



Online Symposium on

Decolonizing Travel(ing) Theory: Explorations in the 'Indian' Analytic Traditions

Organized by the Department of Humanities & Social Sciences

National Institute of Technology Silchar

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Traveling, both as a concept and performativity, has yielded a diverse range of critical literatures that probe into the epistemological, ethical and aesthetic dimensions of travel and mobility. However, much of the critical theories on travel (and, of late, nomadology) draw on the Western canon, while there appears to be a dearth of proportionate research on and/or documentation of the indigenous analytical frameworks that engage with travel(ing) theory. Referencing Edward Said, we use 'travel(ing) theory' as a generative concept to better understand how 'foreign' theories on travel themselves travel across space and time, are adapted in and adopted by 'local' contexts, often a-historically and a-culturally, thus usurping their indigenous counterparts, in this case, rooted in the 'Indian' analytic traditions. Using this as a point of departure, the symposium therefore makes forays into decolonizing travel(ing) theory.

Indeed, 'pre-modern' India has had a strong tradition of traveling, alongside producing an extensive body of works exploring the ethics and politics of traveling. All Indic orders of monkhood -- Hindu (cf. *Sannyasa Upanishad*), Buddhist (cf. *Samannaphalasutta*) or Jain -- for instance, command travelling to be the chief 'marker' of the renunciant, thus distinguished from the householder or the 'laity'. Concepts of the *atithi* (contra Derrida's formulations on 'hospitality', or the Christian ethos of neighbor/brethren) -- premised on the idea of a stranger, who warrants unconditional hospitality -- and that of the *paribrajaka* or positing the Sufi-Bhakti figures as prophetic 'mad nomads' are replete in the 'pre-modern' Indian cultural repertoire, but least theorized from within the axiomatics of Indian epistemology. However, the 'colonial episteme' (cf. Bernard Cohn)

could not make sense of indigenous practices of mobilities, when viewed through 'imperial eyes' (cf. Mary Louise Pratt) and approached from the perspective of instrumental rationality. However, the anxiety around the heuristics of travel continued to reflect in certain indigenous traveling cults -- as illustrated by Rahul Sankrityayan, Indulal Yagnik and Gandhi, among others -- which would have wider ramifications for the Indian configurations of postcoloniality and modernity.

This symposium seeks to stimulate these debates by employing new methodological and epistemological tools from 'Indian' analytic traditions. It is hoped that the symposium will serve as a testing ground for 'critical thinking' as an epistemic paradigm to foreground 'an Indian way of thinking' (cf. A. K. Ramanujan) through 'travel(ing) theory'. Toward this, the symposium explores (but is not limited to) the following set of problems:

1. What are the 'Indian' textual-cultural-analytical traditions -- very broadly defined -- that engage with the discourse of traveling? What epistemic break do such cults offer? How do we make sense of their 'affordances' from within the 'Indian' philosophical traditions?
2. How does 'cultural difference' play out in such contexts? What notions of indigeneity -- both with reference to traveling practices and therioizations thereof -- does it invoke? To what extent, if at all, is this indigenization fraught with the articulation of 'alternative modernity' (c.f. D.P. Gaonker) and/or postcoloniality?
3. How do we decolonize 'travel(ing) theory'? How is this wrought with diverse meanings in the Indian context? What 'epistemic ruptures' come in the way of such decolonizing projects?

To participate in the symposium, please send a 300-word abstract and a 100-word bio-note using the link <<https://rb.gy/nlvkzs>> by 18 June 2021. Decisions on acceptance will be communicated by 25 June 2021.

For questions and clarifications, write to <avishekray@hum.nits.ac.in>.

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