

Chapter III

'A PILGRIM'S PROGRESS': THE JOURNAL OF BISHOP HEBER

Can a good travelogue be good literature? This is the obvious question that suggests itself while one reads Bishop Heber's A Narrative of a Journey. Every foreign visitor to India has more or less the same content of experience to share with his readers. Such travelogues, however, have only ephemeral value since mere depiction of the Indian panorama alone will not make a travelogue a piece of literature. The appeal of Heber's travelogue lies partly in the traveller himself, partly in the continent he travelled and partly in the artistic mode in which he cast his individual experience. In fact his travelogue is a record of his own intimate reactions, responses, thoughts, ideas and day dreams addressed to his wife, Amelia Heber, during his arduous journeys across India with probably never a thought to the form much less to the nuances of artistic expression. Yet in them we notice the sublimity of feeling and simplicity of expression associated with good literature. This aspect of the Bishop Journal prompts Robert Sencourt to pose this pertinent question:

Can we ever disguise ourselves in our journals? Heber's is a complete and obvious picture of the good Anglican Bishop, a missionary in India. The arduous journeys, the spiritual cares, the little conventionalisms, the English view, the romance of the tropic diocese, the common sense, the distrust of enthusiasm, the sympathy, the preoccupation with the archdeacon, the dullness, the goodness of heart, the Protestantism - there they all are so undisguised, so simple. They have made a historic document very near literature ... (347).

The Englishmen of his generation appreciated it on account of its informative content and the Indians liked it because of its underlying generous impulse. Now both these considerations have become secondary. As such the travelogue's enduring values have to be located in the work itself. At this juncture one must make a distinction between literature of travel and written records of travel. F.A. Kirkpatrick in his essay "The Literature of Travel 1700 - 1900" makes a demarcation between the two, though his basis seems to be purely subjective if not arbitrary. According to him the phrase 'literature of travel' suggests in the first instance such books as Stern's Sentimental Journey, Kinglake's Eothen, Borrow's Bible in Spain, Dufferin's Letters from High Altitudes, Stevenson's Inland Voyage - "books in which the personality and literary power of the writer count for more than his theme, books which need not treat of anything new, but merely of something sufficiently unusual to provide an interesting topic for a writer who, in any case would be interesting. ... Their writers are known rather as authors than as travellers." (240) In other words the one who writes is more important than what is written about. This view of authorial travelogues is quite a precarious theory and the writer himself agrees that such books are relatively few. Necessarily most travelogues belong to the second category, written records of travel wherein the merit lies in the work rather than in the writer. The value of their works "lies not

so much in revealing the personality and the literary power of the writer as in successfully describing his journeys and discoveries" (Kirkpatric 240). As far as the written records of travels are concerned Kirkpatric seems to agree with Mary Kingsley's statement "no one expects literature in a book of travel." The implicit meaning is that there are literary and non-literary travelogues. True to his conception or mis-conception in his essay he mentions only such books as can belong to literature. Unfortunately not a single Anglo-Indian travelogue figures in his list though there are a good many titles of European, African, Australian and American travels. In such a critical climate where does Bishop Heber's Narrative of a Journey stand?

Like any other travelogue it is almost a formless piece of writing resembling the picaresque novel on the one hand and the personal memoirs on the other, without plot or characterization or theme; its unifying factor being the traveller himself. Kirkpatric underlines two qualifications for a good travelogue. In the first place, one who writes about the travel should have something of the born traveller in him and in the second place should have something interesting to tell. Bishop Heber had both these qualifications. "He was a man of poetic temperament who wrote verses and hymns, a lover of nature and the exotic, the picturesque and the colourful" (Dyson 226). And yet the question still stands:

can we consider travelogue as literary discourse? After all it might appear almost neutral, unliterary, enclosing the present, the phenomenal and the concrete. Unlike fiction it offers no bi-focal vision since the real and the phenomenal is viewed from a singular point of view. Ambiguity, opacity and complexity which are the markers of literariness in fiction, poetry and drama are seldom present in a travelogue. As such its value lies in its referent than in its conceptual ideas or signs or multiplicity of signs. For this reason probably no department of literature seriously takes up the study of a travelogue unless it is an imaginary foray into the past or future or utopian in nature like Swift's Gulliver's Travels or Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress. In course of time the "born traveller" becomes an obsolete entity and the interesting past to a great extent merely irrelevant. Despite all this array of facts one cannot simply dismiss A Narrative of a Journey or Up The Country from the realm of literature. They appeal to our literary sensibility even if we cannot straightaway, pinpoint the reasons for that appeal.

According to modern schools of criticism any act of communication is literary provided there is the dominance of literariness in it and literariness had been alternatively located in the text, in the reader or in the system. In the case of a travelogue literariness can be located in the reader who has to enter into a "fictional space" in order to comprehend it as well as in its text which enables him to

The thus do so. / travelogue/ belongs to two worlds, the world of the writer and the world of ^{now,} the reader; the gap being bridged by the fictional space. / "To enter fictional space through the medium of words, we must reverse the process of perception generating the images, sounds and other perceptual data that would be available through our senses as if we were in the presence of the named phenomena". (Scholes 25) To the exocultural audience in England whatever people like Bishop Heber wrote in his travelogue and what Miss Eden scribbled in her diary thus become fictional even if to the writers, the unfolding sub-continent was concrete and present. Here fiction results from the semiotic generation of an absent context which is more literary than the evolution of a present context. Every uni-dimensional text however does not evoke complex responses or multi-dimensional effects, unless it is blended with fictional devices. Therefore even in a travelogue which by its very nature evokes semiotic generation of an absent context common fictional devices are a sine qua non. Heber who had a good many models before him used such devices in his travelogue without being conscious of them and without being "arty." As an Englishman, writing for an audience at home he uses literary codes easily understood by his audience. In fact his perception of the phenomena is itself conditioned by these codes. No wonder then that to him the area before the Sunderbans is a nursery of storms, as described by Southey in his 'Padolon', the meeting place of the Hugli is the river

where Dante found the spirit of Filippo Argenti, and the Calcutta Botanical garden is a replica of Milton's idea of Paradise. Similarly his awareness of the Scottish ballads and his devotion to Scott's historical novels colour his idea of the Maratha warrior, Trimbukjee, an inveterate enemy of the British. Trimbukjee escaped from the Thana prison with the help of a Maratha groom who tied his horse under his window and sang a ditty giving the necessary clues to the imprisoned chief. In the night the horse, the groom and Trimbukjee disappeared. Heber is thrilled by this event and quotes the ditty in his journal :

Behind the bush the bowmen hide
The horse beneath the tree;
Where shall I find a knight will ride
The jungle paths with me?

There are five and fifty horses there,
And four and fifty men!
When the fifty fifth shall mount his steed,
The Deccan thrives again. (2 : 335)

Bishop Heber himself comments on the incident in the following vein. "This might have been a stratagem of the Scottish border, so complete a similarity of character and incident does a resemblance of habit and circumstances produce among mankind (Journey 2: 336). The example cited above point to the fact that Heber's perception and expression are governed by codes readily understood by his readers. Coded translation of perception into an alien tongue might have at times blunted, softened or lightened the poignancy of the original experience.

However it is a semiotic pre-requisite for any oral or written communication to an exo-cultural audience. The transformation of the Calcutta botanical gardens, to cite but one example, into Milton's Paradise is to heighten the conceptual perception of the reader who has been nurtured on the Judaeo-Christian mythology. Such devices are not merely to report but to fictionalize, in this case to romanticize the East.

Often Bishop Heber relates an anecdote or incident which reveals the people of India as intelligent, loyal and hardworking. He saw among them the common weaknesses and idiosyncracies he noticed among the Europeans. M.A. Laird makes this pertinent remark regarding Heber's observation of mankind :

Perhaps the most attractive feature of Heber's Journal is the strong sense of the fundamental oneness of mankind which he conveys; he does not give the impression that in passing from England to India he encountered a completely different order of human beings. Not that the picture is idealised; but again he viewed what he regarded as the short comings of the people he met in the context of general failings. Nor did he reserve his approval for those customs or artistic creations which approximated closest to those of Europe. Like other Romantics, Heber was always ready to appreciate the exotic, believing that this is a natural and healthy diversity as well as a basic oneness of humanity. (32)

At times the characters and the human situation turned out to be humourous, almost verging on the ironic. Heber, the traveller enjoyed the humour of it while the priest in him felt the irony of it. So he wrote to his friends at home.

"My life has been that of a Tartar Chief rather than an English clergyman" (Journey 2: 358). His meeting with the Gujarati Saint Swami Narayan provides an example of such a situation. The Swami came to meet him armed with two hundred horseman, mostly well armed with matchlocks and swords and several of them with coats of mail and spears. Bishop Heber had more than fifty horse and fifty musquets and bayonets accompanying him. He found the situation both funny and embarrassing. "I could not help smiling, though my sensations were in some degree painful and humiliating at the idea of two religious teachers meeting at the head of little armies, and filling the city which was the scene of their interview, with the rattling of quivers, the clash of shields and the tramp of war horses." (qtd. in Krishnaswami 144 -5)

Thus Bishop Heber had the unique habit of observing an event from an insider's self-critical stance and highlighting the romantic elements in an eastern character or incident. As a result the passing incidents and the half-sketched characters of his journal become memorable. The same can be said about his scenic descriptions, restricted to the truly sublime in nature. As a child of the Romantic age he had an extreme susceptibility to the beauty of rivers and mountains. Amelia Heber testifies that "the sea always possessed a peculiar charm for his imagination and formed the subject of many of his short poems" (Life 2: 515). Hence it is natural

that the most charming descriptive passages in the journal should be those evoked by the experience of sailing up the Ganges and crossing the mountains of Kumaon. The following description of the Indian ocean, penned in his diary during his voyage to India, truly verges on the poetic :

The deep blue of the sea, the snow-white tops of the waves, their enormous sweep, the alternate sinking and rising of the ships which seems like a plaything in a giant's hands and the vast multitude of sea-birds skimming round us, constitute a picture of the most exhilarating, as well as the most impressive character. (Journey 1, !)

At his description the swampy rice fields of Bengal, the villages and the thatched huts come alive. Heber had a very vivid sense of colour, beauty and proportion. Naturally one is not tired of his descriptions which occasionally are tinted with a spiritual dimension. The sight of the Himalayan ranges had a breath taking effect upon Heber. His journal records his near ecstatic sensations; "My attention was completely strained, and my eyes filled with tears. Everything around us was so wild and magnificent that man appeared as nothing, and I felt myself as if climbing the steps of the altar of God" (2 : 193). This is clearly an instance of the romantic polysemism mediating between the subjective and objective realities. M.H. Abrams in his classic work The Mirror and the Lamp traces the origin of this concept in St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans 1.20 : "For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are

clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead. ..." In the early middle ages the church Fathers, inveterate allegorizers expanded greatly on this passage.

And in their interpretation, the Pauline text was glossed to mean that the world of sense is indeed what it appears to be, a structure of physical objects; but that is at the same time a mirror and mystical typology of the attributes - the power, the love and the glory - of the creator himself. (Abrams 240)

Heber's view of the Himalayas conforms to this angle of vision. He had seen the fabulous and the magnificent Orient of which his friends like Southey and Coleridge had only dreamt. He viewed it from the dual perspectives of a Romantic and a high Anglican priest.

Was Heber's journey through India really a literary pilgrim's progress? Did his encounter with India influence his vision, contribute to his inner growth? Every travelogue, even if indistinctly, projects the author's vision and the inner-growth which is the result of his exposure to different peoples and different value systems. Moreover "every pilgrim sees things his own way, but there are limits to what a pilgrimage can be for, to what shape and form it can take, to what truth it reveals" (Said 168). Heber's was an encounter between two cultures. The outcome was an intellectual growth, a broadening of his vision; the reflection of which makes his travelogues a unique testimony. His Protestantism, his missionary angularity, his aversion to heathenism, all these are

subdued in his encounter with the East. His reactions seldom take the shape of a tirade but a sympathetic statement. His misconceptions are not deliberate but due to lack of first-hand knowledge.

It is in this context that Bishop Heber's Journal becomes all the more remarkable. Reflected in it is a remarkable individual, an intense human being, a true Christian and a liberal minded European who was critical of the existing colonial outlook and discourse. Though aligned to the very system, he was not blind to the various complicitous discourses operating in the fields of religion, colonial politics and economics. Necessarily his reactions and responses to the nineteenth century India and Indians are sober and sympathetic. He noticed the apparent deviousness and callousness of the Indian society. But he did not make an issue of them, like some of his compatriots and some of the present day alienated Indians. He experienced the filth and dirt of the Indian road and towns. One of the first sights that Bishop Heber noticed on reaching Calcutta was a half burned human corpse slowly floating past. Certainly it was much more a revolting sight than what

V.S. Naipaul and travellers like him happen to notice in the twentieth century India. Yet he did not unleash a tirade as V.S. Naipaul does in An Area of Darkness:

India is a stone's throw away, but in the flat it is denied; the beggars, the gutters, the starved bodies, the weeping swollen - bellied child black with flies in the filth, cow dung and human excrement of a bazar lane, the dogs ribby and mangy, cowed and cowardly, reserving their anger; like the human beings around them, for others of their kind. (61).

Bishop Heber was magnanimous enough to understand the reasons for the squalor in nineteenth century India. He was probably aware of the filth and dirt in the industrial centres of England and the mode of existence of the poor, "where they lived in boxes - the back to back rows of terraced cottages." (Toyne 259) so the underworld of India did not unduly affect him.

During his short stay in India Heber became aware of the fatalistic and enervating tendencies of the East. He did not however, turn antagonistic or indifferent to this land. The reactions of this nineteenth century divine exhibit a remarkable tolerance and humanity about them. He was not certainly a missionary on the prowl to find out the vestiges of paganism or blood-curdling practices of the orientals. He did not comport himself as an over-educated and over-refined individual to sit on judgement on a people who were beyond the pale of human, much less, decent existence. In this he was different from

the eighteenth century "Nabobs" and the nineteenth century "heaven borns", different from the missionaries that came before and after him. Mrs. Dyson compares Heber with another missionary, Rev. Henry Martin and comes to the obvious conclusion:

A reader moving from the journal and letters of Martin to those of Heber may have the sensation of emergin from the sad, intense and close atmosphere of a sick room to the fresh air of a garden. Heber is generous and urbane, eager to meet people and learn something from them, predisposed to think well of others and to make allowances for their failings. (228)

Heber's travelogue reveals his encounter with India in three different capacities; as a zealous Bishop, as an observant traveller and as a sensitive human being brought into contact with an alien culture and ethos. His journey across India is in a way a literary "Pilgrim's Progress" a voyage into an alien culture. Without being aware of it Heber may have been one of the earliest Europeans to have followed a sort of modestly semiotic approach which requires interpretation of alien cultural codes without prejudice. It also requires of the enquirer the ability to read an alien code as if it were a system of signs. Unlike Emily Eden who had not read much about

India and was not at all enthusiastic about the prospect of a journey to the East. Heber had certain historical and evolutionary perspective on India as well as a nodding acquaintance with eastern literature. Exposed to travelling he was impressed with the idea that all cultures have their own inner rhythm and logic. He thought of literature as an expression of culture. Sensitized to multi-cultural experience he was naturally receptive and objective to other cultures. He seldom jumped to conclusions or worked under pre-conceived notions. He was essentially an explorer, prepared to find what is there and not a discoverer who goes ahead with certain hypothesis of what is to be found. His liberalism can be traced to his romanticism. All the Romantics shared in a liberality of mind which made them not only sympathize with but also admire aliens and alien cultures.

Bishop Heber was interested both in the temporal and spiritual affairs of men. So his travelogue presents a true picture of the country, its inhabitants and of the times. No aspect of the flora and the fauna, of men and their customs, of the rulers and the ruled escaped his notice. The subjective statement of what happens to him is not central to his work but the objective information about the land that he is passing through. He was struck by India's glorious past and saddened by the universal decay that he noticed around. To him the ancient monuments were pointers to the past. Here it is interesting to note that Bishop Heber was appointed one of

the Vice-Presidents of the Asiatic Society in Calcutta. Its old symbol of the banyan tree and its motto "quot rami tot arbores" were suggested to Mr. Wyn by him. All the same he did not share in the Orientalists zeal for renovating everything old. In a letter to Lord Armherst Heber sounds this note of caution :

The Taj-Mahal of Agra is indeed so beautiful and unique a work that it would be a reproach to any government which would suffer it to fall to decay; but the repair of Akbar's tomb at Secundra and some other works of the same kind, are what the Mussalmans themselves, had they remained in power, would hardly have thought it necessary to do; what they do not thank us for doing and what seems scarcely desirable for those whose interest it is that the memory of former and rival dynasties should be forgotten. (Life 2:279)

Heber's advice smacks of colonial overtones when he suggests that the memory of former and rival dynasties should as far as possible be left to die out. However that seems scarcely his sole-motive. For in the same letter he continues : "this money should be utilized for making up roads, canals and renovating the serais constructed by the Moghul emperors" (Life 2 : 279).

He was not averse to the renovation of ancient buildings, a policy adopted from Hastings time onwards. Dead buildings mattered. But to him living human beings mattered more. Necessarily his criteria differed from most other Englishmen in India at that time. He was antagonistic to the Anglo-Indian habit of establishing islands of luxury amidst vast oceans of

misery. He put more score on public utility works that would benefit more people than beautification of ancient monuments or laying of garden paths to cater to the tastes of a few connoisseurs and bureaucrats. In a letter to Sir William Wynn Bishop Heber outlines his priorities.

New roads, indeed, must be everywhere a public benefit; but the roads which the local magistrates have, in some places made, are rather drives for their own carriages in the neighbourhood of cantonments and camps than any which are of real advantage to the natives or travellers. ... I am more anxious for the general repair of roads, the opening and restoration of canals and above all for the repair of magnificent caravanserais. ... the preservation of which is among the greatest boons which can be conferred on the natives of upper India. (Life 2; 292)

The same human concern operated behind his zeal for the establishment of schools in India. under his guidance a central school for girls was set up at Calcutta. It was a bold step which elicited enthusiastic response both in India and in England. He did not want the mission schools to be centres of proselytization but rather centres of enlightenment. Conversion would be an aftermath. His line of thinking coincides with that of other missionaries who fervently hoped that education will clear away the crust of superstition and prepare the Indian soul for the eventual acceptance of Christianity. That was clearly a wrong assumption but not so the assumption about the blessings of English education to the Indians.

Western education and Christianity were uppermost in the minds of most missionaries and social thinkers of the time

but not so the cultivation of tea and the use of vernaculars. It might surprise a few that the same Bishop who was keen on the cultivation of minds in Calcutta was equally keen on the cultivation of tea on Kumaon hills. In a letter to Lord Amherst from Maunpoor dated January 24, 1825 he makes this observation : "I was forcibly struck in passing through this province with the persuasion that it is here (Kumaon) that the plan, which I had suggested in conversation, of cultivating tea within the limits of the empire might be most successfully carried into execution" (Life 2: 278). Similarly Bishop Heber was one of the earliest Englishmen who strongly advocated the use of vernaculars, especially Hindi, in the courts and in the churches. His was a linguistic and commonsense approach. He advocated, on the one hand, for more magistrates, native or English, for the establishment of peace and order and on the other, the substitution of Persian by Hindustani in courts. Heber noticed that though each province had its own language,

Hindustani is understood almost everywhere even by those who do not speak it correctly. It is the only language used in the army by the Europeans in conversing with their servants, and by well-educated natives in conversing with each other. Nor do I conceive except the Vakeels, and a few senior members of the Sudder in Calcutta who are naturally hostile to change, that an individual is to be found in India who would not rejoice at the substitution which I have suggested. ... Even the wives of European soldiers converse in Hindustani with their husbands. (Life 2: 289)

Heber's zeal for the vernaculars was not limited to the field of education or judiciary alone. He advocated it in the

field of worship too. In a letter to the Secretary of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge he voices the opinion that the change of Christian worship into vernaculars will benefit the Christians and non-Christians alike. He was aware of the fact that the nominal Christians in Calcutta knew only Bengalee or Hindustani and they hardly knew the name of Christ. So he hoped that they might be drawn by degrees "to attend a form of prayer, which while its exterior ornaments would not disgust them by too great a departure from those to which they are accustomed, would convey its instructions to them in a tongue which they understand. ..." (Life 2: 298). There was definitely a tendency in India to bracket Christianity together with the knowledge of English and the resultant vestiges of western civilization. "The missionaries," as Toyns says, "were trying hard to persuade the people that God was an English man, but without much success" (287). So to the majority of Indians Christianity was a whiteman's religion. "The church in the colonies is the white people's church, the foreigner's church. She does not call the natives to God's ways but to the ways of the whiteman, of the master, of the oppressor" (Fanon 42). This aspect of Christian proselytization came to be more and more associated in the minds of the Hindus as the over-zealous Evangelicals began to denigrate Indian gods and vilify Indian institutions. In course of time such polemics became a discursive strategy to embarrass the natives and make them ashamed of their religious inheritance. Heber realized

the folly of such a practice though occasionally he himself was trapped by the colonial discourse of his times. Instead Heber suggested a tolerant attitude towards the customs of the natives and the acceptance of a form of worship in harmony with the culture of the people and in a language understood by them, in short, Indianization of Christianity. It took more than a century for the Indian churches to put into practice Bishop Heber's view regarding the form and language of worship.

Heber found the Indian masses gentle and docile and on the whole his attitude towards them was generous. He did not think of the natives in Manichean terms though he could not free himself from the Eurocentric vision of the aliens as pagans or heathens. To some of the Anglo Indians the native Indian was too unpleasant and dirty to correspond to the noble savage of literature. Still at least some of them subscribed to "the romantic belief in the value of life near to nature, stripped of the artificiality of civilized society" (Drew 8). In Heber's attitude towards the natives this veneer of romanticism is noticeable. At times he found some Indian tribes or other similar to the ethnic group of medieval England. The Kholees for instance was such a tribe in his eyes. In one of his letters from Bombay he speaks highly of them :

The Gujaratis, particularly the Kholees, are manly and bold looking, though very troublesome and ferocious people, always armed to the teeth; with their short kirtles, swords, shields, quivers

and bows, gave me one of the loveliest impressions I ever received of the followers of our Robinhood in Sherwood or of the ancient inhabitants of the vale (Homesdale I believe it is) in Kent, which boasts that it was never won nor ever shall. (Life 2:334)

The same generosity of vision characterizes his dealings with the Indian statemen of the time. He met such personages as Hari Mohan Thakur, Radhakant Deb, Trimbukjee Danglia, Begum Sumroo, the Gaikwad of Baroda, the Raja of Tanjore, Swami Narayan and a host of others. He felt sympathy for the sad state of the last descendant of the Moghuls at Delhi and made this plea on his behalf :

The gigantic genius of Tamerlane and the distinguished talents of Akbar throw a sort of splendour over the crimes and follies of his descendants; I heartily hope that Government reverse the reins of the fallen greatness, and that atleast no fresh degradation is reserved for the poor old man whose idea was associated in my childhood with all imaginable wealth and splendor under the name of the great Moghul. (qtd. in Krishnaswamy 13)

If the last of the Moghuls did not come up to his romantic expectations Trimbukjee one of the bitterest foes of the English did so. To Heber Trimbukjee symbolized the anti-colonial resistance of the native and embodied the freedom loving human spirit. No wonder he calls him a little Napoleon who to the Romantics was the ideal of the new man. Heber had a cordial interview with the Maratha outlaw. His meeting with Swami Narayan however fell short of his theological

expectations. As pointed out earlier, he was not so impressed with the Guru. Heber not only respected men, but also their value systems. The usual tendency among the colonizers was to displace the value systems among the colonized and replace them with the white man's values. They wanted the colonial elite to ape the European elite. Here again Heber was quite liberal in his views. As an example of it one could cite his stand on the caste system in India. As a Christian he could not but be against caste prejudices but as a benevolent pastor he had to tolerate such a moth-eaten practice which in later years came to be looked upon as a crime against God and humanity. Heber was aware of the mentality of the "heaven-borns" towards the natives and logically such an attitude was pardonable between the Soodra and Pariah Christians of Madras. He was unwilling to meddle in such a ticklish issue and so wrote out a sort of excuse to Rev. D. Schreivogel :

God forbid that we should wink at sin! but God forbid also that we should make the narrow gate of life narrower than Christ has made it or deal less favourably with the prejudices of this people than St. Paul and the primitive church dealt with the almost similar prejudices of the Jewish converts. (Life 2 : 259)

For quite sometime the early church had to wink at the Jewish Christians' claim of superiority as descendants of the "chosen race." In the same way Bishop Heber would concede to the hollow superiority complex of the Soodra Christians rather than

apply the levelling yardstick of Christianity. In spite of being a nineteenth century liberal, he was ready to view a complex human situation through Indian eyes.

Heber's two year contact with India, superficial as one might term it, was sufficient to convince him of the ubiquitous presence of hypocrisy in the Indian society. He found a chasm between precept and practice. In a letter to J. Wilmost Horton he makes it quite clear. "Though they consider it as a grievous crime to kill a cow or bullock for the purpose of eating, yet they treat their draught oxen no less than their horses with a degree of barbarous severity which would turn an English hackney coachman sick" (Journey 2 : 233). As far back as in 1823 this churchman noticed what Jawaharlal Nehru noticed a century later, "Love and worship do not always go together." Several other English travellers also have commented on the cruelty towards animals in India. However, what saddened Heber's heart more was the callous treatment meted out to women whose position in the society was only a degree higher than that of the dumb animals. His mild tones no more remained so when condemning social systems that exploited and ill-treated women; "I had noticed on many occasions that all through India, anything is thought good enough for the weaker sex, and that the roughest words, and the poorest garments and the scantiest alms, the most degrading labour, and the hardest blows are generally their portion" (Journey 2: 71). Ill-treatment and exploitation of women have

prominently figured in all travelogues and memoirs. Heber did not make an issue of them nor they were an obsession with him as in the case of Anglo-Indian women novelists of the nineteenth century. He was aware of infanticide, human sacrifices and caste discriminations, but the custom of suttee seems to have shocked his imagination more than any other social evil prevalent in India at that time. The religious aspect of Sutee, however horrid a tenet, was lost on the Anglo-Indians including Bishop Heber. He surmised that such a practice prevailed because the neo-rich wanted to get rid of the burdensome windows, and young as well as old men clung to their young wives even after death. The Company administration of the time did not contemplate any legal measures against social evils. And Heber probably did not anticipate far reaching reforms in the near future. He knew that education would do what administration could not do and hence made the following prediction; "When Christian schools have become universal the Sutee will fall of itself" (Journey 1 : 74). Subsequent history has proved him hundred percent correct.

There were also other cruel practices which shocked Heber's romantic sensibility. The low-caste religious rituals such as piercing the tongue, being swung with hooks during the churook puja festival and so on. As a religious, he could understand the underlying motives of penance and atonement. Yet the penances and austerities practised by the Hindu sanyasis appeared to him as both detestable and meaningless.

During his visit to the holy city of Benaras he recorded :

Fakir's houses, as they are called occur at every turn, adorned with idols and sending out an unceasing tinkling and strumming of Vinas, bigals and other discordant instruments, while religious mendicants of every Hindoo sect, offering every conceivable deformity which chalk, cowdung, matted locks, disease, distorted limbs and disgusting and hideous attitude of penance can show, literally line the principal streets on both sides. (Journey 1 ; 373)

Pharisaical practice of penance and exhibition of religion did not in any way impress this Anglican clergyman. Similarly he could see through the hypocrisy of the rich and their general pretence of non-violence and peace: "The rich eat everything, imitate the Mohammedan conquerors and now the English" (qtd. in Krishnaswami 209). It is intriguing to note in Bishop Heber's writings a decisively anti-Hindu stance, despite the fact that he liked the Hindus more than the Mohammedans. He liked the Hindu for his mild, pleasing, intelligent and sober nature but not his religion which he thought to be the root-cause of all the social evils then prevalent in India.

In the travelogue which is a record of Heber's direct encounter with the people and where Heber is himself, we notice his uniform tolerance. In his letters however, though parallel and often complementary to the travel diary, he speaks from the position of a committed

ecclesiastic. It is when he observes things from ^{this} perspective that he betrays a mild streak of missionary blind spot. Due to grotesque misinformation, disregarding all principles of psychology he attributes all the virtues of the hindus to their nature and all the vices to their religion. During his voyage up the Ganges he found the Mohammedan workers defiant and even quarrelsome. Yet he considered them a better people in as much as they have a better creed. Being a Christian, Heber had a kind of religious affinity to the mussalmans "with a religion closely copied from that of Moses" as opposed to that of the Hindu tribes "worshipping the same abominations with the same rites as the ancient Cannanites" (Journey 2: 284). According to Laird, "there is little sign in Heber's writings of that profound respect for the great non-Christian religions as manifestations in whatever degree of the spirit of God in different cultures which was early articulated by German Romantics, was taken up by F.D. Maurice in mid nineteen century England, and became increasingly evident in theological and missionary circles in the early twentieth century" (33). This respect and magnanimity were based on theoretical assumptions rather than practical observation or contact. The Romantics in Europe imagined of far away places, pockets of ideal and quaint cultures and saw visions of noble savages. Heber on the other hand had an opportunity to watch from close range the degenerate Indian society of the early

nineteenth century about which even Indians did not think highly of. The gap between the real and the imaginary probably lessened his romantic enthusiasim. Moreover being a convinced monotheist it could be hardly expected of him to share in the pantheistic views of Coleridge or Sonthey. M.A. Laird offers the following explanation for this deviation within the romantic frame-work :

While Heber was pre-eminently a man of moderation it was not the moderation that springs from colourlessness, uncertainty or undue caution. Rather it was the product of Romanticism disciplined and directed by Anglican Christianity, of a tension between personal and institutional religion, heart and mind; clothed with good taste and a kind and unassuming dignity; salted by a readiness to recognise goodness where it showed itself, in Hindus and Christians, Dissenters as well as Anglicans. (37)

In his travels and apostolate Heber had also come into contact with many Englishmen and women. He was not in the least pleased with most of their attitudes and manners. If we compare his opinions about the rulers and the ruled, one is forced to conclude that the balance is certainly in favour of the latter. He felt that in fact, it was the Britons who needed Christianity more than the Indians. As an honest Christian he found that the Britishers could learn as much from the natives as the natives from Christianity. He was disheartened by their wanton life, high-handedness towards the natives and apathy to the Christian values. "Heber not only challenged the concept of the superiority of the white races,

but also asserted that the success of Christianizing India did not depend on the continuance of the British rule. He believed that through education alone could the Gospel be made acceptable to the masses" (Misra 33). It was his good fortune to come across such benevolent and far sighted administrators as Elphinstone at Bombay, Metcalfe at Bharatpur and Munro at Madras men devoted to humanitarianism. These men of the world too were deeply impressed by the saintly Bishop. Though there were a good number of such administrators Heber could see deeper into the colonial set up. They were administering this vast continent not for the millions in India but for the share-holders of the East India Company in England. The benefits that the country was gaining were merely spill-overs. He felt that only the crown would be genuinely interested in the welfare of its subjects.

I have sometimes wished that its immediate management were transferred to the crown. But what I saw in Ceylon makes me think this a doubtful remedy unless the government and above all the people of England were convinced that no country can bear to pay so large a revenue to foreigners as to these who spend their wealth within their own borders and that most of the causes which once made these countries wealthy have ceased to exist in proportion as the industry and ingenuity of England have rivalled and excelled them. (Life 2: 414)

Even as early as in 1825 an observant traveller like Bishop Heber could notice the slow degeneration of native skills and the slow death of indigenous industries. These came

to be aggravated as the economic exploitation and industrial rivalry continued for another century. Even so the Bishop approved of the English rule in India as it established the rule of law over a land torn by internal strifes. However to side with the naked interference of the British in the affairs of the native states with consequences far from salutary, was totally a different issue. No wonder, he deplored the case of Rohilkhand in the severest of terms. The conquest of Rohilkhand by the English and the death of its chief in the battle, its consequent cession to the nawab of Oudh and the horrible manner in which Sujah-ud-Daulah oppressed and misgoverned it, form one of the worst chapters of English history in India" (Journey 2 : 119). As a benevolent soul he wanted every British administrator to have the good of Indians at heart and was opposed to the idea of dumping the socially outcast and morally degenerate Englishmen to rule over India. Similarly he was against the lavish life styles of the British officialdom and their efforts to ape eastern princelings. Nor could the Bishop subscribe to the narrow racial pride and superiority complex which the British officials paraded around while dealing with the native population.

One final question that corsses our minds as we read through Heber's Narrative of a Journey is whether it offers, any vision or point of view or not? After all can the travelogue as a genre offer any vision at all? It is but a record of a series of experiences which cannot be structured as in fiction. Moreover it offers only a minimum space for moral or philosophical asides. Unlike the travelogue, structured literary experiences can be made to point out to a personal vision, a sort of a figure in the carpet but not so the unstructured at random record of the experiences of a traveller. Meadows Taylor, for instance, in his novels could easily present a vision of inter-caste conjugal happiness and harmonious East-West Co-existence. His medium, the novel did not stand in his way; on the contrary it gained from his personal vision. It is difficult to conjecture whether Heber had any such vision as he jotted down his myriad encounters with the real and the conceptual sides of Eastern existence. Even if he had one it could not be made as explicit as in Dante's Divine Comedy or Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress which are after all fictional travelogues.

Still whatever he noticed, experienced or enjoyed was sifted through the prism of his personality which was ideologically

Christian and aesthetically romantic. Hence it will not be far from the truth to conclude that Heber in his travelogue and letters offers the 19th century Christian and romantic view of colonialism and humanism. It is in fact another version of the Imperial theme minus its arrogance and self-assurance which many British travellers nurtured in their writings. Heber envisaged a socially ordered and economically stable Indian society under the paternal guidance of the English. Out of the anarchy and chaos brought about by the collapse of the Moghul reign, a new society and a new order were taking shape by the providential arrival of the British. A nascent India was stepping out of the darkness into light. Heber in fact, adhered to the Christian cosmic vision, a hierarchical society wherein the British Christians were called upon to supervise the destiny of millions. He did not subscribe to the then prevalent notion that the British sway in India would be perennial. Yet he wished it were long enough to complete the process of cultural awakening and western education that had taken roots. In the same way he harboured no such illusion that the whole of India would turn Christian. Perhaps he cherished the missionary ideal of winning India to Christianity but that was yet a distant dream and the Bishop was not at all in a hurry. His Christianity was not aggressive or abrasive and he paraded no crusading zeal. He did not equate the success of his missionary enterprise with the number of converts he won. He considered himself only as a humble

tool in the hands of his Master and not a proselytizing
angel or a vanquisher of ^{the} heathen gods. He fervently desired
that the natives should be exposed to the benevolent effects
of Western civilization of which Christianity was an integral
part and Christian ideals should spread through the length
and breadth of this beautiful land.

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Chapter III

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