

**The Representation of Region in the Novels of R. K. Narayan and  
Pannalal Patel: A Comparative Study**

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**Introduction:**

Substantial research work has been conducted on the genre of the novel and its various aspects in English as well as in Gujarati literature, but the study focusing on the theme of the region and regionality in Indian writing in English and the Gujarati novel, especially in the novels of R. K. Narayan (1906-2001) and Pannalal Patel (1912-1989) has scarcely been carried out in a comparative mode. This dissertation is aimed at studying the representation of the region in the novels of R. K. Narayan and Pannalal Patel from the point of view of postcolonial studies by highlighting the socio-cultural, political and religious dimensions in their works. It is possible to locate the postcolonial discourse of creating an image of indigenous culture through the means of rural locale, language and customs in the work of R. K. Narayan and Pannalal Patel. The creative period of both the novelists extends from the pre-independence to the post-independence phase of the twentieth century India. Their works cover majority of features representing the postcolonial dimension of literature, which has been examined in the thesis. Narayan is regarded as the father-figure in postcolonial Indian English fiction. Similarly Pannalal Patel's creativity writing too has a comparable place. Both represent the notion of region and nation which has become now-a-days vigorous debate in postcolonial studies. The thesis explores how the literary discourse of their novels participates in constructing 'nation' in a postcolonial context by representing 'region'. Instead of seeing the categories of 'nation' and 'region' as simple opposites, the thesis examines the problematic ways in which these notions are represented. For instance, in Gujarati the ideas of 'vatan' and 'desh' are used for both-the nation and the region.

**The Novelists:**

Both R. K. Narayan and Pannalal Patel were Indian by birth and remained the leading voices of Gandhian era. Both, Narayan and Pannalal were highly impressed and inspired by Gandhain philosophy and struggle for independence. One of the triumvirates of twentieth

century Indian English Literature, Narayan through his fictional town Malgudi, has communicated Indian sensibility and is credited with bringing Indian literature in English to the rest of the world. He is considered a great critic of human conduct, human relationship within the family circle whereas Pannalal's works are tinged with the native nature, the vicissitudes of life and regional spirit along with humanitarian perspectives. Gandhi's indirect inspiration has persistently provoked Pannalal's creative genius.

### **The Idea of Region**

#### **R. K. Narayan's Malgudi:**

Malgudi, the setting of most of Narayan's fiction is the fictional, semi-urban town in southern India. Since Malgudi landscape or regional set up seems identical with certain places like Lalgudi, Yadvagiri or Coimbatore yet all the efforts to indentify Malgudi as a real place have remained futile, for it is a pure country of the mind which does not actually exists on the map of India. Narayan's concern seems more social than the topography of the region. The greater emphasis is laid upon assessing the customs, traditions and human relationships. The novelist constructs a small world within an imagined locale to represent his thoughts or life-philosophy of various cultures. It seems that Narayan himself is the creation of Malgudi because he has preferred to locate himself within this milieu in the form of confinement. Though, the state of such confinement is very dear to him and he loves to live in it. Malgudi remains like a treasure house to him from where he could extract the latent grandeur of Indian culture and civilization. Malgudi is like Hardy's 'Wessex' region and a dream country in which physical features of various places are re-arranged, modified and magnified. The fictitious region Malgudi mirrors the versatile form of nation. It has been interpreted as a vision, a waking dream and Indian reality.

### **Pannalal Patel's 'Ishan' Region:**

While Narayan's 'Malgudi' is a fictional locale, Ishan region of Pannalal is not an imagined one. This is the region where he was born, brought up and lived. It was lush green with trees, plants, hills and rivers while his stay in Mandali. Pannalal's childhood too was spent on the bank of river Vatrak which flows nearby. The major source of his creative consciousness explored in his descriptions is the Ishan region of his native land, its people, the folk-dialects, the living standards, the customs and their traditional, orthodox values. The region represented by Pannalal truly mirrors a rural backdrop. It is situated on the borders of North Gujarat and Rajasthan. Mandali, the village located near Rajasthan border of Simalvada Teshil in Dungarpur district, is the birth place of Pannalal Patel. The reader of his novels experiences the realistic and wonderful form of nature and seasons, where the roots of his inspiration lie.

### **Research Design and Methodology:**

The methodology applied in the thesis is comparative and draws upon postcolonial theories of nation and representation as a frame for exploration. It involves critical reading of some selected novels of Narayan and Pannalal in social, cultural and political context.

### **R. K. Narayan's Novels surveyed in the thesis are:**

1. *Swami and Friends* (1935)
2. *The Bachelor of Arts* (1939)
3. *The Dark Room* (1938)
4. *The English Teacher* (1945)
5. *Mr. Sampath* (1949)
6. *The Financial Expert* (1952)
7. *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955)
8. *The Guide* (1958)

9. *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* (1961)

10. *The Vendor of Sweet* (1967)

**Pannalal Patel's Novels surveyed in the thesis are:**

1. *Valamana* (1940)
2. *Malela Jiv* (1941)
3. *Manvini Bhavai* (1947)
4. *Bhagyana Bheru* (1957)
5. *Pachhale Barne* (1947)
- 6 *Na Chhutake* (1995)
- 7 *Kanji and Jivi: A Tragic Love Story* (2014)  
(English Translation of *Malela Jiv*)
- 8 *Endurance A Droll Saga* (1995)  
(English Translation of *Manvini Bhavai*)

**Chapterizations:** The thesis is covered in six chapters.

**Brief Survey:**

**1 Introduction:**

The first chapter summarizes the concepts of nation and region, India as nation and framing of Indian nationalism, the significance and sources of regionality along with nature and scope of Indian Literature. This chapter highlights the major contributors and their role in constructing the image of region and nation through novel writing in English as well as Gujarati language. The last section of this chapter offers a space to focus some of the well-known regional novelists namely Gabriel Garcia Marquez (Colombian), William Faulkner (South America), and Thomas Hardy (England) along with Hindi novelist Fanishvar Nath 'Renu' as well as some known Gujarati regional novelists like: Jhaverchand Meghani, Ishvar Petlikar and Chunilal Madiya. They have depicted an ideal representation of region in their

novels through offering a chronicle related to the region. In context to region, they focus the issue like native, cultural identity of the people correspondingly. The representation of a region that persists in the novels transmits to the author's sagacity of place to his notion of selfhood itself. The narratives aim at bringing together the integrated past which is lost in course of time because of interfering factors like colonial impact, industrial revolution and changing values. The novelists have attempted to confirm either traditional or transitional phase of regional life wherein one can observe its two-folded form, say excellent as well as poor. Through locating certain weakness in cultural, political and religious set up, their critical concern offers the impression of generating a fair and balanced societal frame. The chief endeavor of the novelists seems to characterize a particular region and its socio-cultural dimensions through which the quest of national identity has been carried out fruitfully. They have visualized the ideal portrait of cultural identity, self-image and overall personality of a particular locality by focusing on regional specialties. These regions, whether one looks at Gujarati, English or American regional novels, are a microcosm of a larger nationality; albeit quite an important one. If they do not seem comforting to the popular notion, which hardly happens, they at least define the mainstream view of the nation and offer it a distinct culture and interpretations.

## **2 Life and Works of Pannalal Patel and R. K. Narayan in the Postcolonial Context:**

The second chapter highlights how both R.K. Narayan and Pannalal Patel delineated the native culture, its ethos and the national and local spirit in their works. It is possible to locate the post-colonial discourse of creating an image of native culture through the means of rural locale, language and customs in the work of R.K.Narayan and Pannalal Patel. Perhaps, may not be in its strictest sense, but their novels examined in this chapter can be read fruitfully from a postcolonial perspective. R. K. Narayan's *The Man-eater of Malgudi* (1961) is an attempt to restore indigenous culture, philosophical discourse and cultural identity, while *The*

*Guide* (1958) presents socio-cultural change, new cultural identity, colonial abandonment and alienation or the conflict between two cultures and socio-ethical study. His *Swami and Friends* (1935) and *Waiting for Mahatma* (1955) also depict colonial abandonment concentrating Indian freedom movement, and *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937) throws light on cultural identity and nationhood. Similarly *The Vendor of Sweet* (1967) and *The English Teacher* (1945) define the cultural collision and introduce the survival of national, religious ethics as well as native educational set up. Likewise Pannalal Patel's *Manvini Bhavai* (1947) a time-dominated (*Kalpradhan*) love story focuses on an effort to liberate the native culture from its own oppressive structures, misuse of power and exploitation, colonial alienation as well as regional, cultural consciousness. Pannalal Patel's *Na Chhutate* (1955), though a love story, narrates the Gandhian Satyagrah against the tyranny of state rulers. Patel's *Pachhale Barne* (1947) shows the changing social and political references and the struggle against the native oppressors to some extent, while *Bhangyanan Bheru* (1957) presents the themes of religious conversion of tribal youth, the concept of true religion and rural flavour of native culture. Likewise, Pannalal's second novel *Malela Jiv* (1941) too, to some extent approaches the postcolonial note reflecting the hegemonic formation of native people along with regional spirit. Some of the short stories by Pannalal as well represent the postcolonial dimensions.

### **3 The Representation of Region in Pannalal Patel's novels:**

To discuss the representation of region in Pannalal Patel, the researcher has preferred to offer a brief survey of political, geographical and literary manifestation of the Gujarat region in this chapter through which the idea of the Gujarat region can be viewed in a broader perspective. This chapter briefly surveys the manifestation of Gujarat in literature and its geographical set up along with the detailed sketches of Pannalal's 'Ishan' region demonstrating its regional dimensions in the socio-cultural form. Ishan region portrayed in many of his novels has a living relationship with his personal life. This region, drawn in a

realistic manner shows the true spirit of its native inhabitants and rural flavour of regional culture. This small region remains a symbolic representation of Indian rural culture during pre and post-independence period. Hence, various dimensions like the novelist's art of characterization, various communities, their customs, beliefs, superstitions, social evils, natural disaster as well as the specialty of the creator along with the dialectical tone, poetic sense and life-philosophy exercised by the novelist to locate the regional spirit are also included in this chapter.

#### **4 The Representation of Region in R. K. Narayan's novels:**

This fourth chapter concentrates on R. K. Narayan's novels that reflect region to elaborate on the representations of regionality. It analyzes the varied forms of Malgudi region and shows how Narayan is able to transform a particular limited region into a symbol of India and its life. Though fictitious, yet Narayan's region of experience represents South Indian culture, Hence, the historical outline of this region is also incorporated in the chapter. The study of characters, the customs, beliefs, superstitions, social evils, socio-cultural life, natural calamity, freedom movement, language, style and life philosophy, etc. integrated in this section define the regional dimensions of native consciousness reflected in Narayan's creative world.

#### **5 Region in the Novels of R. K. Narayan and Pannalal Patel: A Comparative Analysis:**

The fifth chapter incorporating the title of thesis offers the comparative analysis of resemblances and differences in Narayan and Pannalal's literary career. To study these novelists in comparative approach, the factors like their birth and family, sources of inspiration, educational career, domestic life and economic struggle, evaluation as a writer, publisher, sense of regionalism, and thematic study of their works along with critical reception and Gandhian perspectives are examined.

Gandhian image is clearly apparent in both the novelists. In the matter of their creativity the societal frame, joint family system, etc. confirms its fundamental role in a parallel mode. While dealing with regional representation they visualize the indigenous culture in its multifaceted form through rendering a variety of issues like traditional, cultural and religious norms in Indian setting. The prime note of their fictional world is to define the indigenous spirit of traditional India and defending its indigenous consciousness. Both seem to favour the value based culture and equally claim their hatred for social evils. They aim at humanizing the native identity through mythical truth cited in sacred scriptures. Both were from Gandhian era and joint Hindu big family. Narayan's was a rich source of learning while except a little parental sense; Pannalal wasn't benefited much through family members. Narayan's educational status in comparison to Pannalal was far better. Both had experienced the conventional structure of community, but the orthodox societal frame shaped their vision and life-philosophy. The poets like Umashankar and Sundaram were the major contributors to encourage the literary genius while to Narayan Graham Greene proved sole promoter. Both remained the publishers of their own and had some sort of affection with farming occupation. Both received favorable response from the critics' point of view except a few limitations like deficiency of stylish language. Pannalal has delineated various themes manifesting love, disaster, oppression, morality, social evils along with Gandhian perspectives. Similarly, Narayan's major concern is human relationship in which he has woven together the issues like quest for identity, aspiration towards spiritual maturity, social evils along with Indian freedom movement and Gandhian preaching. Hence, one notices that though both the novelists seems progressing in the same direction and offers similar images of regionality and nation, there are some critical differences.

## **6 Conclusion:**

The final chapter concludes my observation and analysis of the comparative study of the representation of region in both the novelists. Both have attempted to depict the indigenous nature of a nation and its cultural heritage. They have preferred to draw the selected regions which symbolize and define the nation in general. The majority of their novels can be read as postcolonial texts. Postcoloniality in the literature showed its live appeal to construct and modify the indigenous nature of a nation and its regions. These literary artists have tried to locate native culture through their fabricated mythical plots to fortify the idea of nation and nationalism. Their representation of the region does not merely appreciate the indigenous virtues, but also define certain weaknesses located in it since past. The factors like colonial alienation, exploitation, injustice and revival of original culture, etc. are interwoven in the themes with a view to focusing certain virtues and vices prevailing in its existing culture. The ultimate aim of the literary artists is to recover the value based culture. Their geographical sketches of Malgudi and Ishan regions respectively represent chiefly social and cultural scenario of contemporary phase. Theirs is rather a sociological and literary region rather than mere geographical sketches. Narayan's Malgudi delineates urban as well as rural image of India, while Pannalal's Ishan region offers its rustic impression. The chief tone reflected in Narayan's fictional world is mythical truth located in Holy Scriptures, although his favor for Brahminic culture has often been criticized. Pannalal's creativity offers the rustic flavor of native land. What Gandhiji stressed 'true India resides in its villages' is fully manifested in Pannalal's fictional world. Pannalal's Ishan region represents an interior sector of north Gujarat, which visualizes the brave face of community that suffers and survives under wretched predicament. The native oppressions and natural disaster challenge their existence, but their confident willpower remains unshaken. Illiteracy, superstitions and

orthodox traditions constantly suffocate their living yet they enjoy their earthly role. Pannalal views his Ishan region detached from urban flow.

Of course only literary representations of both these novelists do not capture the wide range of complexities and dimensions of region and nation, but offer a useful way of engaging with these multifaceted issues.