



## TRAVEL LITERATURE: HISTORY AND EVOLUTION OF GENRE

*Alka Dhariwal*

*Research Scholar, Department of English*

*Desh Bhagat University Mandi Gobindgarh, Punjab, India.*

### Abstract:

The literary genre of travel writing continues to focus on a person's trip diaries or recordings. One can learn about many towns and nations from such tales, as well as distinct cultures, behavioural tendencies, and living situations. Writings on travel have been created since the beginning of time. India is a country with many different cultures, languages, and eating customs that continues to be a favoured trip destination for people living in India and outside. Numerous travel authors from Europe, China, and the Arab world, such as Jean Baptiste Tavernier, Ibn-e-Battuta, and Hiuen Tsang, have written extensively on their experiences visiting India. All of them have authored books about India, its people, and its culture. All of them have authored books about India, its people, and its culture. Because their accounts are based solely on what the tourists have seen or seen around them, they are not trustworthy from an informational standpoint. They don't give a true representation of India in their writings; instead, they give a fictitious one. The difficulties and societal ills that were common at the period have not been highlighted. Travel writings continue to be a legacy of colonial endeavour, as stated earlier. Travel writers from India are therefore required to share their thoughts on how the country and its inhabitants are perceived by the general public. I'll try to illustrate the development of Indian travel literature and current examples of this genre in this essay. While doing so, I'll also talk about the recent changes that have occurred in this genre.

**Keywords:** Indian travel writings, diverse cultures, travel accounts, colonial enterprise, people travellers.

### Introduction:

Travel accounts are non-fictional works of art that primarily discuss the author's and the traveler's individual experiences. "A non-fiction prose form that depends heavily on the wit,

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:	RESEARCH ARTICLE
<b>Alka Dhariwal</b> Research Scholar, Department of English Desh Bhagat University Mandi Gobindgarh, Punjab, India. Email: <a href="mailto:alkatoor@gmail.com">alkatoor@gmail.com</a>	

observational skills, and character of the traveller for its success," describes travel literature. According to the Meriam Webster's Encyclopaedia of Literature, "the traveller in earlier centuries tended to be an adventurer or a connoisseur of art, landscape, or strange customs who may also have been a writer of merit."

Travelling is an endeavour in which a writer investigates a certain area or location, gathers data, and provides insights about the location that they visit. These travel accounts mostly focus on the people, places, and events that a traveller observes while exploring a certain location. The traveler/writer makes a deliberate effort to put down his experiences so that the readers can refer to them in the future. Roy Bridges, a critic of travel writing methodologies, makes the following observation about the importance of this genre in the Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing: "Travel writing has a complex relationship with the situations in which it may have arisen. It is understood to refer to a discourse created to explain to readers a particular geographic place, along with its natural features, human society, and culture (2). Compared to other genres of writing, Indian travel writing has an amazingly short history. Before the start of the eighteenth century, the entire body of Indian English literature, which is so extensive and varied, was unable to create even a single journey account. Thousands of traders, monks, and mercenaries from the Indian subcontinent travelled to various regions of the world for trade and commerce as well as to discover new lands, according to historical travel reports written in India. None of these individuals who have visited abroad have even left a single narrative of their travels.

They miss the cultural contrasts they encounter in foreign contexts while studying Travel Literature: a perspective on the history of Indian travel tales and new advances in the genre in various countries. Before foreigners began writing extensively about India and its rich cultural past, travel accounts were unfamiliar to the Indian literary tradition. It is regarded as a result of colonial pursuit because of this.

The fictional reports, digvijyas in the epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, and safarnamas, devotional records of the pilgrimages that are made by the saints, all contain elements of travelogues. The travelogues of foreign explorers like Jean Baptiste Tavernier, Ibn-e Battuta, I-Tsing, Al-beruni, Nicolo Conti, and Abdur Razzaq continue to be a valuable resource for learning about India and its history. According to Amitav Ghosh, "There is a recognition that what is common sense for him (the traveller) need not be so far from the rest of the world" when reading these reports. This awareness requires an acceptance of the witness's limited capacity for knowledge as well as a certain degree of openness to surprise. Autobiography is a more prevalent theme in travel writing. If a person has travelled extensively during his or her life, then both his or her autobiographical and travel reports may be the same (4). Up till travel and the study of culture gain relevance in literary circles, travelogue will remain a less-explored genre. One can better understand humanity by reading such accounts. It enables us to dispel whatever uncertainties we may have about a location or culture that we have not yet researched. We may occasionally assume certain assumptions about individuals, their cultures, and their way of life. However, travelogues can also be used to study how people interact with their surroundings and the natural world.

The majority of the stories in travel accounts are either international or situated in India. They might discuss adventures that people in any region of the world take on. These narratives focus more on elaborating on the region's social, cultural, political, and environmental characteristics. Such investigations are occasionally carried out by tourists out of interest to learn more about a foreign country and its inhabitants. If we discuss how a travel writer approaches history, they can have a different perspective. Aldous Huxley expressed his own opinions on travelogues, stating that "it is not done knowingly. Through a sequence of interactions and incidents, the travel writer literally replicates his own views and opinions while representing another nation. The majority of the stories in travel accounts are either international or situated in India. They might discuss adventures that people in any region of the world take on. These narratives focus more on elaborating on the region's social, cultural, political, and environmental characteristics. Such investigations are occasionally carried out by tourists out of interest to learn more about a foreign country and its inhabitants. If we discuss how a travel writer approaches history, they can have a different perspective. Aldous Huxley expressed his own opinions on travelogues, stating that "it is not done knowingly. Through a sequence of interactions and incidents, the travel writer literally replicates his own views and opinions while representing another nation.

Travellers may be divided into two groups: one group would consist of historians and anthropologists, while the other would consist of creative authors. William Dalrymple fits into the first category because he observed India objectively, rather than from his own point of view, and because he did thorough research on the relevant events and facts. His travel writings and his perception of India as a past submerged in the ruins of time demonstrate how the past has an impact on the present. It is stated that only by looking back in time can we comprehend the present. The second group consists of imaginative writers who accurately depicted India in their writings and who did so in a variety of ways. This category includes Theroux and Naipaul. Both of them illustrate India through a collection of tales about their travels or tales related to them by locals of the locations they have visited.

The first travelogue written in any Indian language appeared only around the end of the eighteenth century, if we look at how and when Indian travel writings first appeared in India.

A Syriac Christian priest named Varthamanappustakam wrote the first travel book in Malayalam. He described his epic voyage over several years from the Malabar coast to Rome through Sri Lanka, Angola, Brazil, and Portugal. If this priceless travelogue had not been rediscovered in 1930, it would not have been lost. The Travels of Dean Mahomet was the first published piece of Indian writing in English, if we're talking about the history of Indian writing in English. It was initially printed in 1794. It covers the author's journeys across India while serving as an East India Company camp follower.

Later, he also talks of his time as an immigrant in England, when he opened the country's first Indian eatery in 1810. Travel literature about India during the colonial era was intimately related to the anthropological endeavour of learning more about a specific race and their culture. Some international travel writers use Indian stories and imagery to appeal to domestic readers of

their books. However, some autobiographical works by prominent Indian nationalist figures, such as Mahatma Gandhi, whose work *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* deals with heavy elements of travel narrative in terms of portraying how the writer interacts with challenging circumstances when residing in a foreign country.

Post-independence, travel writing about India has become more popular. *An Area of Darkness*, *India: A Million Wounded Civilizations*, and *India: A Million Mutinies Now* are the three books that make up VS Naipaul's Indian Trilogy. Through this trilogy, Naipaul covers a range of topics, including the national lifestyle and economy. In *India: A Wounded Civilization*, Naipaul writes:

“India is for me a different 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 Travel Literature: a perspective on the history of Indian travel accounts and recent developments in the genre 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).

The well-known author Vikram Seth has dabbled in travel writing as well. Seth chronicled his hitchhiking adventure from Tibet to Nepal in a book titled *From Heaven Lake: Travels Through Sinkiang and Tibet* (1983). But when foreign publishing giants like Penguin and Harper Collins established businesses in India at the height of liberalisation, the genre of travel writing began to flourish more. Additionally, during this time period, Indian travel stories began to be influenced by naturalised outsiders, primarily British. Regarding his research of India's spiritual geography and natural environs, Bill Aitken has written a number of publications. He wrote *Seven Sacred Rivers* (1992), *The Nanda Devi Affair* (1994), and *Footloose in the Himalayas* (2003), among other books. William Dalrymple's works such as *The City of Djinns* (1993) and *The Age of Kali* (1998) talks at length about Indian history as he goes deeper while researching facts about India.

The well-known author Vikram Seth has dabbled in travel writing as well. Seth chronicled his hitchhiking adventure from Tibet to Nepal in a book titled *From Heaven Lake: Travels Through Sinkiang and Tibet* (1983). But when foreign publishing giants like Penguin and Harper Collins established businesses in India at the height of liberalisation, the genre of travel writing began to flourish more. Additionally, during this time period, Indian travel stories began to be influenced by naturalised outsiders, primarily British. Regarding his research of India's spiritual geography and natural environs, Bill Aitken has written a number of publications. He wrote *Seven Sacred Rivers* (1992), *The Nanda Devi Affair* (1994), and *Footloose in the Himalayas* (2003), among other books. In his six-year study of this nation, William Dalrymple chronicles his travels through Delhi in his book *The City of Djinns*. Through the individuals he encounters when visiting India, he examines the history of that nation. By relating it to the nation's current situation, it perfectly describes the ancient history. It continues to be a crucial resource for learning about Indian history.

**Conclusion:**

Through this essay, I've discovered that travel writing serves as a mirror for comprehending any nation or place. This type of writing aims to close the gap between various locales, their inhabitants, their cultures, and the clothing styles that help us identify our individual identities. We can see that using travelogues can be useful for discovering previously undiscovered areas. In addition to producing travel books these days, people often create travel blogs to document their travels. Travel literature has a broad range, a bright future, and many different genres. Nowadays, reading anecdotes about someone's travels is something that people like more. Such travelogues, which will concentrate more on India, its subregions, and its variety as a multilingual nation, are something we really need. There is room to create a wide variety of itineraries that explore various regions and civilizations. We can conclude that travel narratives do have a broad appeal that makes it easier to comprehend different facets of someone's culture and value system and to view any country in a fresh or unique light.

**References:**

- [1] Bridges, Roy. "Exploration and Travel outside Europe". The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writers, Cambridge UP, 2002.
- [2] Frederic, Alida. Understanding India Through Travel Literature, Bookish Santa, 2020.
- 3] Mandal, Somdatta. India and Travel Narratives, Rupkatha Journal, vol, 12, no. 3, 2020.
- [4] Meena, Sunita. INDIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH IN THE WAKE OF TRAVELOGUES. International Journal of Research in Humanities, Arts and Literature, vol. 6, no.1, 2017.
- [5] Ubhaykar, Rajat. Where is Indian Travel writing going after the pandemic (and where it is coming from)?, Scroll.in, 2020.
- [6] <http://www.ukessays.com>

