



## Original Article

### Ancient travel literature

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*Travelogue or travel writing is one of the most popular forms of every literature irrespective of language, region, people and times. This literary form has produced numerous well known works by the great literary figures. It can boast of wide range of writers across the globe. They travellers, pilgrims, researchers and adventurers etc. the name and fame of the works and its creators have never faded away. From the time immemorial this genre is one of the most favourites among the people who possess fine literary taste. Relatively this form has attained the popularity among 20th century. This is because of the large scale globalisation that facilitates the proximity between the regions and the people which were once considered as remote far fetched and inaccessible. There are numerous developments that were caused by the innovations in technology in the modern world which bring them closer and closer. It is because of Information and Technology the world has now become a global village. A person from the one end of the world can land in the other end of this planet within a few hours because of the speedy transportation system. Earlier one has to wait for months for the same distance to cross which is now crossed within a few hours. The scientific discoveries have facilitated the movement of people from one place to another. Earlier people even though willing to wander, but due to lack of means of transportations leave their dreams. Except a few who are privileged as well as determined can materialise the dreams of travelling. Nowadays the communication network is so revolutionised that a person can materialise his or her travel dreams which were earlier may be considered as improbable. This research paper analyses the historical travel works and their importance in developing the understanding of the people, their land, customs, traditions and livelihood patterns.*

**Keywords:** Ancient, culture, encounter, experience, people, traditions, travel and understanding etc.

#### Introduction

The travelogue or the travel literature provide as well as develop deep understanding of the one considered alien cultural traits, its people and their traditions. It is because of the travel, people come into contact with other people and familiarise themselves with the little known customs and habits of another people. They not only encounter but also strengthen and maintain the cross cultural contacts between the people from all over the world. One can be acquainted with the bad and good experiences of people. We can share our joy, happiness and moments of uneasiness by going through the works of the travel writers. It presents the pictures of the lives of the people of this beautiful planet. The imperial masters and their plundering of the local population can be experienced through the works of travel writers. The popularity of travel writing is also at its peak because of the growing interest of academicians, researchers and stalwarts of modern world in the postcolonial literary texts. The equal importance is also given by the postcolonial theorists to social sciences like Sociology, History and Political science etc



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The postcolonial literature critically analyses the evil as well as good effects of the encounters that have taken place among the imperialists and people of the annexed lands. These cultural, political and social encounters play prominent role in developing the understanding of the people from the third world countries. It is the structure on which the superstructure of the modern third world is placed. It is through the numerous travelogues one can go through the reasons behind the plundering by the imperial world. It not only familiarise the readers with the culture of the people but also shed light on the causes of discrimination among the vanquished population. By going through the travel accounts one can understand how Europeans have marginalised the weaker classes and the subjugated class has developed deep scars on the minds, land and culture. It not only developed interest among the academicians but also provide the much needed thrust for the growth of feminism. This genre while portraying the detailed picture of flora and fauna also shed light on the culture of the people and the place of women in that culture. Despite its growing popularity among readers there are a few critics who argue that this literary form is dominated by the orthodoxy and conservative political ideology of the Western culture. While portraying the encountered world the writers of this genre usually ignore the realities of the people and their lives but give more stress on the Utopian world which never exists in reality. There are many writers who intentionally ignore the reality of the people they encountered. Instead they present the fanciful and merry go lucky pictures of which the indigenous population always contradict in many countries. More stress of the travel writing is found on the imaginary flights. Some of the works are marked by the fancy full flights. These works are marked by the nostalgia about present and never experienced past. These works are seen as prejudiced towards the colonial masters who somehow act as their stooges in supporting the brutal and inhuman treatment given by the Europeans. As some of the writers of this literary form belong to the middle class, they vehemently support people from their own class. This class consciousness also becomes a bar in the objective portrayal of the encountered world. Sometimes one can smell racism from the travel descriptions which are quite vociferous in admitting the prominence of Western culture and race. It also dehumanise the culture of the third world countries and the people by presenting one sided picture. Major works which are authored by the Western travellers always turns a deaf ear towards the atrocities that were committed by the Western colonial masters on the people of the annexed regions of Asia and Africa. Although travel literature becomes more famous in the modern era of globalisation, it has also long history. One of the earliest works of this genre is *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*. It is one of the major old books written in Koine Greek which is known as *Periplus Maris Erythraei* in Latin. This work shed light on Roman times and its major trading practices through sea. It has wonderful accounts of the then Roman and Egyptians ports where the trade among the Romans, Arabians and Indians flourish. We can go through major trading destinations of the Roman times which move through the Persian Gulf, Red Sea, Indian Ocean and Arabian Ocean. There is no consensus among the scholars regarding the time and authorship of this work. Some Scholars consider the work is of first and third century. The other stream of Writers ascribes its production to the mid first century and this is the most acceptable view regarding its time. The authorship of this work is still not established but by going through this work one can say that the descriptions found in the work are the result of the first hand experience of the writer. The descriptions are given by the person who is quite familiar with the landscape found in this work. There is not super superfluity in the description. The writer is thoroughly familiar with Egyptian and Roman trading world which is presented excellently in this work. The work also provides an explicit description of the navigation patterns of the historical times of Hellenic world. This book is divided in to 66 sections of which some sections are so long where as some sections are as short as single paragraph. The description of the locations given by the writer is authentic as well as error free that even it can be corroborated with the modern locations. Not only the trade routes but also the trading items of those times are also found in the travel works of other languages. Another well-known historical work in this regard is *Description of Greece*, Which is written by the great Greek writer Pausanias whose time is between C. 110 to C. 180. This work presents the beautiful and accurate picture of the Grecian world of author's time. It is divided in 10 books and most of the parts of the work are about Greek lands like Attica, Messenia and Elis. The description of the ancient cities like Athens, Arcadia, Elis, Phocis and Messenia cover the major portion of this work. Although writer is a geographer, he gives more prominence to the Grecian cultural aspects rather than the topography of that region. He is mostly concerned about the religious practices of his times. He pays little attention to the Greek landscape and architecture. Rather he concentrates more on mythology, culture and history of the Grecian world. Even the legends are thoroughly described by him. It is a fine description of Greek traditions, credence and hereditaments.

Another ancient travel book is *Anabasis* which is written by Xenophon who is a well-known soldier and writer. This work presents an amazing description of the military expedition of which consists of ten thousand soldiers who are on the way to help the Cyrus the Younger in dethroning his brother Artaxerxes II, in 401 BC. The book is divided in to seven books and it is written in 370 BC. *Anabasis* means a movement of army or march. It also means *Anabasis* 'embarkation', 'ascent' or 'mounting up'. Another wellknown travel writer is Xuanzang who is Chinese traveller. He was born on 6 April 602 in Chenliu, in Henan province of China. Right from the childhood days he developed interest in reading and studying religious books, and especially those of Buddhism. He becomes a Buddhist monk at the age of twenty. He visited India when he was seventeen-years old. He visited Nalanda University in modern



day Bihar, India.. On his return he carried many Sanskrit texts. Although defied the travel protocol he received a warm by Emperor Taizong in China and asked him to write a travelogue. *Records of the Western Regions* present Xuanzang's travel accounts .

## Conclusion

In this way travel literature plays an important role in developing understanding regarding the culture, people and society. It also cements the ties between the people from all over the world. The literature not only presents the reality of the encountered people but also focuses on the causes of the underdevelopment .The postcolonial studies provide a major impetus for the development of interest about this literary genre among the readers. It is because of the globalisation this form of literature receives more attention.

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