ABSTRACT

Spiritual Quest as a Journey into Sacred India: A Study of the Travelogues of Helena Blavatsky, Paul Brunton and William Dalrymple.

Travelogues have been popular in the history of world literature. Travel literature, is travel writing aspiring to literary value. Travel literature typically records the experiences of an author touring a place for the pleasure of travel. An individual work is sometimes called a travelogue or itinerary. Travel literature may be cross-cultural or transnational in focus, or may involve travel to different regions within the same country.

Literary travelogues generally exhibit a coherent narrative or aesthetic beyond the logging of dates and events as found in travel journals or a ship's log.

Early examples of travel literature are Pausanias’ Description of Greece in the 2nd century C.E, Petrarch’s ascent of Mount Ventoux in 1336.

Other examples of travel literature include accounts of Aristocrats, clergymen, and others who in their leisure time, travelled all around Europe to learn about its art and architecture. A pioneer of tourism literature was Robert Louis Stevenson (1850–1894). His essay on the pleasures of travelling titled “Walking Tours” describes the pleasures of walking in the lap of nature.

Travelogues were among the first bestsellers. In 1727, Daniel Defoe, whose Robinson Crusoe is considered the first novel written in English, completed the third volume of his travelogue A tour thro’ the whole island of Great Britain.

Travel writing is another genre that has, as its focus, accounts of real or imaginary places. The genre encompasses a number of styles that may range from the documentary to the evocative, from literary to journalistic, and from the humorous to the serious.
Inspirational kind of travel writing takes the travelogue adventure or personal experience a step ahead by incorporating a spiritual message or the motivation for change as experienced by a writer. These pieces are often found in publications geared towards lifestyle modification and self-help as well as in religious publications. Examples of this type are: *A Search in Secret India* by Paul Brunton, and the works of Dalrymple etc.

India is home to many ancient religions and also a host to new ones. Followers of all world religions are present among the peoples of India. Hinduism the direct descendent of Brahmanism, the Vedic religion of more than 3,000 years ago, is the oldest of the country’s religions and has the largest number of followers. This was followed by Jainism and Buddhism which were established around the same time 2,500 years ago, in North India. These were followed by Christianity and Islam.

From the late 19th century a number of European and Indian scholars started the study of ancient India’s history, philosophy, science, religions and literature. This growing knowledge of India’s past glory provided to the Indian people a sense of pride in their civilization. It also helped the reformers in their work of religious and social reform for their struggle against all type of inhuman practices, superstitions etc.

India’s relations with the world date back to pre-historic times. India’s contact with the outside world was made possible both by land and sea routes. The earliest travellers to give accounts of India dated back to the 4th century. Literature was written in the form of travel accounts for the very first time. Wanderers and explorers recorded their adventures and voyages in the form of travel literature.

Journeys undertaken by spiritual seekers have been recorded in writing by the travellers and it is in this way, that Ralph Fitch (1583-91) the first traveller from England gave written accounts about India and created interest among the English to start trade with India. These
accounts were followed by those of Thomas Coryate who walked all the way to India and breathed his last in Surat.

India, attracted many spiritual seekers due to the presence of many Yogis and Rishis. As a travel destination, it was popular for its diverse cultural heritage and natural beauty. Its beauty was praised by the foreign dwellers and some of the most popular destinations were the southern parts of India, with their scenic beauty, and also the hill stations located in the Northern regions.

Among the spiritual seekers, were mostly the international members of the various societies formed in India like the Arya Samaj, Theosophical society etc. They undertook journeys to India to study the hidden secrets which were ingrained into the highly philosophical scriptures of ancient India

Helena Petrovna Blavatsky born on 31 July (12 August new style), 1831, at Yekaterinoslav (from 1926 Dnepropetrovsk) was a Russian-German occultist.

During the course of her journeys which were often many, Helena Blavatsky met an art student named Albert Rawson in Cairo who recollects from memory these words of Blavatsky "This work is not mine, but he who sends me." Her mission was spiritual and for the greater good as opposed to being personal.

In 1856, Blavatsky’s memories about living in India were published in the book From the Caves and Jungles of Hindustan. The book was composed of essays written from 1879 to 1886 under the pen name "Radda-Bay".

Blavatsky helped found the Theosophical Society in New York City in 1875 with the motto, "There is no Religion higher than Truth". Its other principal founding members
include Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907), and William Quan Judge (1851–1896). After several changes and iterations its declared objectives became the following:

1. To form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste, or colour.
2. To encourage the study of Comparative Religion, Philosophy, and Science.
3. To investigate the unexplained laws of Nature and the powers latent in man.

Helena Petrovna Blavatsky undertook a journey into India as a theosophist. She, along with a group of friends travelled to India to explore its rich heritage. They also explored various caves and jungles located in the remote locations of India which had a rich past, under the guidance of a Maratha Brahmin, Thakur Gulab Lal Singh whom she later mentions as her master.

The book, *From the caves and jungles of Hindostan* is written in narrative style by the author. Being a travelogue it is autobiographical and describes the experiences of the author in the mysterious country of India.

The type of travel writing into which the book *From the Caves and Jungles of Hindostan* falls is Inspirational travel writing. This type leaves a spiritual message in the end. The entire book talks about the various adventures had by the theosophists on their journey into India. Every chapter has a particular description of the place visited and hence, it can also be categorized under the adventure type of travel writing.

Helena Blavatsky was herself revered as a god mother and a saint by the Theosophists. She however denies of having any followers or of establishing any “religion.”

The spiritual quest of Helena Blavatsky was directed towards self-improvement gained through her journey into sacred India. The travels though directed towards various
destinations into the jungles and caves, had a deep spiritual impact on the soul of the author as she perceived not only the outer covering but also the hidden divinity in all forms of nature.

Paul Brunton, born in 1898 in London was originally named Raphael Hurst. He changed his name during his journalistic days and it came to stay. He served in a tank division during the First World War, and later devoted himself to mysticism and came into contact with Theosophists.

Apart from the books *A Search in Secret India* and *A Hermit in the Himalayas*, he also wrote another travelogue *A Search in Secret Egypt*. The first two books as their names suggest were accounts of the author’s travels in India. *A Search in Secret India* describes the quest of Brunton for a spiritual teacher. The second book talks about the retreat of Brunton into the Himalayas in search of mystical experiences and peace which are attributed to the holy mountain of the Indians and also the Tibetans. Both the books elucidate the pains taken by Brunton in an honest search for a true spiritual master and the sincerity with which he puts his findings into practice during his search for the mystical experience and its impact on the Human soul.

One of the twentieth century’s greatest explorers of the spiritual traditions of the East, Paul Brunton, left his journalistic career and travelled among the Yogis and mystics and studied Eastern and Western esoteric teachings.

His spiritual practices to sit still and unleash the power of the Overself were combined with the gaining of the working knowledge of the universe. The presence of the spiritual flow in the universe through natural forces and the harmony of man with nature absorbing the divinity existing therein is remarkably described by Brunton.
Nine Lives: In Search of the Sacred in Modern India, is a book written by William Dalrymple about nine different people who chose to strike a balance between the material and the spiritual paths. They are examples of undying devotion in God in the modern era.

Spanning nine different regions in India which included Karnataka, Kerala, Belgaum, Rajasthan, Southern Pakistan near Punjab, Dharamsala, Tamilnadu, Tarapith in Bengal and the banks of the Ajoy river in West Bengal, the book describes the nine most different and remarkable lives of the surviving sacredness in India.

William Dalrymple is a writer of the modern age. He presented the seekers he met during his travels as telling their own tales. The tales are true personal narratives of true spiritual seekers interviewed by the author. The author is not a part of the book; he is merely present in the background to introduce his characters to the reader.

Both the books give an account of sacred India which virtually exists in privacy. The true seekers in search of peace and enlightenment inhabit this world which lies secreted in the heart of India. Dalrymple sought this secret and succeeded in bringing to light the fact that India is still a spiritual country beneath the face of modernism.

India is a country to which millions of people throng daily in search of peace and tranquillity and sacred India is an essential part of it. The term ‘Sacred’ means something or someone considered worthy of spiritual respect or devotion; or inspiring awe or reverence among believers in a given set of spiritual ideas. In other contexts, even objects are often considered 'holy' or 'sacred' if used for spiritual purposes, such as the worship of the idols of Gods. It is often ascribed to people- "a holy man" of religious occupation, "holy prophet" who is venerated by his followers and a "sacred artefact" that is venerated and blessed.
These three authors chose travelogues as they were quoting their personal experiences. The travelogues of Blavatsky and Paul Brunton appear to have been written in Diary form. The narrator is the author himself narrating his experiences on the course of his/her travels. The content is autobiographical, and written in first person narrative.

Dalrymple however is not autobiographical, he writes in the reporting style, where his travels and encounters are described with the character in the focal point. The author, retreats to the background and the character whose life story is being projected, becomes the narrator of his/her own story.

Even though the paths and approaches towards spirituality of the three authors are different, they are in many ways similar to each other. First, all three of them made use of the travelogue as the means to convey their experiences in the course of their travels. The type of expression differs. Helena Blavatsky employs the narrative style and narrates her experiences offering detailed descriptions of the particular place and its historic significance. The wisdom of the sacred scriptures is also ingrained into the text.

Paul Brunton also employs the narrative style, with occasional reflections on the Indian way of life and the Indian’s idea of spirituality. His books are entirely autobiographical and leave a profound spiritual message. The book *A Search in Secret India* is considered as a bible for the spiritual seeker who is in search of a Guru. The subtitle of the book itself is “the classic work on seeking a Guru.”

The books of both these writers contain vivid descriptions of nature. The beauty of nature and the important role it plays in enhancing one’s spiritual abilities is discussed.

William Dalrymple stands apart from the two writers, as he is not on a spiritual quest, but he presents the existence of spirituality and is striving to help the sacred traditions which
are on the verge of extinction like the epic of Pabuji Maharaj, which is considered mot scared by the Rajasthani bhopas.

Through the works of these writers, we can trace the differences in the scenario of Indian Spirituality. When Blavatsky and Paul Brunton were writing, India was under the colonial rule and was averse to the western practices.

As time progressed with the advent of the Westernization of the Indian mind, globalisation became the need of the hour. In the twenty first century, with the rapid progression of the New India, where materialistic life is adopted by the average Indian, the essence of the Old India or in this case Sacred India is still being preserved by the few who have made spirituality a prominent part of their lives.

Another significant aspect of the three writers is that they do not exoticize the East. They attempt to humanize the exotic.

“The modern Sannyasi, in the West as in the East, wears the garb of ordinary men, mingle with them as one of themselves, and yet inwardly is the renouncer.”

Sacred India is today in harmony with Indian modernity, and religion and modernity are marching together towards a greater good. The soul and mind are reconciled and their efficacies are embedded into every Indian. The quest for spirituality is the dream of every individual who has strong religious values.

“As brain is more productive in the long run than hand, so is soul more productive than brain. It is this non-economist conception of the individual which is ingrained in every Indian.”