CHAPTER VI

CULTURAL ENCOUNTERS IN TRAVEL NARRATIVES

Travelling is the means of encountering a strange land/people. The land/people are not foreign, but it is the traveller who is the foreign element in the ‘strange’ land. It is the perception of the traveller that makes him/her call a place/people foreign/new. This happens when the traveller observes certain features or characteristics that he/she has not yet seen in his/her place/people. The perception of the traveller hence makes the land/people appear foreign. The documentation of such peculiar aspects of the foreign land makes travel narratives an interesting and informative literary text for the readers in the academic circles. The traveller’s documentation are hence sources to understand how he/she encounters a foreign land. The travelled land attains an identity as the writer/traveller compares/contrasts or associates/dissociates his identity with the ‘strange’ land.

The detailed study of the travel narratives of D. H. Lawrence, V. S. Naipaul, Bruce Chatwin and S. K. Pottekkatt that was done in the previous chapters have brought in various issues on culture and identity as presented in the select travel narratives by the travellers/writers. The use of words like ‘strange’, ‘self’, ‘other’, ‘foreign’, ‘dark’, have all generated issues related to the construction of identity for the people and the place that the writer documents in his narrative. The genuineness of such usages will be discussed in this chapter where select travellers/writers will be analysed together by making comparison and contrasting statements of each other to show the relevance of the study on travel narratives and cultural encounter.

Travel narratives, as understood from the previous chapters are providing valuable information on how the writers encountered culture based on the documentation that they had made through their individual experiences from the different places that they had visited. Observations are made on how the perception of the writer/traveller can build up the ‘identity’ of the people and place that he had visited, as well as on his own ‘self’ identity in the new/foreign place.
From this study it could be observed that travel narratives do discuss cultural discourses through the encounter of a foreign place/people by the traveller/writer. Edward Said, in *Culture and Imperialism* remarks: “The internalization of norms used in cultural discourse, the rules to follow when statements are made, the ‘history’ that is made official as opposed to the history that is not; all these of course are ways to regulate public discussion in all societies.”¹ Travel writers could be seen in all the travel narratives as presenting a picture of the foreign places entirely different from the notions that already existed about the place. In this way they are creating a new identity for the people/place, whether it be Italians, Sardinians, Indians, Australians, Patagonian or Africans, that could be entirely different from the viewpoint of the indigenous people whose identity is created by the writer. Thus travel narratives provide platforms for discussions on the writer’s point of view about the culture of the place that he had visited. The study of culture through travel narratives leaves more space for discussion based on the narrator/traveller’s encounter of a new/foreign culture.

Even though the study of culture is an important area for research, people have lost their interest in this field of study as evident from the comments of Robert Wuthnow, in *Cultural Analysis*:

Why culture failed to advance? According to social scientists culture actually made relatively little difference in human affairs and for this reason, ceased applying their best efforts to its investigation. They turned from the ephemeral realm of attitudes and feelings to the more obdurate facts of social life-income, inequality, unemployment, fertility rates, group dynamics, crime, and the like.²

From this comment, it could be clearly evident that commercial and economic interests have created a fracture in the advancement of the study of culture. The need for involving the study of culture in research could be seen from the comments of Homi K. Bhabha, in *Nation and Narration* when he points out: “The ambivalent perspective of nation as narration will establish the cultural boundaries of nation so that they may be acknowledged as containing thresholds of
meaning that must be crossed, erased and translated in the process of cultural production.” This comment emphasizes the relevance of this study on travel narrative and cultural encounter, as the culture of any country is to be encountered and studied as it contains multitudes of hidden meanings.

A new culture is encountered when the writer deliberately cross boundaries of his culture to experience the life of the people of a new/foreign place. This is the reason for the curiosity of the traveller while viewing a new/foreign group of people with peculiar beliefs and mannerisms. The curiosity that the traveller has towards a foreign place and its people might be triggered through reading a book about the place or by conversing with the people whom he came across. Hence the new/foreign place and people already acquire significance in the writer’s imagination even before visiting it. Benedict Anderson, the culture critic, comments on the significance of the communion between human beings. He remarks: “It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.” This comment emphasizes that curiosity to know the fellow beings is the reason for most of the travels.

Inferences are drawn in this study based on the observations made from the select travel narratives of the travellers/writers analysed in the previous chapters. It enabled me in answering some genuine doubts that could arise about the encounter of culture that includes: What is cultural encounter? How does cultural encounter occur in travel narratives? What is the role of the traveller/writer in the encounter of culture? Significance of place, the tale (narrated) and the narrator and so on. Edward Said’s, Orientalism raises similar doubts on culture:

How does one represent other culture? What is another culture? Is the notion of a distinct culture a useful one, or does it get involved in self-congratulation. Do cultural, religious and racial differences matter more than socio-economic categories, or politico historical ones? What is the role of intellectual? Is he there to validate the
state and culture of which he is part? What importance does he give to an independent consciousness?5

These questions are answered by me with reference to the observations and inferences made from the previous chapters. The writer/traveller’s experience of culture are represented through the customs, beliefs, mannerisms and the behaviour shown by the people from the different places that were documented in the travel narratives. The writer/traveller could be seen as relying on to their identity of being a foreigner visiting a new place in the narratives. The writer, as seen from his narratives would only include those aspects that he feels note worthy in his accounts. Other positive/negative aspects of the people/place are consciously left out during the construction of the identity as seen through the analysis of the travel narratives.

The first person narrator, or the ‘I’ of the travel narratives stands for the select authors who were already discussed in the previous chapters. They have cautiously used the first person narrative voice as a strategy of narration to give importance to their observations about the people and the places that they had visited. Individual consciousness of the traveller/writer is seen as having importance in the travel narratives. He could be seen as consciously and cautiously constructing the identity of the place/people that he had visited through his narratives. The comment of Homi. K. Bhabha is relevant in this context to show the ambivalence that would happen in the narration of any nation or culture. He remarks:

What I emphasize is that within the liminal image of the nation is a particular ambivalence that haunts the idea of the nation, the language of those who write it and the lives of those who live it. It is an ambivalence that emerges from a growing awareness the cultural temporality of the nation inscribes a transitional social reality.6

This comment emphasizes the inference made by the researcher that an ambivalence could occur in the construction of the cultural identity of a new/foreign place/people in any travel narrative. Thus, most of the travel narratives
discussed in this dissertation might not fully discuss real cultural identity of a nation and its people. It can be a cautious construction of the identity of a new place by the writer/traveller to meet his personal/individual requirements. The traveller/writer is the creator of the identity of the people of a foreign place and if the people are misrepresented, he in turn becomes the destructor of people’s identity. This emphasises that the individual consciousness of the narrator/traveller is significant in the analysis of any travel narratives. Only few of the narrators in the previous chapters have used the second and third person narrative voice to show how ‘other’ people felt about their place of stay. But most of these second hand narrative voices often substantiated with the arguments that the writer already had in his mind. The technique of using second hand and the third hand narrative voice often is found to be a failure in the travel narration. They just gave repetitions of what the writer/traveller had already said.

It could be inferred that the traveller/writer does differentiate himself from the foreign place that he had visited. The ‘other’ culture that the writer represents is that of the new/foreign country or place that he visited. The country or the place that he visited is not new/foreign but the writer’s perception colours the identity of the place as ‘foreign’. From the analysis of the travel narratives it could be seen that the travel writers quite consciously or unconsciously enter into self congratulation about the culture to which they belong as could be seen from the travel narratives of D. H. Lawrence, V. S. Naipaul, Bruce Chatwin and S. K. Pottekkatt. This could be seen from the comparisons that the writers made about their country with the new/foreign country that they visited.

Misrepresentation of the life of the people could be inferred as a major drawback in most of the travel narratives. The travel writers often cling to their own views regarding a foreign place that they visited. Everything that they observed and inferred about the people, their life style, the places etc. was purely based on how they experienced it. Hence the travel narratives documented biased or prejudiced views of the writer/traveller about the new place and people as seen from D. H. Lawrence’s and V. S. Naipaul’s travel narratives.
Often the writers are seen in the travel narratives as making comparisons between their life style, beliefs and mannerisms with that of the strange/foreign people that they met during their travels. It could be seen from the close analysis of the travel narratives that the writers had preconceived notions about the places that they visited, prior to their visit as seen from the observations of D. H. Lawrence’s and V. S. Naipaul’s narratives. This has generated ‘culture shocks’ in them when the place/people does not meet their expectations. The preconceived notions are formed by the explanations given by people who had been there or from other book sources as seen in Bruce Chatwin and S. K. Pottekkatt. The writers can be seen as taking deliberate effort to understand the foreign land and the people out of their own personal experiences.

Racial, cultural and religious differences do matter more for a traveller who visits a new/foreign place as the people would show indifference to the foreign person. The writer, as he came from another cultural background does have prejudices and problems while viewing a foreign culture as seen in D. H. Lawrence’s travel narratives. The role of the writer/traveller as seen from the travel narratives is to generate awareness to the people whom he feels less superior to his culture as seen in the humanist narration of D. H. Lawrence. The writer creates a new/foreign identity for the people through his narrative which could be different from the already existing notions. The writer could be seen in the narrative as often making comparative judgments between the European and the non-European culture as in the case of V. S. Naipaul and S. K. Pottekkatt. The independent ‘self’, of the writer gains prominence through the travel narratives where the second person narrators substantiate the arguments that they hold.

Identity had a major role to play in travel narration as inferred from the analysis of the travel narratives. The writers who were taken for this study can be seen as often relying on their own ‘national’ or ‘racial identity’. People whom the writers came across in the foreign land are often associated with the ‘other’ identity. The ‘other’ is often different from the narrator/traveller. They are presented by the writers with the element of curiosity and wonder as if they represent a curio to be looked upon and are not living things like the travellers as seen in the observations made from D. H. Lawrence’s and V. S. Naipaul’s
narratives. A few writers selected for this study have taken efforts to mingle with the indigenous people and lived as one among them as evident from the observations made from Bruce Chatwin and S. K. Pottekkatt’s narratives. The writers/travellers selected for this study were often insensitive towards the foreign land/people due to the personal biases that they had.

Racial/national identity is a social construct to which the writer/traveller often consciously or unconsciously sticks to. The writers analysed in this dissertation often relied on their national identities, but they do not hinder their understanding of a foreign place or people even though they influence their psyche. Travellers are often in the quest to understand the deeper comradeship that people share across national and cultural boundaries. ‘Nation’ in the words of Benedict Anderson: “is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.” The travellers discussed in this study do not fully dissociate themselves from their ‘cultural identity’ during their travelling and narration, even though they mingle with the foreign people they have their own personal motives in mind. The motive behind mingling with the people of a foreign land as inferred from the travel narratives can be either to study a foreign culture or be liberated from one’s own racial and national identity. Whatever be the motive behind the travels, the writer/traveller is seen from the narratives as deliberately trying to detach from his cultural identity. Edward Said mentions thus:

The more one is able to leave ones cultural home, the more easily is one able to judge it, and the whole world as well, with the spiritual detachment and generosity necessary for true vision. The more easily, too, does one assess one self and alien culture with the same combination of intimacy and distance.

This comment emphasizes the inference that the writer/traveller has tried to make a conscious effort to know a new/foreign culture, but their prejudices or personal biases have coloured their narratives. Obsession with one’s cultural home made most of the writers see the new place as ‘foreign’ and ‘strange’. This is the recurring theme in most of the narratives. I have made random selection of
different places and writers/travellers to understand how the encounter of culture occurred through travelling and documenting. The writers selected for this study do not belong to the new places that they visited, even in the case of V. S. Naipaul.

One of the major observation is that, even though the writers analysed in this dissertation tried to focus on the real life experiences, they often come up with harsh criticism of the life of the people that they encountered. This could be seen as a major drawback in travel narration. From the analysis of the travel narratives that were taken for this study, it could be inferred that religious, social and racial differences can alter the identity of a place especially when a foreign person is documenting about ‘other’ place that he/she had visited. Political and economic aspects could also frame the identity of any place and people. Religious and racial differences that the writers have, have to be minimized in travel documentation as it alters the identity of the people.

From this study, it could be noted that the narrator’s notions of his ‘self’ identity, and his capacity to accurately identify the ‘other’ culture inspite of the predominance of his cultural identity is quite a difficult process. For this a collective sense of cultural consciousness should be there in the writer as belonging to a single culture. The writers need to be careful in framing the identity of a community that they represent through their writing. Travel narratives as seen from this study are often fictionalizing the non-fictional experiences that the writers had, to fit to the reader’s tastes. The reader’s imagination works to get a vivid picture of the country that the writer/traveller had encountered. Hence a conscious construction of the identity occurs in the mind of the readers about the ‘other’ that the writer/traveller documented. In short, travel narratives can construct positive/negative identity for the people/place through the traveller/writer’s documentation, keeping into consideration the various motives/intensions that he has.

Thus identity is constructed by the writer/traveler’s and transferred to the minds of the readers through their documentation. The travel narratives of D. H. Lawrence, *Sea and Sardinia* and *Twilight in Italy*, focused on the theme of exile and elemental liberty that the writer was in quest of during his travels to Italy and
Sardinia. The need for individual freedom is seen as the prime factor that made the writer encounter a new culture. It made him search for a personal space which would help him to move out freely. It was in the need for elemental liberty that the writer encountered the Italian and Sardinian culture. Lawrence’s narrative focussed mainly on the ‘I’ or the individuals experience that the writer had during his travels. The ideas of the first person or the traveller could be seen as colouring the whole narrative. The writer’s prejudiced views on the new/foreign place that he had visited, often made his stay in Italy and Sardinia miserable. This could be seen in his travel narratives as making the writer set for travels again.

Freedom of the soul and love for remoteness are the major themes recurring throughout Lawrence’s narratives. These travel narratives highlight that Lawrence’s travels were a quest to know more about his individual ‘self’ than to study about the life of the people around him. These observations show that Lawrence could have been a little more sympathetic in his effort to study the culture of the Italians and the Sardinians.

Italians are referred with all the negative traits like ‘Children of the Shadow’, ‘furtive creatures’ and so on. These comments provided the people a negative ‘identity’ that was assigned through the Western European attitudes of the writer. Lawrence could be seen in the narrative as branding the Italians as ‘dark’, ‘shadow’ and ‘constant’ and his people as ‘clear’, ‘light’ and ‘evanescent’. These observations show the biased and prejudiced attitude that the writer had about the people that resulted in the identity construction of the people. His narratives occasionally form comparisons between his culture and the Italian and Sardinian culture. This point affirms that Lawrence is unable to get rid of his Western European identity even though he deliberately tries to get rid of it.

Lawrence’s obsession with the theme of religion could be seen in the repetitive and descriptive comments that he made of the crucifixes in Italy and about the mockery that the Sardinians make on themselves through their dressings to go to church on Sunday. Lawrence’s travel narratives could be seen as platforms where the Western European, Italian and Sardinian identities conflict with each other.
Lawrence could be seen as making clear distinction between his ideas of the new/foreign place and the people. He does not want his preconceived ideas of the new/foreign place that he is going to visit, to be altered with his new experiences. This often could be seen as making the writer furious in his narrative. His expectation could be seen as not being met, neither by the people of Sardinia nor by the people of Italy. The inability to mingle with the people had led to disappointment and had made the writer enraged and brand the people as ‘strange’ creatures. These judgements are the products of the influence of the writer’s culture in the narrative. These views hinder the real if any, identity of the people of Sardinia and Italy.

The travel narratives of V. S. Naipaul do convey valuable information about Indian culture. The focal point of this was to analyse the value judgements that the author/traveller often consciously or unconsciously made would colour the cultural identity in his travel narratives. The writer can be seen in his narratives as drifting from his Indian identity to the European identity. He can be seen as often confused with the position that he takes while viewing India. The major reason for the discontent and disillusionment that he had suffered during his visit to India was in accordance to this.

Naipaul’s travel narrative on India makes the reader ponder over the cultural and political changes that occurred in India after the country attained its Independence. Naipaul’s vision of India is neither that of an indigenous Indian nor that of a Trinidadian visiting a foreign place. He is part of India and also separate from India. Hence his vision of India is peculiar. The physical and mental distancing that the traveller/writer had from India, made his views on India biased. The strangeness that the writer felt with India was mainly due to the feeling of being associated with Trinidad and the mental distancing that he had with Indian culture.

The psychological attitudes of the writer/traveller hence have a vital role in the construction of the cultural identity of a foreign place/people. Naipaul is focussing largely on the cultural decay that India suffered through his travel
narratives. He is laying his hands on what ever deficiency that he could find in the country whether it be religious, political or moral for Naipaul. The fragmented notions of the people on the principles of Hinduism and on the ideologies of freedom fighters have led Indians to moral decay. The Gandhian principles are presented by the writer as a tool for non-interference or indifference to social development. The writer/traveller through his travel narratives is hence assigning a new identity to the foreign land and its people by portraying it as in no way superior to his place.

Awareness of the writer’s cultural identity was what overpowered him throughout his trip to India. Naipaul’s vision of India is fractured through the multiple cultural baggages that he carries which inturn generated ‘culture shock’ in him. The burden of the two cultural influences made the writer confused and biased as seen from his travel narratives. Naipaul’s sense of Trinidadian identity hindered his perceptions about the people of India. This observation is further emphasised by the observations of Edward Said, who states:

We have never been aware as we now are of how oddly hybrid, historical and cultural experiences are, of how they partake of many often contradictory experiences and domain, cross national boundaries defy the police action of simple dogma and loud patriotism. Far from being unitary or monolithic or autonomous things, cultures actually assume more foreign elements, alterities, differences, than they consciously exclude. Who in India or Algeria today can confidently separate out the British or French component of the past from present actualities, and who in Britain or France can draw a clear circle around British London or French Paris that would exclude the impact of India and Algeria upon those two imperial cities?9

This comment shows that Naipaul’s multiple cultural identity had helped him to come up with vivid comparison of Indian and Trinidadian culture. But the notions of the traveller do not get biased out of it. The new identity that India got through Naipaul’s travel narrative is due to the ‘culture shock’ that the writer
experienced. This is the reason for his discontent and disillusionment. The traveller can alter the identity of the new culture according to his personal intentions or based on the likes and dislike of the readers of his observation/documentation as happened in the case of V. S. Naipaul’s travel narratives. This could make the documentation/observation inadequate. Peter Berger’s comment shows the inadequacy that could occur in the study of any culture as an individual’s perceptions of a culture could be partial. He explains:

Culture is ‘the totality of man’s products’ defining culture in this way is to view it not only as material artifacts and non-material socio-cultural formations that guide human behavior, (what we call society is a segment of culture) but the reflection of this world as it is contained within human consciousness.  

From this observation, it could be understood that the traveller/writer could make only precise judgements through his/her personal experiences. Naipaul’s observations and conscious construction of Indian culture, even though might prove wrong in the real Indian concept of culture if any, hence remains pardonable.

Bruce Chatwin’s travel narratives In Patagonia and The Songlines provide a detailed analysis of culture from two different cultural contexts. The quest to know the cultural roots could be seen as the common factor that inspired/motivated Chatwin to undergo these important travels.

Chatwin himself does not take sufficient effort to study the language and to undergo many ceremonies which prove important for the study of the aboriginal culture in The Songlines. On the other hand, he uses transcribers to study culture. This shows that his experiences are more peripheral than the lived experiences of the indigenous people. He does not belong to the category of travellers who endure ‘acute’ travels for the sake of experiencing the extremities of various real life situations in a strange/foreign place. Through cultural encounter the new land and people are assigned foreign and ‘strange’ identity through the cultural documentation of the writer in his travel narrative. The recreation of the past life of the ancestors is a major aspect working in the theme of In Patagonia where the
tracing of the brontosaur’s history ‘recreates’ the British readers. This ‘recreation’ is less imaginary/fictional compared to the history of the real life of the Australian aborigines in *The Songlines*.

Chatwin’s intense quest to understand the Australian aboriginal ancestry often could be seen as leading him towards the obsession with the song lines and the myths pertinent among the indigenous people. His obsessions with ‘aboriginal’ life make him encounter the Australian culture. Even though Chatwin seems to be obsessed with the aboriginal life, he could be seen as occasionally showing disbelief towards the sacred culture of the people which could be due to his Britishness. The sacred symbols of the indigenous people like the ‘tjuringa’ are seen and described by the writer with lesser sensitiveness. His obsessions could be seen as disastrous when he tries to play with the sacred cultural symbols of the aboriginals including ‘tjuringa’, ‘dream tracks’, and ‘totem’.

The travel narrative on Australia could be considered as an attempt by the writer to disclose the aboriginal world that the people of Australia have always kept secretive. In the process of revealing the private world of the indigenous people, the writer shows his insensitive signs. Even though Chatwin does not wish to bring his British identity and prejudices into the narrative, it could be seen as unconsciously present throughout the narrative while branding the people as ‘aborigines’. The writer’s concern does not focus on any of the other settlers in Australia as he is seen in his narrative as fully obsessed with the aboriginal world.

Similarly, *In Patagonia* shows glimpses of the culture of the Patagonians through the description of Chatwin’s own opinions about the individuals that he met on his journey. No clear study on the culture of the Patagonians could be made as the writer/traveller’s obsession proved to be focused on providing detailed description about the evolution of the animal from the scientific point of view where more of the narrative is used to study the animal life which in turn reduces the scope for an in-depth study on human nature and culture. Chatwin emphasises more in this travel narrative on the evolutionary theories than on the portrayal of the people of Patagonia. *In Patagonia* does not provide much information about the
life of the people in that country except some occasional remarks about the acquaintances that the traveller had.

The Patagonian narrative does emphasize on Darwin’s theory of evolution. Chatwin’s quest to understand the song lines and the brontosaurus skin has left his narrative more as anthropological and scientific sources than as travel narratives. Chatwin could also be seen as including more fictional accounts in his travels narratives in the form of stories or songs within the travel narration. Scientific theories also blur the purpose of genuine ‘non fictional’ accounts. These are the basic inferences that came out of the analysis of Chatwin’s travel narratives *In Patagonia* and *The Songlines*.

S. K. Pottekkatt, as can be observed from his travel narratives, was a writer who was successful to a larger extent in depicting the African culture without losing its peculiarities. A single individual of Africa was for him, representing the doom of the whole race. The impact of colonization on the civilization and culture of Africa can be seen as highlighted in his travel narrative. African culture could be seen represented as a doomed culture as the people were innocent and ignorant. This had been the reason for the long years of colonization that the race suffered.

Pottekkatt could be seen as giving a new positive identity to Africa that is entirely different from the colonial identity that the continent had. S. K. at many points in his narratives could be seen as coming to grips with his own colonial identity. There are many passages were the tensions between his native identity and the identity of the people/land he encounters become sufficiently evident. (see.181, 182) For instance, he was trying to associate all the places that he saw and the people that he met with Kerala, a state in India. His narrative brings out the inference that he was trying to find elements of his cultural home in the foreign lands that he had visited. At times the writer is filled with wonder on seeing new/foreign places, but suddenly he could also be seen as comparing and contrasting the place with Kerala.

S. K. Pottekkatt as seen from the observations was also the product of a country, India, which was under the colonial rule before it attained its
Independence. He feels that India has been able to come out of the trauma of colonial past. On his visit to Africa, he was able to see that that country did not recover out of long years of colonization. Pottekkatt is spreading the message to the people of Africa to have an independent identity through his travel narration.

African life was presented by the writer as diverse with their peculiar beliefs and customs. Even though the people of Africa were the real owners of the country, they were still under the subjugation of the colonizers. He describes many instances of White subjugation on Africans. Even the landscape of Africa is presented by the writer in his travel narratives as under the control of Europeans. Even the famous waterfalls of the continent were named after the Europeans as seen from the observations. The writer could be seen as occasionally blaming the people of Africa for the conditions in which they live. Here, African ‘cultural decay’ occurred through colonization.

Even though African civilization was branded by the Europeans as savages and cannibalistic the people were documented by the writer as having polished behaviour and were living with a well set code of conduct. They were also presented as innocent and humorous. Hence it could be inferred that the writer tries to create through his narrative a new identity for the ‘dark’ continent. Even though Africa is a foreign country for the writer he relates the same fate of India’s colonial past with Africa. He is able to find his Indian ‘self’ in the African ‘other’. The sympathy and support of the writer was always with Africans. Hence the writer feels a commonality in the fate of the colonized countries and he tries to present to the readers that the colonized countries have their own marvels in the form of beliefs, traditions, art, mannerism and so on. This is again a new construction of identity to Africa by the writer.

As we have highlighted in the foregoing chapters, the ‘identity’ of a nation/civilization is a careful construction by the writer through the encounter of a new/foreign culture. Hence such documentations can remain entirely different from the real life experiences that the indigenous people might have. Through the encounter of culture, the writer could be seen as creating a strange/foreign identity for the old land and people. Hence construction of a new identity for a foreign
place and for a ‘strange’ identity for the people is the common feature that all the travel narratives that were analysed in the previous chapters have. This foreign identity is coloured by the writer’s understanding/perception.

Thus from the analysis of the travel narratives it could be confirmed that travel narratives are sources that document the encounter of culture for the encountered land/people by the traveller/writer where by the identity is constructed. The identity that is assigned to a place/people is purely a construct of the traveller/writer. The writer could be seen from the travel narratives as choosing his self identity to narrate about a land/people. It is a means of deliberate construction of identity to a place/people which need not be accepted by the people who live there. The choice of selecting a place for travelling and narrating depends purely on the author like the identity that he constructs to the foreign people/place. While constructing the identity of a people/place he automatically assigns a foreign identity for himself. The identity that the writer assigns for him can be considered as the writer/traveller’s ‘self’ and the identity that he assigns for the new/foreign place/people is the ‘other’ so as to make the comparison of any travel narrative easier.

Travel narratives necessarily do not only construct an identity for the narrated land/people but also construct an identity for the writer consciously or unconsciously. Thus parallel identities are formed in travel narration which could help in the better understanding of different places if taken in the right sense and not for any value judgement or qualitative analysis. This would help in the understanding of humanity not based on the differences in different cultures but based on what makes the foreign culture different from the already established notions. Thus travel narratives and cultural encounter is a vast area of study which could not be limited within literature but has a larger horizon of implication, when viewed from the sociological, political and anthropological point of view to which the study could be further extended.

The identity that is created through the cultural encounter is based purely on the writer’s point of view which can be different from the existing notions of the identity about the place/people. Thus travel narratives can be considered as
sources where the writer ‘recreates’ a foreign identity for the readers so that it becomes sources of information and recreation through the encounter of culture.

From the foregoing analysis of travel narratives the major inferences that could be made on the study of travel narratives and cultural encounter are as follows:

Travel narratives are valuable sources for the study of cultural encounter as the traveller crosses his/her cultural boundaries and encounters a foreign culture as D. H. Lawrence, Naipaul, Chatwin and S. K. Pottekkatt had done. Cross-cultural encounter occurs in travels narratives when an individual deliberately tries to study the people and places that are foreign/strange to him/her.

Curiosity or wonder is the major element that works behind the encounter of a ‘foreign’ culture as is obvious in S. K. Pottekkatt. This is the guiding force that inspires the travel writers to visit the places and to narrate about it. Cultural encounter through travel narratives redefines the existing notions on cultural identity of a place as the ‘identity’ of a place is carefully constructed by the writer/narrator. The encounter of culture occurs when an attempt is made to study a foreign culture by the traveller/writer.

Travel narratives can be used to understand the culture of any particular group, community or civilization of a particular period of time. Culture could be understood as an abstract term which need not necessarily be restricted to the behaviour, beliefs and traditions of any particular group or individual as could be understood from the study of the travel narratives. Culture should not be assessed based on any particular individual, as individual views or beliefs may differ from that of other groups or communities.

‘Place’ has greater significance in the creation of the identity of the people of civilization as seen from the analysis of the travel narratives. (see. 13, 27, 32, 33, 44, 45, 66, 67, 68, 80, 86, 87, 99) Place provides an identity to the people as seen from the travel narratives of the select writers. It could provide positive or negative identity based on the narrated land and the narrators attitude/intention.
Identity creation could hence be evidently seen from the narratives. Culture of any particular group, community or civilization need not be assessed based on any preconceived notions or value judgements as could be inferred from the travel narratives.

Travel narratives are the careful construction of the identity of a foreign place and a ‘strange’ people by the writer. The identity of the people is a construction by the writer which can be entirely different from the old notions of the place that had already existed in the minds of the readers. Hence travel narratives reconstruct the identity of a place and people as could be seen from the analysis of the travel narratives of Lawrence, Naipaul, Chatwin and Pottekkatt.

Even though the travellers selected for this study tried to get rid of their cultural identity, unconsciously they brought in comparisons between their culture and the foreign culture that they perceived through their travel narratives. Cross-cultural comparisons are unavoidable in any travel narration as could be seen from the comparison made by Lawrence on Western Europe, Italy and Sardinia, the comparison made by Naipaul between Europe and India, the comparison made by Chatwin between Britain, Australia and Patagonia, and the comparison made by S. K. Pottekkatt between Africa and India especially of Kerala.

Most of the travel writer’s sympathies are with the people of the ‘foreign’ place as the writer’s does have the feeling that the place is not better than their cultural home. Hence the influence of the cultural home is always in the psyche of the writer/traveller and a longing for homecoming can always be observed in the travel narratives.

The preconceived notion of the writer/traveller about a foreign place often lies hidden in his psyche before visiting the place. Some of the travellers try to establish that these notions are false by stating examples in their travel narratives but others toil to create worse identities to the places/people that they had described which will be giving a third dimension of the traveller’s experience that would be different from the real life picture of the civilization/nation. Hence travel
narratives carefully construct a new identity for the place/people that the writer/traveller encountered.
Notes


3 Homi K. Bhabha. *Nation and Narration* (New York: Routledge, 1994) 3


6 Homi K. Bhabha. *Nation and Narration* (New York: Routledge, 1994) 1


9 ---. *Culture and Imperialism* (Manchester: Vintage, 1993) 15