UNIT STRUCTURE

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9.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to :

- explain travel writing as a literary form,
- discuss travel writers and travel writing,
- classify travel writing,
- develop skills of a travel writer.

9.2 INTRODUCTION

Ever since the beginnings of civilization, traveling has always been a human desire. In the earlier times men used to travel for a variety of reasons –for the purpose of satisfying his curiosity, for adventure, for pleasure, for political reasons as well as in search of food and jobs . Some of these travelers who possessed alert and methodical minds often recorded their experiences and observations in the form of writing which eventually led to the development of the genre known today as “travel writing ”. It is seen that the world’s ancient and medieval travel literature is quite rich . . In India too, we are acquainted with the travel books and accounts of Chinese travelers like Fahien and Huein Tsang , and French Travelers like Tavernier and Bernier . These travels books serve as the documents of religious , political , cultural

history of India of those times. You must have surely heard about Marco Polo, Ibn Batuta and others who are also great travel writers. During the colonial period, travel writing got a boost when scores of books were written on India by British and European travelers. Though many of these fitted into the image of India as an exotic oriental land, yet quite a few of them presented detailed insights into the land and its peoples. In modern times, interesting travel books have been written by authors like V.S. Naipaul, Paul Theroux, Graham Greene, Vikram Seth and others etc. Our country is also rich in wide range of travel literature written in the regional languages. The travel books serve a variety of purposes because they not only provide valuable information a place but also give us an insight into the history and culture of a people. So in this unit an idea would be given about travel writing as literary genre as well history of travel writing. Some examples of travel writing along with some tips on how to write travelogues would also be provided.

9.3 TRAVEL WRITING AS A LITERARY FORM

Over the years, travel writing has emerged as an important genre of contemporary writing. Travel Writing has always played an important role in the current socio political life of the world community. As a literary form, it expresses the self-definition of the author who tries to place his cultural experience parallel to the experiences of other cultures to create world openness and assist the process of socialization.

As a literary form, travel writing has a threefold characteristic which may be divided into the aesthetic, the political, and the scientific. It depicts the culture at its source, which includes admiration of works of art, comparison of society at home and abroad and observation of the nature of many processes taking place in the society. By combining all these three forms of educative processes, travel writing can effectively draw the reader's attention to the economic potential of a place or its political prospects and history. In doing this, it emulates its goal of integrating diverse forms of observation into a complex whole. Travel Writing can serve as a raw material out of which one may draw

conclusions about indigenous peoples, trajectories of development, evolution and preservation of traditions, courses of events etc. Travel writing is in many ways, a means of on-the-spot recording. All observations of men and events should be described with truth and clarity within a credible frame of relationships. In travel writing, both art and science are skillfully combined in bringing about a synthesis of the visual and literary imagination.

Aesthetics and precision are the two dominant categories for the experience of Travel Writing. A historical look on Travel Writing discovers strains of literality that can enrich our own conception of cultural encounters. It might even encourage reflection on whether we have left behind the older methods or might better think of ourselves as historical tourists following the paths laid down by previous generations of Travel Writing.

Modern anthropologists, historians, geographers, philologists have never stopped relying heavily on the travellers' memoirs as sources of information about peoples whose cultures have been damaged or destroyed.

Here it would be necessary to point that travel narrative is much harder than it looks. The beauty of travel writing lies in its simplicity. It needs to be kept in mind that travel writing is not the same thing as writing guidebooks Finally, it can be said that travel writing has evolved as a literary form and now it has become an integral part of popular contemporary writing.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 1

1. What are the three fold character of travel writing?

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2. Does art and science work together in travel writing ?

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9.4 TRAVEL WRITING AND TRAVEL WRITERS

Travel writing is a broad category of writing concerned with various aspects of travel.

Travel writing is often associated with tourism, and happens to include works of a rather ephemeral nature such as guide books. But that is only one aspect of travel writing. Over the ages, different types of travelers such as missionaries, explorers, scientists, pilgrims and immigrants have all enriched travel writing by incorporating their experiences and observations. That sort of travel writing which possesses a creative content is generally valued as literature and referred to as travel literature. Apart from its creative content, such writing also quite often reveals the individual's interpretation of men and events surrounding a particular geographical location.

It should be noted that the urge to travel and see and experience new lands and peoples has always been a human desire right from the beginnings of civilization. Since the earliest of times people have been traveling for variety of reasons. These range from the urge to satisfy one's curiosity or sense of adventure or the simple pleasure of traveling to moving from place to place in search of food or jobs or because of political compulsions. Some travelers who possessed a sense of alertness and a methodical mind often recorded their traveling experiences and facts as they appeared to them and these ultimately formed the corpus of what today we refer to as travel writing. Some of the more famous travel writers of modern times include Vikram Seth who has, in his *"From Heaven Lake"* written an exciting and highly interesting account of his hitch-hiking trip through China's Sinkiang

province to Tibet and then finally to Nepal. Similarly, American writers like Paul Theroux and William Least Heat-Moon, the Welsh writer Jan Morris and English author Eric Newby have all made their livings through writing travelogues. Morris, however, is more famous as a historian while Theroux is a popular novelist. The Great Railway Bazaar by Paul Theroux is a well known and popular piece of writing. V. S Naipaul's India: *A Wounded Civilization and Among the Believers* are well known travelogues where the author's trips to India and Iran become occasions for deep and extended observations on the nations and their peoples and civilizations, their past glories and present predicaments. Ved Mehta is another well known travel writer.

LET US KNOW



National Geographic Emerging Explorer and PEN award winning journalist Kira Salak first reached acclaim by traveling to the world's remotest locations and writing about them for National Geographic publications and travel books.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 2



Say true or false :

1. Ved Mehta has written *India: A Wounded Civilization*. (True / False)

2. Travelling has always been a human desire right from the civilization. (True / False)

9.5 SOME ASSAMESE TRAVEL WRITERS

Assamese literature is quite rich in travel writing. Perhaps you will be interested to know as to who could have been the pioneers of modern travel writing in Assamese. We can start with name of Jnanadabhiram Barua who wrote travel memoirs titled as '*Bilator Chithi*' (Letters from the Foreign Country) published in 1948 in book form. Dr. Birinchi Kumar Barua's travelogue '*Switzerland Bhraman*' (1948) (Journey to Switzerland)

may be a trend-setter in this line. Hem Barua, a reputed poet, critic, educationist and illustrious parliamentarian, became quite popular and well known through his travelogues like *'Sagar Dekhisa'* (Have you seen the sea ?) *'Ranga Karabir Phul'* (The Red Flower Karabi), *'Mekong Nai Dekhilo'* (I have seen the river Mekong), Israel etc. These books are the result of his travels to various countries at different times. Written in a literary style, frequently accompanied with relevant poetic quotations in lightness of touch and personal appeal make for lively reading. Amalendu Guha's *'Soviet Deshat Abhumuki'* (A Peep into the land of The Soviets) contains descriptions about Tashkand and his experiences there. Similarly, Sayed Abdul Malik's *'Majat Mathu Himalayas'* (Himalaya only in Between) and Naba Kanta Barua's *'Deshe Deshe Mor Desha'* (My country in different countries), Gautam Barua's *'Nana Desh, Nana Rang'* are well known travel writings which have earned merit, popularity and interest. Of late, many books on travel writing have been available in Assamese literature. But mostly, many of them are travel–diaries with narration and descriptions providing informations of different places of visit.

9.6 TWO DISTINCT TYPES OF TRAVEL WRITING

We can say that there are two distinct kinds of travel writing that exists today. One kind of travel writing speaks of travel as a personal experience and is termed sometimes as travelogue or itinerary and the other is which provides information to travelers is mostly falls into the category of travel guides.

Travel writing can be specialized as well as a creative craft. Specialized Travel writing is more specific and it generally concentrates on one particular area of interest. For example a person may write only on business travels or on places of cultural / historical interest. So, nowadays this comes into the category of specialized travel writing. Again, creative travel writing is in a class by itself. This kind of writing is mainly a piece of imaginative prose which is a record of lively experience. Travel writing must be based on actual experience. Creative

travel writing is a class by itself. In such writing the author gives full expression to his / her craetivity and spontaneity in re-creating / expressing the experience of travel. In doing this, the author's sensibility, sharp objective power, eye for detail and capacity to knit together a story in an engrossing style, - all come into play. In such writing stamp of the author's individuality and his particular style of expression have a major role to play.

LET US KNOW



Naipaul's travel books, *The Middle Passage*, *An Area of Darkness*, *India: A Wounded Civilization*, *Among the Believers*, *India* : *A Million Mutinies now* and *A Turn in the South* have been discussed widely and are popular among the readers.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 3



1. What are the two distinct types of travel writing?

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2. What is specialized travel writing ?

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3. Explain creative travel writing ?

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9.7 HOW TO BE A TRAVEL WRITER

Travel writing has always had a wide appeal. In the past, however, writers wrote for an audience that probably did not expect to travel. These readers turned to books to experience a world that they would probably never see. Today, travel books often tell us about places that we can go and visit. The travel book may be a way of learning about a land that we plan to visit or it may be a way of revisiting a place that we have actually experienced. Thus the travel writer today has to imagine a different audience. There really isn't anything mystifying about breaking into travel writing. Desire is but a first step. Like any career there are ways to climb the ladder and the correct approach can help one to reach one's objective.

To be a travel writer, you have to travel a lot, observe a lot and write a lot. There are few tips that you need to follow to become a travel writer. Following are some of the travel writing tips:

- **Travel a lot :** There is no simple way to write about travel with any kind of authority unless you get a basic sense for what life on the road is like. Also, it will help if you travel in a dynamic way — opening yourself up to the unknown and interacting with the local cultures. It is also advisable that for anyone who is really serious about travel writing or even just experiencing the world in a more vivid way to work for a few years in different far away places because this kind of expatriate experience immerses you in a culture in a way that mere travel cannot. Moreover, it conditions you to interact with people, even if you don't fully understand their language or customs.
- **Be a Reporter :** Traveling as a writer is different from traveling as a tourist. Take notes, ask questions, get quotes and notice the little details of your trip. How much did it cost, how long has it been open, how many people have visited, etc. Hence travel writing has been described as part

reporting, part diary and part providing traveler information.

- **Read a lot :** Nothing exists in a vacuum, and you can't write any good travel article unless you read good travel writing. Definitely study your history books and your guidebooks — but don't overlook literary travel narratives, be they in books or magazines. Pay attention to technique as much as content, even when reading novels or general non-fiction. Reading other travel writers is a must. Learn to dissect the elements of their writing. Some of the most famous travel writers are: Bill Bryson, Tim Cahill, Paul Theroux, Ryszard Kapuscinski, V.S. Naipaul etc. Read everything you can get your hands on. Reading is probably the most overlooked step on the road to travel writing. So to become a travel writer you have to read a lot.

- **Research your destination:** Travel writing always benefits from a good knowledge of the region or culture that is written about. Even if you don't use specific information in your travel piece, some degree of research can help you to write about a place or culture or its people with confidence. Once you've arrived in the country/culture, read the local English-language newspaper for details and titbits about the place. You need not be a globe trotter in order to write. Start looking for stories nearby. This will also help you to develop ideas for those exotic locals that you will eventually get to. "Think locally" is more important and it is a skill that is coveted by travel editors. You should pitch an idea not just a place.

- **Research your markets:** If you are writing for friends or some other people you should always know your audience before embarking into writing. Ask yourself who your audience is? Is it young males who like snowboarding, teenage girls, parents with young children? But if you're writing for magazines, newspapers or websites, make sure you're familiar with the publication and its needs. Never

approach an editor with an unclear or inappropriate story. Target small markets first .The internet is good starting point.

- **Learn what publications look for :** All publications have their own slant. An editor can tell you immediately if you are at all familiar with their publication. If you are not you are wasting their time as well as your own.
- **Write a lot and write vividly :** The best way to get published is to write well. The best way to write well is to write often. And, even if you don't get published, you'll have the satisfaction of capturing your experience on paper and intriguing your friends. Your goal is to paint a picture with your words and take the reader on a journey…even though they've never left the couch. This makes it necessary to include sensory details. What did the place look like ?What feelings did it evoke ? What scents did it exude ? What did the experience remind you of ? It is necessary to bring a sense of place to your story. Take photos of the specific places, people and scenes you describe. Shots of buildings and winding streets are just by themselves interesting. But the blue house on top of the hill where the little old man lives is what the reader might be interested in seeing. Videos are very useful. But they should not be too long because people tend to get bored fast. Still, there's nothing as nice as being able to show instead of just narrating, and while photos are better than text, video is always better than photos. But it should be kept in mind that neither the photos nor the videos can really replace the text. They can only embellish the narration.
- **Read the guidelines first:** All publications have guidelines available somewhere — read the guidelines first. These guidelines will tell you exactly how to submit to their publication, and it shows professionalism even if you haven't a clip to your name.

- **Be Patient :** Do not get discouraged if your writing is not published for the first time. Learn to be patient. A travel writing career is something that develops over many years. Learn to grow a thick skin and get used to having your stories rejected or ignored. Remember that editors are extremely busy people, and don't take their indifference as a personal insult. Once a relationship is established with an editor, don't let it slide, it should be nourished effectively through hard work and competence combined with a friendly approach and also don't take things for granted.

- **Nurture your passion :** You need to keep in mind that whatever you do, remember that travel — not travel writing — should be your priority. Always keep traveling and experience new regions of the planet. Even if you never get a single story published, you'll discover that you have fallen in love with the world and made your life richer in a way you never could have imagined.

- **Promote Yourself:** Many seem to maintain that travel writing is 20 percent writing and 80 percent marketing. While this is an exaggeration, yet a travel writer must rely on various publicity modes to promote his / her work. Internet facilities could be best to use in such publicity modes.

- **More than Words:** More and more Internet sites are looking for video content. New media skills are the future. Adding a video content to your writing would certainly make it more attractive and will increase its value.

- **Beware of travel writing courses :** You should be wary of travel courses that promise to have you traveling the world for free. There is no free ride in any career. Results come in through consistent efforts. The most successful people in any business love what they do. The rewards of travel writing are great, but the patience needed is greater. Once you figure that all out you are on your way.



LET US KNOW

Amitabh Ghosh is an anthropologist and is author of several novels and books of travel writing. In *In An Antique Land*, Ghosh describes his historical research, but much of the book contains lively narrative of his travels between Egypt and India.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 4

Say true or false :

1. Traveling as a writer is different from traveling as a tourist. (True / False).
2. A travel writing career is something that develops immediately. (True / false).
3. Travel writing always benefits from a good knowledge of the region or culture. (True / False)

9.7.1 Few Do's and Don'ts of Travel writing

Here are some of the things to avoid in travel writing and some of the things to include.

Don't

- Use cliches.like "A pearl is found in an oyster." "There is only one Mecca, the birthplace of Mohammed, in Saudi Arabia - it is not some trendy retail strip of designer clothing stores." "Paradise is where you go when you die" etc.
- Overdo the adjectives. Words you wouldn't dream of using in conversation, often appear in travel writing: "fabled, wondrous", etc.
- Use the first person. Fascinating as your reactions might be but to the rest of the world it might be different .
- Mention religious or ethnic differences. It's so easy to

patronize about the quaint little customs of the villagers; the interesting way the townspeople behave at funerals etc.

- State the obvious. Most people who travel are aware that the sun rises in the east - even if you add something about the skyline, this is still old news! If you're at the beach, don't write that, "the waves rolled up on the sands". There is absolutely no surprise in this.That is what a beach is for.
- Use journalese. This creates problems for the readers.
- Discuss the gory details. Travel writing is meant to accentuate the positive, not the negative aspects of destinations. (Unless, of course, you're doing an expose).
- Be a snob. People from all backgrounds travel these days. So you would not gain by alienating any of your potential readers by using obscure language or allusions.

Do

- Use short words in preference to long words (likewise for sentences and paragraphs).
- Focus on what's interesting and different about the spot. Find details that are significant in some way - they might be unusual, colourful or humorous - just look for something that makes the place special. Usually this will be a combination of the place and the people. Look around for someone or something that catches your eye and use this as the focus for your piece.For instance, the reader might be interested in an unusual colour scheme in shop windows or buildings; or a pedestrian that draws your attention or may be an absence of something that you'd expect to find in the area.



LET US KNOW

In travel writing, it is necessary to recreate the mood, and the ambience that reflect a destination. For that photographs corresponding to the text of the story may be used.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 5



1. What are the do's of Travel Writing?

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2. Can you overdo adjectives in travel writing?

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9.8 FEW EXAMPLES OF TRAVEL WRITING

These have been taken from the travel writings of V. S. Naipaul, Verrier Elwin and Vikram Seth.

V.S. Naipaul's Extract : An Area Of Darkness :

On the train to Cairo the man across the aisle hawked twice , with an expert tongue rolled the phlegm into a ball,plucked the ball out of his mouth with thumb and forefinger, considered it, and then rubbed it away between his palms. (AAD14).

Nowhere do I see the India I know :those poor fields, those three

legged dogs, those sweating red coated railway porters carrying heavy tin trunks on their heads (AAD71).

Ten months later I was to revisit Bombay and to wonder at my hysteria. It was cooler, and in the crowded courtyards of Colaba there were Christmas decorations, illuminated stars hanging out of windows against the black sky. It was my eye that had changed. I had seen Indian villages : the narrow, broken lanes with green slime in the gutters, the choked back to back mud houses, the jumble of filth and food and animals and people, the baby in the dust, swollen – bellied, black with flies, but wearing its good luck amulet. I had seen the straved child defacating at the roadside while mangydog waited to eat the excrement. (AAD48).

A child was squatting in the mud of the street; the hairless pink – skinned dog waited for the excrement. The child the big bellied, rose; the dog ate (AAD 215).

The camp was a chaos of tents and guy –ropes and cooking stones and pilgrims defecating behind every bush . The woods were already littered with uncovered excrement ; hanks and twists of excrement crowned every accessible boulder of the lidder river, beside which we had camped (AAD167)



A PILGRIMAGE TO TAWANG

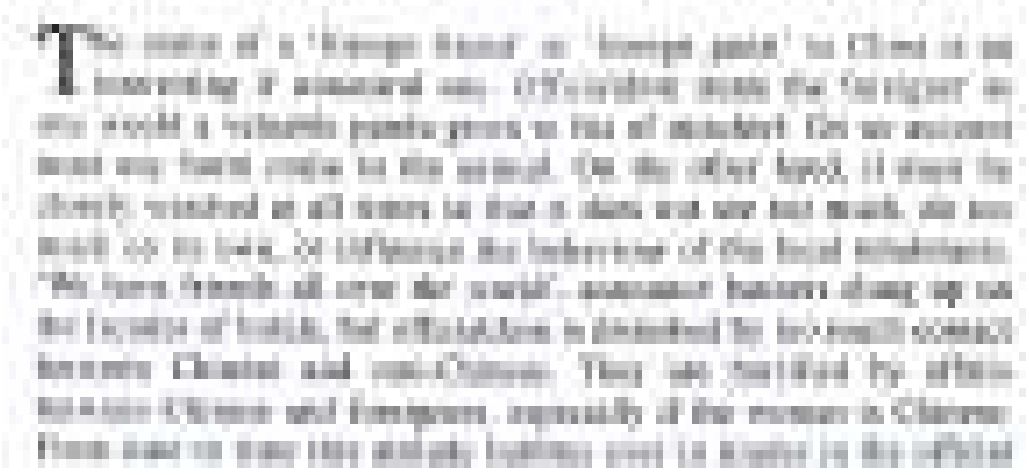
Navtej Singh

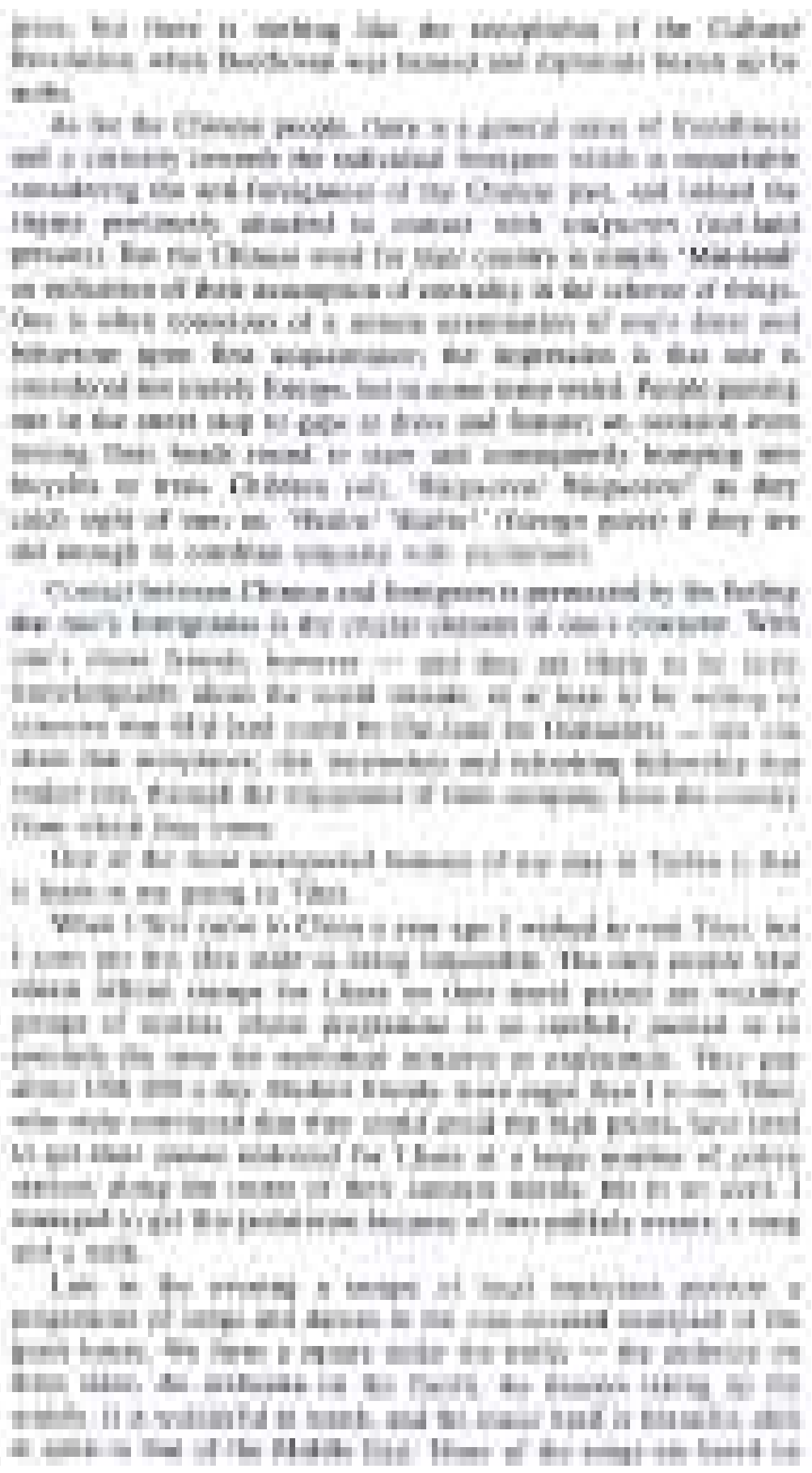


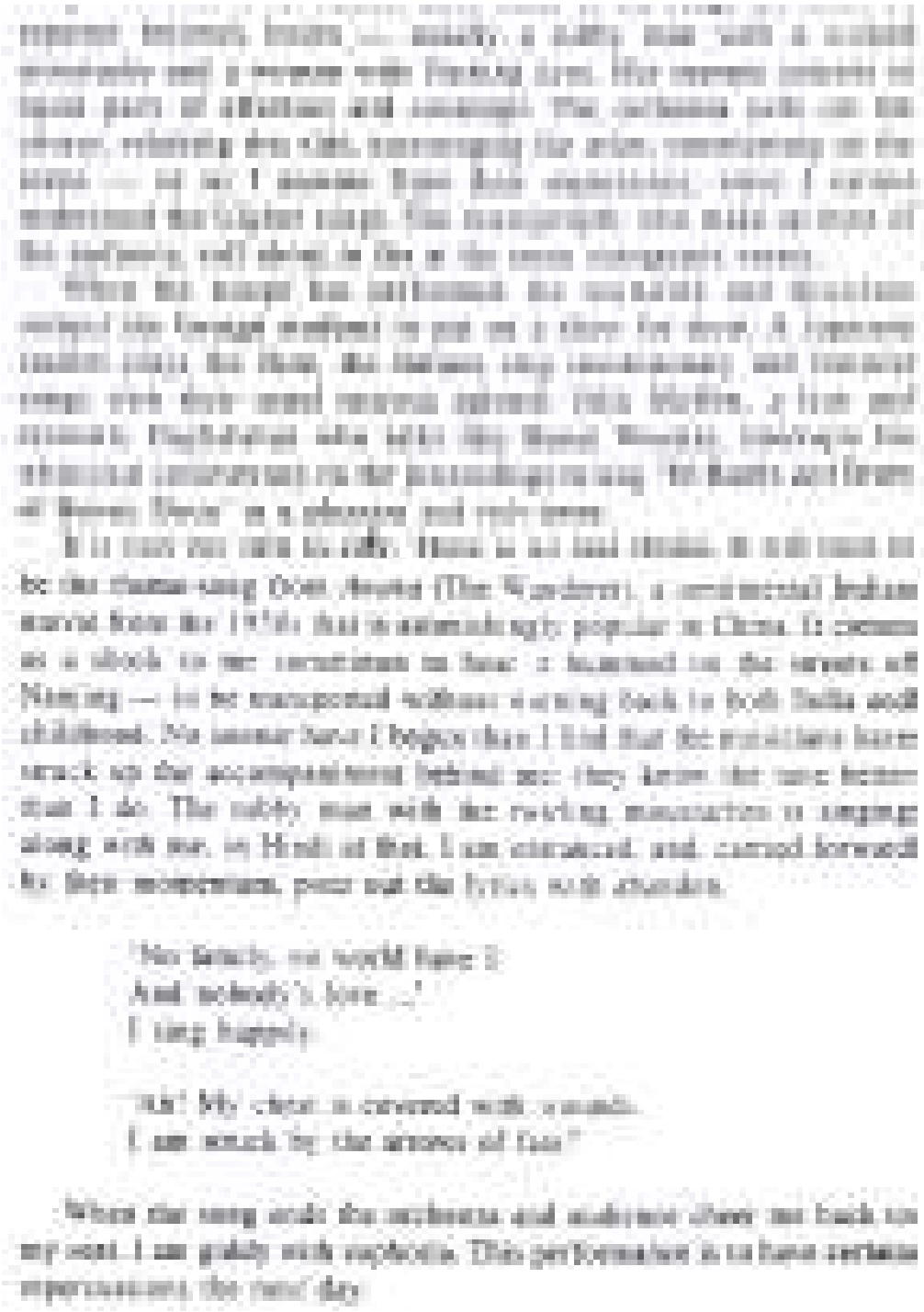


AN INDIAN IN CHINA

Vikram Seth







9.9 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you have learnt about travel writing as a literary genre and also about travel writers and travel writing. We have also provided you an idea about some of the Assamese travel writers and also an idea about how to be a travel writer. Some examples of travel writing have

also been given. Travel writing is a broad category of writing concerned with various aspects of travel. The travel books served various purposes. They not only provide information about the place but also give an insight into the history as well as the culture of the people. The Americans Paul Theroux and William Least Heat-Moon, Welsh author Jan Morris and Englishman Eric Newby all made their livings writing travelogues. Assamese literature is also rich in travel writing. Travel writing is both specialized as well as creative. To be a travel writer — you have to travel a lot and write a lot. Few tips have also been given as how to become a successful travel writer.



9.10 FURTHER READINGS

1. Naipaul, V. S. *Fiction and Travel Writing .2002. Atlantic Publishers and Distributors. New Delhi*
2. *The Reader's Digest Book of World Travel , London : The Reader's Digest Association Ltd .*
3. *Feature Writing Travel Writing, IGNOU. New Delhi*
4. *Crewther, Geoff. India : A travel Survival Kit , Australia and California : Lonely Planet Publications, 1987.*



9.11 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

1. Explain the skills that are required to become a travel writer?
2. What are the few do's and don'ts of travel writing?
3. Comment on a few travel writers of Assam?
4. What are the two distinct types of travel writing?
5. Try to write a travel article on your own.

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