Conclusion

Travel writing offers an intimate, first-hand account of textually depicted cultural encounters and interactions -- the personal biases of writer as traveller notwithstanding. The depictions of such encounters reflect, sometimes, writers’ ideological leanings (or biases). This narrative viewpoint is attained via stress on the omniscient, first-person, autobiographical narrative, merged at various levels with a critical interrogation of the role of history. A travel writer, subsequently, employs the cultural tenets that such stance lends to advocate the significance of his side of travel writing over (via interrogation of received versions of history) and other genres and disciplines. Travel writers’ employment of (and shift amidst) various genres (essay, novel, non-fiction) sub-genres (memoir, biography, autobiography), disciplines (anthropology, history, political science) and sub-disciplines (international relations, ethnography) is subtle, consistent, non-linear, nuanced (and intricate). Such an approach entails and facilitates research that deals with critical issues of power, appropriation (and other forms of cultural representation) in the socio-political and cultural arena.

Though tourism (or post-tourism) is considered to be the nemesis of travel, yet this is not the exact case. The pleasures and comforts of tourism industry can be utilized to enhance the experience of travel. Scores of tourists might not visit even popular tourist destinations due to ignorance, monetary reasons (many do not visit Petra while visiting Mexico because of the high entrance fee) or just discomfort (there are relatively very few visits to Himalayas, Antartica, or to the North Pole). Thus, as apprehended by the traveler, the area’s aesthetic or pristine charm might not be ravaged by tourists. Many exciting travel locations and sites have not been listed on popular online travel marts, neither were they available in the itinerary planned by the hotel (of residence during the visit). Such moment come either suddenly (by chance), or through the recommendation of a tourist guide or local inhabitants of the area. Tourists generally form herds that stay together, away and safe from the road not taken. Singapore and Thailand are packed with tourists, but Malaysia and Indonesia are free for the explorer. The need is to just stray off the beaten track. The traveler / tourist, thus, can have inputs from the inhabitants of the area visited, try to unearth and discern the essence of the area’s history and polity, use mobile phone, internet, Google Earth, facebook, and twitter to get some knowledge of place being visited, and ask relevant questions from their travel agent or guide.
In fact, tourism and/or post-tourism might be a boon for gifted travel writers as internet blogs might give them a chance to get their writings published (online). In many instances, the prospective travel writers have been given the task to write for good publishing houses on the basis of their online following (or the number of visits on their websites). Getting their work published is, thus, no longer a herculean task for such writers.

On the negative side, the onslaught of data and information makes it cumbersome for the people at the top of all good publishing houses to single out good texts/travelogues and travel writers from the average. Though internet has many user-friendly search engines, yet to sort the relevant from the irrelevant might be challenging. Thus, it might be prudent to refer to a good shelf in the library while searching reliable travel related informational statistics. Furthermore, the sudden ecstasies of discovery (during the voyages and travails), overshadows the comfortable pleasures offered by a trip planned online sitting in front of a laptop.

Though travel writing is gaining popularity among the academia due to its amorphous and protean qualities as well as its ability to intervene and deal with contemporary post 9/11 milieu in an unbiased and dialogic, multicultural (rather pluricultural) manner. Yet, owing to immense market pressures (of tourism and publishing industry) in a globalised scenario, it has to face toughest competition from journalism as well as Novel (its perennial companion/adversary). Furthermore, internet has dented the yields of book publishing industry to unprecedented levels. Trillions of individuals write for Facebook, Twitter, Google +, Amazon, etc., without getting (and even expecting) any financial rewards.

There are some affinities between travel writing and journalism (or, to be more precise, literary journalism). But a journalist (belonging to print media, TV media, or internet) might writer about (or in) blogs, report live or post online his factual observations in a 24x7 work environment, at a global scale, catering to an audience that demands not just plain facts but analysis. Too often such journalistic reports consist of bombardment of facts on human mind, whereas, travel writing texts are more nuanced. Robert Kaplan observes that:

Reporting emphasizes the intrusive, tape-recorded interview; travel writing emphasizes the art of good conversation, and the experience of how it comes about in the first place (2).

Thus, travel writers weave their text by shunning parochial ideological biases in favour of immediacy and nuanced version. Against the backdrop of advances in information technology,
electronic media and internet, contemporary travel writers, in order to give novelty to their journeys (and the texts / travelogues formed out of these journeys), endorse uncanny and daring challenges and tests and / or unfathomable voyages.

The writers (Ghosh, Seth, Theroux, Bryson, Iyer, Mishra) discussed in this study transcend (and even transgress) genres -- more so in the case of Iyer’s *The Lady and the Monk*, and Mishra’s *Temptations of the West*. They are not content with mere spending long durations of time at a location -- analyzing its economic, socio-politics, cultural vectors, climate, transport, etc. The writers like Iyer, Ghosh, Mishra, Seth firmly avoid trivial essentializations and / or straight-jacketed political formulas. Yet, some of the finest, globally acclaimed writers like Naipaul and Rushdie might also create a long rattling, tautological meta-narrative out of a typology of travel and embed it in their fictional works. Yet, it has been observed that owing to market pressures, fiction is read and sold more than fiction (and, for the same reasons, popular fiction is read and sold in a much greater proportion than literary / academic / serious fiction). Mishra, Ghosh, Naipaul and Iyer indulge both in writing travelogues as well as novels. Thus, travel writing is (still) a part time vocation for them. Out of the three writers analysed in this thesis, only Iyer is a devoted, full-time travel writer. Ghosh is mainly a novelist and also a travel writer. His *In an Antique Land* the unutilized part of his Ph.D. theses on social anthropology. Though travel writing is his first love, Mishra is also a literary critic (writing for many globally acclaimed organizations like *New York Review of Books*, and *The Guardian*) and a journalist.

Travel writing is a post-novel genre. It is a form of non-fiction writing that existed alongside the novel. But it was in the latter half of the twentieth century that travel writing as a separate genre came to be recognized and canonized in academia. V.S. Naipaul in an interview pronounced that non-fiction is more potent than fiction and that novel is dead as it is incompetent to squarely deal with issues ranging from global terrorism to global warming: “I thought non-fiction gave one chance to explore the world, the other world, the world that one didn’t know fully” (Donadio Web). According to Naipaul, creative novels could be written endlessly:

if you believed that the framework of an ordered society exists. But that no longer exists for most people, so that kind of imaginative work is of less and less use to them. They live in a disordered and fast-changing world, and they need help in grasping it, understanding it, controlling it. And that is how the writer will serve them. (Naipaul Web)
Travel writers perform their journeys to discern the shared cultural nuances beneath the veneer of differences across cultures. Mishra, Ghosh, and Iyer trace them in folk traditions, religious practices, historical underpinnings, mass media, cinema, theatre. Hence, Pankaj Mishra and Amitav Ghosh employ travel writing as a tool to incorporate assorted themes and materials, embedding into it the elements of a bildungsroman, polyphonic ideologies, omniscient and obtrusive narrative view-points like the views of Japanese monks and Sachiko (in Iyer’s *The Lady and the Monk*); ideology of the survivors of Pol Pot regime, Aung San Suu Kyi, the insurgents like Mahender Singh, and Chea Samy (in Ghosh’s *Dancing in Cambodia, At Large in Burma*), and, in Pankaj Mishra’s *Temptations of the West*, the views of Jihadis, Talibs, Tibetans, Chinese, Dalai Lama, Mao, Kashmiris, Indian government, Abdullahs, Nehrus, Gandhis, Nepali monarchy, and the Maoists of Nepal.

Although each chapter stresses on a single primary text, this thesis, altogether, attempts to underscore the magnitude and effectiveness of a critical assessment of travel writing post 1990 (particularly post 9/11 travel writing). Mishra’s, Ghosh’s, and Iyer’s travelogues simultaneously, confirm to and defy the generic boundaries amidst travel writing, novel, autobiography, and narrative history. Each text gives an opening to scrutinize diverse question from differing theoretical stances. Such an assessment studies each travelogue as an instance of varying narrative and generic strategies, but it highlights the level to which all the three travelogues function -- to foreground travel writing as genre that is protean and imbibes the attributes of all the genres to its advantage. All the three writers maintain an autobiographical, omniscient, first-person narrative. Their journey, as writers, anthropologists, historians, journalists and interventionists -- via participation, the archives, and the fieldwork, done in the forbidden terrains like Taliban, Pakistan, Tibet, Zen monastery and Kyoto, Khmer Rouge, and Burma -- exemplify the strategies that form the substance of travel writing and privilege it over other genres and disciplines. Travel writing, thus, aids the writers in maintaining a link between journalism, reportage, personal intervention, and anthropology. The texts of Mishra, Ghosh, and Iyer, thus, employ the topos of travel and / as self-analysis. Iyer roams around as an ardent adventurous monk, Ghosh as travel writer / anthropologist, and Mishra as travel writer / interventionist/ journalist. At many instances, the protagonist, narrator, and writer assume and merge in one role.
Pico Iyer in *The Lady and the Monk* poses the idea that nationalism is no longer the meta-narrative and proposes some alternatives to it. It might be stated the ideas that travel (and travel writing) are metaphors and/or symbols for the creation of discursive ontological ideologies focal to the dealings between self and other, diverse forms of alterity, nationalisms, communal, racial and gender discourses. Ghosh in *Dancing in Cambodia, At Large in Burma* tries to establish links amidst travel writing and anthropological practices, and to the current abjuration, in both, of the myth of objectivity and 'chaste' analysis, recorded, for example, by Mary Louise Pratt and James Clifford in their works.

Personal interviews and intervention, as well as activism (or even - Didacticism), get reflected in Mishra’s *Temptations of the West*. This travelogue starts with autobiographical details, which later become part of the overall narrative. The text betrays ardent individual concern of the writer (and his desire) to depict and communicate with the different peoples and cultures (than his own). This might give the rationale for employing the narrative techniques generally related with fiction, like scene by scene progression, the wide use of symbolic and figurative devices and language -- tropes less utilized in his essays and journalistic articles. The travelogues of Mishra in *Temptations of the West* are the product of such practices and techniques. Travelogues that make generic boundaries porous (and sometimes defunct) -- utilizing the stratagems of fiction, non-fiction, biography, journalism, memoir-bound altogether by the common fabric of travel.

Interrogating and re-scrutinizing the received version of history Mishra makes interventions to reveal the realpolitik and the policies of the statecraft that are detrimental to the well-being of common inhabitants of those regions. His activism and interventions border on arenas of insurgency -- when he narrates the massacre of innocent villagers at Chittisingpura. The talibanization of Kashmiris, Pakistanis, and Afghanis is another instance. It might be opined that this thesis has shown that attempts to construct such narratives are possible and have been exhibited through history of travel writing. They have the potential to subvert the existing literary-cultural binaries and schisms -- like orient-occident / east-west / Islam-Christianity / fiction-nonfiction / literary- non-literary. Iyer, Ghosh, and Mishra do succeed, largely, in constructing meaningful, non-hegemonic, and dialogic travel writing texts (in *The Lady and the Monk; Dancing in Cambodia, At Large in Burma;* and *Temptations of the West*, respectively).
Thus, all three books dissolve cultural distances and binaries, thus, creating a “contact zone” (Pratt 6) for cultural dialogue(s) and negotiations among various cultures and ethnicities.

In this post google earth, post-facebook, post 9/11 era, individuals still want to experience joys or risks of genuine travel. Ian Jack asserts that “it seems to me that if travel writing is to be more than a persuasive literary entertainment -- if it is to have […] some moral purpose -- then the information it contains needs to be trustworthy” (14). Though the travel writers in the post 1990s era are aware of the plurality and multiculturality of their representations as well as their corresponding interpretations. Auge (2001) believes that contemporary travel writers must give facts, be ethically and actively engaged in contemporary world threatened by the dynamics of global terrorism, and environmental pollution and degradation, and yet write aesthetically interesting and absorbing travelogues. In brief, travel writers have to depict “something more representative, more immediately human, and more subjective” (Kowalewski 216). Yet, contemporary travel writers like Seth, Iyer, Davidson, Theroux, Mishra depict the adventurous sides of their voyages in their writings.

The association between postmodernism and post 9/11 travel writing is conspicuous (as postmodernist devices themes, tenets, and tropes have percolated profusely in travel writing -- just in the same manner as they have in fiction). Though gripped with postmodern concepts of the replica and the constructed, writers like Iyer, Ghosh, and Mishra still clinge to modernist and realist conventions. In spite of the realization that the locale narrated and depicted is a socio-cultural and ideological construct. Travel writers, largely, have refused to follow the notion that the actual and the true are worthless expressions; possibly because contemporary postmodern thought propounds that such thought denies reality, value, idealism, and interventionism in lieu of parody, sarcasm, discourse, and ideologies of fragmentation. However, if travel writers blindly practice this theory, they would become identical with novelists and their fictional crafts and practices. Hence, in travel writing, there is no Barthesian ‘death of the author’ or Fukuyamese ‘end of history’. Also, similar concepts related to the indeterminacy of language are rendered feeble.

The quest-theme in travel writing has now been replaced by the poetics of a literary craft, in travelogues, that comprises of an amalgam of anthropology, fiction, nonfiction, autobiography, biography interventionism, and heightened consciousness resulting from personal involvement and dedication for activism, ethics, and personal transformation (or evolution). Or, perhaps, it
has been an abiding concern --and a parameter -- for all good travel writing texts throughout the history of this genre.