



The Teaching and Delight of a Blind Man's Travelogue: An Analytical and Critical Review of His Lone Tryst with reference to "My Solo Trip"

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Abstract: *The travelogue originally written in English by Gokul Krishnan is titled as "My Solo Trip". It was published in "Insight" Quarterly Braille Magazine July to September-2023 Issue-29 and appeared on Page-20 of the aforesaid Braille Magazine. Gokul Krishnan as he himself explicitly states is a totally blind person and works as a Chartered Accountant with Ernst and Young at Chennai in India. His travelogue titled as "My Solo Trip" revolves around and delineates with the theme of fathomless aspiration and an ardent passion for exploration despite absolute sightlessness and total visual disability. This travelogue is so thrilling and full of shrill delight that I preferred to invoke it as lone tryst in lieu of "Solo Trip" as it invariably conjures up poetic passion and creative imagination which is eventually transformed into absolute reality despite a total visual impairment in an unrestrained effusion and emotion to explore, experience, feel and perceive something new, though full of barriers in interaction with the society as well as the administrative machinery of the existing system.*

Index Terms: Tryst, Teaching, Delight, Conjure Up.

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As perhaps the passion for exploration of Rajasthan was seething inside his heart and mind and he had no escort of his own to accompany him in his ventures, Gokul Krishnan embarked upon his lone tryst on 18th August 2023 all alone without the least fretting about his total absence of sight or his absolute blindness.

Before setting out on his "Solo Trip," although he was pondering over his journey for a week, yet he had no definite plan of where to visit in Rajasthan because he had never gone on an unplanned trip all alone on his own.

Albeit he was confident enough to complete his "Solo Trip" because he knew and could communicate in Hindi, yet a tinge of nervousness and thrilling sensations seeped into his veins, as he clearly and honestly admits.

The cab driver he had taken to reach railway station dropped at the entrance point. As he walked towards inside of the station, he asked where Rajdhani Express was standing. As a matter of chance, the person whom he asked about the train and its platform was also about to board up the same train and hence, he happily escorted him to reach the platform and board up Rajdhani Express. The passenger or person who escorted Gokul Krishnan to board up the train was a newly selected joiner in Indian Army. He boarded Rajdhani Express, occupied his seat that he had reserved in advance and thus left Chennai for Delhi on 18th of August 2023 for exploring Rajasthan. From the conversation of the passengers, he sensed that half of the train was filled with the newly selected trainees of the Indian Army and CRPF. As he involved himself with the conversation of co-passengers, he asked the man who had escorted him about the army training and the examination that he had cleared for selection and the man in turn asked him about the challenges of visual impairment and why and how he planned to embark upon a “Solo Trip” for exploration of Rajasthan all alone on his own perils because of his absolute visual disability. Gokul Krishnan in the meanwhile happened to meet another family who was also going to Delhi. He conversed with that family and the other passengers.

He inferred and noticed where the washroom and drop-bins were in that coach of Rajdhani Express train. He says in his travelogue that there are only three things that one can do in Rajdhani Express train: eat the meals which are served, sleep as much as one can and talk to the co-travelers. He says that 28 hours lapsed as 28 minutes and he reached Delhi on 19th of August 2023 at 10.30 A.M.

Suddenly, drizzling began as he alighted the train at New Delhi Railway Station as if symbolizing good omen of welcome, perhaps, the Nature indicating at further triumph of his lone tryst. He had never been to Delhi in rains. He yearned to relax for some time and then venture on his journey to Rajasthan. After deboarding the train, as none of the passengers around bothered to escort him to the exit gate, he tried to walk all alone by himself with the help of his walking stick towards the outside gate. As he walked with the help of his stick, two men offered him to help, but he sensed from their conversation in whispers that they were actually pickpockets and hence, he had to take utmost precautions lest he be looted. Gokul Krishnan sensed that things were not well with those two men from the way they talked among themselves. He tried to walk fast in the bustling Nizamuddin Railway Station but those two pickpockets kept following him. As a matter of chance, a gentleman walking to the exit gate, assisted him in hiring an auto from the Pre-Paid Auto-Taxi Stand. The Auto driver dropped him at the Entrance Gate of Saray Kale Khan Metro Station from where assisted by dedicated Metro Station staff he was able to arrive at the appropriate platform. Being escorted by Metro attendant, he boarded the Metro Train for New Delhi. When he alighted the Metro Train at New Delhi Metro Station, he was further escorted by the Metro House Keeping Staff deputed to assist the passengers with disabilities by way of escorting them to exit from the outside gate. He found this experience “amazing” as he states. He booked a room in a hotel at New Delhi and relaxed till the evening. He left for Jaipur at around 8 PM. in the evening by train.

He arrived at Jaipur at 4 A.M. in the morning. He hired an auto in order to reach the Back Packers Villa where he had already booked a dormitory online. The Receptionist was a little “shocked” to see a blind man having arrived all alone at 5 AM. at his Villa. When the Receptionist asked Gokul Krishnan, he would “explore” Jaipur, Gokul replied, saying why should “worry” while the Receptionist was there. The Receptionist simply “smiled” and allotted him a dorm. He relaxed for a while, had his breakfast and then left for exploration of Jaipur’s forts by local city bus. Google Maps showed bus routes for all the forts in Jaipur. As it happened to be Sunday, all the places were heavily crowded and hence, the desired public succor and support were extended to him. The tourists as well as the guides tried their best to explain the forts to him as much as they could. Thus, he ventured and explored Jaipur, and then went back in the evening to his Dorm booked at Back Packers Villa.

Having rested a little for a while, the same night he left for Jodhpur by bus. He had already booked a room in the hostel, but auto driver he had hired could not find it. The contact number provided to him at the time booking sounded not reachable, but it did not dishearten him. After a search for almost an hour, the auto driver advised him to stay in Hosteller, a popular chain of Hostels. He stayed there in a dormitory with six beds. As a matter of chance, all the staff and the other occupants happened to be compassionate enough to extend him all possible help whenever he was in need. The room boy showed him his bed, rest room, and all other stuff without asking him to do so. They understood the requirements and all other difficulties of a person

with visual disability as there was a Blind School and they already had opportunities to interact with the visually impaired students and staff of the school. The Receptionist interacted with him and explained the places of visit where he could go and explore Jodhpur. Although he stayed there only for a day, yet he met and befriended several people staying there in the hostel who had come from all over India and even abroad. He felt as if that day would never end. On the roof terrace, where the food was served, while taking meals, he felt as if he was in his dining room at home. He decided to adjust time in talking to the room mates, and spend half of the day in exploring Jodhpur. He visited Mandodari Temple in Mandodari Garden built in the honor of the consort of great scholar called Rawan. From thereafter, he also went to visit Ummaid Bhawan Palace. The concerned staff in both the places waived off the visiting charges for him. He came back, took his lunch in the hostel and conversed with people around about his works and stuff etc. The Hosteller was very compassionate and stayed very close to Mehrangarh Fort. He states that the grandeur of the Fort could well be viewed from the roof terrace of the hostel. Gokul Krishnan went to visit the Fort along with his roommate Mr. Mani. He highly eulogized the manner in which Mr. Mani expounded each and every aspect of the Fort to him as a blind man. For a while, he felt as if he got back his eyesight. His words were not adequate to express his thanks for Mr. Mani, as he alleged. After doing some shopping, Gokul Krishnan and Mr. Mani went back to their room in the hostel.

The next day, unescorted by anyone, he went to the nearby Railway Station and boarded a train for Barmer. As he was unaccompanied and felt nothing special to explore in Barmer, he still enjoyed the journey by train. As the train passed through Thar Desert, there was sand all over the train and his entire body from head to toe was covered with sand. The travelling by a passenger train in Thar Desert was itself something very special that he could feel. Fortunately, he had a handkerchief with which he could cover his nose and eyes void of any sight in them. He did not book any room at Barmer he stayed and rested in the retiring room of the Railway Station. He heard and learnt from the local inhabitants that Barmer was the last city before India-Pakistan border. Barmer natives told him that Munabao was the last village before Indo-Pak boarder and hence, this rather made him more and more keen and curious to explore the life and culture in Munabao village.

Therefore, the following day, he again boarded a train from Barmer to Munabao with the fervent aspiration to explore and feel something exciting about the life and culture of the Munabao natives. This one too, was a passenger train which was travelling through the never-ending Thar Desert.

He was told by the people around that Munabao was the last terminal station of the train he was travelling by. The local fellow passengers in the train seemed suspicious of him which rather added to his discomfort. Almost each and every one filled with misgivings asked him why he was travelling for Munabao, and that is too, all alone by himself. The people before the Border Security Forces made a thorough inquiry of him as to where from he was, what for he had come all the way from Chennai to Munabao, and What was his objective etc. This caused his chagrin rise, though he restrained his annoyance. Eventually, much to his "relief," the train arrived at Munabao. He felt himself as being the very last passenger of that train at Munabao Station to alight there. After groping all around, he somehow found the stairs and began to clamber. But he was stopped by the Border Security Force, a part of the Army. He was told that he needed a pass even to enter Munabao. As he did not have a pass, he was not allowed even to enter the village Munabao. They asked him as to how and why he had come thus far. He replied to them that he wanted to see and feel whether there was organized a similar parade to the one organized at Wagah border. None of the army men could believe him when he communicated that he yearned to feel how the life and culture would be at the border. He made his best possible efforts to convince them but rather they became more and more suspicious of him. When he showed them the pics that he had taken at Jaipur and Jodhpur, they permitted him to go. They still asked him where he worked and from where he was actually. He was told that Munabao was barely one Km. from the border and hence it was indeed secured. They were taken aghast and struck with wonder when he narrated the fact that he had gone all the way from Chennai to see and feel that place despite being a totally blind person. Then one of the security officers helped him to board up the one and the only train which left from Munabao to Barmer. The security officer of the army told him that he should not deboard the train at any station in the midst of his journey adding that if the police catch him, he might land into troubles and the police would not be ready to understand whatever he explains to them. He was highly stressed till he was with the police but still he maintained his calm. His stress and frets were gone as the train arrived at Barmer.

After reaching Barmer, he decided to go and visit Jaisalmer. Without taking his lunch, he hastily left for Jaisalmer. One of the passengers at Jaisalmer told him that desert safari was quite popular over there. While in quest of a place to stay, he heard about some tent which he reserved. Some compassionate people at the safari arranged a car to pick him up from the Bus Stand. His intended car and the bus were in proximity with each other. Hence, the driver of the cab spotted him easily without any hindrance whatsoever. The cab driver ensured him a good time at the safari. It was located at 40 km. away from Jaisalmer. He placed his belongings in the tent which he had already reserved, and thus left to enjoy the camel ride. He found and felt the camel ride scary yet amazing as well. He felt he would fall at any time but it didn't happen that way. After that he went for an experience of bike ride for three kilometers in the sand dunes. The bike ride experience in the sand dunes for 3 kilometers was highly thrilling. There were fifteen tents but some people were grumpy. He along with the other visitors were taken to high tea, and then to the cultural evening, where dainty dinner was also served. He relished Dal Bhati for the first time. The concerned employees escorted him to the tent wherein he fell asleep in a while.

He, after taking breakfast, checked out from the safari tent at around 9 A.M. The staff did their best to provide him the best possible stay in the tent. After he left the tent, the staff escorted him to a nearby hotel at Jaisalmer for a smooth stay. After relaxing for the rest of the day, he left in the night for Delhi by train. The next day, he reached Delhi, met his friends over there and left Delhi for Chennai and safely returned after duly exploring Rajasthan all alone by himself.

This analytical review and the critical analysis indicate the paramount significance of the travelogue authored and critically analyzed and reviewed by persons with visual disability which happens to be a new paradigm shift in contemporary literature.

This travelogue titled as “My Solo Trip” and reviewed and critically analyzed as afore teaches as well as it delights, not merely the readers and researchers with disabilities, but even it teaches and delights the readers and researchers without disabilities as well who are leading a normal human life confined to four walls of the drawing-rooms.

It awakens the very keen thrilling sensations and passion for exploration despite suffering from the assaults of visual disability.

This travelogue is undeniably educative, informative as well as highly entertaining.

It teaches us courage and invokes us to come out of four walls' confinements of our drawing-rooms and venture to explore something new and unique whether we are persons with or else without disabilities.

It teaches us that at least once in our lifetime, we must muster courage and venture to travel all alone and explore new world and cultures and life even if we are forced to interact with endless barriers and hindrances whether we are persons with or without disabilities.

It gives us courage to face barriers in interactions with the society as well as the administrations of the society.

Overall, this travelogue authored by Gokul Krishnan, a writer with visual impairment and absolute blindness is indeed highly commendable as it teaches and delights immensely.

It is a very fine piece of disability literature in contemporary arena.

REFERENCES:

1. *Insight Quarterly Braille Magazine*, Mitra Jyothi, Bengaluru, Issue 29, July–Sept. 2023, at 20–27.