Chapter - I

Introduction

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Literature – in a restricted sense – is a body of written work possessing artistic merits; but beyond this rudimentary definition, literature is also a significant marker of the cultural health of a society. Different periods and movements of a society get represented through its literature in various modes from realistic to fantastic; and, conversely, literature too holds the potential to bring about remarkable changes and developments in the society by influencing the climate of thought of the people. Thus, the function of any literature is to represent the society in the best possible manner and, in the broader sense, embody life.

Any literature has certain constant as well as time specific themes. Themes like childhood, innocence, love, death, travel, etc. are the widely written and read subjects of literature presented in any of its genre. Travel, amongst these is an invariable theme of literature from ancient time. People travel for various reasons like pilgrimage, alternative settlement or migration, adventure, discovery, trade, and finally for an aimless rambling for simply the joy of it. This most ancient of human predilections finds witness in literature with the concept of travel becoming a leitmotif in it.

This research began with the hypothesis that the genres like travelogue and fiction written on the rivers reveal a picture of the society and culture on the river banks. Travelogue would help to capture the glimpse of culture with subjective/creative perspective available to a creative writer who is aware of the narratives about a particular society, whereas a writer of fiction tries to narrate the world in a very imaginative as well as innovative way. That is why to assess travel
documents is a good idea to expand the horizon of one’s knowledge beyond the
conventional canon in literature where a researcher has the only option of merely
being a follower of traditional literary discourse.

So, the aim of this research then would be to dive deep into the development
d of travelogue as a genre as it has a vital literary history in both English and Gujarati
languages. The effort would also be to arrive at a clear conceptual understanding of
this genre and how it represents reality vis-à-vis the novel. This endeavour would be
carried out through a thorough critical reading of the famous English and Gujarati
fictions and travelogues on two rivers the Ganga and the Narmada. The reason behind
focusing on these two rivers is mere the mention of the Ganga evokes almost a pan-
Indian cultural view, and similarly can be said for the Narmada in the context of
Gujarat. Essentially then, the research would take a closer look at the cultural,
historical and literary aspects of these works along with the geographical take to make
an interdisciplinary study as a whole.

Literary sources thus present pictorial descriptions of life of different lands. They become important tools to study any civilization on or culture. Taine wrote,

A literary work is not a mere play of the imagination, the isolated caprice of an excited brain, but a transcript of contemporary manners and customs and the sign of a particular state of intellect. The conclusion derived from this is that, through literary monuments, we can retrace the way in which men and women felt and thought centuries ago.’ (Bate 81)

It is evident from the varied range of literary works of Eastern and Western literatures how travel has been a constant activity. In India, the ancient writers like Ved Vyas, Valmiki, Kalidasa must have been great travellers who could portray the
pan-India through their scenic narrations of various places in their epical and literary – scriptural – writings like the Mahabharata, the Ramayana, Meghdutam and Raghuvansham. Whereas in Western literature from early works like Odyssey to The Canterbury Tales to, The Pilgrim’s Progress, Robinson Crusoe, Gulliver’s Travel, and Moby-Dick travel has remained a prime focus.

Historically travel has played a very vital role in building and developing connections and relations between people, nations and cultures. Physical as well as ideational travels have been very important records. There has been exchange of remarkable travels from the time of ancient empires to modern times.

Though India has long held an exotic appeal; its arts, literature, music are distinct, in the imagination of the West, India is the land of magic and mystery, land of snake charmers, wisdom and religiosity, traditions and rituals. But, at the same time, there are aspects of Indic culture that speak directly to the core of the West, which suggest that India and the West have had a shared history going back to many thousands of years.

Many philosophers and traders have visited India as early travellers from abroad. Some 2300 years ago, Alexander the Great brought yogis back to Greece with him, and Athens is said to have been visited by impressive gymnosphistes, naked wise men, from the Indian subcontinent. Indic elements have been detected in early Greek art, too. From Marco Polo, Sir John Mandeville to Bill Aitken and Eric Newby famous travellers from abroad have visited India for different purpose. Moreover, ancient India was a great seat of learning. Scholars and students used to come and study at the Nalanda and the Takshashila Universities. The influence of Eastern, notably Indic, teachings was so widely spread in ancient Greece that Diogenes Laërtius (3rd century A.D.) felt it necessary to determine if Greek philosophy was
having origin from some foreign place or it was a product of native efforts. Pythagoras (6th century B.C.), an early scholar of Mediterranean philosophizing, is acknowledged to have been a transmitter of knowledge and wisdom received from the East. Even today numbers of people visit India to learn Ayurveda and Yoga from senior practitioners of these disciplines of knowledge. The Western modern mind was shaped after the West adopted two powerful ideas, which are essential to the Indic civilization: the idea of living in harmony with nature and the idea that reality has a scientific base. Indian concepts of astrology, astronomy and scientific approach to problems, have attracted many good foreign minds. Indian knowledge system has inspired many great scholars, scientists, and literary figures like Hegel, Fichte, Schlegel, Goethe, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, P.B. Shelley, William Wordsworth, Carlyle, Thoreau, Emerson, Tennyson, W.B. Yeats, T.S. Eliot, A.E. Russell, E.M. Forster, Blavatsky, Romain Rolland, Aldous Huxley, Christopher Isherwood to name a few.

The beginning of Indology—the study of India’s culture—and the idea of empowering this vast and rich land brought significant attention of the different crews to India. The destructive and opportunistic nature of all the invaders in India brought them with their own ill motifs. All the invasions wreaked havoc to varying degrees. Muslim invasions from 1000AD to 1700AD remarkably erased most of the institutes of knowledge sharing. With the entry of the British Raj, rules and schemes formed to Christianize and modernize the country by demeaning Hindu culture. Lord Macaulay, one of the architects of the British Raj said that their goal was to create a new breed of Anglo-Indians, who were “Indian in blood and colour but English in taste, in morals and in intellect.” Significantly, during the British rule, in order to govern Hindu subjects successfully, the British lords were eager to become acquainted with the
indigenous worldview and so they encouraged the study of Sanskrit and Sanskrit literature. As Sir Monier Monier-Williams, one of the pioneers of Indological research put it toward the end of the nineteenth century:

To know the Hindus, to understand their past and present condition, to reach their very heart and soul, we must study Sanskrit literature. It is, in truth, even more to India than classical and patristic literature was to Europe at the time of the Reformation. It gives a deeper impress to the Hindu mind, so that every Hindu, however unlettered, is unconsciously affected by it. (Feuerstein 13-14)

On the name of International Relations, powerful nations started establishing foreign affairs departments. Political angle of establishing these offices into other countries was to maintain an omniscient presence in the other country and also to disseminate the ideas of one’s own nation. Nevertheless, the encounter with the West spurred a spiritual and cultural renaissance in India.

A few pre-independence Indian travellers mainly visited abroad with specific aim of bringing reformation in India through their visits to developed countries of Europe. They also travelled to represent India in different gatherings like Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi took part in Round Table Conference and Swami Vivekananda lectured on Hindu religion in The Parliament of World’s Religions at Chicago. Many Royal representatives used to visit abroad to represent their kingdom and writers were also patronized by the kings – like Sayajirao Gaekwad – for their travels and to write about that journey. Those writers were expected to produce documents on their multifarious experiences of travel. Post-independence Indian travellers have also explored the Western countries primarily with the curiosity of knowing the powerful countries, their culture and ways of development. From ancient times, travel thus has encouraged journeys to various lands for diverse reasons.
Cartography, practice and study of making maps, played the vital role in increasing the travel and voyages across the world. Combining science, aesthetics, and technique, cartography builds on the premise that reality can be modelled in ways that speak of spatial information effectively. Cartography or mapmaking has been an integral part of the human story for a long time, possibly up to 8,000 years which has made the travel to any destination easier. From cave paintings to early maps of Babylon, Greece, and Asia, through the Age of Exploration, Colonialism and on into the 21st century (satellite & remote sensing devices), people have created and used maps as the essential tools to help them define and traverse their way through the world. Mapping represented a significant step forward in the intellectual development of human beings and it offers a record of the advancement of knowledge of the human race, which could be passed from one generation to the succeeding generation in the development of culture. Ancient Egyptian map, the Turin Papyrus Map, of c.2500 BCE, displays the mountains east of the Nile where gold and silver were mined, along with the sites of the miners' shelters, and the road network that linked the region with the mainland. Its originality can be seen in the inscription of the map and accurate orientation. In ancient Greece, even if Homer was not a mapmaker, his geographical descriptions in Iliad and Odyssey almost made readers to regard him as a master cartographer. Hesiod’s poems written probably during the 8th century BCE gave the statement of the ancient geography. Through the lyrics of Works and Days and Theogony he showed to scholars of his generation some definite geographical knowledge. He introduced the names of such rivers as Nile, Ister (Danube), few other coasts, islands, shores and regions. His advanced knowledge of geography not only had predated Greek colonial expansions, but also was used in the initial Greek world maps, made by Greek mapmakers like Anaximander and Hecataeus of Miletus.
In classical antiquity, maps were prepared by Anaximander, Hecataeus of Miletus, Herodotus, Eratosthenes, and Ptolemy using observations by explorers and also a mathematical approach. Anaximander was the first ancient Greek to draw a map of the known world who believed that the earth was a cylindrical form. The way in which the geographical knowledge of the Greeks advanced from the prior assumptions of the shape of the Earth was through Herodotus and his conceptual view of the world. Herodotus travelled very extensively, collecting information and documenting his outcomes in his books on Europe, Asia, and Libya. He also combined his knowledge with his learning that he gathered from the people he met. Herodotus wrote his *Histories* in the mid-400s BCE. Although his work was devoted to the story of lengthy struggle of the Greeks with the Persian Empire, Herodotus also included everything he knew about the history, geography, and people. His work thus provides a complete picture of the known world of the 5th century BCE. Herodotus rejected the prevailing opinion of most 5th century maps that the earth is a circular plate surrounded by Ocean. In his work he described the earth as an irregular shape with oceans surrounding Asia and Africa only. A vital contribution to mapping the reality of the world came with a scientific approximation of the circumference of the earth. This event has been described as the first scientific effort to give geographical studies a mathematical basis. The man credited for this endeavour was Eratosthenes (275–195 BCE). He was also the first person to use the word "geography". Claudius Ptolemy (90–168 CE) revolutionized the description of the spherical earth on a map by using perspective projection. Ptolemy's eight-volume atlas *Geographia* is a sample of modern mapping and GIS. His most important error was a miscalculation of the circumference of the earth. He supposed that Eurasia
covered 180° of the globe, which convinced Christopher Columbus to sail across the Atlantic to search for a simpler and faster way to travel to India.

In the Age of Exploration, from the 15th century to the 17th century, European cartographers copied previous maps (some of which had been passed down for centuries) and drew their own based on observations of explorers and new surveying techniques too. The invention of the magnetic compass, telescope and sextant enabled increasing precision. In 1492, Martin Behaim, a German cartographer, made the oldest extant globe of the Earth. Indian cartographic traditions covered the locations of the Pole star and other constellations of use. These charts might have been used in the beginning of the Common Era for navigation. During the 1900s, maps became more abundant due to advances in printing and photography that made production cheaper and easier. Airplanes made it possible to photograph large areas at a time. Since the mid-1990s, the use of computers in mapmaking has helped to store, sort, and organize data for mapping in order to create map projections. Detailed maps of considerable length describing the locations of rivers, mountains and settlements were also made. In this context, travel and map making are complementary to each other for the progress both the genres.

Rivers have been finding their references in the ancient maps and thus they are important routes for entry into different places since time immemorial. Establishing a new settlement or joining the group of settlers was possible only through travel by water scapes. The earliest civilization of Harappa developed in the Indus River Valley in the middle of the 3rd millennium B.C. It actually rivals the other two old civilizations of Sumer and Egypt in the race of proving itself as the oldest civilization of humanity. Harappan civilization was unable to survive natural catastrophe and
nomadic invasions, and it vanished from history. Until the mid-19th century, it was forgotten or “lost”, even by the people who lived in the vicinity of its sand-covered ruins.

Between about 1500 and 1000 B.C., as the cities of the Indus region crumbled into ruins, one archaeological – historical theory ascribes that Aryan invaders from central Asia moved into the fertile Indus plains and pushed into the Ganges River Valleys to the east. It took these warlike people many centuries to build a civilization that rivalled that of the Harappans. This Invasion theory by the Aryans, strengthened by the British Empire especially after 1857, has since been argued against from noted Indians like Dayananda Saraswati, Aurobindo and Ambedkar and Western scholars like Edmund Leach, Michel Danino and others. These two contrasting theories notwithstanding, it is now certainly known that the post-Indus Valley settlers who depended primarily on great herds of cattle to provide their subsistence, had little use for the grand scale irrigation works and modern agricultural technology of the Indus Valley people. Eventually, these people (or the Aryans as per one of the theories) began to settle down and increasingly relied on farming to support their people. Their priests had begun to orally record the sacred hymns and ritual incantations that had long been central to their culture by about 700 B.C. The emergence of priestly and warrior elites signalled the beginning of a new form of civilization in South Asia. By the 6th century B.C., the renewal of civilized life in India was marked by the emergence of great world religions – Hinduism and Buddhism – and a renewal of trade, urban life and splendid artistic and architectural achievements.

The emerging scenario is of the early Indic peoples as skilled seafarers and enterprising traders. Marine trade seems to have been one of the foundations of their economy. The Mesopotamian records speak of ships from Meluhha fetching wealth to
the people of the Tigris and Euphrates, never of their own ships heading eastwards. Seemingly the early Indic civilization in the third and early second millennia played a role similar to the Phoenicians in the first millennium B.C. The merchants of the Harrapan civilization probably exported the same goods that the former traders of Mehrgarh merchandised overland with countries with the west. The main export article to Mesopotamia was perhaps cotton which was cultivated in India already in the seventeenth millennium B.C. Thus trading played the role of a catalyst for a number of important cultural innovations. The trade routes were unquestionably also the routes along which ideas ran from one culture to another.

In this sense, waterlines have been the most preferable ways for journeys. Societies have historically developed on the banks of the great rivers laying the foundations of the famous riverine civilizations including Mesopotamia (considered generally as the cradle of civilizations), the Nile Valley, the Indus Valley, the Yangtze Valley and the Congo Valley. Culture develops with the emergence of civilization because it mainly includes experiences, rituals, local myths, values and different ways of life of a particular region which has become ‘culture’ of that land. The development of farming caused people to give up their nomadic lifestyles and establish permanent settlements, which grew into civilizations. As the population grew, they developed different social structures, belief system and Governments. Ideas spread from one culture to the other with the help of migration, trade and war. So, the assumption that human civilization developed initially in the river valleys holds true not only for India but also for many of those cultures of the world, which too have been the seat of ancient civilization. Moreover, civilizations developed and diversified different disciplines of knowledge like History, Geography, Anthropology,
Archaeology, Literature etc. Cultural Studies, a relatively recent discipline, has attempted an understanding of such various civilisations and its knowledge systems.

To define is to know something from two interpretive perspectives: what a thing is and what it is not. The formation of definition requires to have a definitive construction of idea which according to the Indian knowledge system must be free from three faults, viz. ativyāpti (over implication), avyāpti (limited implication), and asambhava (improbable) so as to avoid relativism and pluralism in meaning. In other words, act of defining is to know the knowable with conditions of exclusion, inclusion and probability. Seen in this light, defining the term culture defies all these objective criteria. The term ‘culture’ has been variously defined with the differing scope of exclusion and inclusion of its constituents. In fact, the problem is it hardly excludes anything and includes everything. Since there is very little agreement among critics on what precisely would merit the adjective ‘cultural’. This is because there is very little agreement among critics on what precisely the noun ‘culture’ means. The most comprehensive and systematic attempt – one that has become a starting-point for all subsequent critics – to unravel the various layers of meanings the word ‘culture’ is imbued with was made by Raymond Williams, first in his work *Culture and Society* (1958), and then with more depth in *Keywords* (1976, which carried a subtitle: *A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*) wherein he surveyed this, word right from its etymology to the various connotations it put on in the history of British thought.

Culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language. This is so partly because of its intricate historical development, in several European languages, but mainly because it has now come to be used for important concepts in several distinct intellectual disciplines and in several distinct and incompatible systems of thought.
‘Culture’ comes from the Latin ‘root’ word √ *colere* which had a range of meanings: inhabit, cultivate, protect, honour with worship. Some of these meanings eventually separated, though still with occasional overlapping, in the derived nouns. Thus ‘inhabit’ developed through the Latin √ *colonus* to ‘colony’. ‘Honour with worship’ developed through the Latin √ *cultus* to ‘cult’. The Latin ‘cultura’ took on the main meaning of ‘cultivation’ or tending (of plants and animals), and by the early 15th century passed into English as ‘culture’. Thus the primary meaning of this word was in husbandry, the tending of something, basically crops and animals. From early 16th century, the tending of natural growth was extended to a process of human development and this meaning remained until the early 19th century. By the mid-19th century, the continental development of this word, especially the German ‘Kultur’ started gaining ascendance. The debates of German intellectuals like Herder and (by the 1900s) Humboldt bifurcated ‘Kultur’ to have two senses: ‘civilization’ and ‘culture’ with the former suggesting the material and the latter the spiritual development of the human society.

River streams have been essential because they do more than bear merchandise—life germinates and ideas float along their surface. They nurture cultures on her lap with the training of bearing the different moods of them. River, being the feminine principle – *prakruti* – always has been considered as the Mother figure. Riverine society has opened the manifolds of the multicultural society. Rivers are mighty symbols of communication and also human emotions. As ancient Sanskrit writer Kalidasa writes in his *Raghuvansham*,

Rivers are like mothers for the country and mountains like the father.
This father is a magnanimous thoughtful resolute archaic man and the rivers are conscious liberators, swift and source of knowledge, when
clouds which roam free in the open sky spend themselves at the bedstead of the horizon after creating a commotion, then Mother Earth conceives that life giving man with the halo through its river in arteries. These water-filled streams fill the earth with the power of procreation and energy. It is these streams flowing on the landmass which act as the blood-pumping arteries in the body.” (Radhakant 1)

Since ancient times, in India, a river is a mini-co smos in concept. The name ‘India’ has been borrowed from the greatest river of the subcontinent, the Indus. Every river is a mother deity possessing or inspiring myths, history art, dance, music, architecture, and spirituality. Each one has a clear identity, appearance, value, style and spirit. For India and its people, it is not only the caring entity but they also honour its rivers seeing them as the manifest form of divine female powers – as the great poet Homer had sung rivers are “heaven sent” – sent to earth to assist humanity. People have a belief that a river flows for the betterment of others – परमात्मा वहीं.

In every age, diverse human communities have reinvented themselves on river-banks with fascinating nuances. For ages, Indians have revered seven holy rivers that crisscross the sub-continent, enriching its sprawling plains and watering its mountains and lush forests.

India loves myths; they people every literature and every oral tradition of the land. There are various myths attached to the origin of rivers in India. For people in India, a river is more than simply a water force. The holy scriptures like the Vedas have called rivers ‘mothers’ and the Mahabharata, cosmic mother – Vishwamata’. Rivers are revered immediately after the mother and the motherland.

Each river represents a particular colour and image and Indian scriptures weave countless legends around them; for example, the Ganga shimmers white-and-
gold and represents purity or salvation (Moksh), whereas the dark and elusive Narmada is often referred to as the Virgin River connected with the quality of detachment and surrender (Vairagya). The confluence of streams is also considered highly auspicious and is linked to the symbol of conjugal more explicit in a delta, when a river loses itself in the wholeness of the ocean. The physical conjugation is then elevated to a higher level of the self becoming one with the Supreme Being. This imagery is appropriate to India where most believers hold that the goal of life is an individual quest to merge one’s soul with the divine. Life itself is often considered like a river, negotiating its way past obstacles, surging back after petering out in the shallows of despair.

People consider rivers in India to be a human entity and a living being amongst them. They name their daughters after the name of the river, they take holy oaths on the name of the river and they even pray and make offerings to the river to save them from any calamity. Even a modern scientific mind would perform the rituals with complete devotion. People believe that river manifests itself in the form of a girl/woman to her true devout who sincerely takes her travel without any selfish motifs or gains desired. Mystical experience of Bill Aitken – a famous foreign traveller of Indian rivers – on his journey about a fisherman’s daughter and the encounter of the unnamed narrator of a famous Gujarati fiction Tatvamasi with the personified Narmada confirm this belief of river personifying herself to a few travellers. Such experiences might be myths or folk belief but as Miller rightly says,

Myth is not merely an entertaining made-up story but a pictograph of great evocative power that is intended to connect us to the reality which it purports to image. It is a representation of the living truth of the sacred reality or realities. (Feuerstein 25)
It is a truism in saying that the faith of the people keeps alive tradition of worshipping natural sources and thus culture as a whole. Following their faith and tradition, ancient sages have scheduled *Kumbh-Mela*, a huge gathering of number of people on the banks of the river Ganga at four various places from where it flows. This gathering also has its reasons, many local traditions and beliefs attached. It allows whole country to move from one region to altogether different side of the nation and thus variety of people and customs can be visited. Indians have faith that the Ganga would help them to attain salvation. With the thought of getting salvation, people keep on throwing and drowning dead bodies into the river and on the other hand there are people, who consider the water of the river so holy that they drink its water, directly from the flowing river. It is also a ritual performed in India that when a person is dying, drops of water of the Ganga are poured in his mouth. There are issues of pollution, but surprisingly there is no record of people dying drinking the polluted water of the Ganga.

Rivers are also considered to be the best sources for preserving treasure for archaeological survey. Palaeontologists have found that the Narmada Valley in Madhya Pradesh has preserved the fossilised faces of dinosaurs which are considered to be six crore-year-old. The fame and faith of the se rivers are so immense that local as well as people from abroad undertake journeys on and around the rivers. The Ganga is the often visited river whereas the Narmada has a long followed tradition of *parikrama* – circumambulation. Both the rivers have invited attention of the number of travellers from abroad and local regions who have not just travelled but have made their abodes permanent on the river banks after the visit. Travellers have tried to capture their experiences of journey in written form in various genres. Writers have tried to retain the reality factor in their travelogues and many have fictionalised their
travel experiences into novels. Both these genres share characteristics of ‘family resemblance’. So the further investigation of both the genres will take place through detailed reading and analysis of primary and secondary texts in the following chapters.

The second chapter would try to trace the history of the genre of travelogues in both English and Gujarati literature in detail and current developments in the fiction writing. Third chapter will talk of fictions written on both the rivers and fourth chapter will discuss the travelogues. Both these chapters will be looking into the various aspects like nature, culture, traditions related to the rivers and their portrayal in these texts. Fifth and the final chapter will be an attempt to conclude through comparative analysis and discussion of both the genres and texts through previous chapters and to prove the hypothesis that was set. This chapter will be drawing inferences from various works about the impressions that these writers have perceived about India and its riverine culture.
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