Heterotopic Meanderings: A Study of Vikram Seth's *From Heaven Lake* and Amitav Ghosh's "Dancing in Cambodia"

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Abstract

Travel writing, in today's time is a marginalized genre if not a neglected one. The paper attempts to look at travelling from various perspectives. In case of postcolonial and postmodern travel writers it can be seen that travel writing is no more an act of mere 'rhetoric or aesthetics.' The travel writing genre can be seen as one that includes geography, history, economics, culture and a privileging as masculine. Seth's *From Heaven Lake* and Ghosh's "Dancing in Cambodia" besides being travel accounts acquire socio-economic and historical-political dynamics in a spatial sense that is Foucauldian. The paper attempts to look at the twin aspects of these texts where a traveller becomes a historian. Seth and Ghosh are able to write in a "third space," as theorised by Homi K. Bhabha and developed by Edward Soja, juxtaposing the images of the past and present; contrasting the attempts of destruction (political forces) and preservation (social forces) and conveying the conflict of cultures in the place of visit. Both can be seen as attempts to historically construct what has been obliterated by the totalitarian manoeuvres. These travel writings create a world mixing their individual journeys with the contemporary political scenario which make their works "heterotopias," of hybrid experience rather than conveying a single image of their utopia or feared dystopia.

Key Words : Travel Naratives, displacement, colonial history, periodization, spatialization, thirdspace, heterotopia, cosmopolitan identity

Travelling is many-textured: spiritually (visiting a holy place); commercially (for trade); economically (when rendered to tourism); aesthetically (for scenic beauty); culturally (for adding knowledge about new culture); geographically (in exploring the locale). Accordingly, words like adventures, journeys, escapades, explorations, expeditions, excursions, outings, quests, sojourns, tours, trips, voyages, visits, wanderings – become synonyms of travelling.

The history of migration, movement and displacement shows that travel was an ever existing phenomenon both in the Western world and the Eastern world. *Epics were the earliest travel narratives* as they showed the journey of the protagonist be it Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* or *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. They tend to become classics, as Salman Rushdie says, the best of travel-adventures are those in which "some inner journey, some adventure in the self; is the real point" (Rushdie 225). The epics presented the majestic stoicism of a "human being pitted against the immensity of the universe" like "the lone sailor in the small boat" against the might of the sea (Rushdie 222). The corpus of travel narrative was later augmented by the addition of sea narratives, adventure writings, histories, diaries, memoirs, and colonial narratives (both: 1. the imperialist; 2. the slave and indentured narratives). Mildred Mortimer elaborates in "African Journeys":

The very notion of travel calls forth a series of binary oppositions, for journeys are desired or feared, successful or thwarted, individual or collective. They can involve experiences of discovery and/or experiences of spiritual growth and renewal. Most

important, the voyage holds out a promise of transformation, of broader horizons and deeper knowledge. (169)

In fact, the earliest literature that we have in English, had the elements of journey and travelling. While Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (1387) deals with the pilgrims' journey from Tabard Inn in Southwark to St. Thomas Becket's shrine in Canterbury; the knights of Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* were sent on quests by Queen Gloriana. The plays of Shakespeare like *Twelfth Night*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *The Tempest* are set in the context of sea voyages. The picaresque novels hugely made the use of travel mode as can be seen in Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* and *Robinson Crusoe,* and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. Romantic poetry also exhibits its inclination towards poetic wanderings, as can be seen in the journey taken by Wordsworth "outside the city" in *The Prelude* or the mariner's expedition in Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. Travelling as an adventure also becomes strikingly appealing in children's literature, for example in Mark Twain's *Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*, Robert Louis Stevenson's *Kidnapped* and *Treasure Island*, Enid Blyton's *Famous Five,* and Hergé's cartoon series *The Adventures of Tintin*.

Ferdinand Magellan's attempt to go around the world, discovery of America and India by Christopher Columbus and Vasco-da-Gama, respectively, were attempts to find the new territory to rule as the land in their home countries failed to sustain the growing population (Hays 181; McNeill 573). Salman Rushdie writes that "Candide/ Quixote model of adventure" which was based on "escaping from their own roots, from the prisons of everyday reality" has becomes a "Western Phenomenon" (224). Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* beautifully ascertain this fact. It is also apparent that *travelling was seen as a colonial enterprise*[1] (Loomba 8; Ashcroft, et al. 207; Viswanathan 20).

The journey motive in the postmodern/ postcolonial novel remains pivotal for its narrative as marked in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*, Yann Martel's *Life of Pi*, Patrick White's *Voss*, Peter Carey's *Parrot and Olivier in America*, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, and in Anita Rau Badami's *Tamarind Mem*. Salman Rushdie writes that for the travellers in the contemporary age:

> Their true ancestors are not, perhaps, so much the wandering heroes of the classical epoch (Jason, Ulysses, and the unspeakably pious Aeneas) as the picaros of the novel. Many of the most appealing pieces of twentieth-century 'travel writing' read very much like picaresque novels offering us the notion of adventure-as-mad-quest. (223)

In the postcolonial period travel may have become academic or professional or aesthetical, however it has not been able to come out of its "colonial motives" which is precisely an attempt to intrude into the unknown. The colonial tendency can be clearly traced as Rushdie notices that "adventuring is, these days, by and large a movement that originates in the rich parts of the planet and heads for the poor. Or a journey from the crowded cities towards the empty spaces, which may be another way of saying the same thing" (224). However, Homi K. Bhabha looks at travelling from a cross-cultural perspective which is an outcome of colonisation. He writes that "it is the space of intervention …that introduces creative invention into existence…there is a return to the performance of identity as iteration, the re-creation of the self in the world of

travel" (Bhabha 9). Thus, travelling can be seen as a "negating activity" that moves beyond "the estranging sense of relocation of the homeland and the world – the unhomeliness – that is the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations" (Bhabha 9).

Since land is essentially feminine (as is suggested by the names of continents and countries), *travelling becomes a masculine act*[2] (Beauvoir 475; Cixous 149; Woolf "Three Guineas"). Very rarely a reader finds a lone girl/woman explorer except in fantasy or in a group. This position takes a feminist stand which has continuously been inquired, opposed and rebelled against by the feminist theorists. The woman waiting, the man wandering is a recurrent theme in literature. As John Donne writes in "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning":

> Thy soul, the fixed foot, makes no show
> To move, but doth, if the other do.
> And though it in the center sit,
> Yet when the other far doth roam…

Because *travelogues are about landscape or a cityscape* they also enshrine in them an *ecocritical perspective*[3] (Holden 57; Singh 90; Nigam 33). Though travellers or tourists can be a great asset to any location they can also be responsible for indecomposable waste and imbalance in local ecosystem. The pangs of ecological issues may be felt late in remote locations but they get alarmingly high and unmanageable in more accessible places of tourist attraction.

The narrative of travelogue depends on the mode, means and motives behind the journey. More or less, *travelogues "tend to be a linear narrative"* (Rushdie 225). The revelatory process is gradual and chronological. If an epic entails a travel, then travelogues also share this property with epics. In the context of Homer, Aldous Huxley mentions in "Tragedy and the Whole Truth": "that the experiences he records correspond fairly closely with our own actual or potential experiences—and correspond with our experiences not on a single limited sector, but all along the line of our physical and spiritual being" (Rushdie 222). The same holds true for a travel writer. Apart from the "danger, of a journey, of the unknown" (Rushdie 222), a travelogue also communicates the nuances of everyday existence:

> That even the most cruelly bereaved must eat; that hunger is stronger than sorrow and that its satisfaction takes precedence even of tears…And finally…that, even as hunger takes precedence… so fatigue, supervening, cuts short its career and drowns it in a sleep all the sweeter for bringing forgetfulness. (Huxley TWT)

Therefore, like an epic, a *travelogue gives the whole truth.*

Travelling also has a very close connection with history. *Historical accounts are validated by the writings of travellers.* The connection of human experience with history is objective but with geography subjective as can be seen in Australian and Canadian writings[4]. Precisely for this reasons geography was colonized by history in the domain of established knowledge. History acquired an upper hand because of its emphasis on time, objectivity and validity. Foucault points out that carving "a place for geography would imply that the archaeology of knowledge embraces a project of global, exhaustive

coverage of all domains of knowledge" (QG 66). He described that if "geography is invisible or ungrasped in the area of your explorations and excavations, this may be due to the deliberately historical or archaeological approach which privilege the factor of time" (*QG* 67). History is marked by periodization and this "brings us close to the complex methodology of discontinuity" (Foucault, *QG* 67). In *The Order of Things*, Foucault explains about this approach:

> It is not, then, that time or duration ensures the continuity and specification of living beings throughout the diversity of successive environments, but that against the continuous background of all the possible variations time traces out an itinerary upon which climates and geography pick out only certain privileged regions destined to survive. Continuity is not the visible wake of a fundamental history in which one same living principle struggles with a variable environment. For continuity precedes time. It is its condition. And history can play no more than a negative role in relation to it: it either picks out an entity and allows it to survive, or ignores it and allows it to disappear. (Foucault, *OT* 169)

The focus on 'periodization' creates a sense of time and discontinuity between various periods, but at the same time it breaks our sense of space and geography. The same "methodology of discontinuity" can be applied for space. According to Foucault, "geographical discourse produces few concepts of its own, instead picking up notions from here, there and everywhere" making landscape "a pictorial notion" (*QG* 69) and only giving a secondary position in the hierarchy of human sciences. However, there are other "spatial metaphors" which become "equally geographical and strategic" because "geography grew up in the shadow of military" (Foucault, *QG* 69). Foucault describes these geographical metaphors in context of spatialisation:

> *Territory* is no doubt a geographical notion, but it's first of all a juridico-political one: the area controlled by a certain kind of power. *Field* is an economico-juridical notion. *Displacement*: what displaces itself is an army, a squadron, a population. *Domain* is a juridico-political notion. *Soil* is a historico-geological notion. Region is fiscal, administrative, military notion. *Horizon* is a pictorial, but also a strategic notion. (*QG* 68)

Travelogue is therefore written essentially in a spatial sense. Foucault creates a binary between history and geography (*QG* 66). Travelogue acquires an intermediary position between this binary; and, thus, blurring the hierarchy it brings chronology and landscape on the same plane. Besides, a travel account is a documentation of happenings during the journey by an outsider. A *travelogue is written in an intermediary state* in time and space where a traveller traverses from place to place but belongs to none. In this way a travelogue is written in a "third space" (Soja, *PG* 61-62), creating a "heterotopic space"[5] (Foucault, *OS* 8). *Travelogues blur the boundary, binary and hierarchy between history and geography.* David Williams writing in the context of Canadian poetry makes it clear:

> Our own identities are not limited to one race or ethnicity or nation, and that we are not even identical to ourselves. Better yet, we should begin to see how an acknowledgement of our own "otherness" might lead to "new ways of inhabiting multiple places at once, of being different simultaneously. (56)

A travel writer in this way upsets the dominant, the objective mode of historical account by bringing in the description of the landscape, his own personal experience and his interactions with the inhabitants of visiting location. In this way, "time intervened only from without," the differences are thus scattered in "accordance with the fragmented localities of geography" (Foucault, OT 205).

Travel writing can also be associated with the postmodern notion of geography. In the context of geography and organisation of space, Edward Soja talks about the three phases of spatialization.:

1. Post-historicism:The first of these spatializations is rooted in a fundamental reformulation of the nature and conceptualization of social being, an essentially ontological struggle to rebalance the interpretable interplay between history, geography, and society.

2. Postfordism: The second spatialization is directly attached to the political economy of the material world and, more specifically, to the 'fourth modernization' of capitalism, the most recent phase of far-reaching socio-spatial restructuring that has followed the end of the long post-war economic boom.

3. Postmodernism: The third spatialization is couched in a cultural and ideological reconfiguration, a changing definition of the experiential meaning of modernity, the emergence of a new, postmodern culture of space and time. It is attuned to changes in the way we think about and respond to the particularities - the perils and possibilities - of the contemporary moment via science, art, philosophy, and programmes for political action" (61-62).

There is also a difference of approach in *colonial conformists* and *postcolonial posterity* of travel writings in India. Nirad C. Chaudhuri's *Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* and V.S. Naipaul's *An Area of Darkness* turn out to be acerbic accounts of their encounters with the third world i.e. India. Mildred Mortimer describes that "in the attempt to comprehend new surroundings, travellers often posits another binary opposition, the crucial distinction between self and other" (169). Writers like Amitav Ghosh and Vikram Seth shrug off the colonial hangover, thereby, blurring the boundaries between the 'self' and the 'other' in their travel writings. They are more objective, hopeful, empathetic in their approach than their predecessors who remained subjective, pessimist and apathetic. Therefore, in the post-colonial context, travelogues react against the hegemonic order, transforming them into a *postcolonial discourse* (Lindsay 25). Meenakshi Mukherjee opines:

> The non-western worlds of Africa and Asia have never had a part to play in this 'dialectic of alterity,' except for writers like Amitav Ghosh and Vikram Seth who have brought them in though marginally, by using locations like Egypt, Cambodia and China. (qtd. in Pandurang 56).

Thus *travelling also becomes subversive,* making the travelogue a kind of heterotopia, a counter-site, a kind of "effectively enacted utopia in which all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (Foucault OS 3-4) in a constant comparison with the sites and images also from other cultures.

Vikram Seth's *From Heaven Lake: Travels through Sinkiang and Tibet* (1983) then enact a kind of utopian revisioning of Tibet under China. When Seth reaches Urumqi, a land of exotic natural beauty, the region of Tian Chi, or Heaven Lake" he admits, "I could live here content, for a year" (20). On the other hand he throws light on the complex culture of China that it "is a multinational state, sixty percent of its area is peopled by the six percent of its minorities. Beijing is not unalive to the reality of minority disaffection and the need to appease or crush it" (3). This also explains the reason behind the kind of treatment foreigners are given in China:

> The status of a 'foreign friend' or 'foreign guest' in China is an interesting if not an unnatural one. Officialdom treats the foreigner as one would a valuable panda given to fits of mischief. On no account must any harm come to the animal. On the other hand, it must be closely watched at all times so that it does not…influence the behaviour of the local inhabitants…As for Chinese people, there is a general sense of friendliness and a curiosity towards the individual foreigner which is remarkable considering the anti-foreignness of the Chinese past. (Seth 9)

Thus his writing becomes a space where conflicts can be worked out by becoming aware of and accommodating opposing forces.

Seth informs his reader that at Nanjing he used to study subjects "ranging from philosophy to Chinese literature, from economics to history" (4). His statement: "During holidays we are permitted to travel" (Seth 5), points at yet another aspect of *travel being a leisure activity.* The travel that he is about to take was "organised by Nanjing University for its foreign students" (Seth 4).There were two concerns that Seth had in mind: Firstly, the punctuality and discipline that was required in the group travel till Heaven Lake. Secondly, the restriction on the movement of foreigners in China as "a travel pass was needed for every place-outside Nanjing" (Seth 5).

There were issues about managing the time to return home after the journey, about the means of transport to reach to Lhasa, and the third concern was what after Lhasa –whether to go back to Nanjing or to continue overland to India (Seth 15). The initial journey thus comes to an end with a visit to Heaven Lake. It is important to note "Heaven Lake" is the second chapter in the book and comes too early for the reader. But strikingly the narrative continues, thus conveying the significance of the title of the book *From Heaven Lake.* Also that the writer has something more to tell, something more to add. *The poet in the narrator* strikes the chord when he says: "I find my thoughts drawn into the past rather than impelled into the future…I sometimes seem to myself to wander around the world merely accumulating material for future nostalgias" (Seth 35). He decides to visit Tibet: "I have always wanted to go to Tibet, yet I know that this is largely due to the glamour surrounding the unknown" (Seth 33). He goes to Beijing for exit-visa to Nepal. He then sets to Lanzhou from Beijing by train. As a cultural critic he finds that Lanzhou like other Chinese cities is marked by "a stupefying architectural sameness, based on a stupefying ugly set of models" (Seth 37). Travelling through to Liuyan to Dunhuang, Seth throws light on the division of land and plot allocation policy in China. He says: "A private plot is the land allotted by the commune to a family for its own personal use. Below 10 percent land is usually thus distributed among commune members…Certain recent rural reforms in effect divide even the commune fields out among families, setting state quotas for production" (Seth 60).

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The narrative takes a significant turn when Seth moves from Nanhu (Ch. 6) to Chaidam Basin (Ch. 7). In these two chapters the narrator is accompanied by a driver. Unlike Seth who is a visitor, Sui, the driver is a man who does travelling for a profession. Therefore, Sui "is inured to their beauty; his pleasures along the road are mainly social: talk, food where good food can be obtained, haggling in the market, visiting friends…he is busy… almost… until the job is completed" (Seth 73). Both Sui and the narrator are travellers but their attitudes for a journey are entirely different. For Sui road is the existence, the very goal of life in itself, and landscape irrelevant, made drab by continuous journey. Whereas for Seth, who is a visitor, the landscape turns out to be an enthralling experience and road only a means to achieve it. Seth contrasts himself with Sui, who feels at home anywhere, taking pains to find their similarities. Regarding this, Alan Meller writes, in *The Writer-Traveler Character in Latin American and Indian Contemporary Narrative* (2014): "The greatness of Seth lies in that he "does not hide their differences but highlights their sameness, the air they breathe, their condition as travellers, their longing for home" (123). Sui and Seth travel further from Germu to Southern Quinghai. As the narrative unfolds it becomes clear that "Vikram Seth likes to use elements, objects, as metaphors to highlight the commonality of humanity… a metaphor that unites the universality of humanity with the locality of its different cultures" (Meller 246). This is highlighted when he ruminates "that all truckers give lifts to friends, or strangers, and that there is nothing unusual about my method of travel other than the fact that I am not Chinese" (Seth 88). The "whole truth" (Huxley) associated with travelling is expressed by Seth without any inhibition:

> Romantic retrospect aside, the night spent in the truck is distinctly unpleasant. We are cramped and cold. The much-vaunted heating of the truck is ineffectual…We do not talk much. Each of us has his afflictions now: I have my headache, a sore arm from wielding gunny bags and a pain in my leg from damp socks I have been wearing. Sui now has his smoker's cough compounded by a running eye. Gyanseng has neck- and toothache. (Seth 92)

It is the Indian philosophy of the unity of mankind, *vasudaiv kutumbakam* that attenuates the suffering of these three men who desire to go back to their home. As Seth versifies:

> Here we three, cooped alone,
> Tibetan, Indian, Han,
> Against a common dawn
> …………………….
> And dreaming each of home (98)

"Northern Tibet" (Ch. 10) requires special consideration because here the traveller can be seen transforming into a historian, social critic, cultural analyst, a seer. Vincent Digilrolamo is of the view that "Seth is certainly one of the most sharp-tongued social critics to arrive on the scene since Jonathan Swift." The date is 15th August and he compares the achievements of China and India and what they have done for their people in last thirty years. Mala Pandurang points out in this context in *Vikram Seth: Multiple Locations, Multiple Affiliations*:

> *From Heaven Lake* is a record of personal, cross-cultural interaction between a member of one Asian giant, travelling through another. Seth draws attention to lack

of exchange between India and China in recent times, in spite of close geographical proximity. (56)

His analysis bends towards China which has performed remarkably well in developing "system of social care and of distribution," children go to schools, signs of malnutrition are rare, an effective measure for reducing population growth rate (Seth 102- 103). On the other hand, India has failed in its system of social care, population control measures, eliminating malnutrition and schooling children. However, Chinese government is "not answerable to the people" whereas India has been able to preserve its democracy, which is a commendable achievement. He says: "This is quite remarkable. Dictatorships of the left or right are no less corrupt than democracies" (105).

During his stay in Lhasa (Ch. 11 to Ch. 15) Seth visits the Potala, "once the winter palace of Dalai Lama" (136), Drepung and Norbulingka Park. Through Shigatse (Ch. 16) he goes to Nilamau (Ch. 18) and finally "Into Nepal" (Ch. 18) from where he reaches "Kathmandu; Delhi" (Ch. 19). Seth proves the role of a *traveller as a prophet-seer* when he concludes:

> The best that can be hoped for on a national level is a respectful patience on either side as in, for instance, trying to solve the border problem. But on a personal level, to learn about another great culture is to enrich one's life, understand one's own country better, to feel more at home in the world, and indirectly to add that reservoir of individual goodwill that may, generations from now, temper the cynical use of national power. (Seth 178)

The 'heterotopic' space of his book provides a site to carry out his comparison of the differences within the "walls of China", and of the past, present and future of three nations as he moves across them: China, Tibet and India. His movement constantly makes him conscious of his 'being outside home, outside India' on the one hand; on the other he is also conscious of the sad condition of the Tibetan diaspora. On the one hand, he is troubled by the fate of native Chinese population and the hardships they face; on the other hand, he is able to praise them for their qualities. If "space is fundamental in any form of communal life," then space is also "fundamental in any exercise of power" (Foucault, FR 252). The case of China and Tibet are well explored by Seth in the heterotopic sense as far as the juridico-political, geo-historical, and anthropo-geographical scope of his travel account is concerned.

In his article "The Political Organisation of Space," Edward Soja points out the "spatial interaction" that "grows out of the differential attributes of places" (3). This interaction is based on the consideration of the differences in places because of "physical distance," "socio-cultural distance" and "functional distance" (Soja, POS 3). The "third space" (Soja, PG 7) is created in Seth's travelogue, through a *traveller's mindscape*, where the physical, socio-cultural and functional distance of two locations are overcome, bringing them face to face in producing contrast, difference, comparison and similarity. Seth's mind is filled with multiple images, multiple concerns as he indulges himself in the constant comparison of the socio-political conditions of India, China and Tibet, marked by their own rich cultural complexity.

Amitav Ghosh is known for his "ethnographic research" (Stankiewicz 535) and "anthropological fieldwork" (Chambers 26), particularly in the case of his travel writings. His essay "Dancing in Cambodia" (2002) provides a heterotopic site to examine reality in multiple ways. First of all, it picks up twin themes of a nation experiencing colonisation and in its aftermath a threat that lurks over its culture, especially the dance, because of the totalitarian regime. Secondly, there are three separate timelines that are talked about in the essay: 1906 (Rule of King Sisowath), 1978 (Pol Pot's regime), and 1993 (the present time). Thirdly, it entails the idea of twin travels: one by the narrator in Cambodia and the other by King Sisowath and the troop of dancers to Paris. Ghosh begins his essay with an important event that took place during the colonial history of Cambodia.

> On 10th May, 1906…a French liner called the Amiral-Kersaint set sail from Saigon carrying a troupe of nearly a hundred classical dancers and musicians from the royal palace at Phnom Penh. They were to stage the first ever performance of Cambodian classical dance in Europe, at the Exposition Coloniale in Marseille.

> Also travelling on the Amiral-Kersaint was the sixty-six-year old ruler of Cambodia, King Sisowath…The King who has been crowned two years before, had often spoken of his desire to visit France, and for him the voyage was the fulfilment of a lifelong dream. (Ghosh 1)

The theme of the exhibition was "centred on the theme of France's Colonial Possessions" (1). Ghosh points out at the colonial irony that "Cambodia with its four million or so inhabitants was a bare speck, its ruler no more than a minor potentate" (2). When the ship reached France, King Sisowath and his dancers were received very warmly. He in fact became an instant favourite for he "had brought three trunk-loads of expensive gifts with him, 30, 000 francs worth" (Ghosh 2). European travellers went to Phnom Penh to see the Cambodian dance performances but now they were in France. The viewers had thought of "a troop of heavily veiled" dancers; contrarily, they encountered "lithe, athletic women" (Ghosh 3).

Ghosh is able to imply how Sisowath bartered Cambodia to become the ruler under France. The throne of Cambodia was left vacant after the death of Norodom, Sisowath's half-brother. Throughout his reign Norodom "resisted every element of French cultural influence" (17). Sisowath on the other hand had a huge inclination for the French. After Norodom's death King Sisowath "reached an understanding with the French whereby…He also handed over his palace to be used as the premises of a French-run school for Cambodians" (17). It was during this time that the possibility of the visit to France was mooted and Sisowath grabbed it with both hands "to fulfil 'the dream of his whole life'" (Ghosh 17).

Sisowath departed from France proclaiming "in this beautiful country I shall leave behind a piece of my heart" (Ghosh 34). Ghosh mentions the "shock and bewilderment" that the displaced students undergo in the face of "unfamiliarity of wintry Western cities" as a result of which they lock themselves into a room and start pouring their hearts in letters (34). King Sisowath also reclined and recorded his "thoughts on his voyage for the benefit of his subjects" (Ghosh 34).His reflections included "the subject of government" and "the lessons in statecraft." His primary concern was to improve

system of transportation. Next in the list was to familiarize Cambodians with modern machinery. His own highest concern would be to make his country prosperous (Ghosh 35-36). King Sisowath try to model Cambodia on the basis of French system. The "menace of mimicry" (Bhabha 85) is made clear in Ghosh's words that "it is hard to imagine a more abject exhortation to mimicry…if anything, a testament to the ambiguity of mimesis" (Ghosh 36). King Sisowath soon learnt "that travel writing was an expensive indulgence for those who fell on his side of colonial divide" (Ghosh 36). The French government wanted to reclaim the price of those gifts that King Sisowath and his troop had received from the French officials. Thus, faded the ambitious plans of Sisowath thought for the progress of Cambodia (Ghosh 36-37).

The next phase in Cambodian history is marked by Khmer Rouge revolution. Pol Pot who was inspired by Robespierre's ideology of terror was "the grandson of King Sisowath's Palace Minister. Thiounn, becomes a central figure to a generation of Cambodian students in Paris and one of his protégés is Pol Pot" ("Dancing in Cambodia").Though Sisowath and Pol Pot may stand in stark difference yet they admired French: One for its beauty; the other for its history of violence. In 1978 a personality cult was created in Pol Pot's name and thus began the game of ideological cleansing. The hardest hit was the urban middle class.

> City people by definition, they were herded into rural work-camps; the institutions and the forms of knowledge that sustained them were abolished—the judicial system was dismantled, the practice of formal medicine was discontinued, schools and colleges were shut down, banks and credit were done away with; the very institution of money, and even the exchange of goods and services, was banned…No regime in history had ever before made so systematic and sustained attack on the middle class. (Ghosh 8-9)

The conditions of workers were pathetic. They were made to work day and night beyond their limits of exhaustion. The food was not given to satisfy the hunger but keep the body alive. With revolution on, people died in explosions by mines, bombs and guns. Ghosh writes of Pol Pot's regime: "Terror was essential to their exercise of power. It was an integral part not merely of their coercive machinery, but of the moral order on which they built their regime" (44).

The phase after Pol Pot was uncertain. Cambodia lie torn and devastated: "there was still nothing like a real government in Phnom Penh. The country was like a shattered slate" (Ghosh 14). In the course of restoration Ghosh reveals:

> The first priority now was the distribution of food; the second was to find people with skills and knowledge who had somehow managed to survive the 'Pol Pot time.' The fledging Ministry of Culture had already launched an effort to locate the trained dancers and teachers who had survived…It soon found that dancers and musicians had been particularly hard-hit by the Revolution: by some estimates, as many as ninety percent of the artistes of the pre-revolutionary era died during 'Pol Pot time'….Most of the teachers had been killed or maimed…Anyway there was no one to teach: so many of the children were orphans, half-starved. They had no idea of dance; they had never seen Khmer dance. It seemed impossible there was no place to begin. (Ghosh 14-15)

Cambodia "was a country that was only fifteen years old" (Ghosh 24) thus was built from scratch. It was at this time that the reader finds Ghosh is engaged in twin quest of knowing Cambodian history during Pol Pot's regime and the Khmer dance and its performers. This history is constructed by his interactions with people he had met during his explorations. Through Chea Samy, Sros, Loth Sieri, Kheu Seng Kim and Molyka he is able to put the lost pieces in the puzzle together to retrieve the Cambodian past that fell into oblivion in its 'reign of terror.' Ghosh triumphantly celebrates the fact that in 1988 there occurred a festival in Phnom Penh "when classical Cambodian music and dance were performed for the first time since the Revolution" (44).

Edward Soja, in his book *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, expands the scope of geography. He marks that in the late twentieth century, scholars have begun to interpret space and the embracing spatiality of human life with the same critical insight and emphasis that has traditionally been given to time and history on the one hand, and social relations and society on the other. Ghosh in his essay "Dancing in Cambodia" adroitly explores and bases his observation on this notion of 'third space.' He is not only creating a history of Cambodia, but also the history of Cambodian dance form, the experience of Cambodian people through the historical events and his own encounter with the inhabitants. In his essay Ghosh creates a thirdspace, to use Soja's term, where he intersects the spatial organization with social relations, individual experiences, locations, landscape, architecture, environment, home, city, region, territory, and geography.

A traveller is an outsider, an alien, the other, and language can become an "isolating barrier" (Meller 47) for a traveller. But, both Seth and Ghosh are able to penetrate the cultural barriers because of their acquaintance with local language. "Ghosh…tries to learn the language of the place" (Meller 48). Seth on the other hand knows Chinese. It is their acquaintance with the local language that gives them an insider's point of view because they are able to interact with local people personally. They are able to reach and touch the experience of people that they themselves have undergone through the social and historical events that have taken place in their countries. Even in their brief sojourns they are able to permeate into the local culture by avoiding "a non-local language" (Meller 48). Thus, both of them are able to get access through their acquaintance with local language to the destination culture not entirely from a stranger's point of view. Another aspect that Meller notices in Seth and Ghosh is that both of them cherished "not places, monuments or landscapes, but people" (45). They are able to avoid looking at "the other as totally alien;" rather they "are able to see traces of their own selves in the other" (Meller 46). In the major part of their travels they establish a unique bond with people and places they visit. This bond is not "that of hierarchical comparison but that in which the sense of familiarity is awakened; empathy – not sympathy – is explored" (Meller 406). Thus they are able to acknowledge and appreciate not only the similarities but also the differences. Consequently, Alan Meller beautifully brings forth the twin aspects of Seth and Ghosh's writings: On the one hand, they are able to create a utopic vision where "it is possible to establish a non-hierarchical, horizontal, relationship; it is possible to empathize with the other's differences" (406). On the other hand there is the sad dystopic reality of hierarchically

classified humanity nearing to its end. As a traveller, Seth and Ghosh are able to explore both "our capacity of empathy with the other" and "our inner hierarchical categorizations of the other" (Meller 406).

Both Seth and Ghosh defy the idea of *innocent traveller*. Though Seth may disapprove about the political inclinations in *From Heaven Lake* by saying "it is not intended as a summary of the political or economic situation of that country," the reader finds a sympathetic concern in the narrator for the socio-political and cultural situation in China and Tibet. Similarly, Ghosh, in trying to trace the lineage of Cambodian dancers and their history actually unearths the political situation. Both of them raise a voice against the rampant dictatorships prevalent in the vicinity of Indian subcontinent. They are *traveller-historians* who have documented socio-economic and cultural-political facts in their accounts.

Traveller as a prophet-seer is able to project a *heterotopia*, in not only that he travels like a prophet from one place to other; but also predicts or at least make the reader contemplate about the future by presenting the geographical, social, cultural and political conditions. The heterotopia is created out of all the juxtaposing images of places, locations, periods, and people. The mind of the traveller becomes a site for such heterotopic musings. In the context of travel writers, heterotopia can be seen in the mindscape of a traveller-narrator, which forms a *gestalt*[6] in which the mind creates meaning by analysing and organizing various aspects (the historical, social, political, geographical and personal) giving it a wholesome picture to it. Heterotopia can be seen as a gestalt in which a "real place" is capable of conglomerating several places especially geographic utopic spaces. As Foucault explains in *The Order of Things*:

> *Utopias* afford consolation: although they have no real locality there is nevertheless a fantastic, untroubled region in which they are able to unfold; they open up cities with vast avenues, superbly planted gardens, countries where life is easy, even though the road to them is chimerical. *Heterotopias* are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this *and* that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy 'syntax' in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things (next to and also opposite one another) to 'hold together'. This is why utopias permit fables and discourse: they run with the very grain of language and are part of the fundamental dimension of the *fabula*; heterotopias (such as those to be found so often in Borges) desiccate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very possibility of grammar at its source; they dissolve our myths and sterilize the lyricism of our sentences. (xix)

This is something that stands true for Seth and Ghosh as they present the utopic geographical location along with the disturbing picture of their destination.

Therefore, there are two 'imaginary' but not fictional places, which Seth keeps in mind: one of China, and the other of India; while he himself moves from one location to the other. The hybridity of his own character adds to his heterotopic rendering of events for Seth, who is an Indian, knowing Chinese and visiting Tibet. Similarly, Ghosh creates a heterotopia by making use of three time frames in Cambodian history: 1906 (Rule of King Sisowath), 1978 (Pol Pot's regime), and 1993 (the present time). All these timeline run parallel throughout the narrative. Besides Ghosh, like Seth, is an

Indian who travels in Cambodia. English as a medium of expression only adds this heterotopia.

A travelogue is surely an addition to existing knowledge. This process operates at two levels: a) at the level of traveller; b) at the level of reader. Thus, "the travelling adventurer can, after all, gain knowledge that is not elsewhere, and then, by living to tell the tale, offer that knowledge to us" (Rushdie 225). To conclude, I would like to go back to Aristotle who creates a binary between poetry and history. He says:

> …it is not the function of the poet to relate what has happened, but what may happen… The poet and the historian differ not by writing in verse or in prose… The true difference is that one relates what has happened, the other what may happen. Poetry, therefore, is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history: for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular. (Aristotle Ch. ix)

Therefore, *travelogue writing is an intermediary act: neither purely fiction, nor purely fact.* Besides being a creative writer and a travel writer together, gives to Seth and Ghosh, an extra edge to decipher the past and to suggest the future. As suggested by Edward Soja, Seth and Ghosh, operate in "a third interpretive geography, one which recognizes spatiality as simultaneously (there's that word again) a social product (or outcome) and a shaping force (or medium) in social life: the crucial insight for both the socio-spatial dialectic and a historico-geographical materialism" (7). This is because of their own cosmopolitan identity, hybridized-existence, their objective and empirical approaches of Humanities supplemented with human sensitivity and sensibility.

Endnotes

1. Ania Loomba explains the process of colonisation which included "trade, plunder, negotiation, warfare, genocide, enslavement and rebellions…the conquest of other people's land and goods" (2). Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin write that: "One of the most important vehicles of colonial representation has been the feverish travel and plethora of travel writing by colonial travellers. The phenomenon of global travel has been a feature of Imperial writing for several centuries" (207). Similarly, Gauri Viswanathan points out: "Englishmen actively participating in the cruder realities of conquest, commercial aggrandizement, and disciplinary management of natives blends into the rarefied, more exalted image of Englishmen as producer of the knowledge that empowers him to conquer, appropriate and manage in the first place" (20).

2. Simone de Beauvoir writes that 'women in marriage' are circumscribed within the home and domestic sphere. Whereas the husband has the advantage of both: accessing his home and also to remain "a vagabond at heart" (475) and thus, to explore the outer world. Cixous on the other hand associates the societal structure that created a drift between gender roles reducing woman to a passive role and attributing the active role to man. Virginia Woolf made the predicament of women very clear stating: "An odd confession from one of the class whose only profession for so many centuries had been marriage; but significant. Others wanted to travel; to explore Africa; to dig in Greece and Palestine….They all wanted—but what one word can sum up the variety of the things that they wanted, and had wanted, consciously or subconsciously, for so long? ("Three Gunieas").

3. According to the UNEP report there are three main "Environmental Impacts of Tourism": a) Depletion of Natural Resources (water resources, local resources, land degradation). b) Pollution (air pollution and noise, solid waste and littering, sewage, aesthetic

pollution). c) Physical impact (construction activities and infrastructural development, deforestation and intensified or unsustainable use of land and trampling, alteration of ecosystems by tourist activities.

4. C. D. Narsimhaiah writes in the context of Australian and Canadian poetry that it was the geography apart from their colonial history that served for the subject matter for the poets. He says: "If geography made for a distinctive kind of poetry in it is certainly true of Australia and Canada in both of which the landscape and climate played an important part in shaping poetry" (156).

5. According to Foucault, Heterotopias "are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality" (OS 3-4). He differentiates these spaces from any utopic spaces or any other places that they reflect. Foucault explains the role of "heterotopia": "they have a function in relation to all the space that remains. This function unfolds between two extreme poles. Either their role is to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory – Or else, on the contrary, their role is to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled. The latter type would be the heterotopia, not of illusion, but of compensation" (OS 8).

6. Gestalt psychology was promoted by Kurt Koffka, Wolfgang Köhler and Max Wertheimer in which they have talked about the perception of the mind and how it responds to the external factors creating meaning from disjointed things and concepts. In other words, the mind creates a unifying wholesome understanding of the world which is otherwise scattered and differentiated.

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