

## **The Idea of Region in Regional Literature**

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### **Abstract**

The term nation covers the total personality of the land, region or geographical boundaries, cultural values, ethos and existing environmental and religious frame too. Nation is constructed in myths or allegory. The issue of native language too plays the significant role in shaping the national identity. The unified form of custom, tradition, language and geography moulds the image of nation. Nation is the unified form of various regions in Indian context. As per the language spoken, the states have received its regional identity. Regional languages too, have number of dialects spoken among sub-regions. It is argued that the concepts 'region' and 'nation' are not given but are only constructed through a skilful choice of issues in history. Region has its 'distinctive personality' and the sources of such personality are the ecology and the nature of its earth, the folk life flourished through its natural factors and the history and its traditions. Some of the Gujarati novelists have attempted their hand to represent the concept of regional identity which merges within the soul of state: e.g. Meghani's Sorath, Pannalal Patel's Ishan region. The integrated form of such regions defines the true image of the Gujarat region. The regional novelists have offered a chronicle related to the region. In context to region, they focus the issue like native, cultural identity of the people correspondingly. Sometimes, mere the naming of the region governs the all incidents according to nature of regional impressions. The present paper through lights on especially in Gujarati literature and presentation of region of Gujarat by different Gujarati writer.

**Key Words:** Nation, Region, Asmita, Regionalists, Gujaratiness, Sorath, and Ishan regions, Cultural identity

It seems that nations are misrepresented entities and its very nature is instable. Nation is constructed politically and socially. The allegory of nationhood is designed by certain ideology to establish the national convention. The term nation covers the total personality of the land, region or particular boundaries, cultural values and ethos and, in the present time, environmental and religious concerns, too. The factors like

liberation from oppression, individual and general consciousness of the subjects to resist the others shape the idea of nation. The utterance of pronouns 'we' and 'they' separate the identity in mapping logically. Nation is constructed in myths or allegory. Social, political, cultural and religious norms define one's identity. The issue of native language too plays the significant role in shaping the national identity. Cultural

association or exchange with 'others' inspires one to define self-image. Custom, tradition, culture and civilization, physical appearance, language, religious practices, society, community, geographical restrictions etc. judge the status and concept of nation. Unification of such features moulds the image of nation.

Vance defines region as 'a group of national states possessing a common culture, common political interests, and often a formal organization' (Vance and Henderson, 1968:378). The issue observed in conceptualizing a region turns around the requirement of geographical contiguity, but it can be true in context to international sphere. The online dictionary, Thesaurus defines the term 'region' under various categories: A large, usually continuous segment of a surface or space; area or a large, indefinite portion of the earth's surface or a specified distinct or territory etc. Region also consists of sub-regions: e.g. backdrop, cluster. Generally the term is used in terrestrial context. A region possesses its unchanging distinct nature which can be in the form of its natural environment and socio-cultural perspective. Region in comparison to nation remains the smaller unit. Nation is the unified form of various regions. Very often 'Region' and 'Nation' are seen as contrasting categories: however there is significant overlap as can be understood from Gujarati terms like 'Desh' and 'Vatan': literary translation for both Region and Nation.

Though, the recent ideology emphasizes the broader philosophy of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (The whole universe is one single family), where the idea of 'mine'

seems somewhat inferior. As Martin Heidegger states: 'A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something begins its presenting' (Bhabha 1) but looking to internal philosophic debate 'one needs to create his original identity in the present scenario because restoration of self image by rereading and rewriting the texts will enhance, broaden and lead towards the new directions. By asking or examining 'Who we are? What we had? 'Has our identity been shaped by others? 'Are we constructed or transformed due to colonial past or other influences?', we need to seek the answers of many doubts because nation and nationalism is a much debated issue of present era.

Before interpreting the manifestation of Gujarat region in this paper I would like to focus on the sources and significance of regionality first. The differences are observed in various sub-regions, the specialties of divisions and folk-life in a single language region. As a result of it each region receives its distinct personality. Region has its 'distinctive personality' through particular regional specialties. The sources of this personality are:

- The Ecology and the nature of its earth
- The folk life flourished through its natural factors.
- The history and its traditions.

What is stated as ecological references include geography, environment, customs and traditions, professions, fairs and festivals and folk-dialects. In a way, region plays a crucial role in shaping the destiny of the native inhabitants. The folk-life of region is blossomed amidst its distinct

nature. Through the specialties of its earth and local professions formed in association to it, such region receives the nourishment directly. The people generally follow the customary manners. Such folk life can be called regional life. The shaping of life constructed through it is considered the poignant element of regionality. In another way, the forms of nature are the key base of each region's distinct features. The form of nature, in association with its different seasons manifests the new twinkling and among all the land holds the various shapes. The whole folk-life in connection to its moving wheels walks on the path of it in harmony. So the form of culture constructed through the practical approaches, festivals, religious fairs, customs and traditions of folk-life, is also in accordance to it. The clear impression of region and its nature reflects upon people's food, costume, residence and even in shaping the human nature. In order to be familiar with 'region' one must be well acquainted with its historical and geographical set up. The cultural heritage, language, literature and people residing in it play very significant part in defining its regional specialties.

Here is the brief analysis of some of the well-known Regional Novelists who have depicted an ideal representation of region in their novels:

Jhaverchand Meghani (1896-1947) a noted poet, social reformer and freedom fighter from Gujarat is a well known literary figure in the field of Gujarati Literature. Mahatma Gandhi spontaneously gave him the title of *Raashtreeya Shaayar* (National Poet). He went village-to-village in search of folk-lore and published them in various volumes of

*Saurashtra Ni Rasdhar*. His three celebrated novels: *Sorath Taran Vahetan Pani*, *Vevishal* and *Tulsikyaro* exhibit the social life of Sorath region. The areas like Zhalawad, Halar, Gohilwad, Sorath etc. are included in Saurashtra region. Meghani's novels portray the true picture of Sorathi folk-life. The suggestions about the shaping forces of Meghani are also found in his *Jivansambharana*:

"I am the child of mountain; Bagasara of Bhayani is the native land of my fore-fathers. At present, the Gir forest having been cut off and has gone far off from there..... My birth place is Chotila-the heart of red-colored land of anchal Region. I was born in the police station known as dreadful place located near hills of Chotila where Goddess Chamunda is seated. When I was a small child my brothers took me often around the mountain picking me up on their chaste. I could suck the lactation of Panchal region only for quarter past month"( Mistry 15, tr.).

Meghani is the literary author of Sorathi-life. To depict ancient and modern life of Sorath in literature has remained the chief voice of his whole literary activities. He justifies the feelings in depicting the region of his realization in *Sorathi Gitkathao*: "The thirst to inquire and identify the ancient phase of sorath in literature with love has been harassing me like a ghost for the last nine years. I don't disgrace it still. ....striving to solve its mysteries and feeling awful sweetness in it" (Meghani 15, tr.) *Sorath* is the material land of his experiences. Yashavant Shukla observes that the chief tone of his creativity is not only the

*Sorath* or its folk-life, but also the broad humanity amassed in it (Shukla 16, tr.). He calls it humanity. He has admitted that such humanity cannot be the only privileges of *Sorath* but also becomes the universal wealth of geography wherever the man dwells.

Meghani has depicted the folk life which creates the environment of the two decades of *Sorath* region before the world war first in his celebrated novel *Sorath Taran Vahetan Pani*. So the chief protagonist of this novel is the whole *Sorath* community. The *Sorath*, its forgotten and floundering folk-communities framed in love have been made alive. To survive the ancient and vital regional values against the changing scenario of modernity, the whole community is shown suffering, torturing and gets ready to sacrifice himself with smile. Hence, the major source of inspiration is not an individual but the narration of regional life at large. Though the mortal thread of police inspector Mahipatram and his son-in-law Pinaki's story has been woven in it, but through it the aim of the writer is to present the multi-colored picture of social life in its truest sense. Here the rivers, the small bridges, the valleys, the ruins, the thickets, the stations, the markets etc. are found in romantic environment all are attached to heart throbbing land of native *Sorath*. The farming is at the centre among the local businesses due to the fertility and distinct nature of *Sorath* and Panchal land. The character of Sheth ( Navo Khedu) expresses his feelings for *Sorath* land in his words and deeds:

“Mine is the world of vegetation, I have produced the new kind of juice, the color,

and the smell of many grafts by planting them here to there with my own hand. I do not afraid of practicing experiments. My world is wonderful. I do not belong to the human community. My world is of trees and I am also a tree” (200). (tr.)

The Sheth engages the *Bharadi* people in farming who were once dacoits. He becomes their protector:

“Each one has the shelter of this earth. Once they had escaped this earth, are found tired and already returned to its lap. The poor people are already settled and why not? Here all their desires are satisfied” (189). (tr.)

The characters portrayed by the writer enjoy their life mostly in harmony to the earth. The life values, the customary beliefs, the traditions, the practical approaches, the doubts and their real life have been depicted which expands the impressions of regional specialties. The faith and superstition like ghosts, witches, the beliefs to please Goddesses and strange worshipping ceremony etc. are mostly observed in rural culture. While depicting the life of the twentieth century beginning phase, the writer demonstrates the wonder of the people when they see motorcar for the first time. The people are shown dumbfounded when they see the motorcar. E.g. they name such motor vehicle as ‘*Bhunkangadi*’ (199, tr.). The *Jadeja* community of *Sorath* region wears the beautiful turban on their head and ties the woolen shawl under large end, wears full and fitting trouser and combs the hair of their beard in parting line. Gora: the Britisher says to Mahipatram that these *Kathiyavadi* (resident of *Saurashtra* region) communities are marvelous. He appreciates

the young man like Bhavar, the hanging Rukhad Sheth on the trap while receiving the capital punishment and Sumariyo: "Such fine type of chivalry fast decaying: yes. .... Alas! Mahipatram, if I were the big officer in Indian army, I would have raised the question to form the regiment: not of any single community but the regiment of whole Sorath" (50, tr.).

As Meghani has offered us the fragrance of Saurashtra: the land of lions and mountain, its variegated life-style- the saints and *satis*, the stories of dacoits and the brave, Pannalal in the same manner has discovered the north-east border region of Gujarat state and the throbbing nature of land of *Ishan* (North-East) mountains in his regional novels like: *Manvini Bhavai*, *Malela Jiv* and *Valamana*. Pannalal has searched the clue of self-religion (duty). While writing the fiction, he preferred to select the plot from every corner of urban and rural life. But when his logical power became self-sustained and winged, he had measured to think over one and only region which was his own. And in the said region, his natural uniqueness could blossom in full swing. The sight of this land and its people seen in his novels has remained the first charming introduction of unknown and unseen region of Gujarat till present day. It seems that Pannalal has made alive the big fair of *Ishan* corner in the universe of Gujarat: Its *Ishan* region, the Magariya mountains and chora hills, the Jambudiya dhara (deep lake), and up roaring rivers, the fields of maize crops and horrifying forests, the variety of people- the youth wearing colourful feathers, the woman wearing mere petticoat and cloth or flowered skirts, petticoats and gavans (sari), the snuff

smelling women or Hukkah-drinking by male, its Baniyas and Kanbis, its Bhills and Shepherds, the herds of cows and buffalos, their verandah-cum-sitting room(chopad), the courtyards and barns, and houses made of cow-dung and black sand, the walls made of bamboo and maize stalks and houses shaded with grass or the wells in the fields and shades, their fairs and merry-go-round, the marriage songs and ballads to praise the Goddess, their dacoits and thieving, the echoing guns and swinging swords, their bhaidaka (the grain grinded coarsely) and kansar (sweet), and the people: living in the side of mountain and lap of nature, crying, sobbing and enjoying, worshipping the deity of motichhada (measles) and ghost, sacrificing the hens and goats etc. have been vitalized like a fair of *Ishan* region.

Pannalal's depicted region *Ishan* is North Gujarat which is connected with Rajasthan. Hence the bordering state has left its mutual impression on language, literature and culture. Gujarat was known as 'Old Western Rajasthan' territory or what Umashankar Joshi called 'Maru-Gujur'. (Maru-Marvad). *Ishan* region of Pannalal is not an imagined one. This is the region where he was born, brought up and lived. It has the live relationship with his life and creativity. The major source of his creative consciousness has remained the *Ishan* region of his native land, its people, the folk-dialects, living standards, the customs and their traditional, orthodox values. This region has a rural background. 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. Though

Rajasthani language is taught in Mandali and is considered the mother tongue of Mandali. Mandali and the nearby villages are located near the eastern border of Gujarat state, so Gujarati is the language of its native inhabitants. Pannalal belongs to Anjana Patel community. The half of this community resides in Gujarat and the rest in Rajasthan. Undava, the village of Megharaj Tehsil in Sabarkantha district, is the border touching village of Gujarat state. Mandali's border sectors start from there. Hence, Pannalal remained the resident of a village located on the border area of these two states. This region was lush green with trees, plants, hills and river in those days. Pannalal wandered in such a beautiful lap of nature in his childhood. His childhood was spent on the bank of river Vatrak. The reader of his novels experiences the realistic and wonderful form of nature and seasons, where the root of his inspiration lies. His hearty association with its people, their happiness and sorrow, confusions and surviving effort, customs and traditions, the victims of social and economical relationship, their agony, helplessness,

honesty and spirit to face the obstacles etc. are drawn realistically in most of his novels.

K. M. Muni's arrival brought Gujarati novel in a significant turn. Muni was influenced by Alexander Dumas. Muni's historical novels like *Patan ni Prabhuta*, *Gujarat No Nath*, *Rajadhiraj* and *Jay Somnath* are remarkable pieces of Gujarati literature. These novels are historical in nature. He has introduced the live world of characters which defines the true spirit of the region. His bright and affectionate female characters like Rama, Manjari, Minal, Mrunal, Prasanna have established the true spirit of womanhood and added beauty to Gujarati literature. Similarly, the male characters like Jaysinh, Ra'khengar, Munjal, Kak, Munja, Udo and Tribhuvanpal manifest the virtues like valor, chivalry and sagacity.

To conclude this paper, I would say that the region of Gujarat is constructed politically. Though, literary artists are found shaping constantly the spirit of this land. Though, modern Gujarat seems far different than its historical form, but the democratic frame after 1947 and geographical set up of Gujarat since 1960 has remained unchanged.

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