



Tracking Modernity: India's Railway and the Culture of Mobility

Marian Aguiar

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From Mohandas Gandhi's nineteenth-century tour in a third-class compartment to the recent cinematic shenanigans of Wes Anderson's *The Darjeeling Limited*, the railway has been one of India's most potent emblems of modern life. In the first in-depth analysis of representations of the Indian railway, Marian Aguiar interprets modernity through the legacy of this transformative technology.

Since the colonial period in India, the railway has been idealized as a rational utopia—a moving box in which racial and class differences might be amalgamated under a civic, secular, and public order. Aguiar charts this powerful image into the postcolonial period, showing how the culture of mobility exposes this symbol of reason as surprisingly dynamic and productive. Looking in turn at the partition of India, labor relations, rituals of travel, works of literature and film, visual culture, and the Mumbai train bombings of 2006, Aguiar finds incongruities she terms “counternarratives of modernity” to signify how they work both with and against the dominant rhetoric. Revealing railways as a microcosm of tensions within Indian culture, Aguiar demonstrates how their representations have challenged prevailing ideas of modernity.

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