131)

The Grand Tour of the eighteenth century aristocrats gave way to the Citizens’ travel of the later nineteenth century and the mass tourism of the twentieth century. In the early nineteenth century, travel was far from easy. Travellers often took with them their own bedding, plates, cutlery and library. After the Napoleonic wars, the steam engine made travel easier. Travellers now could take the train from location to location. Fussell writes that sleeping cars were added in the 1860s and 1870s, giving passengers an even more comfortable mode of travel. In the 1880s dining cars were added. These trains were even more luxurious than many hotels.
The advent of railway permitted mass travel and tourism. A man named Thomas Cook came up with the idea of “conveying travel in groups with reduced fares and no anxieties about arrangements” (The Norton Book of Travel 272). Cooks’ first tour in 1841 was part of 570 “teetotalers” by rail from Leicester to a Temperance Rally eleven miles away. He scheduled other tours, and they flourished across Europe. He even scheduled tours to America by 1860s.

According to Fussell, “it was the Bourgeois Age that defined the classic modern idea of travel as an excitement and a treat that established the literary genre of travel book” (The Norton Book of Travel 273). Several such books appeared in the 1800s. These books gave detailed lists of items every traveller needed to include on his or her journey. Mariana Stokes stated that a traveller needed “sheets, pillows, and blankets, towels, table clothes and napkins ... a travelling lock for the door, a mosquito net, a medicine chest... lanterns, matches, pens, ink, papers, knives, forks, spoons, carving set, teapot ... pistols, as well as Essential Oil of Lavender ...” (The Norton Book of Travel 274). Mountain views became popular not just in Switzerland but in Italy and America. Trips to Spain, the French Riviera, the Holy Land, and Egypt also became popular, especially, Egypt after the tomb of Tutankhamen was discovered in 1992.

Travellers in the ancient times travelled on foot, on animals, by boat and on wheeled vehicles. Animals were mainly used for carrying load. The sudden connectedness of the universe today due to globalisation and advancement in Science, technology and transportation has made travel much safe and easier. By the twenty-
first century, the advent of luxury ocean liners, cruise ships, and the aeroplanes made travel to even remote and alien places accessible to the masses.

A mass migration among individuals and groups worldwide in the present century has been witnessed due to expatriation, fire, flood, political, economic and religious reasons. Pico Iyer, an acclaimed postmodern travel writer in *The Global Soul* writes that “humans have never lived with quite this kind of mobility and uprootedness before ...”(24). Contemporary travel writers write about the fast spreading mobility among people around the globe due to globalisation, travel and technology, and its effects on human beings.

This chapter attempts to highlight the travels of Pico Iyer around the globe for more than three decades. He is a travel writer, essayist, book reviewer, author and novelist. He was born in England of Indian parents and was brought up in an English Board School and California. He is currently living in Japan with his Japanese partner named Hiroko and her two children. He is the author of *Video Night in Kathmandu, Falling Off the Map, Cuba and the Night, Tropical Classical, The Lady and the Monk, The Global Soul, Sun After Dark, The Abandon, The Open Road: The Global Journey of the fourteenth Dalai Lama* and *The Man Within My Head*.

Iyer’s books are excellent travel pieces. His writings are about his travels in Asian countries such as Bali, Tibet, Nepal, China, Japan, The Philippines, Burma, Hong Kong, India, Thailand, and also his journeys in the countries such as Cuba, Korea, Bolivia, Morocco, Argentina, Benin, Vietnam, Paraguay, Australia, East Timor, Siberia,
Ldakh, Kashagar, Yemen, Brunei, Ethiopia, Canada and Cambodia. Pico Iyer is a wanderlust and a tireless intercontinental wanderer. He is wandering in search of new locales. The author is a traveller from his school days. He says that he has inherited movements and he could not come out of it. He says that he travels principally for joy and adventure. In his interview with Shoma Chaudhury, the author tells, “Travel is a form of religious practice for me. It keeps you alert” (29). Iyer’s journeys capture in new ways our increasingly changing world.

Pico Iyer’s Video Night in Kathmandu And Other Reports from the Not - So-Far-East (1988) is the first collection of essays on his travels in Asian countries in the mid 1980s. The writer takes the readers on a joyful tour through the new worlds of Asia. In the brilliant book he brings to life the places he invented. As Roger Rosenblatt comments, the author invented the modern Asia. All the chapters are loaded with interesting details about the “mysterious East” (VNIK 377).

The delightful book starts with an interesting account of Bali, “World’s loveliest paradise island” in Indonesia (VNIK 33). When he landed in Bali, his eye captured in no time the strong Western invasion and the Western presence in the tiny island. ‘Tourism’ and ‘Paradise’ are the two inseparable features of the island (VNIK 30). Bali had been a centre of attraction to the Westerners. The Dutch sailors, the first Westerners landed here in 1597 and declared it as ‘Eden’ (VNIK 30). For more than a century now, writes Iyer, Bali is thick with foreigners who arrive there seeking pleasure. It has become a dream island and a sought - after - place for fun for many a lot today.
Iyer compares Bali with “Prospero’s Isle” (VNIK 31). It offered all the pleasures of Eden like Prospero’s Isle, he says. Its ‘lush Rousseausque garden’ and ‘lovely and graceful people’ (VNIK 31) was a great facination to him. He writes that Bali, like Prospero’s Isle, “is an island of unseen spirits. It was full of noises, sounds and airs ... a thousand twangling instruments” (VNIK 32). “Bare shouldered ladies” took a stroll through the early morning light (VNIK 32). “Radiant little girls” moved slowly out of the darkness (VNIK 31). Foreigners turned up there in large numbers. Because the Balinese had turned the island into “an island of song and dance” (VNIK 31).

Bali looked crowded because all the visitors were guaranteed full satisfaction. The Kuta Beach, the Sanur Beach and the Ubud in Bali were explored by the visitors. The beaches looked like ‘retirement homes’ for foreign visitors looking around for fun and pleasure. The beaches over there were alive and vibrant with discos, night clubs and twenty-four-hour coffee shops.

Bali is also popular for myths, rituals and superstitions. “There are about 30,000 temples there” (VNIK 32). The pious women who offered prayers at the temples caught his attention. Children were respected for the reason that they were from heaven. Touching a child on his or her head was disallowed. Elders carried every boy or girl until at the age of three so as to protect them from the impure earth. The natives and the ‘alien-natives’ (n.pag.) co-existed and looked happy about the things around them in this ‘enchanted island’ (VNIK 34).
Iyer’s account of Tibet, “The City of Sun” (VNIK 60) and “The Land of Snows” (VNIK 62), begins with a picturesque description of its physical landscape. ‘The huge and highest peaks’, ‘the spacious silence in the hill top monasteries’ ‘the still chambers of lamaseries,’ ‘morning bells’, ‘murmuring chants of the monks,’ ‘blue sky on the white washed terraces,’ ‘the sun-lit bright terraces,’ ‘a labyrinth of numerous nameless alleyways’, fresh air, and the ‘Yak-hair cut tents of nomads’ were eye-catching to the author.

“The Forbideen Land” (VNIK 61) was open to all visitors. The place satisfied everyone who entered there. The Tibetans welcomed all with a pleasing smile. “Tibet was jolly and rainbowed and welcoming,” Iyer felt (VNIK 69). Tibetans are the most pious people. They loved peace. When Iyer wandered through ‘unlit chambers’ of the hilltop lamasery the smell of the butter lamps welcomed him. He found candles encircling Buddhas. The altars had the snapshots of Dalai Lama. The place was so silent and no movement was there excepting the fluttering of prayer flags. No sound was heard except the “low voiced murmurs” (VNIK 65) of the monks. He then left the place and caught a bus to Lhasa.

Nepal is one of Iyer’s favourite places. Nepal, especially, Kathmandu, the author writes, “is the land of delights, idealism and spirited people” (VNIK 78). The local stores were adorned with Tibetan handicrafts, Tibetan paintings, Tibetan bells and Tibetan scarves. Illiteracy was a major threat to the country. There was only one doctor for 1,00,000 people, the writer gathered.
China over flowing with foreigners. The robust growth of China impressed the author. He was dazzled by the splendid structures in the New China. Old structures and monuments too were preserved. Old apartments remained so. There were villas beside a river. Beijing was huge and simple, Iyer noted. Its buildings seemed solid and unprotected. The huge streets were left uncared. There was enormous official buildings. The summer palace looked empty.

In Chengdu, the largest statue of Mao stood elegantly. He gathered from his car driver that “Chengdu has been called a Paradise on Earth” (VNIK 124). The place enjoyed abundant rainfall. Its soil and tranquil climate was a welcoming signal to all. The author visited the temple of the Marquis Wu. The whole place was pleasant to him. He agrees that as commented by Zheng, “it was a land of heavenly abundance” (VNIK 35). Iyer visited all the places in China. He was taken aback by its beautiful landscape. Around Shenkhou, there were many trimmed little gardens. In China, both the sightseers and the natives lived a harmonious life, the author observed.

In the Philippines, Iyer’s English School friend named Louis welcomed him. They together entered into a super luxury hotel to eat. A middle-aged Asian entertained them with Filipino music. Filipinos were familiar with every Western song. They are known for their hospitality and charmness. According to the writer, at least 3,000 Filipinos were playing the music in Japan alone. He points out that another 35,000 young ladies from the Philippines had entered Japan for ‘entertainment trade’. They were found everywhere and were very happy.
When Iyer arrived in Manila, it was raining and dark. He walked out into the dark street. People were sleeping in the sidewalks. Women and babies were found on the forefront. Finally, he arrived at a place to stay. There were no locks on the door of his room. The bed had no sheets. There were forty seven radio stations in the town. All of them nearly played the same A.M tunes. “We are the World” was the song he heard a number of times while he was in the Philippines. This song was recorded by the superstars of the U.S.A for Africa to raise money for the starving in Ethiopia.

Iyer wandered through the streets of Ermita. He enjoyed the music that came out of bars and beer gardens. “Where there is music,” said a T-shirt in a Mabini gift shop, “There can’t be misery”, said another in the same store (VNIK 166). But once he was back on the streets, amid archins and the broken fences, he couldn’t believe that the music could change the world. Instead, he sighted beggars and whores. Condoms were sold more than cigarettes, the author notes. The miserable stories of women and girls shocked the writer. Sadness was everywhere. Poverty was more visible there than any other places he visited, he writes. The author was told that poverty had “reduced its men to rags and driven its women to brothels” (VNIK 180). Sarah, a waitress at Called Cinquo admitted that she could pay her college free from the money she got through prostitution. Every tourist, she added sadly, was interested in only one thing. “I don’t blame them,” she told the author (VNIK 181). Minnine, a waitress in a bar told that she took up job as a waitress when she was seventeen. After some years she began to smoke. She drank and took drugs.
As a teenager, she had once had an abortion, she said. A British executive from Papua New Guinea had married her. When he left Manila, he handed over her the bar he was running. Unfortunately, she stood at a heavy loss within a year. Thus, Minnie had no other option than joining a bar again. Iyer could gather from the people around him such sad stories, elucidating the poverty of the country and the wretched condition of women there.

Once Iyer had been to Angeles City. It was a small town around Clark Air Force base. The Mac Arthur Highway, the main area in the town, “was the saddest-looking place with cardboard signs and cocktail lounges and beat-up bars” (VNIK 167). He sighted a lot of used cars, motels, old-looking cafe, shacks and shanties. There were signs like “Pick up for Hire” and “Goat for Hire” in all the hardware stores (VNIK 167). The national hero Jose Rizal once described, Iyer writes, his home as “a country without a soul” (VNIK 174). When he went to Pistang Pilipino, the main tourist centre in the capital, handsome young men whipped themselves and “six-year-old girls in bikinis” preformed acrobatics (VNIK 174).

Setting foot in Burma, the author looked around. The Mingaladon, Burma’s only international airport lacked the facility to accommodate 7475, or even DC-105. The Rangoon Airport was an old little building. He sighted “discolored and empty mansions” (VNIK 198) by the side of the road. The walls had cracks and the gardens were overgrown with unwanted plants. The Burmese there lived a peaceful life. On Thirlmere Avenue, monks waited for buses. Old Indian gentlemen waited to cross
Windsor Road. Cakes and Snacks were sold in “shabby, dark and little booths” (VNIK 198)

At last, Iyer went to Strand Hotel. A ‘dirty-turbened man’ led him past deserted assembly halls. A very old elevator carried him and stopped with a strange creak. The bell boy led him down a corridor. He had to use a “dungeon key” (VNIK 198) to enter his room. He was provided a hard bed with “hospital covers, an old telephone, a Spartan tub in the bathroom and a Yale lock” (VNIK 198).

When General Ne Win introduced Buddhism and Socialism in Burma, the author traces the history, he eliminated all private business and sent away all foreigners. The country’s borders were closed. He ordered strictly that nothing should enter the country, nobody should leave, and nothing should change. “Time itself,” says the author, “had been sentenced to life imprisonment and History was held under house arrest” (VNIK 199). For years, visitors were not allowed to stay for a long time. A middle-aged lady informed the author that foreigners were allowed to visit only five places in Burma. There were some good hotels in the towns. Tourists needed a special voucher from the tourist Burma Office to stay anywhere else.

Burma showed no interest to attract tourists. Visitors could enter there only by air. The national airlines of Burma, Thailand, China, the Soviet Union and Bangladesh were the few aeroplanes to these “forgotten routes” (VNIK 200). According to the author, Rangoon had been turned into “a sepia-colored daguerreo type of the Raj” (VNIK 202). It had been preserving the memories of the Empire for a long time.
‘Ancient objects’, ‘Office’s cuff links’, ‘rusted fountain pens’ and ‘grandfatherly razors’ were preserved (VNIK 202-203). The Strand Hotel “preserved the forgotten and faded remains of the Empire” (VNIK 203). A horse-drawn Tonga was the mode of transport in Mandalay, Burma’s second city. There was a golf course in Taunggyi but it was equipped with a small hut. A few locals were found in their ‘longgis’. Pagon, the country’s main tourist spot, had many eleventh-century temples. One thatched hut had a sign that said “Post and Telegraph” (VNIK 216). In the whole country, there were a very few hotels. Most of them were empty. “Smoking, Drinking and Flesh is strictly prohibited here within the Sikh Temple premises,” (VNIK 207) said one sign. Another sign advised, “Be kind to animals by not eating them.” Also there was one sign which read, “No Feet Wearing” at the entrance to every pagoda (VNIK 207). The signs looked to the author more suitable because moral values are more important to them. The Burmese are frank and polite people. Their gentle manners attracted the author.

When Iyer returned to Burma two years later, nothing changed much though Burma signalled to welcome the outside world slightly, “It was the same Old, good old Burma,” the author notes down (VNIK 212). He noticed that Burma had never developed. When he visited Burma the second time, he says, “I was tempted to think of it as a fabulous fiction: a Disney version of the Empire, called Yesterdayland perhaps or some Hollywood set of an imperial ghost town” (VNIK 218).

Among the countries of the Third World, Burma seemed to the writer, not to “aspire for Western sophistication” (VNIK 203). Burma had not permitted videos and
burgers. They began to follow a ‘self-created ideal,’ Iyer writes (VNIK 203). They didn’t need the fashions described in the ads sections of American magazines. Iyer could observe that the Burmese observed a strict sense of decency. They said no to drugs. “Burma’s innocence” hit him completely when he wandered around the capital (VNIK 203). The Guardian and The Working Peoples Daily were the two English-language papers found there. Television came to the country in 1980. The main attractions were “Augie Doggie and Doggie Daddy” and “Cat Happy Pappy” (VNIK 204). Rangoon looked completely free of any entertainment at night excepting the local cinema. The Burmese preserved its ruins and decay, the writer aptly puts. In Iyer’s own words, Burma was “a lost world in both senses of the word: a remnant from the past, but also a confused child trying to make its way about an adult universe” (VNIK 215). Iyer saw that Burma was not spoiled and they protected their innocence.

Hong Kong looked crowded with people from the corners of the world. Travellers from different continents gathered there. Everywhere there, “people were on the rise, on the move and on the go,” Iyer noticed (VNIK 222). The author took a taxi to move along the hills of “Mild-Levels.” A noiseless elevator carried him up to the eighteenth floor where his friend from Eton stayed in his three-bedroom luxury apartment. He enjoyed the beauty of the city through his window. Iyer liked to wander all night in the ‘expat city’ (VNIK 224). Infact, Hong Kong is ... the world’s great community of transients and refugees (VNIK 224). It was populated most with Chinese. They arrived in Hong Kong as exiles by circumstance. In 1985, Iyer writes, for the
first time in history, there were more Americans in Hong Kong than Britishers. And
by 1985, people in large numbers began to settle. Many arrived there to shape their
future. Hong Kong welcomed business, men, travellers and expats.

International businessmen crowded there in this “free-for-all-Hong Kong”
(VMK 224). The city accommodated “go-getters, over-achievers and rootless expats”
(VMK 224). Racketeers, drug dealers, gangsters and abortionists chose Hong Kong.
“In Hong Kong,” said a cabbie to Iyer, “there’s lots of freedom. You have money, you
can do anything” (VMK 225). Hong Kong has been rebuilt completely by the expat
community, Iyer records. Jenefa aptly quotes Rushdie who says that “the migrant ...
transforms the new world” (Imaginary Homelands 27). The streets were busy with
young men and women. People were very active. It was to Iyer chaotic, clamorous,
dirty-fingered New York (VMK 233). Yet, tells the author, Hong Kong was “a large
international city” (VMK 235). Expatriates felt it their ‘home’.

“India,” Iyer had always thought, “was humanity itself, an inflation of humanity,
and intensification of humanity” (VMK 224). He liked India. It has 16 major languages
and 1,652 dialects and more than 2,000 castes and at least five main religions and 500
former kingdoms and thousands of gods, the author writes. He opens his account of
India with his views on Indian movies, particularly, Hindi movies. Indian film industry
looked to him like Hollywood in the fifties” (VMK 256). Apart from his views on the
Indian film industry, the author discusses in detail politics, religion, social life,
customs, practices, beliefs, life-styles dreams, deaths and so on. His journeys in India
enchants him. He writes, “every trip through India was to some extent a magical mystery tour into chaos and colour and emotion.” He highlights the Asian people’s dream to visit foreign countries, America, in particular. Extreme poverty in India shocked him. He writes that many Indians want to emigrate to America to escape the grinding poverty of this country.

To Iyers “India, in the 80s, had been like Hollywood in the Fifties” (VNIK 256). Thus, The Video Night in Kathmandu is a remarkable record of Pico Iyer’s travels in some of the Asian countries in the mid 1980s.

Falling Off the Map: Some Lonely Places of the World is a witty and informative book on his voyage into some lonely, isolated and desolated places. These locals are not preferred by the mainstream travellers usually. Here, the author experiences and brings to life the lonely places like North Korea, Argentina, Cuba, Iceland, Bhutan, Vietnam and Paraguay. These places are, according to the author, “isolated and poor places” (FOTM 8). But these ‘Lonely Places’ were a great fascination to him to think about “loneliness and space” (FOTM ix). Moreover, he experiments his philosophy of living a contended life in remote and inconvenient places of the world.

Pico Iyer visited North Korea in 1990. It was “an unusual place to him (FOTM 11). It looked constant and quiet. It had a peculiar culture. The tourist brochures announced thirty-seven-day ‘Mud Treatment Tour.’ The magazines talked about the movies like The Report of No.36 and Order No.027. According to Conde Nast
Traveller, it was one of the “cheapest vacation spots in the world” (FOTM 12). North Koreans are known for their hospitality. “Golfers come to Korea,” said the pamphlets in their embassy in Beijing (FOTM 12). He noticed a sign which read “Honeymoon in Korea”. Another sign said, “Animals and plants invite tourists to Korea”, Iyer notes (FOTM 12). When the author reached a four-story brick embassy, there was no flag fluttering above the entrance of the building. He noticed no signs in English. The embassy looked empty at eleven-thirty even on a week day. The dust covered corridors were empty and dark.

The author then approached a man for getting a visa to Pyongyang. The Choson Minhang Flight 162 which he took from Beijing to Pyongyang was not very well decorated. The passengers were offered some magazines for reading. The author could easily identify the North Korean travellers. He noticed Kim II Sung badges on their chests. The Japanese businessmen politely read the magazines that told them, “The heinous Japanese marauders will be forced out. And the star will be brighter over our land” (FOTM 13).

The magazine Iyer chose to read gave a detailed account of the place he was going to visit. It contained pictures of magazines and generator rooms, quotes from “the Great Leader”, and photographs of a “Happiness-Filled Pleasure Park” (FOTM 13). Upon arriving at Pyongyang International, he was led to Pyongyang Koryo Hotel. The room was entirely empty. The refrigerator was also likewise empty. A calendar on the wall had four important dates in the life of Kim Il Sung. There was a
black-and white T.V, he noticed. Iyer noted that this “socialist paradise” was filled with numerous wonders. He was taken aback to see “The Juche Idea,” a 450-feet ornate column. His guide was telling that they believed in their own strength and were the masters of their destiny. The hotel’s book store showcased 114 different works by President Kim II Sung in Japanese and Arabic. 14 more shelves displayed other titles. Excepting *Story of a Hedgehog* and *Boys Wipe out Bandits*, all the other books were about Kim II running to 1808 pages. The author visited the subway station. It was a 250-foot building. Also, he saw the Thermal Power Station and the Korea Revolutionary Museum. The Children’s Palace with five hundred rooms was a grand structure. There was entertainment at night. He listened to a six piece band play, “The Isle of Capri.” He once played billiards with a Bavarian businessman. The North Koreans were quite different from the South Koreans. The writer observed that their manners seemed more “refined.” To him, North Korea was a “distinctly East Asian place” (*FOTM* 22). Iyer’s guide told him that “we are not a rich country. But we have a pride. All these we have achieved by ourselves” (*FOTM* 23). “Westerners,” he went on, “say we do not have freedom. But we have a different concept of freedom” (*FOTM* 23). His government, he said, “deliberately made Pyongyang gray” so that people won’t go away from there (*FOTM* 23). The last day in Pyongyang, he walked along the deserted streets and the empty roads. Like every visitor in that place, he reached one of the dark underground passageways and joined the expressionless faces.
In Argentina, a mini van took him to travel around the province to Jujuy. He travelled across the “darkened plains” of Ander. Argentina is one of the longest countries in the world, “stretching from the subtropical jungles of Brazil to the frozen wastes of Antarctica,” the author notes (FOTM 26). It is a large country like India. Yet, it is “a lonely place,” says Iyer. It is a land of opportunity and it sounds in the guidebook like a United States of [South] America,” views the author (FOTM 27). It has a highly sophisticated city in the East. Cowboys are in the West. There are great plains and commercial centers in the North East. But, in the South was “oddity” and “isolation” (FOTM 27). The mountains in the West have foothills taller than the Rockies. The Iguazu falls are very wide. Argentina seemed to long for the “old world” it missed; had made it a ‘lonely place,’ views Iyer. Iyer could observe that the places’ distanced itself from the “New World spaces” (FOTM 27).

There are no blacks in Argentina. Some Indians are found there. The dominant colour is blond. The place was very vibrant and its people looked very active and busy. “The people there have a high opinion of their national importance” (FOTM 33). The Argentines are so pround that they have the “widest boulevard in the world,” “largest street in the world” and “the widest river in the world” (FOTM 33).

Argentina displayed its ambition to the visitors, Iyer felt. In the National Museum of fine Arts, the first floor is all Rodin, Monet, and Degas, the second floor had some Argentina copies of Monet and Dagan. The Aleve Palace Hotel in Recoleta glittered
well. Even the animal homes in a zoo were constructed like pagodas, columned Egyptian pavilions and Russian orthodox churches.

When Iyer went to the Plaza de Mayo, a group of old-age pensioners was carrying masks and banners outside the Presidential Casa Rosada. Some student nurses were shouting, “we want teachers” (*FOTM* 38). The mothers of the Plaza de Mayo conducted their weekly march. The Communist Youth were organizing a rally to claim that “The Malvinas [Falklands] belong to Argentina!” (*FOTM* 38). On Calle Florida old men conducted “ritual debates” (*FOTM* 39). The bookstores he visited sold the books which were written by Freud and Lacan. There were more therapists and psychiatrists in Buenos Aires. To the author, the country resembled like Europe. Iyer recalls the freshness of an early morning in Iguazu. The forest was radiant with a “new born clarity” (*FOTM* 40). He saw rainbows across the “crashing falls.” Toucans “flooded” the trees, Lizards “sunbathe” amidst roots and branches. It had been a great joy to him to see the multi - coloured butterflies that flew around him (*FOTM* 41). The author glorifies its Nature.

In Argentina, stolen cars and smuggled items were numerous. He saw UFO Beach Radios and enormous quartz watches for sale. As soon as Iyer stepped into a sidewalk in Paraguay, he was offered pink condoms by a young boy. A “philanthropist” possessed pirated cassettes (*FOTM* 42). Rampa and minipianos filled the stores’ showcases. Arabic music was played. Policemen were sighted looking for bribes. He encountered gold-dealers and criminals. “Bowler hatted women” were selling ponchos
and Bat Mobiles. In the dark, Iyer recalls, the place looked as lonely as “the sound of the panpipes” (*FOTM* 43). Farther South, near the “park-filled city of Mendoza”, the author glanced spectacular mountains (*FOTM* 43). “Warning,” announced a notice in a ski lodge, “It is prohibited here to speak of Politics, Economics, the Rise of the Dollar, the Cost of Living, Personal Finances, Unpaid Debts, Rising Costs, various anxieties. Be friendly, go easy with your nerves” (*FOTM* 44).

Not surprisingly, Ushuaia appeared to him “dressed up in a polar stillness” (*FOTM* 44) and not surprisingly, it felt like “a mirror image of Isafjordhur or the other easily silent Icelandic fishing towns around Arctic Circle” (*FOTM* 44). The “gray” seemed permanent there, along the “sludgy streets,” and the town looked “the perfect finish of gray” - the snowcaps above were “moody and looming”; the Sun, “a dull nickel in the sky” (*FOTM* 44).

In Pantagonia, the skies were “celestial” in this “no-man’s land” (*FOTM* 45). It was bright with “unearthly shades” the author had never seen before. While he was driving in the desert, “miles of nothingness” stretched everywhere (*FOTM* 45). Even the small towns in Patagonia had the “touch of a kind of Alice Springs desolation: the queer desolateness of boxlike settlements set down in a grid in the middle of nowhere” (*FOTM* 45). Red British postboxes were found on lanes called Miguel D. Jones and Juan C. Evans. At night, the place looked perfectly silent again excepting a few cafes.

Iyer drove back that night in the still darkness. A little later, entering his room, he turned on the T.V. The President Menem appeared on a variety show. The next day,
the government announced that “inflation for the month was 95.5 percent,” Iyer concludes (FOTM 47). The author drives home the point that his journey was not mere touring places but gathering information about the economy of a country and other serious aspects.

In Cuba, in the Hotel Pernik in Holguin, Iyer got into an elevator. The elevator went down a few feet and then stopped. He pressed a button and it fell down. The author rang a bell. There was no response. He kicked open the door. The writer saw a black face with a beard in front of him. The man told him not to worry. Twenty five minutes later, he was released and then he took a seat in Pernik dining room. The hotel offered good fish, chicken, fresh fruit and vegetables. The hall was full with people that morning.

Apart from Iyer’s school friend Louis, he met a woman from Aruba. She was there to find her missing grandmother. But the Aruban decided to smuggle out a ’56 Chevy. “Here the people have no salt, no sugar, only one piece of bread a day, she informed them” (FOTM 49). They drove for Santiago. Cyclists who were everywhere drove past rusted buses. “Cuba”, Iyer writes, “is one of the biggest surprises in the modern world” (FOTM 56). Even his guidebooks say, “the most varied and the most beautiful” (FOTM 56). The 4,500 miles of beautiful beach looked empty. Cuba looked vibrant at night with “dark-eyed scarlet girls” (FOTM 56) under the mango trees of night clubs. Cuba is such a wonderful place that Christopher Columbus called it “the most beautiful land ever seen” (FOTM 56). “Cuba’s waiting for you”, is the official
tourist slogan. “We know you were coming”, another sign said (FOTM 57). Iyer writes that “every moment is an adventure here, and every day is full of surprise” (FOTM 58). Iyer never wanted to sleep in Cuba. Even after he had left the place, he finds that “it haunts me like a distant Ramba”(FOTM 59). The salubrious nature of Cuba is so reminiscently ripe in the mind of the author.

Cuba, for Iyer, “is the most infectiously exultant place he knows”(FOTM 59). “Every step I took offered up a new world of joys,” the author appreciatively quotes the comment of Thomas Merton, the trappist monk (FOTM 59). Norman Lewis, after sixty-five years of travelling told Iyer that he had never found, a place to compare with Havana. Many Cubans were mad after wine, women and song. Iyer writes that the island reminds him of that famous statement of the eighteenth century Englishman Oliver Edwards who said, “I have tried, too, in my time to be a philosopher, but I don’t know how, cheerfulness was always breaking in” (FOTM 60).

When the author landed in Havana on a recent trip, he saw the immigration officials, making “kissing noises” at their female colleagues when there was no passengers. “It was one of those places that just brought a smile to your face, even when your heart is breaking,” the author writes (CATN 6) One night, while walking past the commercial buildings of La Rampa, he heard someone playing a saxophone. Cuban pavilion shone with video banks and “rainbowed portraits”. He found himself in a huge open - air disco. The place was thick with teenagers. When the show ended,
at midnight, he walked to a bar in the Hotel Nacional. Four red-faced Soviets were singing melancholy Russian ballads.

The country’s 289 beaches are so near from the capital. A typical Cuban seaside hotel invited foreigners to “Workers Show” and “Happy Shows” (*FOTM* 61). “Cocktail lessons,” music, dance and many other things surprised him (*FOTM* 61). One day Iyer went to CYO Lago, a beautiful beach over there. He was greeted with a Cuban dance band. He sat there the whole day enjoying the beauty of the beach. Cubans were not permitted on the beach.

In Santiago de Cuba, Iyer spent some days in the “gutted home” of a former captain of Fidel. Hemingway’s house was still preserved. The buildings all around were unpainted and unrepainted. Las Americas, the lonely mansion in the beach resort of Varadero, stood with its doors locked. The floor was thick with dust. Iyer also writes that Cuba’s “sunlit sadness” caught his heart (*FOTM* 64). “Cuba is old laides in rocking chairs on their verandas in the twilight, dabbing their eyes as their grandchildren explain azure sea flashing kids dancing all night in the boisterous cabarets and then confiding, matter-of-factly, our lives here are like in Dante’s’ *Inferno* (*FOTM* 64). The author pictures Cuba’s smiles and sadness.

Pico Iyer recalls the days he spent in Iceland. He visited the country in 1987. “Even now, I find myself going back and back to Iceland in my mind, walking through its chilly, ghostly streets, pale even after midnight in the summer, and hushed, no dark to be seen for 2,400 hours or more” (*FOTM* 66). He recalled the empty fields he
walked and crossed, the Sun landing on the sea at 1.00 a.m, and the cloud-covered coast. It seemed to him “as if I was always lost in the ice-blue poem of the Icelandic romantics,” Iyer writes (FOTM 66). The author was haunted by many memories. “Somehow I am always visiting Iceland in my memories, standing on a hill in the golden quiet, my shadow stretching for forty feet or more, then through a sleeping world in the dove-gray light of 2.00 a.m,” the author cherishes (FOTM 66 - 67). Like Cuba, Iceland too is quite enchanting to the writer. For Iyer, Iceland looked so “otherworldly.” The days he spent there were “interludes from life,” he writes (FOTM 67). He was transported by the places’ “emptiness” and “oddness.” There was no beer in Iceland until 1987. Television was not allowed on Thursdays. There were almost no trees and no vegetables. It is a wasteland of volcanoes and tundra. NASA astronauts underwent training there. Its “wilderness” attracted Iyer greatly. According to the author, Iceland has the largest number of poets, presses and readers per capital in the world. He gives vent to his aesthetic sensibilities while pointing out the country’s popularity in the realms of literature.

Iceland is “one of the largest islands in the world,” and at the same time “one of the smallest words in the island” (FOTM 68). The parliament building itself was a two-story block. Prisoners were permitted to go home for the holidays. The country was, in the middle ages, “the literal location of Hell” (FOTM 69). And it is “a kind of Aryan Paradise” for the Nazis (FOTM 69). Iceland, in Iyer’s view, was not an average country. Yet he was determined to see the country again. Beer was allowed in the country after
a long time. There were two television stations. Broadcasting on Thursdays was still prohibited. There was a Holiday Inn in Reykjavik. The Hard Rock Cafe invited visitors for entertainment. Yet, still, again and again, Iyer felt that he was in a kind of “Alice Wonderland” (*FOTM* 70).

Reykjavik was an attractive and serene place. Much of the country was to the author “as if it were made for children” (*FOTM* 71). “Ring - nosed girls” were pushing baby strollers. Reykjavik was almost like “a small child’s toy as clean and perfect as a ship inside a bottle,” Iyer describes (*FOTM* 71). Iceland has no mansions and no slums. Their language had no dialects and no accents, the author writes. The population there was smaller than that of Colorado Springs. Though the capital was “mute” and “motionless,” more and more visitors came to Iceland in search of “desolation” (*FOTM* 71). A vast emptiness in the form of ice fields, tundra, lava fields and Barveu mountains was very visible. The place contained the largest glacier in Europe. The oldest parliament was set up on this “youngest soil,” he writes (*FOTM* 71).

Iyer was impressed by the place’s climate. He describes that “The sun shines silver over the silver lakes” (*FOTM* 72). The country has no extremes of temperature. In summer, when the writer visited, people were complaining of a heat wave. But in the early fall, bitter winds filled the “silent streets.” A local friend told him that he had once been to Stockholm and he almost “suffocated” in the sweltering 64°heat. He wanted to go back to his “cold Iceland” (*FOTM* 72).
An Icelandic girl told Iyer, in a disco, foreigners prefer the place because “it is cold, it is expensive and the people, they are closed” (FOTM 73). Iyer once asked a young Danish student what attracted him in Reykjavik, “Well, for me, I like walking at night in the old town, seeing the old houses. Or if you can go a little bit out of Reykjavik, if it is cold, like tonight, you can see the northern lights,” he said (FOTM 73).

“The penetrating emptiness,” “the black-blanketed darkness,” the sepulchral silence” and “the unearthly calm” (FOTM 81) of Iceland looked meaningful to the writer when he heard from a car mechanic named Oluvi say, “In the dark they have much time to think of god-and of other things in that direction” (FOTM 83).

Bhutan, when Iyer visited in 1989, looked “hidden inside the hidden Kingdom” (FOTM 84). The main square outside his room was empty and silent. He found workers walking to their fields and school children in their traditional gray-and-purple jerkins. Many medieval building stood around him. Thimpu, with a very small population, was the only real town in Bhutan. There was only one main street. The shops there were numbered. The Yu-Druk Travel was empty. Shopkeepers sat outside their stores. Monks were found in a plaza taking rest. Trashcans were everywhere. WHOEVER YOU MAY BE, USE ME TO KEEP THE AREA CLEAN, said one. The stores were named as Dolly Tshongkhang Shop No. 15, Sonam Ricken Beer Agency Cum Bar, Lendrup Tshongkhang Cement Agent (Shop. No.31, Thimpu) and Tipsy Tipsy.

This “Forbidden Kingdom’s young king loved basketball” (FOTM 86). A local video store was advertising paradise, starring Phoebe Cates. Its only Swiss Bakery
was the most famous establishment in the “Land of Hidden Treasures” (FOTM 86). Its dzongs, “the huge white-washed seventeenth-century fortresses cum monasteries cum administrative centres” were some of the spots to see in Bhutan (FOTM 88). Transportation was poor in Bhutan. Even in the tourist centre of Paro, the writer couldn’t see a single vehicle. The jeep in which he travelled stopped many a time in the mid way. “Suffocating dust” and the smell of gasoline filled the air. Foreigners called the local bus “Vomit Express” (FOTM 94).

Simtokha Dzong, when Iyer arrived, was very calm. Students were reading books or memorizing some ancient scripture. Everyday they had nine periods in thirteen different subjects. They were taught classical dance and ancient methods of carving wooden blocks. They mastered Bhutan’s native Dzongkha language. Students would clean the monastery during holidays. Everyday, the students had only thirty-minute period for sports. Students were not trained in modern sports. They were trained how to throw a dart. The place was dark and empty. The statue of Buddha was not so visible in the darkness. There was nothing to see and nothing to hear excepting “dark voices” of the monks outside.

The caretaker of the monastery led the author to another unlit antechamber. Old scriptures were there on the floor. The old monk began to chant. The writer travelled to all the Dzongs in Bhutan: to Para Dzong, Drukgyel Dzong, Punakha Dzong and Tongsa Dzong, Ta Dzong Togsa Dzang. The central Dzong in Bhutan was set in the very heart. It was a huge structure. Numerous burgundy robes of the monks were laid out
to dry. Monks polished incense holders. An eleven-year-old urchin showed him a picture of Padma Sambhava, the Indian mystic who had brought Buddhism to Bhutan in the eighteenth century. He was then taken to his “home” in Tongsa located up above the “huge and empty hill” (FOTM 99). The place was completely dark by five-thirty. He was all alone in the “unlit and unheated old building” for the next fourteen hours. He recalled, at that time, a line he read in Survey of Bhutan, “Black magic is a part of Bhutanese life” (FOTM 99).

Bhutan’s great monuments like the Potala Palace or Mont-Saint-Michel arrested Iyer’s attention. The greatest of all is Taktsang, the temple on the side of a three – thousand foot cliff. Taktsang, the author records, “ is one of the most remarkable places in the world” (FOTM 99). Iyer climbed up the mountain accompanied by a toothless old man and his two ponies. After ninety minutes, he reached the temple. On reaching the top, he felt like “a conquering hero” (FOTM 100).

The “silent country” was a pretty sight to him. At dawn, in Thimpu, the Western mountains were thick with mist. In the mornings, he heard the quiet sound of the tennis ball outside his window. At lunch, in a hotel, Japanese “salary men in dark suits battled with their curries” (FOTM 100). In the evening, the officials from the “cottage-like buildings” in Tashichhodzong “streamed out like boys just released from the class” (FOTM 100). Young girls from Private Indian School gathered at night in the Benez Café to gossip about their boy friends. And then, after dark, the “candle – lit houses
shined,” and the streets were “silent and chill.” Dogs barked all night. At dawn, the sounds of jeeps and horns were heard (FOTM 101).

As the days passed, Iyer learned to live inside that “Sleepy Hollow World” (FOTM 101). He stayed in a small room in the Druk Hotel. He became a member of the Thimphu Public Library. The author bought balcony tickets to see the movies of Stallone. He took the clothes to the dry cleaner. In the mornings, when he got up from bed, he had heard girls sing while they worked. Monks were going to temples. Children sang folk songs in the dusk. The valley looked in “virgin silence” (FOTM 101). “The peaceful windless, silent valley” was more lovelier to him. Religion like Buddhisam finds itself important in his recording (FOTM 103).

Iyer felt that something wrong happened every day in Bhutan. The door locks in his rooms were not properly working. Taps got struck. Lights went off during nights. Complaints such as “Room 411. No hot water,” “Room 423. No electricity,” “No water Room 417” were received from almost every room (FOTM 105).

The Bhutanese Iyer met were gentle, honest and punctual. Their genuine innocence impressed him most. Nobody, during his stay there, approached him for any help or disturbed him. Olympic Villager had declared that the Bhutanese was the most polite among the 160 teams participated at the games in Seoul. Little girls were respectful. They bowed and greeted him and said, “Good afternoon, Sir.” “Their flawless politeness”, Iyer suspected, “was also to avoid the foreigners” (FOTM 107). The Manhattan Apartment was tightly locked. It was feared that the place might be filled
with tourists. “There is a perception abroad that we are trying to discourage tourism”, a top Bhutanese official the author once met told him. He told that was not true; they wanted to encourage it. He further added, “But we want tourists in the package form. Look at Nepal. There are people there who are dirty, with long hair and bad clothes. Women will have sex with anyone. People sleeping in the streets. This we do not want in Bhutan” (*FOTM* 107).

Iyer could understand that the Bhutan government wanted to stick on to their traditional way of life. They wished to design buildings in the traditional style. They were not permitted to possess foreign currency. The Bhutanese could not leave abroad for study unless he or she was sponsored by the government. If a student was sponsored by the government he or she should give assurance the he will return to serve his country. Christian churches were banned in Bhutan. Bhutanese were made to love their country. The government wanted to keep foreigners away. The foreign officials were accommodated in the “twenty – dollar – a – night hotels downtown”. Tourists were made to stay in remote hilltop hotels. The hotels charged 250 dollars a night. The government was cautious to protect the country’s tradition, culture and heritage. But, Iyer felt that Bhutan seemed to change very soon.

In Vietnam, “the local beauties moved Iyer: flower like in their traditional ao dais, pedaling with queenly serenity, across the Perfume River, long hair falling to their waists and pink parasols held up against the sun ...” (*FOTM* 113). The author felt that a journalist will be inspired by the scene to become a poet. Saigon, to the author,
looked like a scooter city. In the town, around the central streets, the youths rode their roaring bikes. Girls were in their cocktail dresses. Boys were dressed in white shirts and ties. Teenagers walked in denim shirts. Old couples were found in high – rise pictures painted on the walls of buildings. Many others waited along the sidewalks.

Vietnam seemed to be two different countries: Sanigon and the other places to the author. He observed that Hanoi in north missed the vigour and vitality of the South. The difference to the author was so conspicuous to him. It was to him like “past and future, silence and frenzy, maiden aunt and bargirl, and ultimately as Beijing and Hong-Kong (FOTM 115). When Iyer asked someone in Hanoi if she had ever been to Saigon, she said that she had never went outside Vietnam. A person from Saigon if asked will also tell the same, Iyer says. He further remarks that “Saigon and Vietnam are as different almost literally, as light and day” (FOTM 114). The author noted that both places differed much. There lived fifty – three distinct minotity tribes. They stuck on to their own colourful costume, customs and way of life. When he asked them how old they were, the strange answer was “ten or fifteen water baffalos’ lives” (FOTM 115). There were ruined French villages and hotels. There were marvellous temples and the remnants of the fourteenth century Charm Civilization. There were “illuminated lanterns” and “oil –lit lamps” along the “crooked streets” at night (FOTM 115). 1,400 miles of “pure white deserted beaches” stretched. Most of all, the Vietnamese were “exceptionally attractive, cultured and hospitable people” (FOTM 115). “The Vietnamese are the last natural human people in the world,” a Korean businessman told him (FOTM 115).
Travelling in Vietnam was not easy to the author. Bicycles, buses with “tail-wagging dogs”, and “horse – drawn carts” confused the travellers. At night, Buffalos occupied the roads. Airways too looked poor. Inside the aeroplane, “the whole place had the air of a hospital waiting room in the clouds” Iyer remarks (*FOTM* 119).

Honoi appeared to Iyer “virgin quiet” (*FOTM* 121). Yet the place with bicycles, pedestrians, cars, shops and stalls looked so congested. Free trade was a remarkable thing in the place. One block had black – and – white TVs. One rack had been allotted to bicycles. In another block ‘thirty’ barbers were waiting with their mirrors before them. Old men smoked Hero and Gallants Cigarettes. Bookshops had the pictures for sale. The racks had copies of *Ba Tuon Mongto Crixto* and TOEFL preparation books. Turtles and snakes were kept for sale in the market. Stalls displayed ‘Disney – shirts, Hong Kong watches, Chinese Fans, snoopy bags and flashing clocks’.

At night the author liked to walk along the “lamp - lit alleyways.” In the “half - lit stalls” lovers were found with ice creams. They purchased cards of movie stars. Families ate their meals under oil lamps. The most beautiful sight to the author in all Vietnam was Haloing Bay – “a local version of the China’s Gulling” (*FOTM* 124). When he visited the place, it was rainy. He spent most of his afternoons wandering around the “deserted colonnades” and “lazy balconies” of a Frech Colonial Hotel. “The rain - washed” beauty of the place drew Iyer (*FOTM* 126).

In the country, Hue is another centre of attraction to the author. It preserved still the “faded glamour” (*FOTM* 126) The Cham Museum housed statues of angels,
the Hindu deities and Buddha. He crossed abandoned Quonset huts and a huge American airfield. He climbed up the Marble Mountains. Steep hills surrounded him. At the bottom of one hill was “China Beach.”

Central Vietnam appeared like “a kind of shadowy no man’s land” (FOTM 128). In Hue, one night, in a lonely French villa a half-black kid asked the author for a cigarette. Iyer recalls the Vietnam War. Da Nang, the “quite village of flowers and wide-eyed toddlers” had been once “rivers of blood eight inches deep” (FOTM 129). He visited some small graves in My Lai. A kept museum preserved the memories of all the “504 people” who were killed on a single morning (FOTM 129). The beach resort of Nha Trang, the hill station of Dalat were other places of attraction to the author.

Dalat was built by the French, the author remarks. It was a kind of “Simla East” to him (FOTM 130). Wealthy people from Saigon preferred this place to spent their holidays. The sightseers were attracted by the lawns of the Palace Hotel. Alpine lakes, waterfalls and forests were the main attractions in Dalat. The most interesting sight to the writer in Dalat was the tourists from Saigon. “Honeymoon couples posed for photographs on tiny ponies,” he writes (FOTM 130). Some preferred to ride on “romantic paddle boats.” “The wealthy holiday makers” were admiring the hibiscus and bell flowers in the beautiful gardens (FOTM 131). The tourists took photos with the locals in “cowboy hats and buckskin jackets.” Iyer writes, “sightseers make themselves at home now” (FOTM 131).
Upon arriving at Paraguay in 1992, the Iyer was taken to Gran Hotel del Paraguay. It was not good. Four dogs were there in the lobby. A few “gray- haired women” from Germany were sitting in the library (FOTM 141). A fan was turning slowly. Iyer wanted to explore the capital. No traffic lights were working. He had never seen anywhere before such widerness. The “showcase cinema” in the plaza, the Cine Victoria, was showing _S.O.S. Sexual Emergency, Tension and Desire_, and _Bed Time Tales_.

“Shoe-shine boys in T – shirts” sat around a statue (FOTM143). In one corner of the Plaza of Heroes, a man was selling bank notes from the world. The Pantheon of the Heroes, a huge monument in the Plaza of Heroes had kept memorials to all the great men in the country such as Dr.Francia, the first President, his successor, Carlos Lopez, who led Paraguay in the Chaco War. Iyer saw more plaques: plaques from the Taiwanese chief of staff, from Peronistas in Argentina, from right – wing groups from Isreal; plaques congratulating Lopez Junior on his sixteenth birthday.

Outside the Pantheon, there were money exchange stores, gold – dealers and shops that sold smuggled goods, pirated perfumes and pumas. Many stalls were selling counterfeit tapes, “musical condoms” and copies of _Playboy_. Some Indians were selling bows and arrows. Every shop seemed to be named Casa – Casa; M.S. Casa Solomon, and Casa Fanny; Casa Kno Ping, Casa Porky, Casa Hung Ching. He saw a main cathedral in Asuncion. It was “emptier and more neglected.” The signs describing Jesus’ passion were written in French (FOTM 146).
Iyer then visited the Museum of Military History. The first room was “devoted to Dr. Francia” \((FOTM\ 146)\). Paintings and relics of La concubina Irlandesa were preserved. Her toilet was there. Her dishes, her fan, her shawl and her jug were collected and preserved. The museum kept an album in memory of her was signed by 87,000 Paraguayans in homage to her. Behind the Museum of Military History was the Government Palace. A local was reading \textit{Cronica}, a weekly paper which contained pictures of bodies of males and females. Avenida Mariscal Lopez, “the grandest street in Paraguay” with its “block – long houses,” “booming malls,” and “ghostly mansions” \((FOTM\ 148)\) made the author feel that would be “the grandest street in almost any country” \((FOTM\ 147)\). It was also named after Francisco Solana Lopez.

When Iyer entered the Gran Hotel, the receptionists greeted him in Hindi. He found a cockroach in his bedroom. The corridors looked wet. In its beautiful dining room, four men were singing songs from Mexico, Cuba and Peru. The cries of the babies in the hall might have disturbed every one, he felt. “There were more babies there than you’d find in a maternity ward”, he records \((FOTM\ 148)\). At every table babies were seated in strollers. More babies were in the garden and in the lobby. He saw there couples from England, Germany and America. Later Iyer learned that people were there to adopt babies. That residential hotel was the “Centre for a lucrative adoption trade” \((FOTM\ 148)\). In Paraguay, he writes, anything can be bought for a price.
The author liked the country very much. “It is one of the forgotten corners of the world, one of the unplumbed shadows,” Iyer describes (FOTM 149). Isabel Hilton quoted someone calling it “the et ceteras in the list of nations” (FOTM 149). Certainly Paraguay was in some sense, Iyer writes, “a country off the map” (FOTM 149). When he asked his travel agent about airline services to Asuncion, she told him that he could go either by LAP or by Ladeco. When he went to a local bookstore to get volumes on the place, it had none on Paraguay.

Paraguay had the reputation of being the “darkest country on the planet” (FOTM 150). Deposed dictators came to Paraguay. The fugitive Nazis were welcomed to start a new life here. The author writes that the Italian neo-Fascists gave their lectures in this place. Croatian thugs got trained here. Chinese tong kings picked up tips and the new President was charged for 145 million he made in shipments of heroin. “Paraguay sounded like a Retirement Home for Performing Criminals,” Iyer writes (FOTM 151). Throughout his visit, his driver from Argentina told him about the lawlessness in Paraguay. He was equally shocked to learn from him that “the police are the ones who are performing the crimes”(FOTM 151).

The author recalls what Graham Greene wrote about Paraguay once. For him, “Paraguay was the end of the line, the place where all roads terminate” (FOTM 151). Iyer learned that smuggling is “a national industry” (FOTM 151). “In this blessed land of Paraguay,” said a war criminal, the government impose no tax and so evasions are not necessary (FOTM 151).
When Iyer went to a library to find books on Paraguay, the titles he found were *The Lost Paradise, A Vanished Arcadis* and *Picturesque Paraguay*. “When I first came to Asuncion from Spain, I realized that I’d arrived in Paradise. The air was warm, the light was tropical, and the shuttered, colonial houses suggested sensual, tranquil lives,” the author quotes the response of the Paraguyan poet Jonefina Pla. G.K Chesterton wrote, the author quotes, “Ye bade the Red Man rise like the Red clay . . . . And man lost Paradise in Paraguay” (*FOTM* 152).

The whole of eastern Paraguay resembled to the author “a luxuriant tropical Eden” (*FOTM* 152). Paraguay seemed “a place of absolutes” (*FOTM* 152). Voltaire was attracted by this notional Arcadia which he described as both “Elysium and its opposite” (*FOTM* 152). Thomas Carlyl wrote an entire book on Dr. Francia, the author notes down. Historically, Paraguay was “the most sunless place on earth,” the writer has read. The story of Paraguay is “the story of the vanity of human wishes . . .” (*FOTM* 152-153). The Spaniards came first there. Then came the Jesuits. Afterwards refugees from Germany or Australia or Italy arrived to build a new Arcadia. Dr. Francia closed the country’s borders and expelled all the foreigners. Carlos Lopez, who ruled next, was described as “more utterly alone than any man in the world” (*FOTM* 153). Francisco, his son, fled the country with his mother and sisters. When the War of the Triple Alliance was over, Paraguay lost the Iguazu Falls, the author notes.

In 1943, Paraguay fought a war with Bolivia. Some 85,000 men were killed in the war. In the civil war that broke out later, more people moved to Argentina. In the
meantime, Paraguay saw “thirty-one Presidents in fifty- years”, Iyer records (FOTM 154). “Dictatorship is to Paraguay what constitutional democracy is to Scandinavia or Britain,” said the U.S. Library of Congress Survey (FOTM 154). As a sorcerer had told Norman Lewis, the place is known for witches. Human right activists and scholars claimed that Paraguay “is home to slavery, child brothels and genocide” (FOTM 155). Even passports, identities, babies anything could be purchased here, the author writes.

The TAP Guide to Paraguay, began: “On visiting Paraguay, tourists may have several aims, in addition to recreation, resting and renewing energy,” the author points out (FOTM 156). But there were no tourists in Paraguay. “The Land of Sun, and of Adventures” (FOTM 156) as its official slogan goes, had no single tourist office around the world, Iyer comments. In the office within the country had a “sullen men” with some “dusty brochures” in front of him. “Asuncion is home to hundreds of places worth visiting,” the book in the hotel the author stayed hopefully suggested (FOTM 156).

Iyer spent more time in the country. He felt at “home” there. A five-star hotel he was staying had a copy of “a three year-old” Business Week. He had to drive slowly through the side streets on a Saturday night in a’ 72 Chevy. When the author talked to some foreign experts, he could know that Paraguay was a favourite place among many old Latin American lands. It was called “the hidden jewel of South America” (FOTM 157). “Oh, Paraguay my favourite country in the continent! said Laura Lopez to Iyer”
“It’s a crazy country wistful and surreal and forlorn”, said a highly engaging American journalist to the author. “But its magical-like Macondo in Gabriel Garcia Marquez, The air is so pure,” added her husband, a Spanish writer. “But they never have mass slaughters in Paraguay the way they do in Chile and Argentina,” the woman went on. Leaving the Gran Hotel, the author decided to move to the Oasis Hotel. He wanted to know about the services the hotel provided. He noticed something scribbled over with hearts: “Nidi and Luis made love all night long 15-11-91.” “Ramon Dermidio Iriquera and Rosa Catalion Gill made love here 1991-1992”.

The writer once took a trip to Chaco. The population was very very less. At night, he “felt like walking through the dark with eyes shut” (FOTM 167). Finally, he reached Philadelphia. A huge, unpaved red road welcomed him. It was “like an empty, one – lane , red mud version of the Wild West” (FOTM 167). On all sides, nothingness and emptiness began to appear. The entire place looked “desolate and deserted” (FOTM 166).

Iyer’s first morning in the town, he rode through the “red – rutted emptiness.” His car bumped over “tire –muddied paths” (FOTM 169) The roads were empty. His host explained that Indians could not sleep here at night as they believed in spirits and ghosts, they feared to go out in darkness. “Now they believed in Jesus. And this is better. Whoever you are – Paraguayan, Brazilian, German, Indian you can believe in
Jesus and find salvation. I am not just saying this. It is the truth,” his host added (FOTM 169).

The Indian settlements over there “looked like rough drafts of the Mennonite communities” (FOTM 169). Some Indians had TVs, radios and cars, the author gathered from Herr Wohlgemuth. An aged-Indian briefed him in Spanish on the missionary life. When Iyer returned to the capital nothing changed. A black magician entertained the onlookers by performing tricks. The camera artists were busy taking photos of young girls. The Cine Victoria was showing Deep Throat II and The Night of Penetrations.

In the Plaza Uruguay, the author found the same girls waiting for customers. Iyer asked a girl whether she was not afraid of AIDS. She refused to believe and said that didn’t exist there. At night children on tricycles rode round the Plaza of the Heroes. On TV news about the spread of cholera were flashing during advertisements for the Miss Universe contest. In the “Dancing Restaurant” the sound of a band doing “MY WAY” was heard by him (FOTM 171). The following day the country was to celebrate Worker’s Day. The irony is that sixty percent of the people there had no real work at all, Iyer writes. The author records both the bright and pale side of life there.

Before the author left Paraguay, he returned to the Green Hotel. Iyer told the receptionist that was a place with a special history. He meant Madam Lynch and all that. “She never lived here. I tell you, I don’t know where the rumours started. It’s a lie” she said (FOTM 172). The truth must be told, the receptionist told him and continued
that “this house belonged to an Italian family. They lived here. Madam Lynch lived near the Jardin Botanico. I think they just started that story to bring in guests” (*FOTM* 172). Iyer thought that “History, like everything else, was on special discount here in the orphaned land” (*FOTM* 172).

The author writes that the buildings in Australia, before nightfall, were bright with “an unearthly light” and the “gold-touched clouds” adorned the sky (*FOTM* 173). The place was empty without people when night began to fall. The author quotes D.H Lawrance, who wrote that “Australia is like an open door with the blue beyond” (*FOTM* 173).

The very name [Australia] is derived from the Latin phrase *terra australis incognita* or “unknown land of the South,” Iyer notes. Captain Cook first landed in “the land of anomalies” (*FOTM* 174). Australia, writes the author, felt to him like “the last place on earth” (*FOTM* 174). The author quotes Marcus Clarke’s comment that “In Australia alone, is to be found the Grotesque, the weird, the strange scribbling of Nature learning to write” (*FOTM* 174). The historical aspects of the countries the author visits are both interesting and informative.

Christmas here is celebrated in midsummer. Trees lose their bark but it does not lose their leaves. It was said that crows fly backwards “to keep the dust from their eyes” (*FOTM* 174). Criminals and convicts were known as “government men” (*FOTM* 175). Thieves were appointed as magistrates. Australia, in the year of its Bicentenary, attracted people. Sports fans watched Wimbledon. The headlines featured America’s
An Aussie band with the name of INXS won all the MTV awards. The Booker Prize, the highest literary award, went to the Australian novelist Peter Carey.

Australia is “the world’s largest island” (FOTM 174). Yet, upon landing in Australia, Iyer felt how “small” and “empty” it was. The country is a small town built in a grand manner. An “eerie quietness” was felt by Iyer (FOTM 176). Even Sydney looked quiet. In the heart of the city, there was nothing but “palm trees, a soft breeze, and the song of birds” (FOTM 177). “The solitary sky scrappers” beside the harbour were in perfect stillness (FOTM 177). The suburbs were not occupied by people. Along the Pacific Highway, “cheerful toy-box buildings” in the “lonely towns” stood majestically (FOTM 177).

It’s “synthetic capital” Canberra appeared very quite (FOTM 177). Huge and empty lawns in the government offices and embassies looked sleepy. The fountains in Canberra was a marvellous sight excepting that it had a “haunting quieteness” (FOTM 177). The author writes that the Duke of Ebinburgh called Canberra “a city without a soul” (FOTM 177). T.V antenne or garden fences were not permitted there. The New Parliament with its beautifully designed seats and its chambers lit with natural light was a great fascination to Pico Iyer.

The taxi drivers, airline officials and waiters in shorts were moving to attend to their works. The Prime Minister Bob was an alcoholic. This kind of openness was very obvious and was liked by the author. Everybody was happy there. Boys were found with their girlfriends in the bars of Melbourne. More men were seen in ear
rings. While pointing out the bright and sensuous life of the people the writer does not mince words in exposing the demerits of the politicians, especially the Prime Minister.

Iyer met a man called Mike. He told him that he came there at the age of fourteen. “There was a feeling that I could do nothing in England; and no matter how well I did at school, I could never go to University. That was just something that people like me didn’t do. But over here, anything is possible. No way I could start up a place like this in England,” he said (FOTM 180). The “lush rolling hills,” known as Rainbow Region, were found crowded with tourists and hypotherapists (FOTM 181). A local bulletin board featured all the oriental arts, from talchi to tae kwon do. “Shoplifting gives you bad Karma,” advised an Asian boutique in Sydney (FOTM 181). “And if I catch you, I’ll make sure you set it in this life you Rat Fink! Sincerely, Sindi,” said another sign (FOTM 181). The writer noticed a fifteen-foot metal cheese, thirty-foot dairy cow and a thirty-two-foot fiber glass banana.

The author could see that almost all were named after crocodile in Australia. In the Airport, Crocodile Attack Insurance Policies welcomed, and brochures informed about Alligator Airlines which operated planes to Bungle Bungle. He read the names such as Crocodile Motors, the Crocodile Lodge, Crocodile Comer which sold croc pizza. The stores sold croc bags, croc water pistols, huge inflatable crocs, and croc T-shirts. The Sweethearts Piano Bar served “cocktails.” A huge croc had been designed entirely out of beer cans. Some businessmen had even constructed a twenty-foot
tall crocodile. The four seasons hotel chain started a new hotel which was shaped liked a crocodile. Prioratizing crocodile and safeguarding men from them wonderfully elucidates the truth that the Australians are concerned about both the animals and men.

The Australians, Iyer noticed, were very flexible and friendly. They fulfilled the expectation of the tourists. A cabin attendant in the Qantas flight gave the safety announcement to its passengers. The tourist guides at the Opera House amused the guests and were better than any guide in the Key West, the author felt. A one-fifty-year-old Argyle Tavern in Sydney staged an actual sheep-shearing on stage.

Folksingers walked along the main reading room of Adelaide’s Mort Lock library with guitars; Cathedrals housed the country’s museums. The Hyde Park Barraks Museum in Sydney had allocated an entire floor for plastic bags. The National Gallery in Melbourne filled one display case with pig’s head. The specimens were designated as “Lamb Brains”, “Calves Livers”, and “Spring Lamb Chops” (FOTM 184).

Iyer was surprised to see the aborigines in the continent. Racist attitudes towards the Asians were obvious. The aboriginals were slaughtered like animals. “Australia for the White man” was the slogan the author read in one of the leading magazines. A conservative English immigrant said that “Australia is a very racist country” (FOTM 186).

Iyer’s writing reinforces the general fact about Australia that the country is a racist one. Hence, his writing is true to its reality. The continent’s “silence and the
sky” was the greatest fascination to the author, he sums up (FOTM 189). Everywhere there was “emptiness and flatness” (FOTM 189). Iyer was drawn by the continent’s loneliness and silence. Pico Iyer, “a lonely person” felt excited by everything in the “Lonely, Lonely Place” (FOTM 190).

The writer has documented the bite-size travel details with bright insights. Nothing seemed to escape from his camera – sharp eye. His brilliant travel pieces, enriched with a sensual feast of rich images and impressions, offer to his readers some nice glimpses of destinations.