

## Parvin Shere's Travelogue as an Interdisciplinary Narrative

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### ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the present travelogue as an interdisciplinary narrative. Interdisciplinary research is a type of research that draws from two or more disciplines in order to gain a well-developed perspective, or discover something new. This travelogue is itself an interdisciplinary text with the use of literature both prose and poetry, and paintings incorporated within to further her explanation of a place visited and to assist her to share her experiences and her internal journey alongside her external travels. This paper answers the following questions like does travel enhances the creativity of an artist, does it transform her and satiates her questioning mind, and does it make her more understanding of life and enlightens her? The writer uses other disciplines like art, painting, history and anthropology in her narrative for better explanation of her experiences and to convey her views and ideas.

Parvin Shere is a poet, writer, painter, and musician. She has travelled to as many as five continents (Africa, South America, Europe, Asia and North America) and twenty-six countries. In this travelogue she says that the feelings that she has developed from her travels are like seashells picked from the sea and from these shells she has found pearls comprising surprises, wonders tears, and smiles which she has tried to sew all on the shawl of paper. Hence the travelogue gets its name *Pearl from the Ocean*. The reason she gives for writing this travelogue is that the outer world creates an inner world within and this inner world provides her with vision and creates an ocean of feelings and fills her mind with millions of questions. It makes her wonder about secrets of life and beyond life, connection and disconnection, the effects of direct and indirect interactions with the nature, the diversities and dualistic nature of life. All this triggers a need to share her thoughts with her readers. She writes, "My pen pours out drops of feelings from the ocean of my heart. It provides me with self-purification and the promotion of my values. When I write, I collect pearly shells from oceans of both my outer and inner worlds. This helps me make sure that my readers hear the unsaid, see the unseen, feel the unfelt, connect the disconnected and realize the unrealized (6).

The travelogue is based on her journeys to South Africa in 2011 and to Peru in 2012. It is divided into two parts: the first part is called 'Black Light' and it entails her experiences both internal and external during her visit and sojourn in South Africa and the second part consists of her internal and external experiences during her sojourn in South America and is called Magical World. These two sections are further divided into several chapters each and are named after her stance or her idea of a place or people inhabitant on a visit to a particular place.

Pearls from the Ocean is a coffee table book based on her inner feelings of her recent travels to South Africa, Swaziland and Peru and her main focus is on Apartheid and the Inca civilization and encompasses related poetry and oil paintings of those places. This travelogue is a projection of her inner voice, of her agonies and anxieties beset by unmediated observations of atrocities perpetuated by fascistic forces ruthlessly operating to meet their ulterior motives and betrays the innate designs of the colonizers the so called flag bearers of peace, progress, philanthropy, democracy and freedom of speech as she herself has visited the prisons in South Africa which she thinks were the living graves of living men. She has recreated the phases of history that still bleed. Her travels to Peru, South America have enriched it with matchless beauty and archeological bounty despite the poverty and backwardness looming large over.

Parvin Shere's travelogue is distinctly different in the sense that it does not consists of bare documentation plain, insipid description but she has given it a narrative color, a fictional touch to her narration and therefore presents herself as a character in the travelogue, as though the narrator and Parvin are not the same one they are two different persons. Parvin has very skillfully separated the writerly "I" from the character "Parvin" in the narration.

This paper analyzes the present travelogue as an interdisciplinary narrative and how other disciplines benefit her travelogue and what travel does to an artist's sense of creativity. This text can be read from many perspectives

such as Postcolonial study through an Oriental Approach as there are many instances where the writer differentiates between her reactions and interactions with demeaning treatments and imperialistic attitudes of other fellow travelers towards the guide and other inhabitants of the places they visit and is also abundant with the malicious consequences of the vast European empires and the enormous inequalities that exist between the different regions of the world in terms of wealth, health and technological developments. This text can also be analyzed on the basis of its Narrative Style as she uses a Third Person Narrative in the travelogue which is very uncommon as travelogues are considered to be very personal genre next only to Autobiographies. But this paper deals with its interdisciplinary aspect as it is itself an interdisciplinary in nature which is very unique in itself.

Interdisciplinary research is a type of study or research that draws from two or more disciplines in order to gain a well-developed perspective, or discover something new. For example, women's studies, and environmental studies draw from different disciplines in order to enhance their understandings of particular issues, or offer an original theory or concept. Interdisciplinary research is very common within the social sciences and humanities.

This travelogue is itself an interdisciplinary text with the use of literature and paintings incorporated within to further her explanation of a place visited or to support her emotions and feelings experienced during her visits to places. This travelogue is made of prose, poetry, and painting, through which Parvin shares what she saw, heard, learned and felt on her journeys.

Travels influence and enhance her ability to create art. She writes in her travelogue that she wishes to see nature in all its colors and hues. She elaborates in her travelogue the reason for her travels as such:

My eyes, right after they opened, hugged the arms of curiosity and became restless. They sought to change unawareness into knowledge. They burned with a deep desire to see nature's art gallery. They sought guidance in the luminous path of the moon and the sun. But how can one set of eyes see all the precious masterpieces of nature? How can one mind grasp the vastness of this beautiful world? The world is like a giant novel. How can we read all the waves written on the sea, all of the flowers written on the ground, all of the fragrances written in the air and all the melodies written on the water-falls? One life isn't enough to read this enormous book of earth. Only a few pages can be in one lifetime. To be amazed by all the magic of nature is not possible if I don't travel. The softness of the petal and warmth of a flame cannot be fully appreciated by just sight or sound. I must touch it to fully experience it. (14)

The prose section provides vivid descriptions from the anticipation of the traveler on her overseas flight, to the magnificent sights she encounters and the inner transformation she experiences. She says that nature beholds her with its beauty and creates a new world for her that never vanishes. It also provides her with new fresh blood for the veins of her creation, gives her new dimensions and new suns and moons rise on the horizon of her thoughts.

Her global travels have enriched her creative vision and expanded the horizons of her literary concerns. The paintings which she made during her travels and the page numbers where these paintings are found in the travelogue are listed here: Dream for those restless eyes, lakes on which float the ferries of dreams! (7). One world.... But (12). Livelihood; Inca woman making wool from Alpaca fur, village Caccacollo, Peru, South America (25). Silent Sounds; Machu Picchu, Peru, South America (27). Lap of Nature; Floating Islands made by reeds on Lake Titicaca, highest navigable lake in the world; 3800 m above sea level, Peru, South America. (29). Apart; Soweto child, South Africa. (31) Squalid; A house in Soweto; Western Township, South Africa. (39). Alone; impression of a girl in Soweto, South Africa. (41) Oppressed; Western Township, Soweto, South Africa. (43) Soweto; South Africa. (47) Beyond (51). Broken; Broken hut in Zulu village, Swaziland. (63) Home coming; Zulu village, Swaziland. (65) Another World; Zulu village, Swaziland. (67) Mirror; A view from the window of the van, South Africa. (71) Dancing colors; Table Mountain, Cape Town, South Africa. (73). Lost in his Beats; A drummer in Zulu village, Swaziland. (75) Far; Towards Table Mountain, Cape Town, South Africa. (77) Flying Dreams; Atlantic Ocean, South Africa. (83) The Fence; Apartheid, South Africa. (87). In love; Colony of penguins, Boulder beach, Cape Town, South Africa. (97). Memories (99). The World Above (103). Dancing World; Feast day in Puno, Peru, South America. (109). World of Reeds; Floating island of reeds, made by hands on Lake Titicaca, 3800 mtrs above sea level, Peru, South America. (115) Magical world; Machu Picchu, Peru, South America. (123). Magical; Machu Picchu, Peru, South America. (131). Call; Machu Picchu, Peru, South America. (135). Echo; Inca walls in Machu Picchu, Peru, South America. (139).

All the painting seems to facilitate the writer's expressions. In one of the painting women sit in the dirt together, weaving brightly colored cloth on tall looms. In another painting an Inca woman cooks on an outdoor stove. In one more painting people carry reeds to thatch their roofs. In one dramatic painting the focus is on man playing the harp. He is outside, perhaps playing for passerby on a street corner. He wears a large yellow hat, and heavy layers of colorful shawls and scarves, suggesting cold weather. He seems to have a wedding ring on his left hand. His face is turned towards the viewer, but his eyes are vacant, suggesting that he is blind. A lot of detail is packed into this painting, creating a powerful emotional impact.

She is the author of two collections of poetry, "Fragments" (Kirchian) and "Raindrops on Parched Land" (Nihal-e- Dil par Sahab Jaise) with related paintings in a coffee table book format. Both books were awarded "Best Book of the Year", in USA, England, and India. Her publications embrace both East and West. The instances where poems are used are many but only some of the poems are listed here. Poems from Pearls from the Ocean are as follows:

*Gravitational Pull*

The gravitational pull of the earth,  
holds everything close to its bosom,  
and provide sustenance for life.  
The trees the vegetation, the creatures of the Ocean,  
flying birds, beasts and men All find refuge,  
In the love of mother earth,  
All this has made it a living and thriving planet.(13)

She is not merely a traveler who seeks exotic sights for her own amusement. Her sense of tourism is conscious of her unpreventable commitment to stand by the suffering humanity. She is a human being among human beings, hungry for experience, for knowledge and for understanding. Her journeys change her from within, brings an awakening and this feeling of enlightened knowledge of humanity she wants to share with others through her words. The narratives of travel in this book are about making connections and overcoming perceived differences. This poem embodies her sentiments:

*Protest*

A small, broken and black world,  
was sobbing in anguish,  
as if she were a thing for amusement.  
Were devoid of any color, in the half-lit corner,  
the delicate silk threads of her breaths,  
were lying shattered.  
Wearing Armani gowns, and Gucci glasses,  
A group of travelers, were watching her in surprise.  
The faces of broken doors and walls.  
Soaked in pain, those shining black eyes,  
were fanning the fire of self-respect.  
In my heart; They were crying out loud,

“Look I am also a citizen of your planet.” (44)

Empathy for the people and compassion and sensitivity towards others is the most important aspect of her travelogue. Her travelogue is abundant with empathetic feeling for the people of the places she has visited. She reaches out to people she meets and listens with respect and deep feelings to the stories they tell her. The impressions of the place and people don't leave her when she leaves the place, she carries them with her and when she reaches her hotel room also, she is still lost in the history of the place. She is restless and she explains herself better in these lines, “Her mind still lingered on the dusty lanes of Soweto. Not even its captivating natural beauty could soothe her. She returned to the room and glanced around; surveying the expensive luxury items it held” (50). This poem here embodies her empathy:

*Toy Houses floating on the Lake*

The round isle of this earth,  
has been installed forever,  
On the broad bosom of ancient times.  
Titicaca is also, A tiny planet.  
Holding the thread of past centuries,  
it still watches from a distance,  
The changing face of time.  
The ancient tiny world of reeds,  
Still exists, wearing its multi-colored robes,  
its breaths are in sync, With the silken threads of the nature;  
Its every heartbeat resonates with nature;  
It still holds fast in its fist, The wealth of its citizens,  
Clouds, rains and rainbows.  
The gold of the sun,  
The pearls of flowers. They feel safe and sound,  
In the protective lap, of this planet,  
always changing its tumultuous face. (117)

In her poems as Catherine very precisely rounds up “Parvin uses simple objects as metaphors to suggest complex transformation.... The poet draws from the natural worlds of mountains, clouds, flowers, birds, and fireflies to express her idea” (30)

The other disciplines apart from literature and painting which are found in this travelogue are history and anthropology. Let's take up History and re-read this text as an interdisciplinary narrative. The protagonist is very fond of history and the role it plays in the formation or destruction of a place. She sees present through past. She is always connecting the past and present and searching for the answers in the light of cause and effect relationship. When she visits the places, it is the history of a place which attracts her attention more than the surrounding flora or fauna or the natural sights. It is a journey through time, showing us how certain events can in a sense longer in a place, resonating long after they have occurred. She has a special talent for evoking the spectacles of the past, by showing how traces of them remain for us to see and feel today. She accomplishes this through making a very personal connection to the events, placing herself both in the past and in the present, showing us how these events might have been experienced by the people who lived through them. Her travelogue is professed with her deep understanding and knowledge of history of the places she travels. Her quest for knowing more about the people who were consciously or unconsciously part of history-making takes her to places not usually frequented by conventional tourists.

In this travelogue she writes about two such places she visited which are immersed in torturous history and historical narratives and the experiences of their people. Peru in South America and South Africa are poles apart from each other with no common thread but if we dig deeper we come to realization that the people of both the places are victims of colonization and imperialist savagery that treated the indigenous peoples of these two places worse than animals, seized their independence, subjected them to atrocious suffering and disgrace and plundered their riches and natural wealth while oppressing them to miserable poverty, disease, hunger and sufferings in the same place where they used to be free and happy. To support this claim there are many excerpts from the text I would like to cite. When Parvin the protagonist visits South Africa though she enjoys the beautiful and scenic sights of the place but it is her attraction towards history which takes a dominant place in her narrative. The following lines are told by Canon the guide in her trip and his narrative holds her complete attention:

Apartheid was fully exposed after the police had killed twelve-year-old Hector. The heart-rending tragedy on 16<sup>th</sup> June 1976 grabbed people's attention the world over. Now 16<sup>th</sup> June is observed as a public holiday in South Africa. With the beginning of Apartheid in 1948, the racial violence transgressed all the bounds. It divided people on the basis of race and color. Any spirit of amity was lost. Inter-race marriages were forbidden. People of different colors were forced to live in separate areas, go to separate schools, hospitals and restaurants. There were separate platforms, public conveniences, parks and public transport even the grave yards were separate. Black people needed passports to gain entry into white quarters. But they had to go there because they worked for whites. Sixty thousand black people were illegally ousted from their homes and sent to live in Soweto. District 6 a locality of Cape Town was demolished and its residents were driven away from there. Let alone the scarce supply of electricity, there was no proper hospital there. Black children were given only a nominal education so that they could be exploited as laborers to do domestic chores for whites. The strangle hold for Apartheid started loosening by the end of 1980 on account of ill reputation it earned throughout the world, after the outbreak of Soweto revolt and the death of Hector. The ruthless cruelties perpetuated by Apartheid came to an end in 1990. The apartheid government was abolished. Nelson Mandela was released from prison after 27 years. He became the first Black President in 1994. (55)

When she visit Pilgrim's Rest, a historical town located in Mpumalanga, South Africa that has been declared a national monument. She writes, "It seemed as if Parvin had landed in a magical village where relics of 1870 were safely preserved. It felt as though time had come to a halt and as though people still lived in that century" (56). In another passage she gives historical aspect to the geography of the place when she describes the rivers:

'Blyde River' means 'river of happiness'. There is another river namely Treur - a Dutch word, which means 'mourning'. Once, in 1844, some people had gone for a stroll on its bank. As they did not return from there, their relatives surmised that they had lost their lives in the river. So, they named it 'river of sorrow'. But they had survived intact. One fine morning, they emerged from another river. So, this river was christened 'river of happiness'. These rivers merge at one place." (57).

She describes the historical aspect of another river in the lines, "A fatal battle took place between Dutch and Zulu tribe. A lot of blood was shed in Kwela Zulu Natal. The British were also defeated by Zulu - who fought with javelins against the Dutch, who fought with guns. The battle turned the river red and it was called the battle of the river of blood. (70) On another occasion she writes, "The relics of stone-age can still be witnessed in Swaziland. The stones bearing patterns of the shapes of animals, human beings, hunting, war and dance scenes dating from 25000 BC to 19<sup>th</sup> century is still available here." (61) She writes about the history of South Africa that it can be divided into five chapters, she writes, "(i) The time when the land belonged to the Africans, (ii) Advent of Dutch, (iii) The British, (iv) Apartheid and (v) Freedom. Today 48 million people live here in peace with freedom." (70).

The other discipline we can study in this travelogue is Anthropology. For her understanding the different way of life, culture, customs, traditions, religious beliefs, social understandings, political views and their livelihoods and how all these factors shape and reshape their worlds is of paramount importance and enables her to expand her vision. According to her this supreme understanding of different people and their cultures comes when one spends times with people away from the artificial glamour of the commercial tourist "hotspots". She says in her travelogue that seeing the real face of life in different continents by spending days with inhabitants along the countryside, in villages, is the

real purpose of her travels. It's not that she hates the beauty of nature around her, in fact she enjoys the scenic beauty, and she doesn't altogether diminish the value of sight-seeing and love for nature during her travels.

She enjoys and cherishes the wonders of nature around her but her main emphasis is to see and understand the souls of peoples than savor the beauty of natural surroundings of the places she travels. This book is about bringing together of differences and the merging of understandings. It is a projection of her inner voice, of her agonies and anxieties affected by the observations of her surroundings and hence in this travelogue we find more empathy towards the inhabitants of the place visited than the serenity and beauty of the place. The lines which highlight the anthropological analysis are offered by the guide Canon but for Parvin they are of high importance to take up the major space in her account of the journey. And thus, Canon says:

A new world emerged. Class systems were abolished. All citizens lived in unity. Apartheid carried a stigma. Unfortunately, eighty seven percent of the land belongs to whites, the minority community, and only thirteen percent of the land belongs to blacks, the majority community. It is quite ironical. White people held high positions in various offices. The basis of Apartheid system lies in the obnoxious belief that the white race is superior to the black one. Blacks were denied the right to vote. They were left with no option but do menial and physical work. The distinction during Apartheid was also based on color. A child born to a black and white couple was separated from its parents. Families were thus disrupted. No siblings could study in the same school. Black parents were not allowed to meet their white children there. White and black people were not allowed to meet and befriend one another, let alone enter into marriage. Interracial marriage was considered unlawful and illegitimate. Those who participated in it were subject to punishment. Black people were not allowed to go to entertainment parks and other sites in the presence of white people. Mixing of white people with black people in private parties was unlawful and illegal. The two races lived in different worlds, cut off from each other. Those who disobeyed the law were subject to three months imprisonment. White people were ensured every type of security. The Government provided them with facilities to guard them against vagaries of weather. There were separate restaurants, post offices, and worship houses for the two races. Railway platforms had two types of entrances. Obviously, the better one was for white people. There were also separate compartments in the train. If a black maid wanted to accompany her white mistress, the taxi driver would not allow it.(53)

He resumed his commentary, "The residents of this town are good artists. Here, people have been able to preserve their tradition and culture. The name of the tribe here is Ndebele. They paint their houses in dark colors. The women paint their utensils and their courtyards." (53). He further gave an account of the culture and tradition of his country. He said:

The dowry system was prevalent there. A wolf was given in dowry' The fatter the woman, the fatter the dowry' That's why every male wanted to marry a fat woman. But now, this has changed. Wolves have replaced with cash. Several women want to lose weight. Slim girls now fetch a heavy dowry and bridegrooms will even give a dowry to the parents of a bride. As per tradition, the girls go to the river to shed tears in remembrance of their ancestors. The bride strikes the earth with a stick and declares that she belongs to a man now. Then the people of the village gather there to celebrate the marriage." He added, "Pretoria showcases ancient and modern buildings" (53).

Canon the guide continued his narration to which the author gives large spaces of her text. She reports Canon's commentary:

South Africans believe that one can reach God with the help of the spirits of one's ancestors. This belief is prevalent among all tribes, Zulu and Zhusa. As believed, the spirits of the ancestors come to render help in their pressing need. The physician who prepares herbal medicines prescribes the ways to reach the spirits. It is a necessary act to slaughter a sacrificial animal for the atonement of a sin. Money is taken for the girls to be given in marriage. The parties strike a bargain. This practice is known as Lobola - the price of bride. Generally, ten cattle or a horse is given to the parents of the

bride by the parents of the bridegroom or by bridegroom himself. The cattle are very important for them. They avail them at the time of marriage, birth or death. The practice of giving and taking the dower depends on the financial position of the parties. There are many rituals in marriage ceremony, like slaughtering of animals, presentation of gifts and so on. They continue for three days. Here children address the elders as uncle or aunty. On the contrary, ten-year-old children in North America address 80 years old persons with their first names. People are family centered here. Extended family system still continues. Members of three generations live together. They have separated their cottages in one compound. The children live with their parents until they are married. On the contrary, in North America, children start independent life after they attain the age of 18. Oupa and Ouma, grandfather and grandmother, enjoy central position in the family. But this tradition is loosening its stranglehold at some places.” (69).

This travelogue can indeed be read as an anthropological study of South Africa and North America as she brings out the similarities and differences between the two continents she visited. This comparison makes her travelogue an interesting study.

This paper answers the following questions like does literature enhances the creativity of an artist, does it transform her and satiates her questioning mind, and makes her more understanding of life and enlightens her. The answer to all these questions is positive and this transformation is conveyed through her use of other disciplines like art, history and anthropology in her narrative filled with her empathetic enquiries.

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