

Gender Related Travel Etiquettes and Indian Society in Rishad Saam Mehta's *Hot Tea Across India*

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Abstract

Gender related issues are based on male, and female. Each human being strives for an egalitarian society, especially in India. Humans imbibe a lot of information in the present societal life and each one is important. Travel writing expresses the values and ethics based on the experiences of a traveller. In the contemporary scenario, travel writing shows the impact on the traveller and his experiences through society. Thus, the conception of change enhances a fresh aspect in the Indian society, and can be seen as a progression in the field of travel literature. In general the present stand can be assumed through the evolutionary prospect. In the paper Travel etiquettes and Indian society spread its wings, and this shows as a significant medium in travel genre during the contemporary stance, particularly focusing on the traits of Indian travel writing. Travel experience creates an approach based on social realisation from the researcher's point of view. The paper also depicts the travel behaviour of the traveller and the people who surround the traveller. This paper, as an aiding tool, projecting the contemporary travel enhancement in the present Indian scenario based on gender concerns.

Keywords: Behaviour, Culture, Gender, Journey, Society.

Travel etiquettes are based on landscapes and how people use transport and its facilities. Travelling for leisure is good for all humans, and, it is not always so easy to separate the desire of travelling and its effect on an individual. Travelling helps in building an egalitarian society. Gender equality is the main component which should be considered by human beings. Especially while travelling, a traveller meets people with different mindset, and tries to comprehend much from them. The people confined to a society find that the elimination of gender inequality may be eluded by a traveller. Gender equality extends across the Indian society to develop an egalitarian based notion. Recently, opportunities provided by Tourism Department help to have a societal impact while travelling. It also gives the traveller the experiences of culture while towards positive change in a gender based society.

Indian culture is embedded deep inside each one of the inhabitants. Indians are shaped from birth through the culture he is in. Therefore in order to understand anyone outside a certain culture, one should intentionally move out of it, and the best way to do this is by travelling to different places. Indian society offers astounding varieties for a traveller. Indian culture itself is the heritage of social norms, traditional customs, ethical values, artefacts, ethical values and technologies that enhance, and is connected to the ethno-linguistically diverse India. Gender concerns are not made by its own but it is made or created by humans. Every human needs to understand that every other person is equal; only then the notion of gender equality can be materialized.

Rishad Saam Mehta portrays his travel experiences in *Hot Tea Across India*, deliberated from a trip from Mumbai to Delhi in a truck. He is accompanied by two of his best friends

Shapur and Chetan who love exciting activities. Rishad and Chetan try to stop a truck for about ninety minutes at Wadala in Mumbai. Several truck drivers fail to notice them and finally, one driver named Rathi Lal Khan stops. It is true that Rathi is unenthusiastic about taking them to Delhi. On this situation, it has been accepted that the whole operating cost of the driver and the cleaner would be met by them, and hence the deal is completed. Consequently for three days they share the small cabin with the truck driver and cleaner, Sher Mohammed Akbar.

The author points out a number of differences between train travel and truck travel, particularly in India. Journey by train is safer in comparison with truck journey. While travelling by train, there will be numerous co-travellers, the policemen in the name of security and above all, the traveller in case of emergency can stop the train. Contrastingly, a truck journey is unsafe, as it has to take the by-pass roads and desolate places where they could be seized and assaulted by bandits at any hour. However, the advantage in a truck journey is that, it can be stopped at any place and at any time for the travellers' ease. Train journey has the delight of mingling with people from diverse cultures in the same compartment; whereas in a truck, one can visit people in their own environs according to his or her preference.

The paper deals with Travel etiquettes faced by the author. The author goes for a cup of tea, at a point in the clearance process during a halt. Tea shop is one of the significant spots of the Indian village-side, and the other one, is a plain bamboo hut. Owing to the unavailability of milk in the tea shop, the author expects a conventional milkman clad in a *dhoti*, carrying milk in an aluminium container. However to Rishad's astonishment, the milkman comes with a buffalo, and gives them unprocessed milk, which on consumption, makes his stomach upset. Also they use open fields on the side of the road to answer nature's call as there are no public toilets available in those days. Such facilities while travelling can be good only in cities and towns. On such a

crucial day, the author chooses an incorrect place, in front of a shop. As he was relieving himself, the employees sleeping in front of the shop, wake up and have seen the unclean act. The men get annoyed and the author flees away from the spot. This unruly incident happens to be the last the author had executed in his life. According to the suggestion of Mr. H. Singh they are not prepared for the harsh climate. He tells them that the climate would be as enjoyable as summer. Besides, the temperature goes down by seven degrees and they are freezing, and it would likely to drop by two degrees at the crest of the night. The next morning the author is almost frozen; however a cup of tea prepared by Doltu a lad from Himachal from the Everest tea masala gives him relief. The author says, “That morning cup of sweet masala chai that he served might have been made out of milk powder and tea bags, but it was so well brewed, it refreshed my mind and cleared the drowsiness and heavy-headedness” (20).

Two exciting activities the tourists desire to accomplish in the Indian tourists spots in the high ranges are trekking and camp fire which can be achieved as a team or family. At Chandra Tal they sing and dance around the camp fire, they decide to have the camp there for two days: “Chandra Tal, the moon lake which sits tranquil and blue, nestled like a robin’s egg amidst high mountains. The lake itself is at 14,107 feet, and to camp here you need to carry all your provisions with you. There is no friendly tea shop here; there isn’t a single permanent structure, and I hope it remains like that. Chandra Tal is as close to heaven as you can get while yet in a mortal form” (16).

They hire Doltu, to aid them to set up camp, otherwise it would be impossible for them to set up the camp. In another incident, ten years prior to the trip to Rishikesh, the author, Chetan and Mounet go for a trek from Uttarkashi to Dodi Tal and Yamnotri. After the trek they spend a few days in Manali. As they are not economically well off, they have determined to reach Manali from Haridwar by the Himachal Pradesh Transport Corporation’s ‘LUXAREY’ bus. They

struggle to get a ticket standing in a line and are totally dissatisfied at the sight of the ‘Luxury’ bus. They reach Manali, seventeen-and-a-half hours later. It is true that the Himachal people consider this as luxury. The driver is obliged to stop the bus wherever there is a *dhaba* or a solitary tea shop in order to relieve himself and to taste a hot cup of tea.

Local bus journeys in India are lively and colourful, though they provide a moderate service. A local bus is described as a vehicle moving on four wheels, carrying or transporting people. Majority of the buses carry more passengers than the allotted or available number of seats. The seats are made of wood and are extremely uncomfortable especially when the driver hits a pothole. In addition to this, the bus is overcrowded and fully packed. It is explicated as: “I found it difficult, thanks to the cramped seating position, so I amused myself watching other people sleep. It made entertaining viewing to see people contort themselves into all types of positions in an attempt to get comfortable on the hard wooden seats” (38).

The passengers in the buses are not as cosmopolitans as in trains. Mostly they are the members of the local society such as farmers, *sanyasis* (ascetics), young people and even shepherds accompanying their goats. The odour from the goats is intolerable for the author, and makes the journey a dreadful experience. He tries to mitigate the odour by consuming more cups of tea and smoking cigarettes. Finally he is obliged to go on the top of the bus. He says, “Lying amidst soft gunny bags filled with woollen wear that Tibetans were taking to sell in the markets of Manali, and taking in the fine views all around, that was beyond doubt the best part of my bus trip in the Himalayas” (40).

During his later period, the author takes on a journey through Manali-Leh road in his 1998 electric Royal Enfield bike. He had bought it for the reason that it was the only motorbike available then in India which was efficient for off-roads, but even that motorbike fails to perform well while crossing a stream of ice-cold water running over the road way Manali-Leh. The

author comes to a conclusion that the most captivating or enthralling place for motorcycling in India is: “The high road to Leh that goes over five mountain passes is the epitome of motorcycling in India . . . you haven’t done the mother of all Indian two-wheeler rides if you haven’t ridden a Bullet to Leh” (42).

In another situation, the author transports his motorbike from Mumbai to Delhi, and as he reaches Delhi the next morning by flight, he is of the opinion his motorbike would be at Delhi so that he could ride it from Delhi to Leh, and then to Kashmir. However, when he reaches there, a bespectacled clerk at the booking office tells that it would take at least one week for his motorbike to be dispatched due to the huge freight surplus. Afterward, he meets a man named Mishra the leader of a group of loaders had promised to ship the bike in the next cargo for an amount of rupees one thousand and hundred. However Mishra’s team vies with another team of twenty loaders headed by Bheema. As there is a surplus of parcels, the things pushed by these teams first would only find a place inside the bogies. Rishad writes the remarkable scene as: “Three on each side and one behind, they rushed in at an angle while the other men intensified the normal cargo-loading to distract Bheema’s boys. As they reached the doorway, two of their team swiftly reached down and lifted the front wheel . . . and just as the rival gang of loaders noticed the entry of this huge parcel, the bike was inside the luggage van” (45).

Unfortunately the author is late for his train at the Delhi railway station as he is detained by bad traffic. His bike is not there and the railway clerk tells him that only one vehicle is left in the bogey but that is a Bajaj Scooter. Nobody has any clue about the bike whether it is off loaded at some other stations or it is still on the train to Amritsar. Nevertheless, they promise that he would, by one way or the other, get hold of his motor bike in not less than four days’ time. It reveals the pathetic state of the Indian Railways service. Not only he faces the inconveniences due to the poor service and carelessness of the Railways, but he would also be looted more by the

railway people: “Like hyenas gathering around a dying animal, the loaders, clerks, superintendents and guards were going to move in to make my unfortunate inconvenience their monetary gain” (48). There is a ray of hope at that moment when the author meets a young promising employee, Kapil who is not only efficient but also decent in his behaviour and swift in action in order to get things done.

People in different guise and eccentrics met by the travellers during their journey are another feature that makes a travel lovely and memorable. Whilst the author is crossing Panipat in Haryana, he is completely drenched in a sudden burst of thunderstorm. A security guard, at an old warehouse allows the author to park his motorcycle under a shed and invites him into his room to have tea. Richard Arneson says, “an egalitarian might rather be one who maintains that people ought to be treated as equals—as possessing equal fundamental worth and dignity and as equally morally considerable” (web). It signifies how fellow human beings are to be considered in the society. Similarly his friends Navaz and Karandip in Chandigarh entertain him at their homes and help him to reduce the weight of the luggage. At Shimla he stays in the house of his friends Ruchi and Aarsh who are on their honeymoon in Dandeli, Karnataka. The author and the couple have become good friends since then. At Thanedar he meets yet another good friend named Thakur Prakash who owns a delightful Banjara Orchard Retreat in Thanedar. The author says “I consider it one of the best places to stay in all of the Himalayas Thakur Saab is a gracious host, full of stories and always ready for an invigorating trek” (57).

Meeting strange people and their memorable etiquettes make them significant and give an exciting experience for travellers. The author meets three jolly Sikh lawyers from Hoshiarpur at a retreat in a delightful little village named Jalori. They invite him to their rough and ready barbecue bar by a bonfire. They are in their mid-fifties and had travelled around North India by motorcycles in their youth. He accompanies them with an old monk, and has a plate of chicken

tikka and in turn, they share with him their daring bulleting days. Destinations for travelling are usually chosen by travellers based on their purpose, convenience and taste. Some destinations are well-known for assured type of travellers. For riders, especially who ride bullet bikes, Manali is the most excellent place for riding from late May to early September. Rishad explicates: “It is a cherished dream of most Bullet owners to do this classic Manali to Leh ride. A sort of pilgrimage or initiation into the cult that is ‘Bulleting’” (61).

Travellers face encumbrances and obstacles, which create disharmony, worries and tension, breaking social relations. A society without social dilemma is sociologically a saga. Each society has its own social problems, and a few problems are widespread over the whole society. Social problems are behaviour models on stipulation that are considered objectionable or undesirable by numerous members of the society. A very extensive range of behaviour that is broadly regarded almost in contravention of norms is held in current social order. Horton and Leslie put across a social problem as “a condition affecting significant number of people in ways considered undesirable; about which is felt that something can be done through the collective social action” (qtd. in Purushothama 2). Social problems are associated to each other in the society, especially Indian concerns.

True self (as well identified as real self) and false self (as well identified as fake self) are psychological concepts, which are initially introduced into psychoanalysis in 1960 by Donald Winnicott. The paper conveys that true self is described as a sense of self based on spontaneous genuine experience, and a feeling of being alive is based on the gender concerns. Each human is a wonderful creation and has the ability to be treated equally. The true self is represented by human’s real feelings and desires, while the false self is a part has changed its behaviour, repressed feelings and pushed aside needs in order to survive. By accepting oneself, one’s presence can make another human happy. Self-exploration highlights the theme of self-

acceptance, which expresses one's own individuality, the way one thinks of about himself/herself, the way one views the world, and the characteristics that outline him or her. Uniqueness also helps human beings to make decisions and to know how to behave towards fellow human beings especially in the Indian society. Gender identity forms a significant part in life dictating the level how a person views oneself, and relates to other persons' ideas and nature. Thus, gender is associated with the identity which is related to self-reflection and equal treatment by every other human in the society.

The paper brings out the egalitarian voices and emphasizes mainly on the removal of inequalities among fellow human beings based on gender concerns. It highlights the equal space for each and every human being, and no one has the right to dishonor fellow human beings. Egalitarian dogmas have a backdrop of equality wherein each one is equal in a fundamental or moral status. The quality of being unequal can be sorted out in the form of disparity and unevenness; these ideologies should be eradicated for the betterment of gender concerns and happy environment. The paper spells out the requirement for an egalitarian society. Non-egalitarian or elitist realities faced by human beings are brought to light to remove inequality in the society. The research paper favours the concept of egalitarian traits and voices out such traits for the betterment of travel etiquette and Indian society alluding to gender concerns.

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