

**Footprints on the Thar: Travel, Brotherhood and Cultural Identity  
Youthful Mobility, Memory and Regional Consciousness in Contemporary  
Rajasthan**

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**Abstract**

Travel writing has long served as a literary medium through which individuals negotiate identity, culture, memory, and belonging. In contemporary Indian literature, youth-centred travel narratives emerging from regional spaces have increasingly become important cultural documents that preserve lived experiences and local consciousness. This paper examines *Footprints on the Thar: Travel, Brotherhood and Cultural Identity* as a contemporary autobiographical travel narrative situated within the socio-cultural landscape of Jaisalmer.

The study analyses how the journey of a group of young friends celebrating their birthdays evolves into a profound experience of companionship, masculinity, cultural interaction, spontaneity, and emotional growth. Through train journeys, folk performances, desert camps, humorous interactions, and unexpected conflicts, the narrative constructs an authentic portrayal of youth culture in Rajasthan. The paper further investigates how regional identity and oral storytelling traditions shape the narrative texture of the chronicle.

Drawing upon theories of travel writing, cultural memory, and masculinity studies, the paper argues that the narrative transcends the conventional tourist memoir and becomes a significant reflection of contemporary youth consciousness in India. The journey emerges not merely as geographical movement but as an emotional and cultural experience that preserves friendship, nostalgia, and regional belonging.

**Keywords:** Travel Writing, Rajasthan, Brotherhood, Cultural Identity, Youth Culture, Memory Studies, Masculinity, Jaisalmer, Regional Literature, Autobiography

**Introduction**

Travel has historically remained one of humanity's most meaningful acts of discovery. Beyond physical movement, journeys allow individuals to engage with unfamiliar cultures, social realities, landscapes, and emotional experiences. In literature, travel

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narratives have traditionally documented geographical exploration and cultural observation. However, contemporary travel writing increasingly emphasizes personal memory, emotional authenticity, and lived experience.

Modern Indian youth travel narratives differ significantly from classical travel literature because they emerge from ordinary experiences rather than elite exploration. These narratives prioritize friendship, spontaneity, humour, and emotional connection over formal documentation. Within this context, *Footprints on the Thar: Travel, Brotherhood and Cultural Identity* becomes an important representation of contemporary regional travel writing.

The narrative documents a birthday journey undertaken by a group of young friends to Jaisalmer during December 2022. Although the journey initially appears to be a recreational trip, it gradually evolves into a deeper exploration of friendship, regional identity, folk culture, masculinity, and memory.

**The chronicle presents multiple dimensions of youth experience:**

- spontaneous decision-making,
- emotional bonding,
- performative masculinity,
- cultural immersion,
- humour and rebellion,
- and nostalgia for fleeting moments of youth.

Unlike polished commercial travel narratives, this work preserves colloquial speech, local dialects, raw emotions, and ordinary incidents. Such authenticity gives the narrative sociological as well as literary significance.

The purpose of this paper is therefore to critically examine how the travel experience represented in the narrative contributes to the understanding of:

1. Brotherhood and masculine friendship,
2. Regional cultural identity,
3. Travel as emotional transformation,
4. Folk culture and oral traditions,
5. And autobiographical memory.

**Objectives of the Study**

The study aims to:

1. Examine the representation of friendship and emotional brotherhood in the narrative.
2. Analyze the role of travel in shaping youth identity and memory.
3. Explore the depiction of Rajasthani culture and regional consciousness.
4. Study humour and spontaneity as literary techniques.
5. Understand the relationship between autobiography and travel writing.

**Research Methodology**

This paper adopts a qualitative and interpretative methodology. The research is based on close textual analysis of the autobiographical travel narrative. The study incorporates:

- cultural studies,
- travel narrative theory,
- memory studies,
- and masculinity studies.

Primary evidence has been drawn from the narrative itself, while secondary theoretical frameworks have been used to contextualize the analysis.

### **Travel Writing and Contemporary Youth Experience**

Travel writing in India has evolved from pilgrimage narratives and colonial accounts into deeply personal memoirs. Contemporary youth travel literature often rejects structured tourism and instead celebrates spontaneity and emotional unpredictability.

In *Footprints on the Thar*, the journey begins with the challenge of convincing friends to join the trip. This itself reflects the realities of modern youth life where responsibilities, hesitation, and uncertainty constantly interrupt freedom. The eventual formation of the travelling group creates an atmosphere of collective excitement and emotional anticipation.

The train journey occupies a significant symbolic position within the narrative. The railway compartment becomes a temporary social world where the friends celebrate birthdays, tease each other, interact with strangers, and escape everyday routine. The midnight transition from Naman's birthday to Abhimanyu's birthday symbolizes the emotional continuity of friendship and celebration.

The narrative's realism emerges through ordinary details:

- sharing cake at the station,
- conversations with strangers,
- playing Ludo with fellow passengers,
- and humorous interactions with elderly travellers.

These seemingly insignificant moments become emotionally meaningful because they preserve lived human experience.

### **Brotherhood and Masculine Camaraderie**

The emotional centre of the narrative lies in its portrayal of friendship. The relationships between:

- Abhimanyu,
- Naman,
- Sawai Singh,
- Bhawani,
- Abhijeet,
- and Harsh

create a strong representation of masculine brotherhood in contemporary India.

The friendships in the narrative are expressed not through overt emotional language but through:

- teasing,
- shared risk,

- protective behaviour,
- physical humour,
- collective celebration,
- and loyalty during conflict.

The practice of “birthday bums,” repeated throughout the journey, becomes symbolic of performative masculine affection. The physical playfulness reflects how emotional intimacy among young men is often communicated indirectly within Indian social culture. A particularly important moment occurs when Abhijeet consumes weed under peer influence and becomes physically unstable. Rather than abandoning him, the group becomes deeply protective and concerned. The narrator worries about his friend’s safety and the responsibility of facing his parents. This reveals emotional maturity hidden beneath youthful recklessness.

Similarly, the surprise arrival of Deepanshu at Jaisalmer demonstrates another dimension of brotherhood. His willingness to travel unexpectedly to celebrate the narrator’s birthday transforms the trip into an emotionally unforgettable experience.

#### **Masculinity and Emotional Expression**

The narrative presents masculinity as both performative and vulnerable. The young men constantly engage in behaviours associated with traditional masculine culture:

- loud humour,
- mock aggression,
- flirtation,
- adventurous behaviour,
- and emotional concealment.

However, beneath this surface lies emotional sensitivity.

Moments of fear, gratitude, concern, nostalgia, and emotional dependence reveal that the characters are not emotionally detached. Instead, they negotiate between societal expectations of masculine toughness and genuine emotional connection.

The desert environment further intensifies this performative masculinity. The open landscapes of the Thar Desert become spaces where the boys temporarily escape social discipline and experience freedom.

Yet the narrative repeatedly reveals emotional fragility beneath this freedom:

- anxiety during conflicts,
- fear of authority,
- concern for friendship,
- and reflections on mortality and regret.

Thus, the text complicates stereotypical representations of Indian masculinity.

#### **Jaisalmer as a Cultural Landscape**

Jaisalmer functions not merely as a geographical setting but as a cultural and emotional space within the narrative. The city symbolizes:

- royal history,

- desert identity,
- architectural beauty,
- folk tradition,
- and timelessness.

The descriptions of:

- the fort,
- sand dunes,
- jeep safaris,
- camel rides,
- Kalbeliya performances,
- and desert camps

create a vivid sensory landscape.

The fort becomes a symbol of historical endurance and Rajput pride. The narrator repeatedly expresses admiration for the labour, artistry, and strength involved in constructing such monumental architecture.

The desert itself functions symbolically as a space of emotional openness and unpredictability. Away from urban routine, the characters encounter unfamiliar experiences that deepen their understanding of friendship and selfhood.

### **Folk Culture and Regional Identity**

The representation of folk culture is among the most significant aspects of the narrative. The Kalbeliya performances, folk songs, shayari sessions, and traditional welcomes preserve the cultural identity of Rajasthan.

The hospitality experienced at the desert camps reflects regional traditions of honour and warmth. Rituals such as:

- tilak,
- aarti,
- and “ghol”

symbolize cultural continuity.

Importantly, the narrator and his friends do not remain passive spectators. They actively participate in dancing, singing, joking, and interacting with performers. This participation dissolves the boundary between tourist and local culture.

### **The use of Marwari expressions such as:**

- “Khama Ghani,”
- “Ram Ram sa,”
- and “Banna”

preserves linguistic authenticity and strengthens regional consciousness within the narrative.

### **Humour and Oral Storytelling**

Humour structures the narrative at almost every stage. The chronicle contains:

- prank calls,
- playful lies,
- teasing conversations,

- comic misunderstandings,
- and exaggerated storytelling.

The prank involving Harshvardhan and the fake police complaint reflects the oral storytelling culture common among close-knit male friend groups. The humour is conversational rather than literary, giving the narrative an authentic oral texture.

Humour also serves important psychological functions:

1. It reduces tension.
2. It strengthens group identity.
3. It transforms ordinary events into memorable experiences.
4. It prevents emotional heaviness.

The conversational quality of the text reflects oral narrative traditions deeply rooted in Rajasthani culture.

### **Conflict, Authority and Youthful Rebellion**

The confrontation with the desert camp owner JP Singh introduces conflict into the narrative. The disagreement emerges from late-night celebrations, noise, intoxication, and masculine ego.

This episode becomes important because it reveals:

- group solidarity,
- youthful rebellion,
- intoxicated aggression,
- and negotiation with authority.

Despite the aggressive atmosphere, the conflict eventually resolves peacefully through apology and emotional negotiation. The narrator's refusal to escalate the matter demonstrates emotional restraint and maturity.

The episode reflects how youth culture often fluctuates between celebration and confrontation.

### **Memory, Nostalgia and Autobiographical Consciousness**

The narrative operates fundamentally through memory. The narrator reconstructs:

- songs,
- conversations,
- landscapes,
- gestures,
- jokes,
- and emotional reactions

with remarkable detail.

This preservation transforms the chronicle into an autobiographical archive of youth.

Nostalgia becomes especially visible in the conclusion where the narrator reflects upon the temporary nature of youth and friendship. The realization that one must travel with friends "before life moves on" introduces existential depth into the narrative.

The journey therefore becomes more than recreation; it becomes a defense against future regret and emotional emptiness.

### **Regional Consciousness and Rajput Identity**

The narrative also reflects strong regional pride and Rajput cultural consciousness. Discussions about:

- Maharajas,
- royal lineages,
- desert history,
- and stories such as the Rolls Royce incident involving Maharaja Jai Singh Prabhakar

demonstrate historical awareness among the characters.

The journey through Rajasthan becomes an act of reconnecting with regional heritage and identity.

### **Conclusion**

Footprints on the Thar: Travel, Brotherhood and Cultural Identity emerges as a powerful example of contemporary Indian travel memoir writing. Through humour, emotional authenticity, folk experiences, and youthful spontaneity, the narrative captures the realities of friendship and regional identity in modern Rajasthan.

The chronicle demonstrates that travel is not simply movement across landscapes but movement through emotional and cultural experiences. The desert spaces of Jaisalmer become sites where:

- friendship deepens,
- masculinity is negotiated,
- cultural identity is experienced,
- and memory is permanently formed.

The text's greatest literary strength lies in its sincerity. Its unfiltered dialogues, local dialects, emotional vulnerability, and humorous realism preserve a lived experience rarely represented in formal academic literature.

Ultimately, the narrative reminds readers that journeys undertaken in youth often become lifelong emotional landmarks. The footprints left upon the sands of the Thar Desert become symbolic footprints upon memory itself.

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