

## Travel Memoir

**Dr. Shazia Siddiqui Khan**

Associate Professor and HOD, Dept. of English, Mumtaz P.G. College, Lucknow.

**Abstract:** Before beginning on the enterprise of recording this travel memoir, let me declare that this is a piece of writing like no other, that I am getting published. It includes two distinct sections, the first, concerning Dubai, a shoppers paradise, and the second being about a place in Atlanta, Georgia, in the United States, visited purely out of my love for the imaginative world of books. The exceptional quality of the memoirs is that the first one was written in 1999 and the second in the year 2001, just a little prior to the devastation of the twin towers in New York, which also, incidentally, I did have the fortune to see, standing in all their splendid glory. The writing and the publication have a huge gap of more than two long decades between them. In those days, my career in academia had not taken off and I used to frequently write as a freelancer for various newspapers. Readers may notice references to the same in these write-ups. So I present the memoirs with much warm nostalgia and hope that reading the same would be a unique learning experience too.

**Keywords:** memoir, exceptional, imaginative, freelancer, nostalgia.

## INTRODUCTION

### Dubai

Almost a year long sabbatical was enough, I firmly decided, admonishing myself somewhat. Before those grey cells began to rust, I just had to put them to good use. Enough of indulgence. High time I shook off that holiday mood and got down to doing something worthwhile!

Being in Dubai for a week long holiday gave me the great tip-off that I had subconsciously been waiting for. Dubai, an amazing blend of tradition and modernity would help me create a brilliant, enriching travel account, immensely enlightening for all who read it. Yes, this was going to be my big chance!

Loaded with shopping (great bargains, I'd congratulated myself) I landed in Lucknow, tired but still in high spirits for the fantastic trip I had just completed. I got down immediately to doing what was foremost on my mind- sleeping that fatigue off.

A few days later, sufficiently refreshed, I began exercising my brain and those carefully manicured, long, delicate fingers, co-ordinating the combined effect to produce a decent, organized write-up, befitting the taste of those discerning readers, always so hard to please. What I had not realized was that a grave folly had already been committed and redressal was impossible. As they say, 'what's done cannot be undone'. My mistake was that I had embarked upon my pleasure trip and had just given in to all the enjoyment there was to savour. The bright idea of putting the fun-filled holiday in this extraordinary place to some further use, only dawned later. I had chalked out no itinerary and as it turned out, this was not a very wise thing to do.

Refusing to despair, I still struggled desperately to get my facts together. Let me see: tourist attractions, cuisine, monuments, shopping malls. Already it sounds confused, haphazard, just mad! Teetering, but trying to start on the right foot, I decide to talk about shopping in Dubai, the one thing any tourist there can simply not resist doing. It is undoubtedly a shopper's paradise. Think of anything and it is available there, and mostly at a reasonable price. With *Woolworth*, *Ikea*, *Marks and Spencer*, all having shops in Dubai, the place can compare with the best shopping centres anywhere in the world.

One place that is bound to be a dizzying experience is the gold market or *souk*, as termed in the native lingo. Those with a penchant for jewellery will find themselves losing their sanity. Everything visible in the shops seems to have received the 'golden touch' from Midas' fingers. One can get the most exquisite pieces of jewellery and an unbelievable variety of designs here. Even the price of this gorgeous yellow metal is lower there. Could Eve's daughter's possibly ask for more?

Dubai is also a paradise for who do not just eat to survive but rather, live to eat. It is a haven for gastronomic delights from all parts of the world. One can gorge on Chinese, Italian, Lebanese or Arab food to suit one's taste-buds. Eating joints in Dubai offer a whole range of cuisines, more specially for the non-vegetarians of course. But those with more traditional food habits need not worry. Indian restaurants offering all kinds of Indian food, ranging from U.P. *ki chaat* to *pav bhaji* to South Indian *dosas*, *idli* and *uttapam*, can be found at almost every street corner. Even the

*desi baap* of Pepsi and Coke, our very own *ganney ka ras* is available in profusion.

This gets me to state a rather pleasant fact about Dubai, so far away from the native land, one does not really miss it, does not suffer from any torturous pangs of nostalgia. Indians reside there in teeming abundance. Any products ostensibly 'made in India', that one has a particular fondness for, would perhaps be even more easily available there. Familiar notes of popular Hindi film songs can often be heard in shopping centres or other public places. Even our Hindi masala movies, the very latest ones, can be seen in cinema halls, on the big screen!

In fact, the most intriguing aspect of the country is the multiplicity of races and nationalities that one comes across there. Blacks, whites, yellows, browns, greens, blues... (sorry I got carried away in the fabulous riot of colours). Jokes apart, Arabs, Lebanese, Turks, Chinese, Phillipinos, Indians, Pakis etc together contribute to the population. What's more, even non-Indians have a working knowledge of our language and could surprise, or rather, shock you with their modest vocabulary just when you have managed to dig up some trivia about their motherland to naughtily mock about! Language-problem for an Indian is completely non-existent in Dubai.

So that's about it. I've done my best. I've taxed my memory and laid down all that I deemed fit to be recorded. Give credit for my honesty, dear reader, as I admit that this was far from being a complete and planned visit. There are beautiful places like the Dubai Creek Golf and Yacht Clubs which I did not have the privilege of seeing. But the visit to the museum at Al Fahidi fort was an experience worth cherishing. The same, however, cannot be said for the Desert Safari too.

This may be a write-up miserably falling short of meeting proper and formal travel literature standards. Neither is it meant to. But penning down what I have has certainly given me the cathartic release I was hoping to find. I want nothing more. I humbly leave the rest to the censure of my most esteemed readers. Shred me to pieces if I so deserve.

### Atlanta (USA)

By far, Scarlett O'Hara of **Gone With The Wind**, with her vivid, green eyes, a spitfire temper and a seventeen inch waist, has been one of the most memorable fictional characters of all times. Just as vivaciously was it brought to life by Vivien Leigh,

in the 1939 movie production, 3 years after the book itself was released.

For those who have read the book, or watched the film, and plan to visit the United States, would therefore find it an experience of a lifetime, to visit the Margaret Mitchell House and Museum, where the story of the highest selling book of the world, at one time, (after the Bible) was born.

Situated on Peachtree Street in Atlanta, Georgia, this sprawling mansion became Margaret Mitchell's home from her early childhood. Part of it has now been converted into a museum open to guided tours for tourists at \$10 per person. Its walls are adorned by blown up pictures of the author and her family, many of whom were the inspiration behind a number of characters of the fictional work. Also displayed are pictures of the actors who played major roles in the movie. The original set of the entrance to *Tara*, the house of Scarlett, has also been put up for display.

When hard times befell Margaret Mitchell and her second husband, John R. Marsh, she let out all the rooms of the house and moved into a small one in the basement. This room has amazingly been maintained as such for tourists to see, and looks as warm and inhabited as it must have been almost a century ago! The linen and curtains etc have been painstakingly selected to be close to the actual. A black dress with some exquisite lace around the neck and sleeves is displayed on her bed. This indicates that she was really a cute, little thing, measuring under five feet!

Ms. Mitchell called this place the Dump. The couple did a lot of entertaining and friends kept streaming in constantly. Margaret herself was very gregarious and a shameless flirt. This often gave people the wrong signal. Our guide related an interesting anecdote. Displaying her fiercely independent spirit, Ms. Mitchell retained her maiden name, which was written on her name plate on the door, with that of her husband, John Marsh. A young man, encouraged by her open, friendly behaviour and mistaking her to be single, waited past many dark hours of the night for the other male in the house (her husband!!) to leave so that the two could get time alone!

Another interesting belief concerns a big lion-head shaped at the end of a wooden staircase. It is said that touching the muzzle of the lion leads to a bright future for those intending to wield the mighty pen and becoming writers.

Would you believe this: had it not been for a serious accident where Margaret Mitchell hurt her leg and was confined to bed for a long period, we would perhaps not have got the novel which most readers have ranked among their favourites?

The house has twice been the target of attacks by maniac arsonists, but miraculously survived without much harm. The efforts made towards its maintenance will always have those interested in her book filled with a deep sense of gratitude, for

allowing them to know better, the creator of a work which inarguably has timeless appeal.

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