

INDIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH IN THE WAKE OF TRAVELOGUES

Sunita Meena

Research Scholar, Maharaja Ganga Singh University, Bikaner Jaipur, India

Received: 20 Dec 2017

Accepted: 27 Dec 2017

Published: 10 Jan 2018

ABSTRACT

Travel narratives have always been a great source of exploring the self as well as discovering new aspects of the human life; there are a lot of historical incidents which promoted the literature writing in India and the Indian writers in foreign countries to achieve their thought on India and Indians. This research paper throws light on the Indian writing in English and the travel narratives written by the India Diaspora writers. There are multiple new and surprising experiences of the authors which were never ever existed even in their imaginations, but have been experienced while traveling through different parts of the country India.

KEYWORDS: *Indian English, Indian Diaspora, Indian Independence, Travel Narratives, Communal Riots, False Mentoring, Humanity, Autobiographies, Commonwealth literature, Cultural Conflict, Quest for Identity*

INTRODUCTION

The history of Indian English novel needs to be focused with details up to the recent contributions of the contemporary writers, from its imitative fancy to an intermediary phase of assimilation finally reaches to authentic expression. 'Indian Writing in English' is a relatively recent phenomenon; as one may trace its feet into a century back in India. Indian writing in English has come into power only in the last couple of decades as some of the writers have achieved wide international fame. Indian English literature refers to the body of work by writers in India who write in the English language. It is also associated with the works of members of the Indian Diaspora, such as V. S. Naipaul, Kiran Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri and Salman Rushdie, who are of Indian descent.

Indian Literature comes under the broader realm of Postcolonial Literature or the Commonwealth Literatures- the production from previously colonized countries such as Africa. This literature is believed to be the production out of the two cultures which the Indian English novel expresses through all the phases of imitation, assimilation and self-expression.

The early Indian English novelists though seemed to be imitative and stereotyped, have marked Indian sensibility which later claimed real recognition and special attention to shift the centre of English novel out of the Europe. The Indian English novel begins with the publication of *Rajmohan's Wife* in 1864 by Bakim Chandra Chatterjee; before which there were translations of the Western classics and works either imitated or inspired by the Western motifs. Chatterjee is deemed as the father of novel writing in India. Other notable productions of the time are Rajalakshmi Devi's *The Hindu Wife* (1876), Toru Datt's *Bianca* (1878), Kali Krishna Lahiri's *Roshinara* (1881), H. Dutt's *Bijoychand* (1888) and Kshetrapal Chakravarti's *Sarata and Hingana* (1895). Most of the novels of the period focus on the plight and life of women with a bold angel of the reality in life. All these novels have played a vital role in starting literary renaissance in India.

Ravindranath Tagore has exerted a big influence with his choice of themes. He has fostered the infant genre and brought new power to it with his *Gora* (1910), *The Home and the World* (1916), *The Wreck* (1921), *Farewell My Friend* (1929), *Four Chapters* (1934) and other works in Bengali. Then Gandhi's arrival galvanized entire nation into terrific action turning the independence movement into an emotional saga. Simultaneously, the religious literatures also played a big role in shaping of the sensibility of the Indian English novel.

The arrival of 'the founder fathers', as William Walsh addresses to Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, and R.K. Narayan, gave a new power and direction to the Indian English novel. They defined the area in which the Indian novel in English was to operate, and made the first models of its characters and themes. Another feature of the time is that the middle class was taking vast interest in the creative writing and ordinary people suddenly found that their own lives could be made the theme of literature. The novel became a handy instrument to the new social and political awareness, and this found the creative expression in novel. The novels like K.S.Venkataramani's *Kandan the Patriot* (1932), Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938), Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* (1935), *Coolie* (1936) and *The sword and the Sickle* (1942) were written during the storm and stress of the freedom movement. M. K. Naik points out; *The Indian English novel of the period was deeply influenced by the epoch-making political, social and ideological ferment caused by the Gandhian movement.* (Naik, 152)

A bitter and chronic freedom struggle yielded Indian Independence, but a gloom of perpetrated partition blackened the celebration of victory in the literature. Many of the serious writers concentrated their attention to give expression to the partition wounds such as Khushwant Singh in *Train to Pakistan* (1956); Padmini Sengupta in *Red Hibiscus* (1962); Raj Gill in *The Rape* (1974); Bonophul in *Betwixt Dream and Reality* (1961) and Chaman Nahal in *Azadi* (1975). All these novels have tried to capture the shocks and miseries of the men and women during the partition.

The Cultural conflict and the search for identity have become the issues of discussion in Indian Writing in English after Independence. The country's process of reconstruction and rebuilding with positive domestic and international affairs during the 1950s and 1960s have remained productive period for the literature. Keeping with the new emerging sensibility and concerns the novel has taken new theme of the East-West encounter causing struggle to the protagonist, who tries to find place between two cultures; one inherited and the other acquired through education or different influences. During the freedom struggle the cultural conflict has remained on the social level, but in the novels of 1960s and 1970s it has come to very personal level, leading to the crisis of identity. Anita Desai's aspects of loneliness, alienation and useless attempts of understanding; Nayantara Saghil's socio-political incongruities and realities, female quest for sexual freedom and self-realization; and Arun Joshi's exploration of problems of detachment and involvement, indifference and commitment, all together attempt to focus on an individual's relation to the society.

Kamala Markandeya deals with the encounter between the diametrically opposite East and West in the context of human relationships and cultural values. Ruth Praver Jhabwala's early works in India deals with social idealism and chaos of the early decades of independent India and the themes of romance and arranged marriages in India's Westernizing middle class preoccupied with marriage. Other remarkable writers of the time are Manohar Malgonkar, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Shasthi Bratta, Khushwant Singh, D.F.Faraka, Ninad C. Choudhari, Sudhin Ghosh, Ahemad Ali, Balchandra Rajan and Santha Ram Rao. The novels of 1960s and 1970s operate within a limited range and affordable solutions may be due to the general historical and political decline because of the debilitating wars with Pakistan and the Emergency

declared in 1975 dealt with death-blow to the Indian sensibility. The novel of the 1980s is 'bursting like myriad flowers on a laburnum tree' and reflects the sudden realization of the historical reality in which the individual has an important role to play after awaking by the taste of totalitarianism. Thus, the active role of an individual in making of the history has become an important theme of the novel in 1980s. With trans-national and trans-continental scope, innovations in theme and technique, the plurality of nature of society and importance of national integration the novels of 1980s claim international recognition and special attention to the Indian English novel.

The novelists with choice of theme and technique show how in cultural mixing the characters of different nationalities interact with ease, and share the vision and objectives of other postcolonial writers.

The quest for identity continues but, now, against the larger cosmopolitan world in which an individual is belonging to everywhere, a cultural traveler with ability to merge into all cultures while broadening horizons of modern experience. The writers of Diaspora, particularly, have faced many problems themselves and have presented these issues through their writing. After a gestation period of 1970s for the making of the new Indian sensibility, Salman Rashdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), while shaking the very foundation of the Indian English novel has taken the literary world by storm. The novel breaks away from the norms set by the earlier writers with the experimental, confessional, interrogational and polemical narrative techniques. In search of identity the protagonist moves through suffering a crisis of identity which involves a process of correction. Amitav Ghosh's *The Circle of Reason* (1986) deals with the young orphaned protagonist's search for identity through the picaresque adventures

and at the last stage of his search for identity he realizes the idea that for a balanced life, passion should be moderated by genuine human concern. In his *The Shadow Lines* (1988) cosmopolitanism moves to a broader examination of the inter-action of cultures, and the individual's attempt to find a place in this interaction.

Another important novel of 1980s is Kamala Markandaya's *Pleasure City* (1982) focuses on the cultural confrontation between the East v/s the West, but tradition and modernity as Multinational Corporation comes to a village and the struggling villagers cannot resist the regular income offered by jobs because of it. Indira Mahindra's *The Club* (1984) is centered round Lucy and her step sister Mabel who have stayed in India after the other English people left. Upamanyu Chatterjee's *English, August: An Indian Story* (1988) through the story of an I.A.S. officer presents the contemporary youth's search for identity whose cosmopolitan upbringing functions as alienating force, leads to a disturbing sense of rootlessness, disillusionment and disaffection, but finally finds his own solution through a positive involvement in the compelling realities of life in this county. Ruth Praver Jhabvala's early novels and short stories are set entirely in India, but *In Search of Love and Beauty* (1983) continues her preoccupation with India by using her European Jewish heritage and American experience and explores the background of the Western characters and examines the roots of their fascination with India. Jhabvala satirizes overwhelming sexual attraction of the Indian men, and the charisma of a fraud mentor in *Three Continents* (1987). In Anita Desai's *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1988), the German Jew protagonist's series of flashbacks show us his early prosperous life, Nazis killing his father, his timber business in Calcutta and peaceful life is interrupted by the Second World War and the persecution of his Muslim business partner in the communal riots in Calcutta in 1947 echoes the earlier persecution of his father. Anita Desai reveals all the characteristics of diasporic fiction: a concern with the fate of immigrants, and a growing distance from the Indian reality, which is viewed from the outside in *Journey to Ithaca* (1995).

Travel narratives are non-fictional prose forms that are written out of the personal experiences of the traveler/writer. Travel literature is a “non-fiction prose form that depends largely on the wit, powers of observation, and character of the traveler for its success. In past centuries, the traveler tended to be an adventurer or a connoisseur of art, landscape, or strange customs who may also have been a writer of merit.”¹ is defined by the *Merriam Webster’s Encyclopedia of Literature*. Travelling is an endeavor in which the writer moves through a selected region, giving information and commentaries about the place that he/she visits. Travel narratives are often records of the places, people, and occurrences of a particular region that a traveler visits. An individual work is often known as a travelogue. Travel writing is a conscious act of the traveler/writer to render his/her experiences into documents for future reference to the readers. In *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, Roy Bridges, critic on the approaches to travel writing, comments on the significance of the genre: Travel writing... has a complex relationship with the situations in which it arose. It is taken to mean a discourse designed to describe and interpret for its readers a geographical area together with its natural attributes and its human society and culture. Travel writing may embrace approaches ranging from an exposition of the results of scientific exploration claiming to be objective and value-free to the frankly subjective description of the impact of an area and its people on the writer’s sensibilities.² Travelogues or travel narratives have value beyond mere cataloguing of occurrences and dates. They contain tales of conquest, exploration and adventure compiled often in a non-fictional nature by the narrator. The role of the interpreter/narrator is of importance in understanding a travel narrative because the interpreted land or people are preserved in the narrative of the writer. The narrator acts as brine which can preserve or sap out the qualities of the society depending on the power of representation in his/her narrative. “A travel writer should have an unnatural cleverness in representing unusual incidents in a humorous manner. They should be literary writers than being mere travellers.”³ Observes a writer referring to the context of travel writing in India. Travelling is an activity that helps a traveler to transgress the cultural, social, racial, ethnic, and religious and gender based boundaries that exist among humanity.

Any perception of any individual about any place is bound to be unique. The manner in which a traveler/writer views a new/foreign place will be different from the way in which the people living in that place perceive it. Hence, the accounts of a traveler would reflect much more curiosity in comparison to that of the indigenous person. The travel writer usually highlights the quality of the place, its culture, custom, people etc. that acquires only secondary importance in the accounts of the narrative of an indigenous person of that region. Hence the perception of the traveler/writer about the culture of a place/people is important in understanding any travel narrative. Travel narratives describe in detail the customs, traditions and life styles of the people of different places. The power of the travel narratives to mirror life’s reality is emphasized in *Sanchara Sahithyam Malayalathil* (Travel Literature in Malayalam): In travel literature, importance should be given more to the writer as an individual. A work that contains descriptions of the visited places like hotels to stay and the sights to see will only be travel documentation. Along with that the writer should document his experiences and responses. Travel literature is more closely related to autobiography. If an individual has travelled throughout his life time, then his autobiography and travel accounts will be the same.⁴ Documentation of travel in the form of literary texts/narratives had been a less explored area until recently when travel and the study of culture have gained prominence in the academic circles. Travelling and documenting about travel could help in the clearer understanding of humanity. Travel narratives help in answering many doubts that we have about our fellow beings across cultural boundaries as explained by Homi Bhabha, culture critic, in *Nation and Narration* thus: “When did we become a people? When did we stop being one?”

Are we in the process of becoming one? What does this big question have to do with our intimate relationships with each other and with others?"⁵ A clearer understanding of the places and people is possible through the study of travel narratives as it gives a clear picture of the areas that has been explored and documented by the travellers/writers.

Travel narratives were looked upon as a popular genre of literary study. Mary Baine Campbell, remarks thus: The sense of travel writing as a genre was, where it manifested itself, often crude and restrictive, but the articulated concept of a corpus or 'tradition' was in fact useful, especially to social historians, in showing contemporary readers how to be proficient at reading with the grain of older accounts. Without that, we cannot do the 'deeper' work of reading against it.⁶ Travel narratives as a part of the academic inquiries focuses more on the ways in which different cultures are perceived across different time periods by the traveler/writer. The relation of human beings with the environment can be studied through the study of travel narratives. Travel narrators concentrated more on narrating the social, political, cultural and environmental aspects of the region that they explored. These explorations are mainly done out of the curiosity of the traveler to understand a 'foreign' place/people. This may be due to the personal need of the writer/traveler to get displaced from the society in which he/she lives in. Inspiration serves as an important factor for the documentation of most of the travel narratives. Inspiration behind writing a travel narrative may differ according to the writer. It may be due to the need of the writer to give a social/political representation of the places that he/she had visited. It could be due to the economic gains and popularity that the writer aims out of it. Inspiration to write travel narratives could be due to the traveler's personal interest in gaining knowledge and his/her intention to supply it to the readers who doesn't have a chance to visit those places and experience the life there. D. H. Lawrence (1885-1930), Sir. V. S. Naipaul (1932-), Bruce Chatwin (1940-1989) and S. K. Pottekkatt (1913-1982) are popular travel writers. It provides a comparative study of travel literature and cultural encounter by randomly choosing authors from various parts of the world. Moreover, it is to understand the deeper meanings in travel narratives by focusing on different cultures. The major travel narratives includes, D. H. Lawrence's *Twilight in Italy* (1916) and *Sea and Sardinia* (1921), V. S. Naipaul's *India: A Wounded Civilization* (1977) and *India: A Million Mutinies Now* (1990), Bruce Chatwin's *The Songlines* (1987) and *In Patagonia* (1977) and S. K. Pottekkatt's *Kappirikalude Nattil* (The Land of the Blacks) (1951) and *Simhabhoomi* (The land of the Lions) (1958). Even from its earliest stages, travel writing has been a mostly male prerogative. This is not to deny the place of the female travelers. But as Susan Bassnett, in the context of female travel writing has efficiently shown in *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*: This difference reflects the difference in social terms between men and women in the nineteenth century, with men occupying a far more public role and women only assuming a public role in particular circumstances. Some pieces of writing were clearly conceived as monograph, others written in the form of letters, diaries, or sketches and then assembled into book form.⁸ As it has been amply evidenced, women's travel narratives remain for the most in the form of diary entries, travelogues, letters and memoir. Susan Bassnett renowned for her contention of translation studies contrasts this opinion of Billie Melman and comments: Alongside the myths of the heroic explorer, however, there are other kinds of narrative, some of which have been produced by women. The travel text as ethnography or social commentary transcends gender boundaries and increasingly in the twentieth century, male and female travelers have written self-reflexive texts that defy easy categorization as autobiography, memoir, or travel account.¹⁰

'Culture' and 'identity' are two complex terms that evolved out of human interaction with each other. Identity derives from assumptions of assigning oneself to any particular group or community. Culture, as already seen, is a complex set of human actions that makes a particular group different from another. 'Culture' is related to identity as the culture of

any community itself is its identity from the rest of the parts of the world. The relation of culture with identity is further explained by Kath Woodward, in *Questioning Identity: Gender, Class, Nation*, thus: “Identity presents the interface between the personal-what is going on inside our heads, how we as individuals feel about who we are-and the social-the societies in which we live and the social, cultural and economic factors shape experience and make it possible for people to take up some identities and render others inaccessible or impossible.”²⁶ Travel narratives can be read as documents that blend culture with identity based on the encounter of a foreign place that the writer/traveller had.

Travel narration tracks the cultural boundaries and assigns roles to the people whom the writer meets. All the characters that the writer represents in the narrative relates to his personal interest in describing the people/place. Hence travel narratives become a discourse. A discourse is described in *Introducing Culture and Media Studies*, by Tony Thwaites: “A discourse is the particular mode of textuality of an institution. It is a set of textual arrangements which work to organize and co-ordinate the actions, positions and identities of the people who inhabit them.”¹¹ Travel narratives generate an understanding in the minds of the readers regarding a place. Power relations are further explained and roles for the people are assigned in a narrative based on the location/place that the particular people live. Many questions are likely to be encountered in this process of reading and interpreting a travel document.

Naipaul states in *India: A Wounded Civilization*: India is for me a difficult country. It isn't my home and cannot be my home; and yet I cannot reject it or be indifferent to it; I cannot travel only for the sights. I am at once too close and too far. My ancestors migrated from the Gangetic plain a hundred years ago; and the Indian community they and others established in Trinidad, on the other side of the world, the community in which I grew up, was more homogeneous than the Indian community Gandhi met in South Africa in 1893 and more isolated from India.¹²

CONCLUSIONS

It is very much noticed that innumerable incidents led the literature in India and this country has always been a source of producing great authors. Autobiographies written by Diaspora writers contain many details which surprises them as well as their readers. It would be more interesting to find the intrinsic details of the particular works with a particular highlighted aspect in further studies based on this research paper.

REFERENCES

1. Kathleen Kuiper. Ed. *MerriamWebster's Encyclopedia of Literature*.(Massachusetts: Meriam-Websters Inc, 1995) 1128.
2. Roy Bridges. “Exploration and Travel outside Europe. (1720-1914)” *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*. Ed. Hulme, Peter and Tim Youngs. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 53.
3. N. P. Ummarkutty. *Sanchara Sahithyam Malayalathil*.(Travel Literature in Malayalam) (Trivandrum: Chaithanya Printers, 1989) 28.Ibid.,29.
4. Homi. K. Bhabha. *Nation and Narration*. (New York: Routledge, 1994) 7.
5. Mary Baine Campbell. “Travel Writing and its Theory.” *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*. Ed. Hulme, Peter and Tim Youngs. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 266.
6. Roger Fowler. Ed. *A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms*. (London: Routledge,1990) 34.

7. Susan Bassnett. "Travel Writing and Gender." *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*. Ed. Hulme, Peter and Tim Youngs. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 232.
8. Billie Melman. "The Middle East/Arabia: 'The Cradle of Islam'." *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*. Ed. Hulme, Peter and Tim Youngs. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 117.
9. Susan Bassnett. "Travel Writing and Gender." *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*. Ed. Hulme, Peter and Tim Youngs. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 225.
10. Smrutisikta Mishra, *Travelogues: An Innovative and Creative Genre of Literature*, *International Journal of English and Literature (IJEL)*, Volume 4, Issue 4, July-August 2014, pp. 45-50
11. Tony Thwaites. Illoyd Davis & Warwick Mules. *Introducing Cultural and Media Studies: A Semiotic Approach*. (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 140.
12. Manjit Inder Singh. *V. S. Naipaul*. (New Delhi: Rawat Publication, 1998), 19.

