

IJRTBT | WOMEN TRAVEL WRITINGS: A JOURNEY OF SYMBOLISM**Shilpi Kalwani**

Birla Institute of Technology & Science (BITS Pilani), Rajasthan, India

*Corresponding Author's E-Mail: shilpibsp@gmail.com***ABSTRACT**

In the past few decades, travel has become a means of exploration, knowledge, and lifestyle. With such an increase in interest towards tourism, why are women travel writings not being acknowledged? This study is one of the earliest attempts to conceptually explore the multidimensional domain of women travel writings. The purpose of this study is to conceptually understand the journey of women travel writers from around the world over time, and the reasons for their limited presence in this genre. A systematic review of the literature was conducted to explore various facets of women travel writers. The findings suggest a strong influence of gender stereotypes, government policies, cultural barriers, imagery, and symbolism as substantial factors affecting women travel writings. The study is one of a kind to investigate the multifaceted genre of women travel writings chronologically and geographically.

Keywords: Women Travel Writers; Pandemic; Symbolism; Gender; Culture

INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry has already suffered a huge loss globally due to the pandemic. An estimated loss of a billion international tourists since the COVID-19 pandemic (Prasad & Ghosal, 2020). In such a scenario, women travel writings have been hit the worst. If you search for Women Travel Writers in India, the results will display a compact list of seven names which are: Janhavi Acharekar, Aswathi Thirunal Gowri Lakshmi Bayi, Romola Butalia, Karabi Deka Hazarika, Anees Jung, Savitri Devi, Rosy Thomas. Compared to any other genre in literature, travel writings seem to be the most budding one with an unsaid journey yet to unfold (Spencer, 1991).

In terms of world history, the background of travel women writers is diverse. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu began her quest for travelling in 1716, accompanying her husband for his official work trips. Whereas Alexander David-Neel begin her travel journey by running away from home as a child. Later she became the first Western woman to enter the forbidden city of Tibet, Lhasa (Alacovska, 2015). Progressive measures taken by various Governments that include scholarship have helped the genre grow to a great extent (McKenzie, 2007). The exploration of travel writings brought with it an array of issues. The issues are diverse and range from gender stereotypes to professional classifications. It goes to the extent of gendering the vocabulary and digging the personal intent of the authors. It also went through intense critical review to justify the non-presence of women in the genre (Turner et al. 2017).

Travel writings by men were always considered more professional whereas women travel writings were categorized as a personal interest (Mulligan, 2014). This paper is an attempt to study and lay emphasis on the journey of various women travel writers since the beginning of time. Women travel writings have always been a symbolic representation of the era or society they have lived in; thus, symbolism marks an important role in the journey of these women travel writers (Hartley, 1992). An attempt to study the impact of symbolism on the journey of these travel writers worldwide is the aim of this research. The objective of this research is to

find out the reasons for diminishing numbers of female travel writers especially in India. It tries to study the gender stereotypes and challenges associated with this genre of writing and to describe the significance of culture, gender, imagery, and symbolism in travel writings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

History of Travel Writing

Travel writings by women were often considered as a part time interest instead of a profession. Before 19th century, most of the female writers constitute wives of diplomats and nuns (Amireh & Majaj, 2014). By the onset of 19th century, it became common to find women travellers exploring the unknown and documenting it. The number of women led travel stories in journals was a pleasant sight (Bohls, 1995). Margery Kempe is one such example. Her travel tales were discovered and appreciated later in the 1930's (Gilroy, 1996). Another one to join the league was Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. She wrote while accompanying her Aristocrat husband at work. Her travel writings "Turkish Embassy Letters" described the private lives of women in Islamic society (McKenzie, Le Blond & ISA, 2012). Mary Catherine le Jumel de Barneville, Countess d'Aulnoy from France wrote beautiful travel stories summing up 20 years of her travel experiences. There were some revolutionary women writers like Celia Finnes, who travelled on horseback and documented her journey through England and Scotland. The first true European travel guide was birthed by a women named Mariana. In 1820, Mariana Starke documented her experiences of travelling through France and Italy. It was a one-of-a-kind book to include exclamation mark rating systems on hotels and food prices (Leask, 2004). In 1869, another renowned travel revolutionary Marianne North decided to travel the world after the tragic incident of her father's death shook her completely. She contributed towards beautiful paintings and articles based on her travel experience from 1871-1885. Her quest for painting took her to places like Brazil, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, South Africa, Seychelles, and Australia. Her paintings and artwork are present at Kew Botanical gardens even today. The 18th century brought with it the culture of letter and article travel writings. Lady Marguerite Blessington, Mary Wollstonecraft and Lady Anna Riggs Miller were the major contributors to this trend. In 1789, a travelogue titled "A Journey through the Crimea to Constantinople" was noted for its direct and no-nonsense approach. The author Elizabeth Craven was later recognized for her unique writing style.

The 19th century saw a massive shift towards women participation in travel writings. Independent and adventurous women such as Isabella Bird and May Crommelin were the talk of the town. Crommelin's article published in Idler Magazine was a prominent milestone in the genre. Even the religious barriers could not stop these revolutionary women from exploring their dreams. Isabelle Eberhardt from Switzerland, posed as a man and travelled across Algeria and Tunisia, post converting to Islam. Even her unfortunate death in a flood calamity at Algeria couldn't stop her exemplary work from being published and appreciated. She lost her life at the age of 27. Another remarkable story is of a journalist named Elizabeth Cochrane aka Nellie Bly, who travelled the world in less than 80 days. She travelled the world within 72 days with one set of clothes, a small travel bag, £200 and a quantity of gold from New York in November 1888. These inspiring stories pave way for women travel writers to explore their creativity in the field and provide a new perspective to the genre (Stearns, 2016).

Challenges for travel writers

When a travel writer is writing about a foreign country, the writer is representing his own biases and judgements through his real-life experiences. These writings can never be objective, as the human error is always present. When it comes to women writers, these judgements intensify as

they suffer comparatively more societal restrictions from childhood. This bias is evident in women writings (Palmer, 2009).

The prejudices do not exert themselves on the writings and are not present everywhere. Human psychology is a result of years of evolution and hence associating it with a few chosen sets of events would be unfair (Robinson, 1990). The ideologies are framed over years of life experience and work as a compass for the traveller (Blaser, 2014). In the past, Indian writings were always represented by English authors and sprinkled with imperialism. Hence the writings had a substantial impact of prejudice in them. In the case of Indian history, though India got independence from the British rule in 1947. But Indian writings are still viewed through the lens of imperial remembrance. The road towards independence of women travel writings from the prejudices and bias is a long one and would take years of patience and efforts to bring about a revolution (Mills, 2003).

The onset of 21st century brought with it a lot of drastic changes. There was disruption in the classical theories and ideologies globally. This transformed the way travel literature was perceived by the readers. The travellers could now be either historians and anthropologists or the creative artists (Clay, 2017). Both ways there was a dearth of women contributors to the genre. The dominance of male writers in the genre presented a repeated pattern of writing. A travel writer during the process of travelling is aware of the impact his perspective is going to create. This objective vision of keeping the readers, writing style, story narrative, and the theme in the back of the mind interferes with the creation of new art. The understanding of the marketing and economic strategies produces creativity blocks in the hindsight. This repetitive pattern promotes creation of cliché art. The perspective of the travel writer is not merely a replication of experience. It would be apt to say that a piece of travel writing reflects one's ideologies, personality, experiences, and judgements. When a particular genre is subjected to gender stereotypes and biases, it promotes monotony and repetition. This psychological block and monotony can be broken by introducing fresh perspective in the genre. Women travel writers bring a sensitive emotion focussed approach on travel stories which is different from the conventionally consumed travel writings.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Two methods of reasoning have been adopted in this study. Inductive reasoning moves from detailed observations to broader generalisations. It is usually termed as the 'bottoms up' perspective. Here we make use of inductive reasoning to begin from a detailed scrutiny of travel writings towards framing some conclusions towards reasons for presence of fewer women travel writers in the genre.

Whereas deductive reasoning flows from theorized principles that are known to be true to a particular interpretation. In this case the reasoning involves the movement from generalized principles (physical & demographic challenges with women travellers) to conclusion and theories that support the methodologies for study of the reasons for fewer women travel writers in this genre. The research is based on a close reading of the writings and references of substantial women travel writers. Along with that it will involve methods of study such as Descriptive Studies and Naturalistic Observation. Mainly three criteria have been followed to make the selection Global Approach, Chronological Approach and Gender based Approach.

DISCUSSION

Major Findings

This study is focussed on exploring the reasons behind diminishing number of women travel writers. The major findings from the literature review and analysis suggests significant impact

of cultural boundaries on women travel writing (Turner, Stannard & Walker, 2017). Globally, different cultures of the world have unique understanding of gender stereotypes. This research confirms a strong influence of culture, gender, imagery, and symbolism behind diminishing number of women travel writings (Kinsley, 2016). The extraordinary journey of progression demonstrated by the genre is a substantial reason to explore the reasons behind its limited presence in the travel literature. Findings also suggest that changes in government policy with respect to the aids and scholarships provided to women travel writers will be the game changer in the coming years and would give the required support to women travel writings.

CONCLUSION

The emerging critical interest in the genre of travel writing a relatively new field of literary study is no doubt attributable to the proliferation of postcolonial, multicultural, autobiographical, and cultural studies in recent years. The earliest critical analysis of the genre tended to exclude women travel writers, which is why a separate examination of women's texts became so necessary. The first critics who began articulating the difference of women's travel writing confined their interests to mostly nineteenth century, mostly British authors, which is why the genre stands comparatively neglected at a global level. Thus, this research in some respects both broadens and alters our overall impressions and understanding of the genre. With support from Government bodies such as scholarships for women writers in this genre, things look brighter ahead for budding female travel writers.

Limitations and Future Directions for Research

There are two major limitations associated with this research which also led the way for future directions for research. The study is based on literature review and hence lacks empirical support. This leads the way towards further research in this direction that could involve empirical validation of the presence of culture, gender stereotypes, symbolism, and Government policies on the diminishing travel writings. This could also provide empirical evidence as to the extent to which of the factors impact the diminishing of women travel writings.

The second limitations are the generalizability of this research. This research does a literature review for varied parts of the world which are culturally distinct. To validate and generalize the results, an experiment could be set up across varied cultures and parts of the world to see if the results confirm to the findings suggested by literature reviews. Hence, this research can act as a base for further empirical and experimental research to explore the reasons behind diminishing travel writers.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares that she has no conflict of interests.

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