

Integrating Feminist Digital Narratives of Travel into Literature Pedagogy

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Abstract

This study critically evaluates the intersection of travel writing and digital media by investigating women's travel blogs as a pedagogical tool in the evolving literary landscape. Travel blogs, as digital texts, can be considered as an emerging genre in feminist digital humanities, critically engaging with issues like gender dynamics, cultural negotiation, and narrative agency. By integrating these digital narratives into the curriculum, educators can promote critical discussions about representation, accessibility, and intersectionality, fostering interdisciplinary engagement among learners. This paper further examines the role of travel blogs authored by women through the lens of disability highlighting how travel writing in the cyber space renegotiates notions of ability, mobility and visibility while highlighting entrepreneurial opportunities in electronic publishing. By engaging with these trajectories, literature classrooms become spaces for innovation and critical reflection, contributing to feminist discourse in a globalized world while addressing themes of empowerment, marginality, and inclusivity across digital and physical landscapes.

Keywords: Digital narratives, travel blogs, identity, representation, feminist pedagogy

Introduction

The future of Indian education is at crossroads between theoretical foundations and electronic advancements. With technological methodologies like blended learning and flipped classroom programme,

education is at constant efforts to maximize the effectiveness of learning experiences. The role of the teacher will also evolve into that of an intermediary, a supervisor, who will engage, regulate and maintain a stimulating and reciprocative association between digital learning and traditional teaching. The self-blend model, containing massive open online courses and flexible-model courses focuses significantly upon learner centricity through multi-disciplinary and multi-modal approaches established through innovative technologies like the virtual lab and robotics catering to UG, PG and research scholars. Furthermore, with ICT (Information and Communication Technology) tools for collaborative comprehension, accompanied with user-generated tools like blogging, mind mapping and comprehensive digital platforms that enables videos, images and hyperlinks, will deliver a project-based thematic understanding of complex subjects, creating a conducive learning environment (UGC, 2021).

This research paper focuses on the transformative potential of feminist pedagogy in literary education and research empowering learners to explore themes of identity and representation in the cyberspace, fostering a deeper understanding of gender-related issues in digital literature. The fourth-wave of feminism which began in the early 2010s is characterized by a focus on autonomy, intersectionality, and the use of internet tools for activism, building a bridge between the digital age and addressing the unique challenges of contemporary society. This wave highlights the importance of digital pedagogy and research, addressing how technology shapes discourse and representation with feminist themes (Mohajan, 2022). By using digital tools and platforms, fourth-wave feminism not only expands the reach of feminist literature but also fosters critical analysis and collaboration among research scholars and students, creating a dynamic literary landscape that reflects the complexities of modern identity and intersectionality.

Within the framework of literary studies, women's travel literature, particularly presented through digital narratives and travel blogs, serve as a crucial lens to examine different aspects of self-representation, offering new perspectives on the lived experiences of marginalized communities. Contemplating on travel writing as a pedagogical tool acknowledges the gravity of changing trends in English literature with the surfacing of women's digital writing as new narratives of ability and resilience. Feminist pedagogy combined with digital technology

not only enhances a more interactive and reflective learning process but also prepares students to navigate and influence the rapidly evolving digital landscape. While existing literature often examines travel experiences from a gendered perspective, it frequently overlooks how women use digital storytelling to balance financial independence with the psychological benefits of travel. Moreover, there is a notable lack of study exploring the community-building aspects of women's travel blogs and their role in supporting cyber-networks that promote both financial literacy and mental health awareness among female travellers. Addressing these gaps can provide valuable insights into the intersection of gender, travel, and digital media.

Women travelling solo and cataloguing their journeys into episodic structures is an electronic feature of blogging which transcends time and reality to a great extent. This fluidity permits real-time interaction between the author and reader, surpassing the conventional standards of communication which adheres to tempo-spatial constraints. But the origin and escalation of women's travel blogs remains a modern phenomenon, indicating the growth of popular media and platform economy—the developing facets of digital technology. Recent travel reports verify a growing tendency among diverse women backpackers and solo travellers of quitting their corporate or IT jobs to pursue their passion for travelling (Middha, 2018). This tendency has given rise to a community of solo female travellers who are challenging monotonous social and economic structures renegotiating employment, personal agency, and liberty. What remains a notable factor is the capability of such female travellers to earn recognition, garner readership, and generate employment for themselves through travel blogging. Travel blogging itself is multidimensional, encapsulating various aspects such as travel photography, travel journalism, travel planning, etc., each holding its own value in the tourism market. The expanding role of content creators and social media influencers within the travel industry has created greater autonomy and representation for women bringing forth a fusion of information and entertainment related to travel.

Travel with Lakshmi: Promoting Cultural Sensitivity Towards Indigenous Practices

In this era of digital reality, travel writing has transmorphed into digital travel writing and the custom of maintaining a personal diary has transitioned to the virtual space, substituting the journal for a website.

Each narratorial record is recognized as a 'post', depicted in a reverse chronological order (Barney, 2022), and the legible substance, called content, becomes a gateway for making monetary income through sponsorships, affiliate marketing, private advertising, and by selling commercial products and expertise (Perkins, 2024). Lakshmi Sharath, author of the travel blog *Travel with Lakshmi*, has travelled more than 25 countries and is considered among the 'top travel-bloggers' and digital media influencers in the country (Sharath, n.d.-a). She's a full-time blogger since 2005 and has travelled extensively narrating her travel encounters under the section *100 Stories of India*. Focusing on the rural and cultural aspects of travel, that is often portrayed as a secondary or temporary obligation in commercial travel blogs that highlights luxury and fast travel, Sharath's posts contemplates on traditional aspects of travel. Her journeys resemble *travel consciousness* and community interaction which is regarded as a crucial factor for distinguishing the roles between the tourist and the traveller. Her narrative style, personal yet objective, ascribes her as a 'travellee'— a subject with an agency in travel writing.

From the post-colonial perspective, in modern travel writing, the narrator or the travellee writes from an objective standpoint not simply observing but also engaging, learning, and sometimes influencing the local culture. Such digital writing then assumes the traits of "counter-travelogues", critiquing commodified and voyeuristic approaches with the digitization of travel attempting a wholesome experience from the real to the virtual world. This interaction induces a multifaceted perception of "others" differentiating from people, experiences, artefacts and even the natural surroundings, contributing to a rich, diverse and immersive involvement. The travelling self acknowledges the presence of "others" manifesting as "locals" in travel texts and locating oneself in their historical and socio-cultural context (Tarkka & Martin, 2023).

Sharath's recent blog post describes the weavers' community of Gopalpur, a remote village in Odisha, known for weaving tussar silk which even has a Geographical Index (GI). Woven into fabric through traditional handlooms, this wild silk stands as a testament of India's rich textile history and cultural heritage, reflecting the craftsmanship and artistry of the weavers. Additionally, Sharath also pens her introduction to an indigenous musical instrument native to that place called *Kendera*, an instrument made from coconut shells, bamboo, and the skin of a

monitor lizard. She proceeds to her next story depicting the craftswomen of Antia region, who weaves a yellow and golden dried grass that grows even up to 5-6 feet on river banks called *Kaincha*. Women then split the dried grass evenly, sometimes with their teeth and then use their deft fingers to intertwine them and weave them into crafts like mats, baskets, trays, coasters and even small boxes (Sharath, n.d.-b). In another blog article she writes about the historic *Gotipua* dance, a ritual previously performed at the Jagannath Puri temple. Practised solely in Raghurajpur, a small village in Puri, Odisha, the words 'goti' means single and 'pua' means boy. The young boys perform as a group and had to master both singing and dancing besides being adept at playing musical instruments. Dressed like women with jewellery especially designed for them, the Gotipua dancers were considered the feminine companions of Lord Krishna in his childhood (Sharath, n.d.-c).

These ancient and revered aspects of India's ancient history and folk-culture are rarely a matter of interest when observed from the native's point of view. Travel writing does not only provide a medium of representation of ideas, concepts, and codes within a cultural discourse but digital platforms like travel blogs also produce virtual narratives for the representation of the 'other' in its totality. Travel blogs transform into an element of literary culture that exhibits a regenerative creative process that produces an open semantic discourse through which meaning is created, transferred and transformed across periods, genres, texts and cultures. The NEP (2020) further encourages inculcating Indigenous Traditional Knowledge (ITK) and the integration of traditional and folk knowledge into the current education system. The Indianization of the country's education and knowledge system requires an effective and restructured curriculum and pedagogy that can make teaching and learning interesting and relatable, ultimately rooted in Indian ethos and context. Indigenous Traditional Knowledge (ITK) captures the traditional, technological, social, economic, and philosophical wisdom of a particular society. It advocates mental abilities, customs, and ways of living in harmony with nature. ITK spans over a diverse array of subjects, including agriculture, law, mathematics, psychology, sustainability, and health (Singh & Patangia, 2023). Sharath's *100 Stories of India*, situates travel writing as a significant learning tool propagating and incorporating local knowledge which leads to a better understanding of the evolution of the community, society, and country. Women's travel

blogs can bring a new area of introspection by not only highlighting women's growth by challenging conventional notions of mobility and liberty but also in agency and capability of representing women-centric communities at the grass-root level.

The Shooting Star: Promoting Climate Literacy through Sustainable Travel

The blog, *The Shooting Star*, by Shivya Nath, who is considered to be the first digital nomad and one of the most popular solo travellers in India, promotes sustainable travel that supports local communities and minimizes environmental impacts. After signing the Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in tourism in 2021, she *pledged* to keep track of her carbon footprint through 2022. She also developed a strategy to measure her aviation carbon footprint to balance the impact of her air travel and collaborate with the tourism industry to advocate climate action (Nath, 2025a). Carbon footprint refers to emission of greenhouse gases (GHGs) by an individual, organization or product. Travel by air remains the biggest contributor of carbon footprint with the accommodation sector trailing behind. Her article, "How Farmers in Haryana Are Using Technology in the Face of Climate Change" (2024), tackles the issue of agricultural harvest, subsidy, air pollution and climate change and sheds light on potential uses of digital literacy and connectivity. She focuses on zero tillage farming and climate smart grains alongside the use of "Happy Seeders", a unique device that collects rice stalks as mulch, while simultaneously sowing wheat seeds, allowing for healthier soil and cleaner air. The policy offers 80 per cent subsidy and is extremely effective in stopping crop burning in Chandigarh and Haryana that leads to severe air pollution in Delhi (Nath, 2024). With attempts to present the 'ground reality', her blog depicts a different perspective to travel writing, embodying a responsibility that embraces a sustainable approach to travel.

In another article, the blogger's revelations about community tourism provide a fresh viewpoint on how the rural setup can play a part in tourism and benefit from it as well. Local tourism empowers regional and indigenous communities to control mainstream tourism and natural resources while preserving their cultural integrity. It creates climate resilience and alternative employment for women allowing them to work while balancing domestic responsibilities. A significant portion

of the income generated is invested for the community well-being and education (Nath, 2025b). Community Based Tourism (CBT) concentrates on local communities unlike commercial tourism which is a tourist centred enterprise. Such approaches help to minimise the consumerist nature of business tourism. Places are not understood as genuine entities with borders but are rather treated as commodities interconnected with people through various systems shaped by performances happening within and around those locations.

The inescapable and prevalent cultures of sharing and co-creation have compelled travellers and internet users to become active participants in the visual production and consumption of virtual destinations influenced by mass media (Siegel et al., 2022). Women through travelling and digital literacy have created a space for themselves in the real and virtual world and have been able to penetrate spaces and places otherwise considered unsuitable or irrelevant from a gendered perspective. By assimilating travel writing as a part of English literature pedagogy, an interdisciplinary course can be formed that promotes critical thinking, empathy and activism among students. Shivya Nath's exploration and Lakshmi Sharath's documentation underscores the inadequate representation of marginalised communities in the face of environmental and socio-economic challenges. These narratives emphasize the intersection of heritage, sustainability and gendered labour demonstrating how marginalized groups preserve their livelihoods and cultural identities in face of modern challenges. Women's travel writing proposes rich opportunities for pedagogy, and if effectively integrated into a structured academic framework can provide meaningful exposure to various global experiences. This initiative will not only diversify the literary canon but will also equip learners with critical tools to analyze the intersection of culture, gender, and environmental sustainability.

Wheels and Wonders: Disability, Identity, and the Rise of Entrepreneurial Voices

Tori Hunter, the disabled travel blogger and content creator from Canada, garnered attention when she was recorded on camera getting disembarked from an airplane while strapped to a wheelchair. Living with Spinal Muscular Atrophy, the 26-year-old traveller expressed her terrifying experience as she was seen being carried down the aisle with the help of staff and her father holding her head to prevent injury

(Morris, 2024). This incident prompted her to advocate for improved accessibility and scrutiny of travel protocols for disabled passengers. Her blog, *Tori Hunter* addresses inaccessibility in air travel for disabled people, and voices for an inclusive space that recognizes disabled travellers as valuable participants in the travel industry. Interestingly, the blog represents more on wheelchair mobility and lifestyle, and attempts to create awareness about access and rights to spaces. As a young adult with disability, the blog attempts to debunk the myth of able-bodiedness, both mental and physical. Her article on exploring Banff, a town in Canada, is based on accessible vacation on a wheelchair that signifies visibility and practicality. Maintaining a distinction from infomercial travel writing that accentuates attractive travel destinations and luxury accommodations, her post narrates her journey above the 2,292 feet Sulphur Mountain through the Banff cable-car or gondola (Hlacey, 2020). It is ironical that destinations like mountaintops in Banff prioritise wheelchair convenience while airports struggle to meet basic accessibility standards. Another post in the blog mentions her wheelchair-friendly hike in the Myra Canyon of British Columbia in Canada, which she claims as the most accessible hike for wheelchair users, despite being located 1,280 metres above sea level (Hlacey, 2023). Tori's articles contain hyperlinks that endorse affiliate marketing and seek sponsorships but her blog also consists of a "Work With Me" section which invites collaboration, particularly with brands and organizations that aligns with her priority of inclusivity and accessibility for disabled passengers. Through social media promotion, accessibility consultancy, and user generated content, she has occupied space within the travel industry as a professional travel writer and blogger (Hlacey, n.d.). Combining storytelling with entrepreneurial skills, travellers with disabilities are transforming their lived experiences into marketable expertise by using travel writing in the digital landscape.

Renee Bruns, a wheelchair bound solo traveller, has visited 124 countries and holds the Guinness World Record for the "most countries visited in one year using a wheelchair" (Bruns, n.d.-a). Diagnosed with diastrophic dwarfism—a genetic disorder that affects bone and cartilage development, Bruns has visited 66 countries in a single year, solo, without any medical assistant or help. Her narratives stress the emotional connections formed through travel, highlighting moments of kindness and a sense of belonging overcoming societal perceptions.

This theme is particularly poignant in her writing emphasizing the importance of communication in these interactions (Hardingham-Gill, 2023). Beyond travelling, travel writing has enabled Bruns to adopt multifaceted roles and amass extensive media coverage in the virtual realm. The webpage *Press* on her website *Renee Bruns*, features a diverse range of content, categorized under labels such as prints, podcasts and videos that demonstrates her travel experiences thus expanding her reach to auditory and visual audience (Bruns, n.d.-b).

Through her curated travel content and media presence, Bruns' personality has transformed beyond that of a digital figure transcending limitations often imposed by disability and gendered subjectivities. Her virtual identity as a life coach, motivational speaker, and travel consultant validates the impact of digital economy in altering the landscape of cultural and material consumption, making it more diverse, accessible and specific to individual needs.

Ding and Chai (2022) in their article, "The Rise of Digital Capitalism and the Social Changes it Caused", write about how digital economy "stimulates workers' adaptability and ability to develop and market personal skills, increases the possibility of high remuneration and reduces the risk of complete unemployment". The digital economy uses information and technical skills to create content using ICT and other applications, distribute it through various platforms and services, aiming to share such content and data for public consumption. Similarly, travel blogs capitalize on information and data to create economic opportunities where women explorers and travel content creators exercise control and freedom in the cyber space. Digital travel narratives, such as those created by Tori Hunter and Renee Bruns provide several critical and theoretical insights particularly in areas of feminist digital humanities, disability studies, and cultural studies. These narratives by disabled female travel writers contend the body as a site of both challenge and empowerment. By navigating their experiences through the lens of digital writing, these anecdotes illustrate a perception at the convergence of identity, mobility and accessibility simultaneously engaging students with themes such as intersectionality, narrative agency, and the ethics of representation. These digital stories profess inter-abled depiction and professional empowerment within the growing information economy redefining the roles of a traveller and author. Digital media's role in academic and cultural discourse can implore questions on how different

cultures perceive gendered disability proposing a critical reassessment of how bodies are perceived in both public and private spaces.

Conclusion

Feminist digital travel narratives manifest the self through writing in the blogosphere, instituting this digital feminist discourse as a new movement in the cyberworld. The digitization of travel writing establishes an 'interstitial space', a 'third body' in which female travel writers can assert merit and self-expression which remains independent from the Symbolic Order. Rather than following a singular or linear writing structure, these narratives display an abstract and pluralistic undertone indicative of a counter space, the 'Otherness', defying the masculinist structure of language (Chakraborty, 2013). Travel writing, reshaped through the digital medium of travel blogs, becomes instrumental in representation of identity, claimed and assumed, in the virtual landscape, thus challenging traditional stereotypes of marginality, disability and gender. The internet then becomes a non-traditional, ungendered space, a spatial construct which allows women to (re)claim, and navigate selfhood through writing, or, in this case, blogging, as a matter of gender performativity (Azariah, 2016).

The major advantage that travel blogs bring forth when incorporated in higher studies for research scholars and students is openness and originality, promoting a firsthand experiential narrative of women's lived experiences, which remains underrepresented in Indian education and higher studies. As digital tools facilitate new ways of interaction with texts, a new discourse can be sought which will be transparent and fluid, surpassing barriers of language, structure and style. Digital humanism, by employing computing tools and methods to analyze, visualize, and disseminate literary texts can cultivate crucial discussions about the role of technology in shaping narratives and literary discourse. Digital reading, writing, and practices have evolved through the development of interactive e-books, online discussions, and multimedia resources. Furthermore, posthumanist perspectives challenge traditional notions of authorship and agency, inviting students to consider the relationships between humans, technology, and the environment as integral to literary comprehension. Visualisation, undoubtedly, remains a dominant cause and effect for implementing digital technology in literary studies. This development will promote a holistic and dynamic approach to literature,

motivating students to explore diverse voices and narratives while negotiating the intricacies of modern existence.

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