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Rethinking Technology Transfer in a Colonial Milieu: Railways and Shifting Meanings of Travel in Late Colonial India*

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ABSTRACT

The article reappraises nature of technology transfer in a colonial context by underlining how the colonised mediated and shaped what was ostensibly an imposition by the imperial administration. This wider point is illustrated by demonstrating the ways in which in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, different groups of Indians used newly introduced railways to reconceptualise meanings of travel by adding new categories of travel while significantly modifying the extant ones. Crucially deviating from both 'technology as imperialism' and 'technology as subversion' historiographical paradigms, this article argues for a more nuanced appraisal of technology transfer, especially emphasising the role of users in shaping the impact of technology. Examining a diverse range of sources, viz., railway records (Annual Railway Reports and railway passenger statistics), newspaper reports and travelogues and pamphlets written by Indian railway travellers, the article claims Indians not only mediated the impact of trains on travel in late colonial India; but they shaped the outcome of this technology transfer in ways that reveals agency and remarkable involvement with a new mode of transit. In short, the article demonstrates dynamic interaction between imperial policies and responses of the colonised through the lens of technology transfer.

KEYWORDS

Technology transfer; railways; late colonial India; pilgrimage; Grand Tour; agency of the colonised

Introduction

In a poem penned in the early decades of the twentieth century, Rabindranath Tagore, the noted Indian poet described what by that time had become a popular practice, i.e. travelling by trains during vacations.[1] It is perhaps no

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*Unless stated otherwise, all translations are mine.

coincidence that Tagore associated this shift in travel habits with trains – the technology that allowed Indians to travel far and beyond with regularity. Indeed, contemporary sources indicate remarkable involvement with the new technology of transit, especially the ways in which Indians used trains to travel as well as reconceptualise meanings of travel.[2] Therefore, using Tagore's poem as a literary entry-point, this article will argue for reappraising nature of technology transfer in a colonial context by illustrating how Indians mediated and shaped the impact of railways on travel in late colonial India.[3]

Riding the Rails: Travelling in Late Colonial India

The introduction of railways in the mid-nineteenth century India was primarily to establish more efficient economic and military control over the region.[4] Consequently, when the first train rolled out from Bombay (now Mumbai) in April 1853, neither the railway promoters, nor members of colonial administration thought railway travel will be popular amongst Indians because trains were 'opposed to the present habits of the people.'[5] Such perceptions however, was proven wrong as Indians took to railway travel both instantaneously and enthusiastically. Half-a-century later, reminiscing Indian passengers' initial enthusiasm for railway travel after the introduction of trains in Eastern India, G. Huddleston, the chief superintendent of Eastern Indian Railway wrote:

> The first division of the experimental line from Howrah to Hugli was opened for passenger traffic on 15th August 1854 and a fortnight later an extension was opened to Pundooah. During the first 16 weeks no less than 109,634 passengers were carried and gross earnings (including receipts for a few tons of merchandise) were £6,792 15s, 9d or an average of £424 per week. And the board [of the Eastern Indian Railway Company] reported, "looking to the small portion of line opened, the traffic has far exceeded the most sanguine expectations; and perhaps the most gratifying feature of all is in the fact that, contrary to popular belief in the indisposition and inability of the natives to avail themselves of railway communication, by far the largest number of passengers carried has been of the third class. The following is an analysis of the traffic – first class 5,511, Second class, 21,005, Third class, 83,118.[6]

Clearly, since its introduction, railways magnified number of travellers.[7] And while travel was not unknown in pre-railways India,[8] the prospect of relatively speedier travel and an expanding railway network significantly added to the number of people who decided to travel.[9] Of this, the most noticeable increase was of those who took the trains to important Hindu pilgrimage sites such as Benaras;[10] though lesser-known pilgrimage sites too began to attract a sizeable number of pilgrims.[11] This increase in passenger number was as much a result of conscious planning of railway routes as it was due to trains making pilgrimage an all-season affair by breaking down the seasonality previously associated with the practice.[12] Given this visibility of railway passengers who were pilgrims, it is perhaps unsurprising that prevailing analyses of impact of railways

on travel in colonial India have mainly focused on pilgrimage.[13] But as the diverse range of sources examined here indicate, impact of railways on travel in late colonial South Asia was more complex than presently assumed.[14] Recent analyses of technology transfer in colonial South Asia have questioned older understanding of introduction of western technologies as 'tools of empire.'[15] Aligning with this historiographical shift,[16] this article underlines how Indians as railway users shaped the impact of a new technology of transit by conceptualising it as 'useful;' and how this perceptual shift was accompanied by an invention of new categories of travel while existing traditions (viz., pilgrimage) were significantly modified. These changes, the article argues, had wider consequences especially around issues of sectarian identity formation and nationalism in late colonial India. In short, this article underlines the crucial role of users in shaping social outcomes of technology and demonstrates how various needs and aspirations of different social groups in late colonial India mediated introduction of railways and its impact on travel in hitherto unexamined ways.[17]

Travel as Education, Steam as Tutor

Writing in 1860, the year in which direct railway connection from Calcutta to northern India was established, Jagmohan Chakrabarti, author of a Bengali travelogue noted crowded scenes at the Howrah station's third-class ticket booking counters for tickets.[18] Indicating a degree of continuity, another Bengali travelogue published in 1911 described a similar scene of passengers clamouring for tickets at a station in north India.[19] Despite the time-gap between the accounts, both authors interpreted this demand for tickets as indicative of a wider shift in peoples' perceptions of travel as an activity worth pursuing. More crucially, the authors linked this perceptual transformation to introduction of railways, claiming that since trains had made journeys shorter and faster, older notions about travel as 'time-consuming' or 'dangerous' have been replaced by a new-found appreciation.

Taken together, these perceptions alongside Tagore's poem quoted earlier indicates that in late colonial India, causal connection between practical advantages proffered by a new mode of transit and a consequent shift in perceptions towards travel was widely felt. Indeed, since the commencement of railway operations in mid-nineteenth century India, pamphlets, travelogues, and railway records underline the ways in which in trains transformed peoples' perceptions of why they travelled. For instance, a Bengali pamphlet published in 1855 claimed unlike pre-railway days, travel was 'now' regarded as safe, underlining the impact of trains in making daily commute from suburbs around Calcutta a popular practice.[20] Another Bengali pamphlet published in 1863 argued trains had made travelling safe to the point that it allowed pregnant women to travel to their natal homes for childbirth.[21] A similar pamphlet penned by the prominent Bengali intellectual Akshay Kumar Dutta argued compared with other forms of land or water transit trains were the safest.[22] Dutta's pamphlet

was perhaps an effort to allay early anxieties about railway travel amongst Indian (here Bengali) passengers.[23] But as both passenger statistics and travelogues suggest, despite concerns, trains induced a clear shift in perceptions about travel.

This shift is perhaps most noticeable in the ways in which the authors of the travelogues disassociated notion about travel from previously established Indian conventions of either 'eloquent silence' or 'explicit condemnation.'[24] Instead, travel was argued to be 'useful.' And though, none of the authors defined what 'useful' constituted; a rather useful vagueness as we will later see; the use of the word suggests an idea rather akin to education, offering possibilities of self-improvement.[25] The author of a travelogue underscored the connection by pithily noting how travelling has produced knowledge.[26] Similar thoughts were echoed by Haricharan Bandyopadhyay, a school student. His travel narrative began by noting how 'knowledge and pleasure' accrued from travelling to new places.'[27] Dharanikanta Lahiri Choudhury, author of a Bengali travelogue expounded on benefits of travel in a rather elaborate manner by noting: 'knowledge is enhanced and refined by travelling […] Acquiring new knowledge and education [through travel] diminishes arrogance and narrowness of mind. No other instructions or lessons can inscribe knowledge in our hearts more than travelling.'[28]

The authors of most of the travelogues conveyed similar thoughts, though with varying degrees of earnestness. One author argued travelling was a remedy to satiate desire for learning, seeing, and experiencing new things.[29] Another author claimed, 'without travelling it was difficult to achieve either self-realisation or progress.'[30] Some authors even chose specific audience to disseminate their experiences of 'benefits of travel'. Har Devi, the author of Hindi travelogue published the account of her travel from Lahore to London for women of Punjab who were restricted in *purdah* and could not therefore enjoy either travelling or experience its associated benefits.[31] Similar sentiments also influenced Prasannamayi Devi, the author of a Bengali travelogue, to publish her travel narrative.[32] Given such belief in travel-as-education, it is perhaps not surprising, many of these authors found the Grand Tour as a template worth emulating.[33] The Grand Tour was praised for taking generations of European youth away from the confines and comforts of home, while acquainting them with the outside world through a demanding travel schedule and imparting valuable lessons, both academic and otherwise. [34]

Clearly, as a result of ease of transit, travel in late colonial South Asia came to be thought as both 'safe' and 'useful.' This was a simultaneous move away from traditional Indian perceptions about travel and a conscious borrowing from Europe where notions about benefits of travelling on both mind and body had enjoyed an enduring presence.[35] But a closer reading of these travel-as-education prescriptions in the travelogues reveal the process was not a simple and wholesale discarding of indigenous ideas in favour of 'colonial discourse.'[36] If anything, this

reconceiving of travel as a practice that offered specific advantages show significant deviations from European notions – a discussion to which we now turn.

'Useful' Travel: from the Grand Tour to *Desh Bhraman*

> These days everyone travels for change [of air] […] Foolish me, I have little understanding of why travel for change, after all, the object of its concern [the body] will turn into ashes [after cremation].[37]

The disapproving tone of the above excerpt suggests though travel was reconceptualised as 'useful;' it also led to a hierarchisation in which some kinds of travel came to be more valued than others. Of all kinds of travel, newspapers and travelogues recommended *desh bhraman*, a new, though not altogether distinct category of travel, as the most 'useful' one.[38] *Desh bhraman* was argued to be 'useful' for two reasons: (*a*) visits to historical places was likely to trigger thoughts about the contrast between India's glorious past and gloomy present under a foreign rule; and (*b*) knowing the land and its inhabitants offered a better understanding of India, especially its vastness and the diversity. An author of a Bengali travelogue conveyed why *desh bhraman* was the most 'useful' form of travel by simply noting: 'India is an enormous book, a perusal of which should start with an acquaintance with the language of travel.'[39]

Expressing similar sentiments another author claimed *desh bhraman*, especially visits to ruins of forts and palaces demonstrated India's glorious past was a historical reality; not myth.[40] Surendranath Ray, a noted journalist claimed in his travelogue, 'desh bhraman not only satiates curiosity […] it also leads to acquiring of unlimited knowledge and experience [by visiting new places and meeting new people].'[41] Pandit Ramshankar Vyas, the author of a Hindi travelogue also thought *deshatan* was a key source of acquiring experience and knowledge. Elaborating upon the idea Vyas argued: 'as a result of this [travelling across the country], humans conveniently acquire a knowledge of the differences between different groups of people [such as] their cultures, thoughts, differences in geographical locations and so on.'[42]

Though widely peddled, especially in Bengali travelogues and newspapers,[43] *desh bhraman* however, was not the only 'useful' form of travel recommended by the authors of the travelogues. Pilgrimage came a close second, a hardly surprising choice given that pilgrimage has long been associated with a form of self-improvement.[44] But this recommendation of pilgrimage as 'useful' came with a caveat. Not all pilgrimage was regarded as 'useful.' Instead, in an ahistorical and scripturally dubious reconfiguration, pilgrimage involving leisure and pleasure was criticised as harmful.[45] For instance, noting Bengalis crowding second class reserved carriages to travel to Mathura and Ayodhya respectively, one bystander wondered: 'if pilgrimages were created for these light-hearted,

pleasure-seeking pilgrims?'[46] Travelling across pilgrim centres of Mathura and Brindavan, Surendranath Ray voiced similar sentiments: 'tirthas have now become like fetes organised by Lady Minto.'[47] These criticism of degeneration of pilgrimage however, was accompanied with an interesting formulation. The authors of the travelogues and pamphlets claimed pilgrimage in essence was an older version of *desh bhraman*, entailing travel from one pilgrim centre to another scattered across India. Baradaprasad Basu for instance, argued:

> Amongst university graduates in the West, there is a well-established practice of travelling for acquiring knowledge and experience. *It is true that we [Indians] also had a similar tradition of desh bhraman that has now fallen into disuse for a number of reasons*. […] Acquiring knowledge while on pilgrimage [desh bhraman] is a superior practice, as it also involves spiritual growth. […] Now [with trains] we can once again venture out on pilgrimage and acquire knowledge for self-improvement and for greater social good.[48]

Ghosthabihari Dhar elaborated in the following words:

> In the West, young graduates are sent away for self-improvement and progress. This custom was also prevalent in ancient India but it fell in disuse. The arrival of Hindu-hating Muslims led to the degeneration of this [useful travel] practice. […] Though travelling is useful, but by undertaking pilgrimage one also acquires spiritual progress. This [advantage of pilgrimage] was not lost on ancient Hindus as Rama, Krishna, Parshuram and later Shankaracharya and Chaitanya travelled across desh [pilgrim centres] illustrating the utility of the practice.[49]

Similar thoughts were echoed by several other authors. Indeed, in this new formulation, pilgrimage came to be redefined as an older, more spiritually satisfying form of *desh bhraman* that had been present in India since the days of Hindu mythological epics: *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. In a diatribe that conflated *desh bhraman* with *tirtha bhraman* as well as rejected the idea of travel-as-education as western in origin, Nagendra Nath Basu claimed:

> Of course, in past people were unfamiliar with how to write about bharat bhraman after crisscrossing the desh in 15 days by train. As now, then people did not go for desh bhraman to improve their selves. In those days people were usually god-fearing and had regard for religion. They also knew that activities entailing religion would also improve their body and soul. Hence, they went for desh bhraman propelled by religious spirit […] endured hardship to travel to distant pilgrimages and returned having gained both physical and moral upliftment.[50]

Crucially, authors claimed people have forgotten how travel was considered as 'useful' largely because of the Muslim interregnum. Muslim rulers, the authors argued, 'systematically erased useful tradition of travel' aka pilgrimage, thereby contributing to its degeneration. In 1855, Kalidas Moitra noted:

> The condition of roads and means of travelling described in the *puranas* is a sufficient reflection of the state of affairs [travelling] in the Hindu period. During the Muslim rule however, the roads were miserable […] and infested with bands of robbers […]

> Now with the introduction of trains, pilgrimage [travel] will be cheaper and faster and everyone will be able to travel.[51]

Others made the link even more explicit by claiming:

> In ancient times Aryan seers always travelled for pilgrimage. *Ram* and other incarnations of *Vishnu* went for pilgrimage and so did *Shankaracharya, Chaitanya and Nanak* […] But slowly time changes […] eventually Hindu hating, infidel Muslims asserted their supremacy over India. Hindu pilgrimage centres were destroyed and roads to pilgrimages became difficult to traverse due to lack of repair and presence of brigands, for all these reasons common folks were not interested in travelling anymore and pilgrimage as a custom fell into disuse except for those who wanted to abandon their domestic duties.[52]

Despite appearances, here it can argued that these pronouncements of belief in travel-as-education and blaming Muslim rule in India for disrupting a well-established practice of 'useful' travel was not an indiscriminate acceptance of colonial discourse.[53] Evidently, the authors of the travelogues and pamphlets were selectively appropriating European notions of travel-as-education, including the Grand Tour. New meanings were also added to suit Indian (here upper-caste Hindu) needs. It is perhaps not without significance that deviating significantly from the European notion of travel-as-education for self-improvement; travel, in the pages of these travelogues was mainly recommended for collective social regeneration with explicit political goals. At a related level, unlike Europe, nowhere in the pages of these travelogues an attempt was made to define 'useful.' This lack of definition, as we saw, added a vital component of flexibility allowing authors to suggest pilgrimage or *desh bhraman* or change of air or could be equally 'useful;' the latter being contingent upon context. Equally importantly, though Grand Tour was touted as model of 'useful' travel; nowhere however, does the authors suggest that travel should involve pleasure; while 'sowing wild oats' was not even mentioned, a rather significant departure from what constituted as typical behaviour from the participants of the Grand Tour.[54]

Indeed, as criticism of 'degenerate' pilgrims indicate, pleasure was particularly rejected as a part of travel-as-education, presumably because in the case of colonial India, travel was recommended for realising very different goals than Europe. That conscious departures from European notions and practices were based on an awareness of difference of India's socio-political contexts is also evident from reformulation of pilgrimage as an older form of *desh bhraman* and thus 'useful'. This reframing had little, if any basis in either early modern or modern European ideas of travel and its attendant benefits.[55] If anything, reconceptualising pilgrimage as *desh bhraman* was an attempt to add new meanings and practices to both the categories of travel – a process with wider consequences.

Technology and 'Invention of Traditions:' Reconceptualising Travel in Colonial India

Reconceptualising travel as 'useful' added a new category of travel *desh bhraman*; and modified older traditions of travel such as pilgrimage largely by ascribing an ahistorical fixity to it, while adding new meanings. This section shows that these changes had wider implications, some more visible, others less so, though equally significant. The most tangible and wider impact of this process was perhaps the creation of a new category of travel – *desh bhraman*. Clearly, both the word *desh bhraman* and the notion of it, alongside its advertised benefits were all products of the colonial encounter.[56] Inasmuch, the ways in which benefits of *desh bhraman* was celebrated in the travelogues leave us with little doubt as to why it was thought to be the most 'useful' form of travel. *Desh bhraman* was a prescription for infusing a sense of pride accrued from past glories in a colonised population, presumably to foster a sense of nation and nationalism. But the list of sites that authors these travelogues recommended as a 'must visit' to feel proud in India's past glory reveal an interesting pattern.

The places chosen were a combination of pilgrimage centres and ruins of forts and palaces scattered across northern and western India. Prominent in this list were places associated with 'glorious history' of pre-Islamic India. A discussion of what constituted *desh* in this prescription of *desh bhraman* is beyond the scope of this article. However, the choice of destinations and the accompanying descriptive notes indicate that *desh* was conceptualised as a Hindu nation – with its contours being defined by sites with a history of anti-Muslim resistance.[57] Furthermore, references to India's glorious past were almost always about pre-Muslim period and 'accomplishments' of Rajputs and Marathas – a choice suggestive of ignoring Islamic past as well as a silence on the shared historical heritage. Also, while *desh bhraman* was peddled as a means to familiarise with diverse populace of India, the authors of the travelogues made no references to Muslims, except as largely denigrated historical figures.[58] This absence of any reference to meeting Muslims even as co-passengers can be construed as a particularly significant omission if one also bears in mind that given the itinerary, the authors traversed through regions with high density of Muslim population.[59] In short, *desh bhraman* was a prescription to recover pride in a past untainted by foreign presence, with both Muslim and British conflated as equally alien, aggressive, and detrimental to India's well-being.

Given this specific understanding of India's past and conceptualising *desh* in religious terms, it is perhaps no coincidence that pilgrimage was argued to be a form of *desh bhraman*, with the added traction of ancient tradition and past usage.[60] Indeed, it can be suggested that this formulation of pilgrimage as an older form of *desh bhraman* implied that the geographical contours of *desh*

has always been a product of Hindu religion and Indians (aka Hindus) have since time immemorial conceptualised nation as an interlinked space of pilgrimage sites. That this idea of imagining *desh* as sacred geography enjoyed currency is evident from the way in which some authors described their travels interchangeably as *tirtha-yatra* or *desh bhraman* without any qualms about fusing the two. Manomohan Mitra, a Bengali playwright noted in his travelogue: 'we left Kashi and took the train for pilgrimage to Mirzapur [Bindhyachal] […] everyone [in the family] are happy to be joining me in desh bhraman.'[61] Similarly, although Surendranath Ray claimed his decision to part ways with two Bengali travellers was because his intention was *desh bhraman* while the latter were pilgrims; nonetheless, he visited prominent Hindu pilgrimages such as Benaras, Mathura and Brindavan.[62]

This, however, was not a singular instance. All authors who professed *desh bhraman* as their purpose of travel visited pilgrim sites without any qualms about their choice of destination. At a related level, authors like Ghosthabihari Dhar, Baradaprasad Basu and several other authors chose *tirtha yatra* [pilgrimage] or some versions of the word as title of the travelogues, but this did not desist them from describing their travels as *desh bhraman*. Here therefore is a significant overlap between different purposes of travel and despite a clear understanding of differences (at least of definitions), it can be suggested that for most authors a clear distinction in forms and aims of travel did not exist because pilgrimage could double as *desh bhraman*.[63] It is perhaps self-evident that notwithstanding niceties of definitions, travels aimed at regaining 'glorious Hindu past' sharpened sectarian identities in late colonial India; thus adding to growing feelings of nationalism based on narrow religious identities.[64]

Equally importantly, though not as explicitly, this railway-induced formulation of *desh bhraman* as pilgrimage or vice versa shows technology transfer was mediated by Indian agency. After all, besides anti-Muslim tirade in these travelogues, frequent references to India's 'Aryan past' also undermined claims of British civilisational superiority and by implication justification of colonial control over India.[65] Mediation by users in technology transfer is also evident in the ways in which pilgrimage came to be reformulated as an older form of *desh bhraman*. On one hand, this was a riposte to the colonial state's claims of lack of traditions of travel amongst Indians – a drawback that was often cited as an evidence of Indians' purported desire for progress. At another, reconceiving pilgrimage as more utility oriented permitted appropriation of a new mode of transit as a suitable vehicle for journeys of self-explorations of either spiritual or political variety.

This attempt to inject new moral and material meanings to pilgrimage can be interpreted as a product of reformed Hinduism – itself an offspring of the colonial administration's longstanding criticisms of Hindu rituals and practices.[66] But as religious scholars have shown, pilgrimage for Hindus has always been more of a folk tradition than textual.[67] Consequently, both enjoyment and

salvific attainment often did not have anything to do with the intention of the pilgrim.[68] Pilgrimage could therefore be conveniently repackaged as *desh bhraman* or for that matter any other form of travel and yet did not lose its ability to offer religious merit. As the evidence here shows, this flexibility of pilgrimage was not lost on the authors of the travelogues. Surely, condemnation of pleasure and discussions about degeneration of pilgrimage suggests an attempt to ascribe a scriptural perspective to an inherently flexible tradition; nevertheless, the reality of authors combining or conflating *desh bhraman* with pilgrimage suggests an awareness of how the latter remained a folk custom open to changes.[69]

Conclusion

This article has shown how a cross-section of Indians mediated the impact of introduction of railways on travel in late colonial South Asia by reconceptualising travel as 'useful,' and inventing new categories of travel while modifying extant traditions. However, as the evidence is mostly gleaned from textual sources, it will be expedient to reflect upon the possibility of a wider diffusion of these ideas. The number of people who could have read the travelogues and newspapers were not substantial. But crucial here will be to remember that in late colonial India established traditions of orality interacted with a vigorous print culture.[70] Equally importantly, the passenger statistics substantiates people travelled in trains regardless of whether they read the travelogues. In other words, the notion that trains have made travelling easier was also experienced practically by an increasingly significant number of people.[71] If one adds to this that largely due to the nature of pilgrimage, for most people (including the authors of travelogues) travelling entailed visiting different pilgrim centres while 'taking in the sights;' imagining *desh* in religious terms would not have been difficult as pilgrimages were sites in which identities were refined and information absorbed.[72]

Also, these travels and travelogues were a product of late-nineteenth and early twentieth century India, a period when politics of identity formation reached its defining moment. As such, the ideas contained in the pages of the travelogues were also available beyond the covers (both literally and metaphorically) and in all likelihood many railway travellers accessed similar ideas from different sources such as factory sites; membership of different caste or religious groups or affiliation to political parties and municipal/civic politics. Lastly, we have to consider impact of mass transit, especially railway travel on notions of identity by standardising 'what ought to be seen,' and how travel experiences were interpreted.[73] Though presently such analyses mostly focus on Europe and the USA[74]; as is evident here, in late colonial India too, railway travel shaped formation of identities, including imagining India as a Hindu nation and rejecting claims of western civilisational superiority.[75] These are as much evidence of technology transfer being mediated through

the users/colonised as they are illustrative of appropriation of a new technology for purposes beyond subversion of colonial rule. This article, therefore, argues for a reappraisal of nature of technology transfer in a colony milieu by underlining the variegated and varying role of the colonised in mediating and shaping the outcome of the process.

Notes

1. The lines referred here note: '[…] with the onset of holidays as everyone leave home to travel by trains.' R. Tagore, 'Dur,' *Sishu Bholanath* (Santiniketan, Vishwa Bharati Publications, 1922); 50. Tagore was one of the most prominent literary figures in the 20th century and the first Asian to receive Noble Prize for literature in 1913.
2. Contemporary sources include railway passenger statistics, newspaper reports in Bengali and Hindi translated in English, and travelogues in Bengali and Hindi written by Indian railway travellers. Sources are discussed in detail in the second section of the article.
3. Here India refers to pre-1947 boundaries and hence includes modern India, Pakistan and Bangladesh and late colonial is c. 1880s–1930s.
4. Railway promotional literature published in the early nineteenth century made it clear that railways in India were expected 'open' the region to utilise natural resources. For instance, C.W. Grant, *Bombay cotton and Indian Railways* (London, Longman, Brown, Green and Longman, 1850). For an accessible account of the various factors (including social progress and 'improvement') that influenced introduction of railways in colonial India, see, Kerr, *Engines of Change*. On 'opening up' see, R. Ahuja, *Pathways of Empire*.
5. Grant, *Bombay Cotton and Indian Railways*, Preface, 8.
6. Huddleston, *History of the East Indian Railway*, 29.
7. This claim based on an analysis of passenger statistics available in the 'Annual Railway Reports' that dutifully noted the rising number of passengers. Interestingly, despite the unsanitary conditions in which most Indian passengers were forced to travel, third-class passenger traffic was the mainstay of the railway revenue till early decades of the twentieth century. See, Reports to the Secretary of State for India in Council on Railways in India, in Parliamentary Papers, V/4 Series, India Office Records (hereafter IOR), British Library (hereafter BL).
8. The colonial stereotype of Indians being immobile (largely due to religious and caste prejudices) before the advent of steamboats and railroads has now been widely discredited. For a useful account providing long-term perspective on themes of mobility and circulation in South Asia see, Markovits, Pouchepadass and Subrahmanyam, *Society and Circulation*; also, Sinha, *Communication and Colonialism in Eastern India*.
9. There is consensus among historians of colonial India that trains increased the number of people who travelled. See, Kerr, *Engines of Change*; Prasad, *Tracks of Change*. The 'relative' here alludes to a recent analysis that have shown railway travel in India was not as fast and safe as claimed by the colonial administration. See, Mukhopadhyay, *Imperial Technology and 'Native' Agency*. Railway network expanded rapidly in the late 19th century and by the turn of 20th India had the fourth largest railway network in the world. See, Kerr, *Railways of the Raj, 1850–1900*.
10. Kerr, "Reworking a Popular Religious Practice"; K. Maclean, *Pilgrimage and Power*.

11. A case in point will be Bindhyachal in north India. Records of the Eastern Indian Railway Company show a clear increase in number of pilgrims to Bindhyachal after the introduction of railways in the region. See, Letter from Colonel W.E. Morton, dated 31st March 1866, Secretary to Government of North Western Provinces, Public Works Department, to the Deputy Consulting engineer, Government of Bengal, Railway department, Proceedings of the Railway Department, Government of Bengal, P/433/39, 1866 (Contd.), IOR, BL
12. Earliest railway routes were designed to overlap pre-colonial travel routes, thus connecting major centres of trade and pilgrimage. See, Minute by Lord Dalhousie to the Court of Directors, 20th April 1853 in Correspondence regarding Railway Communication in India, Microfilm No. 60, National Archives of India, New Delhi. For how railways made pilgrimage an all-season affair see, Kerr, 'Reworking a popular religious practice.'
13. Broadly speaking, impact of trains in increasing popularity of pilgrimage remains a constant theme even in most recent accounts of railways in colonial South Asia. See, Kerr, "Reworking a Popular Religious Practice."; Maclean, "Pilgrimage and Power"; Prasad, *Tracks of Change*; Chatterjee, *The Purveyors of Destiny*. A notable exception being I. Kerr, 'Representation and Representations of the Railways ". Here Kerr explores the impact of railways beyond popularising pilgrimage while noting the need for further explorations.
14. This article examines three distinct body of sources: railway records, especially passenger statistics from Annual Railway Reports; Bengali and Hindi newspaper records translated in English, and travelogues written in Bengali and Hindi by Indian railway travellers. An analysis of these sources has not only allowed crucial deviation from current historiography; but it also is a riposte to a recent claim that 'one of the prerequisites of a railway history is the 'abandonment of an excess of probity, proof or empirical data.' Chatterjee, *The Purveyors of Destiny*, 3. For details on Railway Reports see endnote 7. Travelogues used are catalogued in Blumhardt, *Catalogue of Bengali Printed Books*; *The catalogues of the Hindi,* ; IOR, BL. Indian language newspapers used here are from: Native Newspaper Reports from Bengal; and Native Newspaper Reports from North Western Provinces, V/5 Series, IOR, BL. The years consulted are 1858–1920.
15. Tools of Empire alludes to Daniel Headrick's book title; but also, to historiographical analyses that argues technology transfer in colonies was imposed from above and the role of technology was limited to advancement of colonial interests. See, Headrick, *The Tools of Empire*; Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men*. In the last decade this paradigm has been challenged by historians exploring technology transfer in colonial India. the works listed here is not exhaustive, but representative. See, Sarkar, *Technology and Rural Change*; Lahiri Chaudhuri, *Telegraphic Imperialism*.
16. Prasad, *Tracks of Change*; Chatterjee, *The Purveyors of Destiny*; Mukhopadhyay, *Imperial Technology and 'Native' Agency*. For a recent and non-South Asian study see, Karuka, *Empire's Tracks*.
17. Clive Dewey and David Arnold have interrogated and disaggregated the category of 'colonised' and have argued for technology being used for exerting power and dominance by one group(s) over others. See, Dewey, *Steamboats on the Indus*; Arnold, *Everyday Technology*. For a handy introduction to conceptualising role of users in technology see, Oudshoorn and Pinch, *How Users Matter*.
18. Chuckerbutty, "My first railway to Rajmehal".
19. Chatterjee, *Pather Katha*, 11.

20. Moitra, *Bashpiya Kal O Bharatbarshiya Railway*, 11. The claim about immediate popularity of daily commuting to and from Calcutta from nearby suburbs is substantiated by railway records.
21. Azim-al-Din, *Ki Majar Kaler Gari*, 5.
22. Dutta, *Bashpiya Upadesh*, 3.
23. Dutta's used 'various English sources' to write the pamphlet. Notably, in England and other parts of Europe anxieties about railway travel and concerns about physical safety was common. in the initial years of railway operations. As such, such concerns are not uniquely associated with the colonised. See, Schivelbusch, The *Railway Journey*; also, Bradley, *The Railways*.
24. For a discussion of how Hindu tradition did not attach much significance to travel, except for pilgrimage, see, Sen, *Travels to Europe*, 2; Mukhopadhyay, "Writing Home, Writing Travel". Perhaps it is not insignificant that in Mahabharata, the Hindu mythological epic, Yudhishthira defines a happy man as someone who did not have to travel or leave his home. See, *Vana Parva* [The Forest Episode], *The Mahabharata of Krishna-Dwaipayana Vyasa*, English Translation by K.M. Ganguly (Calcutta, Bharata Press, 1896).
25. The notion of 'useful' in the travelogues is most likely a product of school and university curriculum that was infused with the idea of improvement. Although (despite appearance) this may not indicate an uncritical acceptance of a European idea; see Mukhopadhyay, "Colonized Gaze?. For 'useful,' see, Ahmed, *What's the Use?*.
26. Gangopadhyay, *Vividha Darshan Kavya*
27. Bandyopadhyay, *Bhraman Vrittanta*.
28. Lahiri Choudhury, *Bharat Bhraman*.
29. Sengupta, *Bharat Bhraman*.
30. Dhar, *Sachitra Tirtha Yatra Vivaran*, 20.
31. Devi, *London ki Yatra*, 1. *Purdah* is the practice of covering face and head common amongst women in South Asia.
32. Devi, *Aryavarta: Janoiko Banga Mahilar Bhraman Kahini*, 2. For a discussion on how travel and travel writing offered a distinct intellectual space to women see, Sen, *Travels to Europe*; Bassnett, "Travel Writing and Gender".
33. Here Grand Tour refers to the 17th-18th century tradition of young Europeans (mostly British) travelling across Italy and France. See, Colletta, *The Legacy of the Grand Tour*. Both Baradaprasad Basu and Gostha Bihari Dhar identified the Grand Tour has having contributed to training of knowledge of self and the world amongst western youths. Basu, 'Tirtha Darshan'; Dhar, 'Sachitra Tirtha'; and P.C. Basu, *A Journey through Upper India* (Calcutta, 1887), in Travel Accounts/Narrative Tracts, Volume 696, IOR, BL.
34. The 'gains' the authors claimed accrued from travel included acquiring knowledge about how different groups of people living in different parts of India and experiencing India's past by travelling to places of historical significance.
35. In Europe the intellectual and other benefits of travel have been acknowledged since the Classical period. Though in the Middle Ages (and in other periods) the impact of physical travel and its attendant benefits on individuals were questioned; by the early modern period travel once again came to be acknowledged as a useful pursuit, with the eventual establishment of the practice of the Grand Tour as the epitome of belief in educative benefits of travel. There is wide and diverse literature on the theme of benefits of travel in European intellectual tradition, here however, listed are those ones I have widely used. Abbeele, *Travel as Metaphor*; Legassie, *The*

Medieval Invention of Travel; Hulme and Youngs*The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*; Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy*; Colletta, *The Legacy of the Grand Tour*.

36. Colonial discourse can be described as a discursive regime of knowledge created by colonial administrations to rule over the minds and bodies of the colonised. See, Young, *Postcolonialism*, 385.
37. L. M. Moitra, *Tirtha Yatra Vivaran* [Accounts of pilgrimage] (Rajshahi, Publisher Unknown, 1909); 23.
38. The word *desh bhraman* can be translated as 'travels around the nation.' Though never precisely defined in the travelogues, the usage however, suggests *desh bhraman* was understood as a form of travel that entailed travelling across the nation (*desh*); meeting people living in different parts of desh and visiting places of historical importance. The claim that *desh bhraman* was not a distinct category of travel will be discussed in the following section.
39. Lahiri Choudhury, *Bharat Bhraman*, Introduction (unpaginated).
40. Devi, *Aryavarta*, 84.
41. Ray, *Uttar Paschim Bhraman*.
42. Vyas, *Paribhraman*. *Deshatan* is a compound of two Hindi words: *desh* (land/nation) and *paryatan* (travel). The use of the word shows that the idea was circulating in the Hind-speaking world, though possibly not as much as in Bengal. This claim is based on the comparison between the appearance of the word desh bhraman (or words similar in meaning) being more frequent in Bengali than in the Hindi travelogues and newspapers.
43. For an analysis of Hindi travelogues see, Bury, "Novel Spaces, Transitional Moments".
44. There is a voluminous literature on benefits of pilgrimage both for South Asia and beyond. For an accessible account of popularity of pilgrimage in the western world see, Norman, *Spiritual Tourism*. For South Asia, see, Jacobsen, *Brill's Encyclopaedia of Hinduism*; Bhardwaj, *Hindu Places of Pilgrimage in India*; Jacobsen, *Pilgrimage in the Hindu Tradition*.
45. Perhaps one can think of criticising railways as more of a literary trope to underline how pilgrimage (both journey and practice) used to be more 'virtuous', before the onset of various forms of westernisation. The idea of this complaint being a trope is also substantiated by a wide consensus amongst scholars of Hindu religion and pilgrimage about how the latter has always involved degrees of non-religious component. In other words, pilgrimage did not suddenly degenerate in the late-nineteenth century India. At a related level, the blame that railways somehow degenerated pilgrimage by easing the journey is contestable also because in Hindu pilgrimage traditions the emphasis is not on the journey, but on the sites and their salvific powers. See, Jacobsen, *Pilgrimage in the Hindu Tradition*, 146–7. For discussions on how Hindu pilgrimage was always more than acquiring religious merit see Glushkova, "Moving God(s)ward, Calculating Money; Bharati, "Pilgrimage in the Indian Tradition",. The mix between religious and non-religious is however, not confined to Hinduism. See, Norman, 'Spiritual Tourism', Stausberg, *Religion and Tourism*.
46. Bose, *Professor Bose'r Apurva Bhraman Vrittanta*. Both Mathura and Ayodhya were/are prominent Hindu pilgrimage sites.
47. Ray, *Uttar Paschim*, 76. *Tirtha* or pilgrimage literally means 'a ford' thus underlining the transition to spiritual. Jacobsen, *Brill's Encyclopaedia of Hinduism*, 383.
48. Basu, "Tirtha Darshan", 56.
49. Dhar, "Tirtha Bhraman", Volume. V, 22.

50. Sen, *Tirtha Mangal*, Introduction, unpaginated.
51. Moitra, *Bashpiya Kal*, 45.
52. Basu, "Tirtha Darshan", 63.
53. In historiography of colonial India there is a lively (and ongoing debate) about the impact of western ideas, especially through education on the minds of colonised. This vast literature cannot be referenced here; though for two divergent views on the diffusion of western knowledge and its impact, see, Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest*; and Rao, *Beyond Macaulay*. The role of British in creating and abetting sectarian differences in colonial India is also a contentious subject with a vast literature. For two different views on role of colonial state see, Bayly, "The Pre-History of 'Communalism", Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism*.
54. Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy*; Chaney, *The Evolution of the Grand Tour*.
55. In the pre-modern and modern period, the European idea of 'beneficial travel' precluded pilgrimage and emphasised acquiring secular knowledge. See, Legassie, 'The Medieval Invention of Travel.'
56. This is not to suggest there was no pre-colonial idea of territorial belonging. This is to argue desh bhraman was a product of British political control over India and reflects western ideas of nation and nationalism were being incorporated and used in a different context. For pre-colonial notions of patriotism see, Bayly, *Origins of Nationality in South Asia*, Ray, *The Felt Community*. For two diverging accounts of 'western' ideas of nation and nationalism on Indian nationalism see, Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*; Bayly, *Recovering Liberties*.
57. The itinerary centred around Rajasthan, Central India, and Western India – places associated with Marathas and Rajputs – two groups with long traditions of resisting Muslim rule. Scholars have shown by the late 19th and early 20th centuries India was increasingly being imagined as a Hindu nation. None of these analyses, however, frame it within the railway induced ability to travel. See, Goswami, *Producing India*; Banerjee and Basu, "Secularizing the Sacred, Imagining the Nation Space"; Banerjee and Basu, "The City as a Nation".
58. Mughal emperor Akbar was the only redeeming figure amongst Muslim rulers of India. As for meeting Muslims as co-passengers, there is only reference to it in a Bengali travelogue in which the author admits closing the doors of the carriage in which he was travelling to keep out 'garlic and meat-eating Muslims.' See, Shastri, *Dakshinapath Bhraman*.
59. This included modern states of West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan in India.
60. For an interpretation of such sentiments from the perspective of history of religion see, D.L. Eck, "The Imagined Landscape: Patterns in the Construction of Hindu Sacred Geography", Das, Gupta and Uberoi, *Tradition, Pluralism and Identity*; Jacobsen, *Brill's Encyclopaedia of Hinduism*, 382.
61. Basu, *Manomohan Basu-r aprokashito diary*.
62. Ray, *Uttar-Paschim*, 77–8.
63. This interpretation of *desh bhraman* as a new category of travel, though no means a distinct is different from Kumkum Chatterjee's analysis. Chatterjee argues that though slippages occurred, the authors of the travelogues 'established a distinction between travel-as-pilgrimage and travel-as-nationalism', see, Chatterjee, "Discovering India", 192–227. For this specific reference, see, p-205.
64. There is a broad consensus that sectarian differences magnified in late 19th century India and provided a basis for imagining India's political future on basis of religious identity. For representative samples from this vast literature see, Chatterji, *Bengal*

Divided; Gould, *Hindu Nationalism and the Language of Politics in Late Colonial India*.

65. For a discussion of how Indian appropriated and used the concept of Aryan from Orientalist scholars see, Ballantyne, *Orientalism and Race*.
66. Here too, the literature is vast; for an accessible account see, Sen, *Social and Religious Reform*.
67. Jacobsen, *Pilgrimage in the Hindu Tradition*, 18. For a dated though still useful discussion on how colonial control over India was justified in often confusing and contradictory ways see, Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*.
68. Jacobsen, *Brill's Encyclopaedia of Hinduism*, 388.
69. For a discussion of the advantages of pilgrimage as a source of both salvation and religious merit see Jacobsen, *Brill's Encyclopaedia of Hinduism*, 391–392; Flood, *The Oxford History of Hinduism*. On how pilgrimage continues to be redefined see, Jaffrelot, 'The Hindu Nationalist Reinterpretation Of Pilgrimage in India". Recently, Knut Auckland's work has shown how government of India is promoting pilgrimage and swadesh darshan (a variant of desh bhraman) through railway travel. See, Aukland, "Krishna's Curse in the Age of Global Tourism". For this specific reference see page 1947. There is little doubt that associating a word like *darshan* with its unambiguous religious connotations with 'seeing' the nation is suggestive of a continuation of the idea of desh bhraman as pilgrimage albeit with new labels.
70. Ghosh, "'An Uncertain "Coming of the Book"; Pecchia, Buss, and Chudal, "Print Cultures in the Making"; Orsini, *History of the Book in South Asia*. Chris Bayly argued pre-colonial and colonial India was a 'literary aware society' where spread of information and ideas should not be gauged by levels of literacy but oral transmission of information. Bayly, *Empire and Information*.
71. Relevant here will be to note that railway companies in late colonial India used advertisements in stations and other prominent sites to lure tourists. See, Mukhopadhyay, "Colonized Gaze?".
72. Pilgrimage centres have been shown to be spaces/sites where political ideas, especially notions of religious affiliation as a basis of national identity were diffused. See, Maclean, *Pilgrimage and Power*; Van der Veer, *Gods on Earth*; Deshpande, "Hegemonic Spatial Strategies"; Karve, "On the Road".
73. Koshar, *German Travel Culture; and From Monuments to Traces*; Kosher, "What Ought to Be Seen"; Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*.
74. For a recent analysis of links between wandering and national identity see, A. C. Kinzer, Wandering: On the development of a literary motif in European literature during the long 19th century,' Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Kent, UK, 2020.
75. Though not many, but some recent studies have underlined impact of trains on standardising travel itineraries and in creating a 'template' of interpreting travel experiences even in colonial India. See, Sinha, 'Communications and Colonialism'; Mukhopadhyay, 'Colonised Gaze?'.

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