

Indianness in Railway Travel Narratives

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ABSTRACT

Travel is a research into the depths of a previously unexplored city. It expands the boundary of knowledge. Exploring the depths of the nation's external and internal spaces allows the traveller to feel the hues and flavors of its cultural consciousness. Travelling across India by train offers an interesting blend of flavors that reveal the essential Indian sensibility and spirit. Indian trains are true examples of different cultural patterns as it travels through different states of India. The peculiarity of an Indian train is that people of different caste, gender, sex, culture can be seen. Indian trains and railway stations are the best examples of cultural diversities. Railway narratives are cultural travelogues as they are symbolic of the perpetual mark of Indian culture. The Indianness of the nation can be exactly tracked down through railways as its people have inevitably marked themselves on the railways. A study on railway narratives also brings highlights into the obstacles that slow down the development of the nation such as illiteracy, bribing, hunger, corruption, etc. This paper seeks to analyze the importance of Indianness in the travel narratives *Chai Chai: Travels in Places Where You Stop But Never Get Off* by Biswanath Ghosh and *Around India in 80 Trains* by Monisha Rajesh. It also looks upon the importance of railway stations in India.

KEYWORDS : Travel narratives, Indian Train, Culture, Railway Stations.

INTRODUCTION

Travel is considered to be an unavoidable activity of human life. A journey is a part of human existence. It shapes one's life. The ilk for travel remains an external affair and gives the traveller a break from the usual habits that result in the stimulation of soul and mind. At the beginning of the journey, the traveller has only a narrow understanding about the nation to which he has to travel. As the journey progresses, the knowledge about the new place makes the traveler more cheerful.

Travel literature is the written record of a person's personal experiences of visiting places for the sake of travel. Travel narrations are instrumental in transmitting knowledge about the distant and exotic land, its people, and culture. People travel to different places because of many reasons, the most important reason is the desire to go out from their limited world and to know about the unknown.

Travel memories bring a fresh outlook on our lives and the way think. Travelogues act as a vehicle that depicts the duality of the nation. Travelling gives a clear idea of the true identity of the nation. Train plays an important role in bringing people from different parts of the country. The train is the perfect meeting point for different people from different backgrounds. During their journey, they meet a lot of people like pilgrims, nomads, wanderers, people from different cultures, etc. Indian railway stations are one of the most wonderful places for killing time and they are like the models of Indian society. Train journeys help the travelers to recognize and explore the traditional centers, cultural places, etc. The train travel captures the essence of that nation.

By reading the two travel narratives, one can perceive the real essence of India. It also portrays that railway stations are a blend of different cultures. In the travelogue *Chai Chai: Travels in Places Where You Stop But Never Get Off* by Biswanath Ghosh explains the seven small towns in India and the contrast between the cultures of the south and north. In the next travelogue, *Around India in 80 trains* by Monisha Rajesh describes her journey from Delhi to Mumbai to Kanyakumari and the Indian concept. These two narratives give the real nature of India.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

This research paper aims at fulfilling the following aims and objectives:

- To understand the real nature of India
- To show how the Indian culture is different
- To analyze the importance of railway stations in India

HYPOTHESIS

The travelogue is a combination of monologue and travel, mainly written as the author's monologue. Travelogues consist of the travel experiences of an author during his expedition. It is regarded to be one of the widest genres in literature containing various forms of writing relating to nature, exploration, adventure, etc. This genre excavates the hidden facet of a place or people highlighting the importance of travel writing. It opens the way to understand the ideologies and psyche followed by a group of people of a particular region. Travelling has always been a basic human desire. The travellers in India are always in a blaring team. The train travelogues are written with an intention to reach a specific destination and later explore it. These travelogues are mainly inside and around life on a train. This gives a basic idea about the nation and its culture. Indian travelogues seek to discover the truth of India.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Travelogue is a form of creative writing in which the narrator's encounter with different places serves as the central subject. Travel is a movement from a familiar place to an unfamiliar place, a new place. By travelling to different places one acquires knowledge about the unfamiliar place. Travelling expands the knowledge of human beings. It not only makes understand about different heritages and cultures closer but also induces social integrity and understanding.

The present study discusses the Indianness in the travelogues *Chai, Chai: Travels in Places Where You Stop But Never Get Off* by Biswanath Ghosh and *Around India in 80 Trains* by Monisha Rajesh. These travelogues help to understand the real nature of India and Indian culture and also describe how the Indian culture is different. Railway narratives are the cultural travelogues as they are indicative of the permanent sign and Indian culture. It also portrays that Indian railway stations are the blending of different cultures.

Books, journals, and interviews are used as secondary sources. The study is an analysis of two Indian travelogues. The methodology is used as per the MLA eighth edition. Apart from this, almost all directives and guidelines are followed as per the norms and suggestions relating to the research study. For the present study, a broad range of data is collected. Different types of references and critical books relating to this specific area are collected.

INDIAN CULTURAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN RAILWAY NARRATIVES

India has always been a favorite destination among tourists. India has been famous for its ancient traditions, various cultural heritage, spirituality, etc. Thus the cultural consciousness of the

nation and its discrepancy with modern agendas have always been an interesting topic to Indians as well as foreigners. While travelling to different countries allows the traveler to develop his knowledge about its culture. Today's travelogues acknowledge the relationship between culture and power. Indianness can be ideally depicted through the study of railway narratives. Our nation has an effectively connected railway system, which allows the traveler to examine its interiors. It can be said that the Indian railway stations exactly signify the dual nature of the nation. A close examination of any picture of a railway station gives out its vibrancy and simplicity.

Biswanath Ghosh in his work, *Chai Chai: Travels in Places Where You Stop But Never Get Off* discussed the flavor of small towns and depicted the railway stations as the circulatory system of India. They established the link between the urban and isolated rural life. These small towns are known only for the giant railway stations. He found the railway stations as the epicenter of activity in each of the towns. For him, the platform be-like a large hospital ward. He noticed that a large number of homeless people lie down there. They considered railway stations as their temporary residence. The mannerisms of individuals help to understand about his/her culture. The attitudes and beliefs of an individual can be a porthole to recognize the norms and cultural values of a nation. Biswanath Ghosh described one of his experiences of travelling together with Tamilians, Bengalis, and Marwaris, and also he discussed their eating habits. He noted that Bengalis find train journeys as an excuse to eat out while the Marwaris travel together as a large family and always carry a stock of food like Tamilians. For him, train journeys are the exact portrayal of the real India. He noted the contrast between North Indian towns and South Indian towns. South Indian towns are cleaner and their people are more predictable. His journeys to the villages beyond India's major railway junctions give the idea that how the villages have benefited with the establishment of railway stations.

Monisha Rajesh in her travelogue *Around India in 80 trains*, describes about her train journey from Delhi to Mumbai to Kanyakumari, taught that the best way to explore and understand the diverse and rich Indian culture is only through the railway network. She discussed the encounter with the class-conscious society. The travelogue revealed the merging of different cultures in terms of language, customs, etc. She admitted that her co-passengers were very anxious to know about her father's name because it will reveal her caste, class, and community. She also explained the act of hospitality of Indians, it reflects the friendly nature of Indians. The concept of 'Atithidevo bhava' is a very Indian concept. Throughout her journey, she found that at the end of a journey travellers make the train as their home and co-passengers as their family members. She also pointed that travelling through India is filled with "a charming hash of tat and colour". Today many travellers visit India to explore its realms of spirituality. For her, travelling by train is the best way to understand more about the nation. She examined that the Indian railway system is flooded with reservations.

Biswanath Ghosh and Monisha Rajesh observed the Indian way of travelling together in groups. They happened to see some families who are on their way to visit temples. Monisha Rajesh recollected one instance when she happened to see that two foreigners were shocked to see the families travelling together. She responded to the foreigners that "It is a very Indian thing." This conveyed the Indian tradition, where family is given prime importance.

CONCLUSION

Travelogues on train journeys especially bring out the essential Indian spirit through a collective experience. On examining the railway narratives as observed through the encounters and experiences of the travellers, the progression, the culture, and the identity of the nation can be traced. This helps to realize the nation as a chorus of individual voices rather than the inference of a generalized opinion. Railway narratives are the cultural travelogues as they are indicative of the permanent sign of Indian culture. Indian railways revealed the national sensibility in all its

variations. The basis of the Indian community lies in respecting the dissimilarity in its diversification. An analysis of the railway narrative indicated that travelling can be a great leveler and it helped in maintaining the differences between people from different caste, gender, culture, class who travel together. These travelogues concentrated on the concept of multiculturalism. Salad Bowl theory is applicable in these two travelogues. A salad bowl always contains different ingredients. Like a salad bowl, Indian culture is a mixture of different cultures. Diverse culture can be seen in India. Diverse cultures occurred when people from various religions, races, ethnicities, and nationalities come together. The railway station can be said to be the best example. Trains and railway platforms contain elements of diversity. The authors clearly portrayed that railway stations as a place of diverse culture. Travelogues depicted that railway stations as a melting point of culture. Across the globe, the hospitality of India is known with the concept of 'Atithidevobava,' which is treating guests like a god. This has created a sense of Indianness. The train journeys allow the people from rural areas to connect to mainstream India. This created a feeling of belongingness among the people in the nation. The railroad literature reflects the Indianness that is contained in its travelogues. Travelling helps to understand the peculiarities of a country that unites it together forever.

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