



## THE POSTCOLONIAL COMPASS: GUIDING THEORIES OF PRATT, SAID, AND SPURR ON THE CRITIQUE OF TRAVEL WRITING

**Abhimanyu Dev Singh Billawaria**

PhD Scholar, Department of English, Nava Nalanda Mahavihara, Nalanda, Bihar

**Dr. Meeta**

Associate Professor, Department of English, Nava Nalanda Mahavihara, Nalanda, Bihar

---

### **ABSTRACT:**

*This study utilizes the postcolonial frameworks of Mary Louise Pratt, Edward Said, and David Spurr to dissect the intricate dynamics within travel writing, examining its role as a fertile ground for negotiating power relations, cultural exchanges, and the construction of identities. By engaging with Pratt's notion of "contact zones," Said's critique of Orientalism, and Spurr's exploration of the "rhetoric of empire," this research aims to reveal how travel literature simultaneously reinforces and subverts colonial discourses. The analysis demonstrates that these theorists offer essential insights for understanding the complexities of travel narratives, showing how these texts contribute to ongoing debates around representation, alterity, and the legacies of colonialism. Highlighting the importance of postcolonial theory in analyzing travel writing's role in shaping and contesting postcolonial identity and resistance, the study offers novel perspectives on the dialogues between the traveler and the "traveled upon" within a global context. Through this, the paper not only acknowledges the pivotal contributions of Pratt, Said, and Spurr but also positions travel writing as a key medium for exploring the nuanced interactions of postcolonial discourse*

**Keywords:** Postcolonial, Louise Pratt, Edward Said, David Spurr, Travel Narratives

### **INTRODUCTION:**

Scholars have long been fascinated by travel literature because of its complex storylines that tangle through the fabric of many civilizations and regions. But when it intersects with postcolonial studies, an intricate layer of analysis is introduced, exploring the ways in which narratives of encounter and discovery are entwined with the historical legacies of colonialism and empire. This study explores the critical viewpoints offered by David Spurr, Edward Said, and Mary Louise Pratt. Their ideas together function as a postcolonial

---



compass, directing the criticism of travel literature. By utilizing Pratt's notion of "contact zones," Said's examination of Orientalism, and Spurr's deconstruction of the "rhetoric of empire," this research aims to untangle the intricate ways in which travel literature simultaneously upholds and subverts the systems of identity, power, and resistance that define postcolonial discourse.

The notion of the colonial "other" contains an inherent negative connotation toward its subject. This depiction is recognized and examined within the field of postcolonial critique as the result of views that are European-centric. The statement "Colonial discourse aims to depict the colonized as degenerate beings rooted in their racial origins, serving to legitimize conquest and lay the groundwork for governance and indoctrination" (Location 70) by Homi K. Bhabha emphasizes this. Complicating the whole colonial story is the colonizer's identity, which depends on how the colonized 'other' is portrayed. In addition, it provokes hostility between the colonized peoples and their colonizers, highlighting the fundamental tension in colonial relations.

### **Theoretical Discourse:**

The critique of colonists who claim to be bringing civilization to colonized territories is explored by Aime Cesaire in his essay "Discourse on Colonialism" (1955), which highlights the denigration of the colonial 'other'. Cesaire dispels the idea that there is any real human interaction between colonizers and colonized by highlighting the stark contrast between civilization and colonialism. Rather, he presents a striking image of "relations of domination and submission," in which the colonial people are routinely erased and stripped of their existential, theological, and cultural roots. Intriguingly, Cesaire suggests that colonialism has an effect on people other than those who are colonized. He claims that by seeing the indigenous people as less than human, the colonizer himself becomes an animal. This realization provides a thoughtful analysis of the dehumanizing effects of colonial tactics. He says:

The colonizer, who in order to ease his conscience gets into the habit of seeing the other man as an animal, accustoms himself to treating him like an animal, and tends



objectively to transform himself into an animal. It is this result, this boomerang effect of colonization that I wanted to point out. (5)

Travel literature's spaces of colonial encounters may be seen via Pratt's concept of contact zones, which highlights the intricate dynamics of asymmetry, co-presence, and interaction. The analysis of how travel tales handle the conflicts between the self and the other, particularly between colonizer and colonized, is greatly aided by this approach.

In contemporary times, previously marginalized or overlooked literary genres are now taking center stage in academic discourse. Travel writing, a burgeoning theme in the humanities and social sciences, has garnered significant attention and research. Various branches of scholarship, including literature, history, geography, and anthropology, have accorded it a privileged position, fostering an interdisciplinary body of criticism. This approach aims to enhance our understanding and appreciation of the historical complexities embedded in the postcolonial era's travel literature. Writing and travel, like two sides of the same coin, are intrinsically connected, as the significance of travel becomes meaningful when shared, contributing to the collective knowledge and interest of humanity. A traveler's narrative holds an age-old tradition, reminiscent of fictional works, while travel, often in the form of pilgrimages, carries spiritual connotations, as exemplified in Christian beliefs where life is symbolized as a journey. This perspective, notably reflected in John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, lays the groundwork for masterpieces like Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, becoming a wellspring of narrative art for storytellers across generations.

Said's definition of Orientalism encompasses more than just travel writing; it also includes the larger Western intellectual heritage. He contends that the system of knowledge creation known as orientalism advances the objectives of colonial nations. This entails closely examining how information about other cultures is created, validated, and spread in the context of travel literature in order to uphold colonial hierarchies.

Said's thesis offers a vital resource for comprehending how the "Other" is portrayed in travel literature. Orientalism investigates the ways in which the West creates knowledge about the East, not just as a means of dominance but also as an expression of the complex interplay of geography, knowledge, and power.



Said dispels myths that are frequently found in travel literature, especially those that have to do with the East. Said promotes a critical investigation of the prejudices ingrained in depictions of "exotic" places and peoples by outlining the manner in which these stereotypes are woven into the fabric of Western discourse.

The medieval narratives penned by Marco Polo and John Mandeville marked a transformative shift in the conventional paradigms of pilgrimage during the late Middle Ages, instigating a newfound curiosity about alternative ways of life. Their works sowed the seeds of modernity within the realm of travel writing, particularly captivating enthusiasts for centuries. John Mandeville's *Travels*, in particular, held enduring fascination among lovers of travel literature. The pivotal moment arrived with Christopher Columbus's inaugural voyage to America in 1492, widely regarded as inaugurating a novel era in travel writing. Columbus, influenced profoundly by Mandeville and Marco Polo, echoed their impact in his own writings. Consequently, from the sixteenth century onward, the meticulous documentation of travel experiences became almost a fervent passion, laying the groundwork for the initiation of colonial enterprises. These travel accounts served as potent sources of inspiration for ambitious European nation-states, fostering ideas of aggression and domination in foreign lands. The inherent potentiality attributed to these lands was often narrated before the realities on the ground were fully comprehended, emphasizing the critical role of knowledge acquisition. The profound impact of the discovery of America is notably discernible in Thomas More's prose romance, *Utopia* (1516), which, alongside numerous fictional works, significantly influenced subsequent travel writing worldwide. The true potency of travel writing lies in the freedom it possesses to explore diverse perspectives for critical interpretation. Samuel Purchas, a preeminent English collector of travel texts, acknowledged this individuality's power in the 1625 introduction to his compilation, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*.

The linguistic techniques employed in travel writing to establish Western domination and create the colonial subject are the main subject of Spurr's critique. An organized method for analyzing the narrative devices used to uphold colonial ideology is provided by his identification of twelve rhetorical devices used in the service of empire.



In order to understand how some travel writings function as locations of cultural negotiation and contestation, this study employs the frameworks of Pratt, Said, and Spurr. Travel writing frequently reflects a dual nature, offering platforms for resistance, conversation, and the creation of hybrid identities while simultaneously serving as a means of reaffirming colonial hegemonies through exoticism and otherness portrayed in the literature. Because of this contradiction, travel tales become even more complicated as tools of postcolonial critique and imperial power.

In the framework of colonial encounters, Hulme investigates the ideas of "creolization" and "hybridity". Contrary to oversimplified ideas of cultural purity, he stresses the mixing and negotiating of cultures in the contact zones. This point of view complicates typical colonial narratives in travel writing by promoting an understanding of how cultures affect one another via interaction.

Hulme illuminates the social, political, and economic elements that influence travel tales through his emphasis on the material circumstances of exploration. Scholars may understand the economic drivers of travel writing and its effects on colonized civilizations by looking at the material interests that underpin exploration and colonialism.

The integration of the ideas of Pratt, Said, and Spurr sheds light on the complex ways that travel writing influences the creation and dismantling of postcolonial identities. The study demonstrates how these theoretical frameworks provide a more profound comprehension of the tales' functions in both upholding and contesting the colonial legacies. The idea of travel writing as a kind of witness to the changing dynamics of international power relations is also discussed in this conversation, with an emphasis on the genre's capacity to heal divisions and promote a more nuanced understanding of cultural diversity.

## **CONCLUSION:**

At the end, it concludes by stating that postcolonial theory is essential to understanding the intricacies of trip writing. This research provides a comprehensive view of the genre's ability to express modes of resistance and reconciliation by negotiating the ideas of Pratt, Said, and Spurr. It also sheds light on the complex link between travel writing and colonial discourse. These postcolonial theorists' insights will be crucial in shaping future analyses of travel



writing as it develops, guaranteeing that the literary exploration of other cultures is done so with a keen awareness of the political, social, and historical factors that influence these narratives.

To sum up, the critique of travel writing from a postcolonial perspective employs a multifaceted approach that takes into account the dialogic character of encounters, the power dynamics inherent in the process of producing knowledge, and the material conditions that influence images. Researchers using this compass to analyze trip tales in a more nuanced way show the intricacies of cross-cultural interactions and its consequences for the development of identities and landscapes in a postcolonial world.

### Works Cited

- Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, editors. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literatures*. Routledge, 2003. (Original work published 1998).
- Boehmer, Elleke. *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*. 2nd ed., Oxford University Press, 2005
- Bruner, Edward M. *Culture on Tour: Ethnographies of Travel*. University of Chicago Press, 2004.
- Hulme, Peter and Tim Youngs, editors. *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*. The Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Loomba, Ania. *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*. Routledge, 1998.
- Maclean, Gerald M. *The Rise of Oriental Travel: English Visitors to the Ottoman Empire, 1580-1720*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.
- Mills, Sara. *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism*. Routledge, 1991.
- Pratt, Mary Louise. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. Routledge, 1992.
- Purchas, Samuel. *Purchas His Pilgrimes (1625)*. Mac Le hose, 1905-7. Vol. 1. (Note: If the publisher is the same for all volumes, you can include the range of volumes at the end, like "1905-7").
- Singh, Jyotsna G. *Colonial Narratives/ Cultural Dialogues: Discoveries of India in the Language of Colonialism*. Routledge, 1996.
- Spurr, David. *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse Journalism, Travel Writing and Imperial Administration*. Duke UP, 1993.



Thomas, Nicholas. *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel, and Government*. Princeton UP, 1994.