

Quest for Identity in Parvin Shere's *Pearls from the Ocean*

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the means of self-representation, the conflicts between self/other, and the conscious and unconscious quest for identity by the writer. This paper attempts to understand travel narratives as the narratives about the journey undertaken for the quest for identity by traveler/writer wherein apart from the physical journey of the author the emphasis is laid on the emotional and psychological journey within the author. 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. Her travelogue, *Pearls from the Ocean* is an interdisciplinary text with the use of literature prose, poetry and paintings. This paper attempts to answer the questions like, what is identity; does quest for identity play an important part in travel narrating; what factors exhibit the significance of identity in travel narratives; does travel facilitates the quest for identity of the writer/traveler through the analysis of Parvin's travelogue.

This paper analyzes the means of self-representation, the conflicts between self/other, and the conscious and unconscious quest for identity by the writer. This paper attempts to understand travel narratives as the narratives about the journey undertaken for the quest for identity by traveler/writer wherein apart from the physical journey of the author the emphasis is laid on the emotional and psychological journey within the author.

What is identity? Does quest for identity play an important part in travel narrating? What factors exhibit the significance of identity in travel narratives? Does travel facilitate the quest for identity of the writer/traveler? What is the paradigm for self and other that the writer focuses on to establish his/her own identity? These are the questions this paper focuses on.

Parvin's travelogue conforms to the guidelines laid down by Norman Douglas ,“the reader of a good travel book is entitled not only to an exterior voyage, to descriptions of scenery and so forth, but also to an interior, a sentimental or temperamental voyage which takes place side by side with the outer one.”(203)

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 sea-shells 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 *Pearls from the Ocean*.

It is an interdisciplinary text with the use of literature prose, poetry and paintings. There is an interrelationship between verbal and visual art. She works with both forms in order to give us a composite picture of her experiences and her imagination as she travels the world. Image and text, long thought to be “contraries” that involve very specific limits to their modes of representation are in fact shown here to be complementing to each other, each contributing to the story in their own significant and unique ways. While Parvin's narrative gives us access to an interiority that brings philosophy, memory and emotion into the foreground, her paintings give us a very specific and striking way of experiencing the color, shape and movement of the faraway places and people that are depicted here.

This 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.

Travel narratives are a record not just of journey but a metaphorical interior voyage that represents an important existential change in the traveler towards self discovery and self realization. According to Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan, “travel narratives articulate the poetics of the wandering subject and the roving ‘I’ ”. (14) In Parvin’s words:

The outer world creates an inner world within. This inner world provides me with vision and creates ocean of feelings. Our restless whirling planet Earth and webs of thousands of stars in the lap of endless space entangle my mind with millions of questions. It makes me 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. On the face of our planet, there are some black spots and some bright shines. All these trigger a need to share my thoughts with my readers. 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)

Identity of a person is the projection of the self, a process which cannot be fabricated. We develop our identity by tackling what we perceive to be our problems. We find our identity by understanding ourselves, and others. According to Coulmas, “Identity is a multi-layered dynamic process rather than an inborn trait that cannot be helped. Identities are partly given and partly made.” (178) Childhood impressions and aspirations play a fundamental role in its formation. The other defining factor of identity is the *Zeitgeist* (the spirit or mood of a particular period of history as shown by the ideas and beliefs of the time) of their time. Search for identity involves a much greater sensitivity not only to ourselves but to the society in which we live. Parvin shows her refined oriental sensibility and inherently feminine delicacy by having her husband and son accompany her on her travels although she has a strong individuality, she doesn’t believe in reconstruction of women’s identity and in her absolute independence. She is happy to be travelling with her husband and her son. She has strong familial ties with her family and still retains her individuality.

Traveling plays an important role in the construction of the identity of the individual through social interaction or through chance encounters with fellow travelers. What one considers right may be wrong in other’s eyes as in the case of the use of Veil. Veil is viewed through different angles by Westerners and Islamic societies as pointed out by Robert J.C. Young in the following passage:

For many Westerners, the veil is a symbol of patriarchal Islamic societies in which women are assumed to be oppressed, subordinated, and made invisible. On the other hand, in Islamic societies, and among any Muslim women in non – Islamic societies, the veil (*hijab*) has come to symbolize a cultural and religious identity, and women have increasingly chosen to cover themselves as a matter of choice. As a result, the veil is more widely worn today than ever before. (80)

To the *Flaneur*, the city is a canvas upon which the richness and diversity of urban life are painted. References to painters, ways of seeing, and the intense visual quality of the city are essential, for example, to Baudelaire’s concept of the *flaneur* as a visionary, “We might also liken him to a mirror as vast as the crowd itself; or to a kaleidoscope endowed with consciousness, which, with each one of its movements, represents the multiplicity of life and the flickering grace of all the elements of life.” (443)

In this sense Parvin can be called as *Flaneuse* because the reason for her traveling is to see the real face of people, to understand the different ways of life of diverse people having different cultures and different faiths by spending time with them and interacting with them and feeling connected, across the differences and distance of geography, language, culture, wealth and history expands her vision of life. She says that nature beholds her with its beauty and creates a new world for her that never vanishes.

Her travelogue is very picturesque and sentimental and her writing style both emotive and impressionistic. The *Flaneuse* does not typically travel out of necessity but from a need to fuel her desire for pleasure and experience. She highlights this aspect of her travelogue in the following lines:

Also, I wish to see nature. I wish to see the sun’s golden rays silently spread over earth’s various canvasses. I wish to see countless species of beautiful flowers that bring heaven on earth. I want to see palettes of slices, on all comers of the Earth. I want to see multicolored flowers spread on mountainsides, and blue dancing waves bathing golden

sand on sea shores. Natural beauty holds me. It creates a new world for me that never vanish. My travel introduces me to ugliness and beauty. Most importantly, it provides me with new, fresh blood for the veins of my creations. It gives me new dimensions. New suns and moons rise on the horizons of my thoughts. (15)

Her travelogue is like an autobiographical project, with the representation of the self, narrative unity and justification of her lives and the lives of others, exploring questions of identity and selfhood. In her travelogue we find a conscious attempt on the part of the writer to explore her selfhood and identity, to express the contours of her inner world of thought and feeling, and to reach an understanding of the influences and circumstances that shaped her and inward scrutiny as the writer attempts to reach some sort of self-understanding. An introspective analysis of how she is changed by her travelogues.

Her travelogue seeks to interweave the inner and outer worlds, mixing ostensibly factual, objective description issues relating to politics, economics, historical and public affairs of the people and places, through which the traveler passes. Hence, the combination of narratorial modes, according to Rob Nixon, is “an oscillation between ‘an autobiographical, emotionally tangled mode’ and a ‘semi-ethnographic, distanced, analytical mode’.” (15)

In her travelogue we are introduced to South Africa and Peru through the eyes of someone coming to an understanding of these places in a new way, instead of easy generalizations, we are presented here with a vision of intimacy and personal connection, a vision that invites us to share a space with real individuals who have complex histories and heartfelt emotions. There is a kind of sentimentality about her writing and that makes us feel that we are not outsiders in this story, and neither are the South Africans and Peruvians who are represented as individuals. Parvin states:

Upon my travels, I jumped over the walls of faith, languages and cultures and went into the court yard of hearts. When I met people, I felt their feelings and came to the conclusion that all the colors of life are similar. People might wear different styles or different fabrics of clothing. But deep inside, their souls are wrapped in the same style and same cloth. Human lives are really only one color, hidden in the different colors of language, culture, tradition and religion. Their emotions, their problems, their needs, their tears, their laughs are similar across all corners of the Earth. After this awakening, a childish thought awoke – that this Earth is home and all humans are one family. (16)

She reaches out to the people she meets and listens with respect and deep feeling to the stories they tell her. She empathizes with the sellers in the market and the tourist guides, with the Zulu dancers she watches, while absorbing stories about their marriage rituals, and with an elderly author she meets in a museum shop, who tells her the tragic story of losing his family home when his Cape Town neighborhood in District 6 was razed to the ground by the government.

She does not simply observe but reacts to the scenes around her, and records her reflections in her account. She seeks out situations which arouse strong feelings and sensations of spiritual intensity bringing out changes in her during travel experiences and by the others they encounter in her travels.

She 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 and this attraction towards history which takes a dominant place in her narrative. It is a journey though time, showing us how certain events can in a sense longer in a place, resonating long after they have occurred.

In Peru, the writer marvels at the natural beauty of the country. She describes her first vision of Peru, from the air, as if descending into a dream-like world of clouds. In Puno, she travels by rickshaw, watching the people and noting their chores and habits, such as the chewing of coca leaves. On the floating islands of Titicaca, she listens to local legends, learning the origins of the place names and the history of the people. She speaks to local craftspeople and sees the wares they make from natural materials. She learns from the people who live there how to build the floating islands they live on, by weaving them out of reeds.

She learns about the Inca people, their closeness to nature, and how their traditions have survived into the present day. She learns about their belief in the sun as god, and the sacred status of snakes. As she tours the houses

of worship, she is full of respect for their ancient way of life, and attuned to its beauty. At one point she describes a water mirror, made from stone, in which worshippers perceived the reflections of the night stars.

The travelogue is written in present tense so that the reader feels the journey as it enfolds in front of her. She recreates the view for the reader in details sometimes in metaphorical language that aims to recreate vividly the external scene and simultaneously giving subjective impressions of the scene.

Her travelogue has the traits of literary and cultural movements like Romanticism and sentimentalism. Her use of language throughout the book shows a wonderful skill in negotiating between the real “real” of descriptive language and the “dreamlike” aspects of poetic language. As a poet she is extremely accomplished, and her poetic work again acts as a complement to the prose writing here.

She writes in her travelogue that she wishes to see nature in all its colors and hues. Her travelogue becomes a vehicle to present her distinctive sensibility and unique outlook on the world. She elaborates in her travelogue the traits of Romanticism in the following lines:

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? 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)

There is sometimes digressive tendency found in her travelogue. Digressive, wide-ranging form of travelogue, in which the narrative focus often wanders far away from the actual scenes in front of the traveler allows a more detailed portrayal of the interior world of the traveler because consciousness is not bound by space and time in the same way as the body, and the travelers physical presence at a site will often be a spur for memories, reflections and imaginings that lead far away from their immediate surroundings.

Her travelogue is also a journey through time, showing us how certain events can in a sense linger in a place, resonating long after they have occurred 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.

When she visits Pilgrim's Rest, a historical town located in Mpumalanga, South Africa that has been declared a national monument she is mesmerized by its Victorian appeal. She thus records her feelings, “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)

Rubina Faisal says that this travelogue is a projection of Parvin's 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. She has recreated the phases of history that still bleed in her travelogue.

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 exists between the different regions of the world in terms of wealth, health and technological developments.

The other fellow travelers that writer uses to define their difference forms the basis of their his/her claim for greater degree of sophistication, open-mindedness and modernity, hence paving a way for self promotion in travel writing. Travel writers contrast themselves with the other travelers they encounter on their journeys by labeling them as tourists.

Tourists represent the very worst form of travelers because of their superficial, apprehensive and indolent travel habits and insensitivity resulting in their not gaining any form of significant insight into themselves. Hence creating the hierarchical binary or antithesis between tourist and traveler, wherein the tourist is inferior and traveler is considered superior. Travelers don't simply relate retrospectively or in a summarizing manner but reflects their thoughts and recreates or dramatizes the act of taking those views, so that the reader shares the experience with them.

In the words of Carl Thompson, “ Often these fellow travelers will be classified as mere ‘tourists’, whilst the writers ascribe to themselves the attributes and activities that are felt to characterize the true or proper ‘traveler’. ”(122) Narrating about a travel experience is a conscious work done by assigning identity to the people and places described, in consideration with the writer’s own personal ‘self’. She laments on the activities of other fellow travelers, thereby setting herself apart from, or superior to other travelers making her travelogue a self promoting narrative. She opines:

Her fellow tourists had left the house after witnessing the hardships braved by the members of the family; to them everything was a source of entertainment. They dispensed a token charity as was custom. To Parvin the contradiction of life here was an enigma. The tourists followed Canon and surveyed the entire area on the dusty lane; needless to say, they viewed everything as those who watch horror movies with interest and for entertainment. (44)

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.

Assigning one’s identity with reference to a foreign place could be understood by these lines in her travelogue, “McDonald’s restaurant was also in sight. It was amazing how MacDonald’s thrived everywhere. Smiles flickered across the faces of other travelling companions at the sight of McDonald’s” (51) This point is further emphasized by the remarks of Kath Woodward in *Questioning Identity: Gender, Class, Nation*:

Considering the claim that identity involves how I see myself and how others see me have led to some suggestions about how this takes place. First, we have to be able to imagine ourselves, to reflect on who we are and how we appear to others. Second, we do this through symbolizing, through producing images and visualizing ourselves. The ability to visualize ourselves and to represent ourselves gives us some degree of agency, although the repertoire of symbols upon which we can draw is always limited by the peculiar culture which we inhabit. (13)

She highlights these differences in the following lines:

Children played with broken earthen pots in the dusty lanes. They appeared to enjoy themselves immensely. Their faces beamed with pleasure, peace and contentment, because they knew nothing beyond the bounds of their small world. They had nothing but water tap shared by four families’. They believed that the tourists belonged to some other planet. Away from this world Parvin thought about privileged children, who are blessed with costly clothes and play games like tennis, badminton, soccer and basketball. The pieces of broken pots here, the sources of games and sports of township children, are but garbage to the privileged children in the west. (45)

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. 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 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.

Empathy for the people and compassion and sensitivity towards others is the most important aspect of her identity. 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 doesn'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)

In the words of Emmanuel Renault, "Identity is a given fact that we will be content with affirming so long as we can define ourselves as being part of a larger and indisputable whole. (102). This aspect of quest for identity is highlighted in the travelogue in the following lines:

Parvin reached the hotel. Unable to sleep, she went to the balcony. Natural sights attracted her attention. There lay sky-high mountains with open arms. Small lights twinkled like stars in the distance. But she was restless. 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. She vividly remembered the house where nineteen people lived in two rooms. She thought about the indifference and self-esteem of the poor young girl and the poverty-stricken children playing in the street. She also missed Suleiman, who wanted to be an advocate. She could visualize his eyes radiating hope and holding great dreams. She also remembered the houses with tin roofs. Her eyes fastened on the luxury items in her room. She felt suffocated there. (50)

The term 'identity' refers to the capacity for self-reflection and the awareness of self. Components of identity include a sense of personal acknowledgement and of uniqueness from other people based on their familial, cultural, and social encounters. This construction of selfhood and uniqueness makes a person distinct from others as people define themselves in the eyes of both others and themselves. Parvin opines:

Other tourists looked at them with surprise and indifference perhaps they felt that their time was being wasted, but it was the most important moment for Parvin, because it brought smiles on the faces of the children. She felt both happy and sad. In a contemplative mood she remembered that the journey in this world is short. No one could stretch or contract it. (45)

Often, the dialectical making and unmaking of the self is mirrored in the accounts that these travelers composed and is revealed at moments when conventional plots and perceptions give way to narrative rupture, at moments when narrative voices multiply or collapse.

Carl Thompson opines:

Texts which seems to undercut travel writing's frequent tendency to monologic imperiousness of vision by fashioning fragmented narrative, comprised in large part of extensive quotations from other authors. And by incorporating into the text other voices and other points of view, this dialogic or polyphonic narrative technique arguably works to 'decentre' the narratorial self". (127)

One such incident where Parvin shifts the focus of her narrative is when she writes about Sulaiman in the following passage:

A boy, about seven years of age, came near Faraz. He said his name was Suleiman. The intelligent boy didn't hesitate to talk to Faraz. He asked Faraz his profession. Mature questions of his young mind were a source of surprise to her. The boy said he wanted to be an advocate. (45)

This decentring of the self suggests that no self is entirely a singular, unique to one individual. Having other voices to enter in her narrative like Canon, the guide's perceptions and large commentarial sections highlights the inter-subjectivity in her travelogue. The descriptions offered by the guide Canon are of high importance to take up the major space in her account of the journey. He gives a very fair description of his country. He answers Parvin's questions very honestly, though he also spoke truthfully about the crimes in his country, he was very proud of his country. Unlocking his heart, he was all praise for the values of his country when he drew a comparison with North America. He gives an account of the culture and tradition of his country. There is also a mention of other guides Richard. She uses his voice to describe Cape Town, "Like Canon, Richard started the account of his country, "Cape Town has the world's longest desert, known as Namib. No city in the world has as many varieties of spices as Cape

Town". (76). Richard like Canon provides descriptions and information about the historical, political, economical, and cultural backgrounds of the places visited in his guidance.

Furthermore Canon's descriptions have the power to stir her imagination that flitted from one thing to another. Her mind is filled with his words even after reaching her hotel room. She reminiscence:

She thought about the merging of two rivers, the river of happiness and river of sorrows, the intermingling of sheen and shade, a regular routine of life where joys trail sorrows and sorrows trail joys ceaselessly. Joys and sorrows are inseparably interlinked and prevail upon each other in turn. These two rivers are a pair of eyes, one of joys and the other of sorrows. (57)

She uses the voice of Sandy a beautiful girl, the receptionist of "More Quarters Hotel" in Cape Town, who was very cheerful, helping and amiable. Parvin used to sit in the lounge to talk to her about her country and Apartheid. Sandy opines:

They were not allowed to stay for more than 72 hours in the areas of whites. They had to keep their Identity cards on them because the police used to check. In case they failed to produce the identity cards, they were immediately arrested. On the other hand, whites needed no identity cards. They enjoyed freedom of movement, whereas blacks had restricted movement, and only then with official permission. (92)

She also uses the voice of Patricio Vivanda, another guide:

Patricio Vivanda, the guide, arrived early in the morning at the hotel with his sight-seeing van. The tourists started talking to the guide. Their conversation centered on Peru. They asked questions about the country, and the guide answered every question proudly. Parvin thought about his deep love for the country. (105)

She uses the voice of Yesmani, another guide:

There are 2200 people on this island. Forty thousand tourists come here every year for sight-seeing. It was once a part f the Inca's Empire. The Spanish used it as jail after they occupied the land of the Incas. There were two schools teaching in Ouechua and Spanish as mediums of instructions. One of them specialized in handicraft and the preservation of their tradition. The residents of Taquile Island are very shy. Twenty years back, they used to hide from strangers. (119)

According to Prof. Ateequllah, she has given her travelogue a narrative color, a fictional touch by presenting herself as a character in the travelogue, as though the narrator and Parvin are not the same one they are two different persons. She has very skillfully separated the writerly "I" from the character "Parvin" in the narration.

She uses a Third Person Narrative in the travelogue which is uncommon as travelogues are considered to be very personal genre next to only Autobiographies. She seldom describes herself directly. She used indirect descriptive strategies as well, like she uses the voice of different guides for historical, political, social or economical descriptions of the places visited.

Her travelogue also figures intertextuality like retelling stories she has read or heard thus intermingling or distilling multiple other consciousnesses. She mentions about other texts in the following lines:

He made mention of a book by Olive Schreimer (1855-1920), a very famous South African writer. She was the first creative writer who was widely acclaimed. Her most celebrated novel was The Story of an African Farm. She wrote it in 1883. She was an intellectual and had written books opposing war. While showing books, Noor familiarized her with celebrated poets and writers of his country. Parvin was pleasantly surprised to see Cry, The Beloved Country a book by Alan Stewart Paton (1903-1988). She had already seen a film about racial discrimination whose story was based on that book. This novel was so well received that 15 million copies of it sold like hot cakes all over the world. It is written without a parochial bias, the book deals with injustice, spiritual conflict, poverty, crime and the structure of society. (91)

An instance of her using the tool of intertextuality is found in the following lines wherein she quotes the lines she could not help reading repeatedly from *Cry, The Beloved Country* a book by Alan Stewart Paton, thus:

Cry the beloved country, for the unborn child that is the inheritor of our fear. Let him not love the earth too deeply. Let him not laugh too gladly when the water runs through his fingers, nor stand too silent when the setting sun makes red the veld with fire. Let him not be too moved when the birds of his land are singing, nor give too much of his heart to a mountain or a valley. For fear will rob him of all if he gives too much.(91)

Another instance of her using the tool of intertextuality is found in the following lines:

The conversation centered on the creative writers of Peru. Good - natured and cheerful as they were, they spoke proudly about Mario Vargas Closa, the greatest, favorite writer of their country. A dramatist and journalist, he had a dozen novels to his credit. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 2010. His most popular novels are "The Story Teller" and "The Green House". Their central theme is Peru. He was a failure in politics, though. Cesar Vallejo, Peru's most celebrated poet has three collections of poems. He is considered to be one of the most prominent poets of the 20th century. Claudia Llosa, the niece of Mario Vargas, is a successful film-maker and a writer in Peru. Her film, "The Milk of Sorrow", was nominated for an Academy Award for best foreign film. (105)

Attempts to decentre and diffuse the narratorial self in travel writing, by the use of third person narrative, polyphonic modes of travel writing like extensive quotations, multiple narrators do not necessarily undermine an author's controlling presence in her text. As James Clifford has noted, 'quotations are always staged by the quoter', whilst the interweaving of different voices often still involves, and implies, a 'final, virtuoso orchestration by a single author'. (139)

The writer, through travel narration assigns an identity to himself/herself that might be different from the already existing notions.

Emmanuel Renault provides an elaborate definition of identity, in *Keywords: Identity*, "Identities cannot be reduced to the simple pre political dimension of knowledge, of background, static and pre reflexive, because they are capable of being altered in the struggle to be recognized and in their entry into public space." (108) this remark emphasizes the fact that identity can undergo changes while it is used in a public/social circle. Identity to which a writer associates is based on how he associates/dissociates with a foreign place. According to Kay Ferres, in *Deciphering Culture*, "I do not know my 'place' except through its relation to these other alluring places. (10) Parvin's personality is deeply affected by her association with the foreign place. She writes about the effects she goes through in the following lines:

Parvin felt everything with emotional involvement. It seemed as if she were among the people of District Six, gripped by the fright caused by the roaring bulldozer rushing toward her as well. She felt as though her existence was also turned to debris. The book fell from her hands. She fell on the earth. (94)

From this comment it could be seen that identity has its relevance only in relation with the other people/places. It does not have a separate stand beyond that. Notions of identity are generated by the writer/traveler during cultural encounter. Cultural encounter happens during travelling. She elaborates this point in the following lines:

Now everybody was new - Richard, the guide, and Cathy and Lisa, her fellow tourists. They were Jews. They were aware of the fact that they had Muslim fellow tourists. But their sincere affability and affection led Parvin to believe that the fundamental need of every human being is love and affection. But high walls separate people. Some can't break the walls even though they wish to (95)

The transformation of 'self' into an individual identity is a long process that is involved during travelling and documentation. The writer's 'self' could associate with any place/people that draws his/her attention. 'Self' is described in *Deciphering Culture*, by Gillian Swanson, thus: The spaces of private life-constituted in relation to home,

family and personal bonds- functioned as a refuge from the public world, maintaining the boundaries of individual 'nature' (78)

Thus notions of 'self' define the individual and public space shared by the writer/traveler. The notions of 'self' is not limited to the state of mind of the traveler/writer. It is defined by the political, social, cultural and economic spheres in which the writer/traveler live. During her tour, Parvin realized that, if one chanced to meet someone speaking their native tongue, they felt naturally close to them. It gave them a sense of security. She writes, "Even strangers then seemed familiar ones." (95)

'Self' is further defined by Gillian Swanson that would enable in the clearer understanding of the travel narratives. She remarks:

Even the definition of the most intimate realms of the self takes place through the regulation of customs and manners, and, just as behavior is shaped by its harnessing to a socially legible, communicable, system, so too are ways of feeling made habitual and depend upon those established 'ways of being' that are offered within specific social environments. The differences between such environments have long been the subject of representations of various sorts. They were of particular interest in that period I am identifying as that which consolidated distinctions between public and private, and the sense of an inner and personal realm of individuality formed in the intimate, everyday habits of self fashioning. (84)

This remark by Gillian Swanson broadens the understanding of 'identity', 'self', and 'other'. Thus cultural encounter and travel narratives could be studied, taking into account the various binaries; public/private space, individual/collective sense, self/other notions, strange/foreign, people/place, and so on. Clear notions about all these binaries would make the study of travel narratives interesting as well as informative to the readers where by peripheral view points of the traveler/writer would attain significance in viewing a foreign culture. Parvin elaborates this point in the following lines:

The musicians had CDs of their songs for sale. Parvin called them over to buy some. One of them came near and spoke in English. She was pleasantly surprised to hear this. Other tourists were busy eating and talking. He sold Parvin some CDs then resumed his music and song. Wrapped up in the wonderful atmosphere, Parvin was shocked to see others busy discussing about their shopping. She thought, "the world has a variety of people, each different from one another, and so many are disconnected." The other tourists were not interested in taking in the captivating atmosphere.(133)

She mostly employs figurative language, imaginative forms such as poetry and paintings in order to reflect on the significance of travel or to educate readers about the wholesome effects of it on the development of her identity to enrich our understanding. She highlights this aspect of her narrative in the following lines:

Parvin was in the ruins, with their dilapidated walls and roofs, the shadow of an ancient culture, a part of age- old history. The ancient walls seemed to say, "life used to bloom here, used to be fragrant." The place had the warmth of community." She was immersed in a sea of deep feeling. She was abreast with lost moments of the past. She drank in the gentle wind. She was removing the moss that gathered on the heart from the troubles of life. Her life, filled with its own troubled days, felt ecstatic pleasure here. The birds, like clouds, were resting in the arms of the mountains. The dreamlike atmosphere was like that of a great painter. Windows of color and smell opened to her. Pure wind had such an ecstatic pleasure that it had no name. Parvin's inner world was illuminated by a spiritual peace. The following poem about natural beauty flowed from her pen. She was torn awake from this world of magic by the sound of the guide. She then took photographs of the natural beauty before she left. These scenes will remain with her forever. (143)

In the process of defining oneself or representing one's identity, the easiest way to distinguish or differentiate oneself from another is to use the terms 'self' and 'other'. 'Self' and 'other' are the terms that are defined elaborately by critics including Edward Said. Identity can be seen from the remarks of Wang Bin, a theorist on identity, in *Keywords Identity*, as the ability "to define or talk about them as a totality when confronted with the Other." (81) Parvin writes:

Spontaneously, she was reminded of a western day care, which was housed in a grand building, and where well-dressed children were deposited from expensive cars. Here the mothers transport their children on their backs; Parvin's mind was firmly gripped by the dusty lanes .She wished to stay here for some more time. (45)

This definition would be the right fit for defining identity in terms of the travel narratives as the traveler/writer does have an identity that differentiates him from the rest of the world.

This is described in *Keywords: Identity*, where David A. Hollinger, comments thus: Identity is a degree of personhood established more by internal, psychological mechanisms than by afflictions with a group. Indeed, some psychologists in the United States do use the term identity in this way, and assume that to have an identity is to have a unified self, capable of acting effectively in the world. Sometimes this will involve close ties with this or that group, but group affiliation is incidental rather than definitional to the process. (31)

According Eric Leed in *The Mind of the Traveler*:

The mental effects of passage—the development of observational skills, the concentration on forms and relations, the sense of distance between an observing self and a world of objects perceived first in their materiality, their externalities and surfaces, the subjectivity of the observer—are inseparable from the physical conditions of movement through space. (72)

She ends her travelogue on the following note which validates the above mentioned quote by Eric Leed. She elaborates thus:

Far away, she felt lonely, understanding her unique attraction to the earth. Sitting in the plane, flying at a high altitude, she had forgotten the thousands of differences dividing people, the tortures perpetrated due to hatred and cruelty. She missed the earth. It looked like a house to her. She had forgotten the ruthlessness of it. She missed her home and her old friend, the tree in front of her house. The earth receded into distance. She cast a glance to space through the small window of the plane. Her eyes met a remarkable sight of twinkling stars. She saw the moon descend on the window and heard it whispering to her. She was in the Milky Way, lost in thought, What is the limit of the limitless universe? Where is its beginning? Where is its end? How many worlds are there in space? What is the reason behind the creation of the universe? The child in her constantly bombarded her with questions. In answer to them, she composed the following poems. (146)

The quest for identity exhibits a basic human need, the need to structure one's personal identity in relation to others, to identify oneself with what lies outside the self, to find roots and establish connections to the past as well as to the future. During traveling individuals find them confronted with the external world. This confrontation can sometimes shatters the old, self-evident sense of identity, evokes confusion and frustrates the individual sense of belonging and further triggers the quest for identity, the traveler's most intimate self-perceptions about the direction or meaning of his or her life are altered. In her words:

Parvin thought about impermanence and the transitory nature of relationships, as the tourists waved good bye to one another. Every relation is impermanent, be it a blood relation or any other. They rise and break like bubbles. One passes one's life amid a forging and breaking off bonds. Some people get used to it and some are shattered. (145)

Hence travelling plays an important role in the quest for identity.

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