

RAIL CANVAZ

A TrainTrackers' Initiative

January 2026



When Empathy Meets Dignity

Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam had said, “*Dream, dream, dream. Dreams transform into thoughts and thoughts result in action.*”

How many of us dream? All of us! But how many of us dream for the upliftment of others? And how many of us think of transforming those dreams to change the life of others? Well, the answer is ‘a select few’ in this world of cynosure and scepticism. Sudhanshu Mani, better known as the VB Man of India, definitely can be counted amongst one of those select few as his contribution to our national carrier goes far beyond his achievement of crafting the Vande Bharats. This issue of Rail Canvaz explores the other side or the humane side of this towering personality as the protagonist himself writes about his unique strive that eventually got transformed into a unique feat. During his days as the Divisional Railway Manager of Bangalore Division under the SWR, Mr. Mani did undertake something exemplary.

What impression our mind gives once we come across a ‘Coolie’. Perhaps a species relegated to the edges of a developing society who earns his bread by bearing the burden of carrying your baggage across the railway stations, mostly in a clumsy and graceless manner. The term ‘coolie’ itself is ignominious enough, unfortunately widespread as well, over ‘Railway Porters’. The reel world might portray them differently by giving the class a fillip of the glamour quotient but the real world gives a visually different treatment which is no less than mortifying. Reality is often harsh and hits one hard. No one including the railway authorities did ever think about changing their ways of life or at least their modus operandi until one Sudhanshu Mani considered something out of the box. One needs empathy rather than sympathy to change the course of someone’s life and that’s exactly what Mr. Mani had done. Thus, ‘*When Empathy Meets Dignity – A story of Railway Porters*’ by **Sudhanshu Mani**, is our Cover Story which makes one relate with the present scenario of the porters approaching passengers with airport-style baggage carts in most of the railway stations.

We now toggle from the VB Man of India to the Waterman of Indian Railways – **Ajay Singh**. A Mechanical Engineer by profession, who served Indian Railways (IR) for 34 years, has been on a mission for optimal use and reuse of water within the ambit of IR. The *Hubli Golf Course water self-sufficiency project* speaks volumes about the success story of the initiative that paved way for many more inventiveness and keeps sensitising the next generation about the importance of water in our daily lives. This is another strive that upholds a less explored aspect of our national carrier.

Next up, we have two interesting and contrasting articles on the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway (DHR) – one by **Paul Whittle** and another by **Joydeep Dutta**. Paul Whittle’s article explores the lost flank of DHR in *Tracks along the Teesta* while Joydeep Dutta’s writeup reminiscences about ‘*The town station and a mysterious line*’. The two articles tell stories of the heritage railway across different timelines. The name Darjeeling is not confined to the DHR only; Indian Railways has a train named after this hill station as well – the Darjeeling Mail. **Anamitra Ghatak** looks back at the history of this historical service across decades in *Darjeeling Mail – through the twists and turns of re-routing*. The anecdotes simply keep the reader glued to the history of this train of antiquity.

The ‘recollection’ phase is not exactly over as **Jakob Stilling** and **Mick Pope** write home about their respective experiences and encounters with the steam behemoths of Indian Railways. Stilling’s account ‘*Capital Steam*’ is the fourth and final chapter of his 1993 travel journal where as Mick Pope pens the final instalment of *A Narrow Gauge Ensemble from 1980*. Both the articles remind the readers about those days of yore when ‘Steam Power’ used to propel railways across the nation. **Kunal Gupta** takes the genre forward with the second part of *My Childhood Train Journeys* recalling from his own juvenescence.

Shifting gears, we move onto our Technical Insight section by **Anamitra Bose** which is lit up by the technical specs of the WAG5 Class of locomotive which is often touted as *The Classic Unicorn of Freight Locomotive* of the nation in the AC Electric segment as these locomotives were once the mainstays of goods transportation. The technical nitty-gritty gives way to *Railfanning in the abode of Chinars* – a travelogue based on the formative years of the railways in the Kashmir valley by **Arbab Acharya**.

After all these articles defining different eras with varying tastes and aspects of IR, we turn our focus on two significant events – the first one being about the expansion of the nation’s first metro. *Kolkata Metro Expanding Its Wings Part-I* by **Somanko Tiru** reports about the opening of a phase of the Orange Line while its *Part-II* is a Photo Story by **Arkopal Sarkar** and **Anubhab Chakraborty** that



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canvasses about the inauguration of the Yellow Line and the *Part-III* is also a Photo Story by **Rudranil Roy Chowdhury** about the Green Line now being fully operational. The completion of the Green Line implied linking of the Howrah and Sealdah stations with Saltlake Sector-V at one go – a pivotal and key factor of traffic management in the City of Joy. The opening of the Yellow Line finally makes Kolkata Metro reach the NSCB International Airport after decades, thereby accomplishing the long-standing demand for metro accessibility to the airport. The Orange Line, on its completion, will further boost airport connectivity as it will offer an alternative route for dispersal.

Adding to the string, we have *The Sleeper Renaissance of Vande Bharat* which is a coverage of the inaugural runs of nation's first VANDE BHARAT SLEEPER train introduced on 17.01.2026 followed by the Photo Story made out of photos by various rail aficionados from the inauguration of a spate of AMRIT BHARAT TRAINS embracing various routes crisscrossing the country.

Finally, we have reached the last phase of this issue where we have twin articles about the coverage of a special event – **RAIL UTSAV**. A detailed account of the programme, split in two parts, organized by the Eastern and North Eastern Chapter of the Rail Enthusiasts' Society in partnership with The Calcutta University Institute, The Indian Railway Finance Corporation, Besco Limited, Precision Model Works (PMW) and Team TrainTrackers highlight the essence of a first of its kind initiative that won laurels across the world of ferroequinology and amongst the railway officials. The *Planning and Preparation* of the event apprise about the backstage efforts and groundwork while **Tapan Pal** gives a detailed description of the events in '*When the festival unfolded*'.

As we have set off this issue with Sudhanshu Mani, we also sign off with his obituary on Sir William Mark Tully, better known as Mark Tully, who was not only a fearless titan of journalism but also an erudite scholar penning many books apart from being a passionate railway enthusiast. The demise of this Kolkata born stalwart, accredited with the moniker of 'BBC's Voice of India', has cast a spell of grief across the railfans' fraternity as he has been the mentor of many railwaymen and non-railwaymen alike. Through this writeup '*Adieu Sir Mark Tully*' by **Sudhanshu Mani**, we pay our homage to the departed soul who acknowledged the role of Indian Railways during the nation-building years and considered it as a living microcosm of the nation.

We have already parted with 2025 and welcomed 2026 with much fanfare. 2025 had been a year of landmarks for railways in India and across the globe. IR has celebrated almost all the milestones, either centrally or regionally, and rail enthusiasts have been part of all those initiatives, in fact, they often have been the catalysts in making railways recognize the occasions – minor or major. We embrace this New Year with high hopes from our national carrier in rationalizing and easing tatkal bookings, tackling delays and punctuality issues, minimising accidents and upgrading security, highlighting on quality of passenger experience, managing overcrowding and limited capacity along with financial sustainability and modernization. While we always find the soft target in railways by blaming them for blemishes – small or colossal, we, also being responsible citizens of the nation, have our own set of responsibilities of buying proper journey tickets, keeping railway property and premises clean and stop vandalizing railways for causes alien or attached to it.

With this issue, we are into our sixth year of publication and we thank all our patrons and followers for their unconditional support and constant inspiration. **Wishing all a prosperous New Year 2026 along with greetings for a Happy 77th Republic Day! May the ideals of equality, liberty and justice guide us....**

Jai Hind.

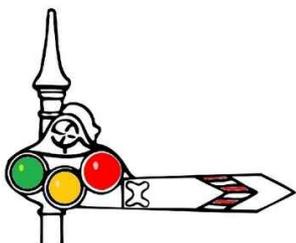
Somsubhra Das



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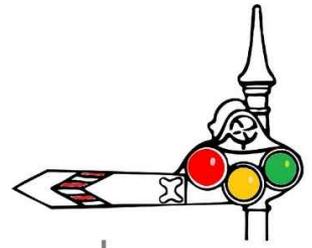
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Its Time to Act Now



Save Kolkata Trams

Write to WB Govt. to revive this most eco-friendly mode of public transport

JOIN THE MOVEMENT WITH CTUA
Calcutta Tram Users' Association



The Hubli Golf Course Water Self Sufficiency Project

Ajay Singh



Ajay Singh, an officer of the Indian Railways Service of Mechanical Engineering (IRSME), 1991 batch, served Indian Railways for over 34 years before taking voluntary retirement in October 2023. Post retirement, he has dedicated himself full-time to the cause of water conservation and sustainable water management. Widely known as the *Rail WaterMan of India*, he focuses on the revival of open wells, ponds, and wetlands, promotion of water-wise campuses, and sensitising communities—especially the younger generation—towards responsible water stewardship. His work blends institutional experience with traditional wisdom and contemporary sustainability practices.

Golf Link Railway Officers Colony of South Western Railway in Hubli is spread over about 60 acres, with a beautiful Golf Course inside the campus. Water supply to the colony, including that for the Golf Course, is through 5 bore wells and municipal supply. Currently the Golf Course is being **watered** using three bore wells inside the golf course. A water self sufficiency project for the golf course was initiated with the objective of stopping extraction of bore well water for golf course use and work towards converting the Keshwapur plus Golf link colony catchment area into a **“zero run off area”** by trapping maximum quantity of rainfall runoff to recharge the shallow aquifer. Open wells have been created inside the golf course which help in reducing reliance on bore wells tapping into confined aquifers at depths of about 400 feet. To maintain shallow aquifers, recharge ponds have been created, which are fed with rain water. The project was designed by the author, then CME/EnHM and undertaken by the Hubli Division of South Western Railway, executed by DEN Shri Amrut Senagar and his team. Project was inaugurated by the then General Manager Sri Arvind Shrivastava in February 2025.

The waterscape of the colonies is such that almost all surface water runoff is routed through the golf course before it exits the campus. Further, surface runoff water from the municipal limits on the Keshwapur road is also routed through the golf course for a short run before it goes out of the boundary again along the Hubli-Dharwad railway

line. The layout and terrain of the golf course has been used to design a large-scale water recharge system while preserving the functionality of the course and enhancing its aesthetics. The Golf Course was divided into four zones for creation of ponds and open wells as well as using an existing pond, called the oasis, to collect rainwater instead of it being fed with bore well water.



Principles of traditional rain water harvesting as well as permaculture have been used to design the project. Each of the ponds uses an existing channel to route water into the pond. The open wells are made of 6 feet diameter concrete rings to a depth of 24 feet.

Valuable inputs from the golf course users and maintenance team, specially Sri Katware, then CMM/SWR and Sri Suresh Pillai, golf course caretaker led to a design which improved the golf course also.

Walking paths around the golf course and several T boxes were rehabilitated as part of the project. The ponds besides improving the overall aesthetics also act as a water hazard for the golfers.

Even before the rains, all three newly created wells had water to varying depths. Post monsoon, there is healthy water level in all three wells. The yield from these wells will reduce bore water abstraction and thus help in reducing the load on the confined aquifer in the Keshwapur area of Hubli.





Rail-fanning In The Abode Of Chinars

Arnab Acharya



Arnab Acharya

An IT manager by profession with over two decades of experience, he is based in Bangalore currently. Have been an ardent rail-fan for aeons, Tram-fan, Calcuttan at heart, fan of RD Burman, adda-fan and many more such eccentricities. Having grown up near the crossing of the NJP-Bengdubi BG track and the erstwhile Siliguri Jn-Katihar MG track and some inheritance from his father, he could not help but become a rail-fan, albeit a naïve one to start with. He is also a member of IRFCA and CTUA.

As those of you who have visited Kashmir know, it has its own charm – like no other. It works its magic on you, if you let it. As always, I like to plan our travel in advance. That also means a railfanning trip – even a tiny one – gets tucked right into the larger scheme of things; my family even joining me, if they are game – lucky me, right?! So, that’s how the visit to the Srinagar station happened – on an election day, of all days! Mind you, I did not know of the election beforehand, but it meant choosing between either RF-ing or dropping it for good! No prizes for guessing what I chose.

Trains are still a pretty much new phenomena in this part of the world, which also means that the station could be built very much out of the way from the main city and its newer extension. In fact, it is relatively closer to the airport, in this place called Nowgam (Now=*naya* in Hindi or new, gam=*gram* or village). Amusingly, even the local cabbie that we had for our entire trip, had trouble locating the station – which says a lot about the railways’ inroads into the populace. However, I firmly believe that is set to change. More on that shortly.

From NH-1, we branched off into the tree-laden Station Link Road that goes some seven hundred metres and leaves you near the station. The large entrance, with Kashmiri woodwork, welcomes you. The main building has the typical Kashmir color-coding - green slant roof and a brown building. Even Platform 1 has wooden framework (topped by metal sheets).

We barely missed the 04614 Baramulla - Sangaldan DMU, as it left. Once you enter the main building, the first thing that you notice is the X-ray machine on one side. A blue timetable board exhibits the trains in service with Sangaldan spelt as Sangandan, unsure why! The only other train we saw was 09767 UP (DMU towards Baramulla), which was on time. It was just before this train came in, that I ended up chatting up

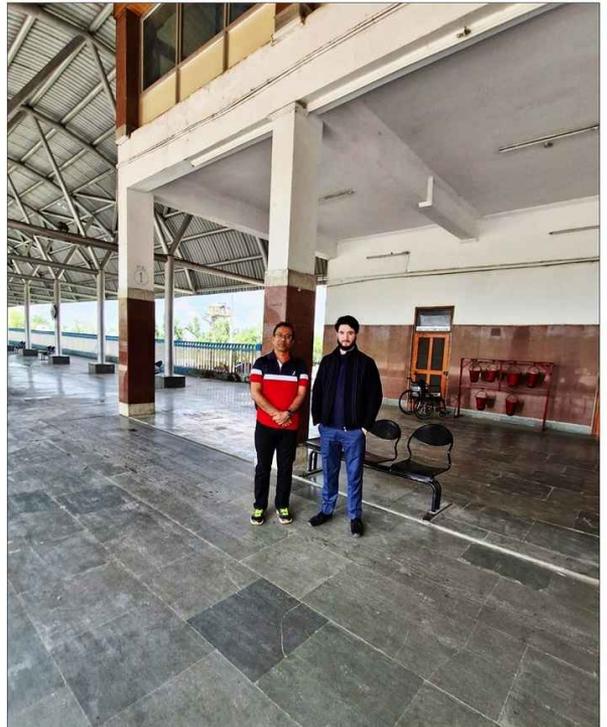


adjacent tracks! Maybe no extension of the Himsagar to Srinagar or Baramulla yet, as coaches in Kashmir need a heating arrangement which means specially upgraded rolling stock. Needless to say, the 2 Vande Bharat rakes in Kashmir have been so equipped. I could not but hope that one day, with greater technological advancement, there will be at least weekly trains to various regions of the country. That would also help better integration of Kashmir with the rest of the country.



There were few other factors that did not escape my attention. One, there is a security post on each of the overbridges over the tracks. Secondly, there was a heated waiting room on the island between platforms 2 and 3; separated into gents and ladies' sections. Thirdly, the station boards at both ends of the platforms are pink in color (and not yellow). Fourthly, I never met such a handsome station master!

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A Narrow Gauge Ensemble from 1980

Part-II

Mick Pope



Mick Pope is a trainspotter hailing from the UK. His passion for ferroequinology has its roots to his great grandfather being a Station Master in his country of birth. He has been following his passion from the age of 14 with a primary focus of seeing and watching the number of every steam locomotive in the UK. With the culmination of the Steam Era in UK in 1968, he switched to document industrial and worldwide steam which justifies his coming to India for over 30 times since 1980. His connection with India was not limited to these visits only as his uncle used to be a teacher at the St. Georges School in the Nilgiris in the 1930s. He continues to visit many other places in Europe, Asia and Africa for quenching his thirst for passion.

In 'First Part' of my account of my first railway tour of India, our last visit had been to the Indian Iron and Steel Company's narrow-gauge line at Manoharpur. We departed from Manoharpur at 21.41 hrs. on Train 6 to Tatanagar where we arrived just after midnight and transferred to Jamshedpur. After a comfortable night in the company guest house, we spent the day in the steelworks and had the opportunity of a rare non-railway visit to the road vehicle test circuit. Over the years, the works has operated rail lines of broad gauge, metre gauge, 3' gauge and 2' gauge but I think the MG had been discontinued. The focus at Jamshedpur were the US-built BG loco, nearing the end of their lives.

However, there was one narrow gauge locomotive active and one of special interest. This was also US-built by HK Porter and operated the overhead 3' gauge line that fed the blast furnaces. An earlier loco for working this task, a British built Andrew Barclay 0-4-0 tank, was preserved on a plinth.

Moving on from Jamshedpur, we visited two more steelworks at Burnpur and Kulti having travelled overnight my Train 87 [I was young back then and had more stamina for this perpetual travel!]. There was no narrow gauge at Kulti and we did not see the battery electric 2' gauge at Burnpur. This was building up to one of the highlights of the trip, the Dehri

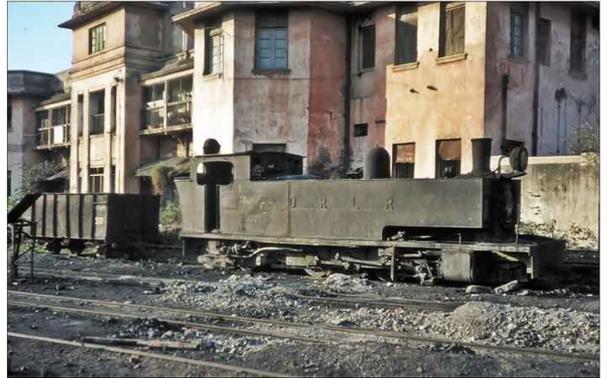


DRLR Locomotive # 10 ZB

Rohtas Light Railway (DRLR). Another overnight Train 51 took us from Asansol to Dehri on Sone. Our next visit, the following morning, was to Rohtas Industries to view their interesting collection of broad-gauge locomotives. Nominally, they had three 2' 6" gauge locos but these were operated by the DRLR and I am guessing they worked the link between the factory and the DRLR.

The Dehri Rohtas Light Railway had a fabulous collection of locomotives, some bought from Indian Railways, some from other private systems and some, I think, ordered new. The line was opened in 1911 and extended at various times until it was 41 miles long and had a passenger service as well as a busy freight service carrying mostly marble, limestone and cement. In later years, the line used examples of the ZB class 2-6-2 as used on Indian railway narrow gauge lines and K class 2-6-2T bought 'second hand' from Indian Railways. Older locomotives were still operational at the time of our visit with many of the older locos stationed in the main loco shed and a smaller secure shed. At the Dehri end of the line No. 5, an 0-6-2T built in 1920 by Avonside of Bristol, UK, was shunting the yard. Also in steam were No. 18, an ex-Indian Railways AI class 2-8-4T, built in 1913 by the North British Locomotive Company and No. 27, another ex-Indian

DRLR Locomotive # 5



A Tank Locomotive of DRLR

Railways K class also built by the North British Locomotive Company. A number of the ZB class were noted in steam and on freight trains along the line. We had a passenger train hauled by No. 6, a 0-6-4T, another Avonside built in 1926. Unfortunately, there were not enough passenger carriages for all our party and some of us had the unique experience of being transported in the railway's ambulance coach hauled by a jeep converted to run on rails!

We travelled as far as Banjari and there had a great surprise as we encountered a non-DRLR locomotive in action. This was a Baldwin 0-6-2 tank from 1918 formerly of the Bengal Provincial Railway and purchased by the Kalyanpur Lime and Cement Works who also had three other locos on site, under repair or out of use. These were a Manning Wardle 0-6-0T stored in the shed, an Avonside 0-6-2T minus wheels on blocks outside and a relatively modern Hunslet Engine Company 0-6-2T placed in a siding. We were entertained to lunch in the company canteen. A fascinating site before the return journey was the novel method of turning the jeep, which clearly could not operate in reverse. This was achieved by jacking it up using a large, centrally located jack located between the rails and spinning the vehicle round!

Over the next day or two, we visited Indian Railway loco sheds as we travelled eastwards via Varanasi. A special stop

0-6-2 Baldwin at Kalyanpur Lime & Cement Works





A War Locomotive 0-6-2 Baldwin aka 'Lion'



1900 built Kisan make 0-6-2 Loco of Saraya Sugar Mill



4-6-4 Baldwin built loco at Daurala



Andrew Barclay built loco at Daurala



No # 3 an Avonside 0-6-2T at Kalyanpur Lime & Cement Works

had been arranged at Sardarnagar on Train 50 to Gorakhpur which normally passed through that station non-stop. This surprised the train crew who apparently knew nothing about this! From this stop, we transferred to the Saraya Sugar Company's **petrol railcar** which took us to the company's compound among the fields. We dined with the owning family and slept in their guest bungalows. The following morning, we viewed their amazing collection of 2' 6" narrow gauge and metre gauge locomotives. On the narrow-gauge No. 2, a Kitson built 0-6-2 tender engine built in 1900 was working along with an ex-North Western Railway 4-6-2 from the same builder. We also saw the famous 'Tweed', the 1873 built ex-Bengal North Western Railway 0-4-0 on the metre gauge.

Making our way to Agra via Delhi, we made our last two narrow gauge visits of the trip, both involving sugar plantations. First, we visited Khatauli. Here another Baldwin war locomotive, named 'Lion' was working cane trains from the fields while at the loco shed a rare John Fowler 0-4-0 well tank, 'Cheetal' [named after a type of antelope] was being steamed for a special train for our party. A well tank is unusual for carrying its water in a tank below the loco rather than over or each side of the boiler. Out in the fields a Baldwin, a World War 1 'War Locomotive' 0-6-0 tank 'Lion' [Baldwin 44699 of 1917] was bringing a loaded cane train in

A Manning Wardle 0-6-0T at Kalyanpur Lime & Cement Works



Khatauli Loco # 1 aka Lion

[Baldwin 44699 of 1917] was bringing a loaded cane train in to the mill. They had another Baldwin named 'Tiger'. I smile to think how 'Cheetal' managed to survive in the shed with a 'Lion' and a 'Tiger'! 'Lion' was purchased by a preserved railway in the UK although there is a question mark over whether it contains parts from Tiger as it was often common for locos to exchange parts.

Moving on, we visited our final narrow-gauge location, the Delhi Cloth and General Mills Company at Daurala. This company's rail system had closed some years earlier but the locomotives were available for sale and probably for that reason, were in good condition. Some were later sold to the Khatauli Mill mentioned earlier and the rest, sadly, scrapped. I understand some British enthusiasts tried to raise funds to purchase some of the locos but were unsuccessful.

This ended our visits to narrow gauge industrial sites and we returned to Delhi where we visited the Indian railway depots and the museum. Fired by what I saw on this visit, I have visited India on many further occasions both to photograph on the railway and to enjoy other aspects of the country but now, sadly without the pleasure of steam.

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Khatauli Loco # 3 aka Cheetal





Capital Steam

Jakob Stilling

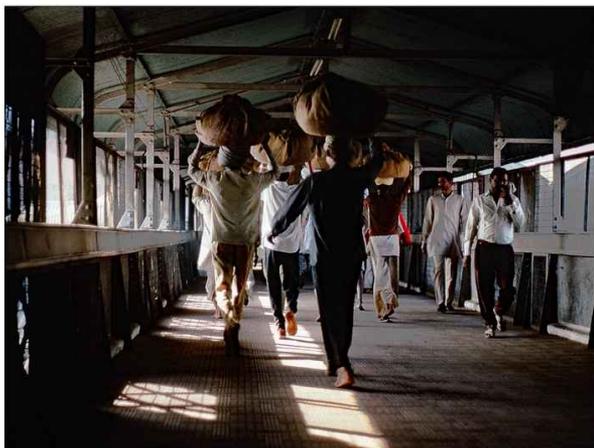


A Danish lawyer born in 1961, he became a volunteer steam train guard in 1984 and began photographing trains in 1974. He has traveled extensively across Europe, Asia, and parts of Africa and the Americas in search of steam locomotives. His railway journeys include multiple visits to East Germany, Poland, and the Indian subcontinent—starting with Northern India in 1993 and further trips to Pakistan in 1994–95. Since 2017, he has toured India again with his wife, visiting iconic narrow-gauge lines like KSR and NMR.

When I started my account of steam adventures in northern India in November 1993 in the May 2023 issue of this magazine, I was so anxious to get the story of Punjab steam underway that I omitted my first few encounters with the steam dinosaurs in the metropolitan area of the capital. To round off my account I have written a few lines about my first day in the Indian subcontinent.

I was travelling with my friend Johs, who had arrived in Delhi a few days before me. Before the days of the mobile phone, a common arrangement was to agree in advance on a meeting point and a time, and to come back every hour on the hour if contact was not made. We had set up a meeting point in front of a budget guesthouse in Main Bazaar (Paharganj) at 06.00 on the Sunday morning I was arriving.

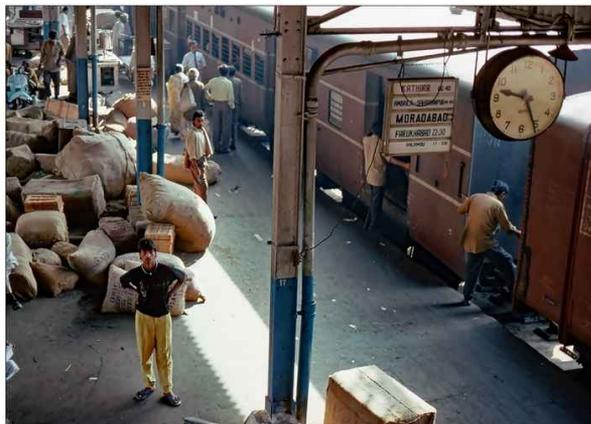
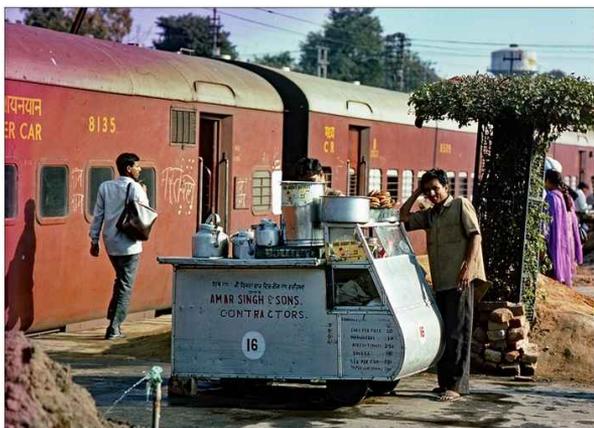
My Lufthansa flight from Frankfurt arrived in the very early hours of the morning and clearing passport control and customs, exchanging money and arranging for a transfer by Ex-servicemen's Air Link Transport Service (EATS) that was recommended in the Lonely Planet guidebook, took some time. The bus (17 Rupees according to the guidebook; I remember that prices had gone up since printing), only left when full and made several stops at budget accommodations en route to the centre of Delhi. The last stop was at the rear entrance of New Delhi station. The transfer ended up taking most of the remaining few hours of the night, especially as the night managers of the hotels where we stopped en route, were all trying to enroll a few extra customers from the bus for a room in their establishment. It was however still very dark as I got out of the bus behind New Delhi station, carrying my heavy backpack and all of my photo gear.



The area leading to the footbridge stairs was full of rickshawmen sleeping in the passenger seats of their bicycles with a few fires on the ground still smoking. The city centre was all boarded up for the night with few people around as I made my way via the footbridge to Chelmsford Road.

The time was by now almost 6 AM, which was our first agreed meeting time, and when I reached the stairs leading to the Kiran Guest House, Johs came down the stairs to meet me. I was thus able to check in immediately and could leave my bags in the room. After a nap, which was needed at this stage, I was ready to encounter Delhi. What a difference compared to the empty street in the early morning! By 8.30, main bazaar was awake and kicking, and a wall of traffic, sounds and colours, man and beast, met me, as we walked down the stairs to get a 'chai' (tea) and a snack for breakfast.

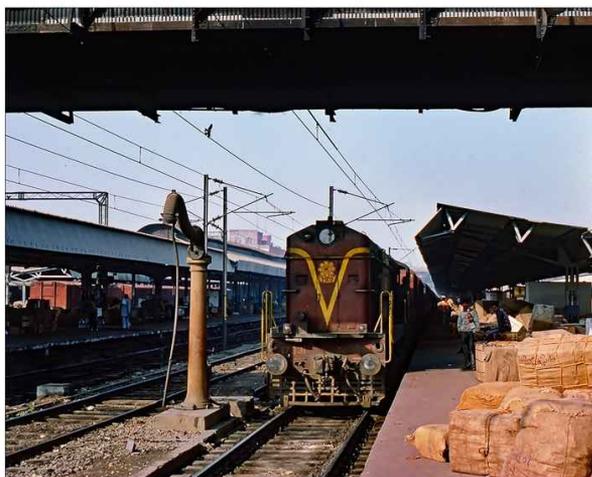
We had booked and paid for our Indrail passes via a British travel agent and the voucher was to be exchanged for a paper pass in the Foreign Tourist booking office in New Delhi station. Unfortunately, it was closed on Sundays. Johs had already been there on Saturday to get his. We had hoped that there would be an IR agent somewhere near Connaught



Place who could issue my paper pass on a Sunday, but no luck there. We would have to wait till Monday morning to get my paper pass and had a full day in Delhi on our hands before we could catch a train towards Jalandhar.

We walked through the busy market and boarded a motor rickshaw, negotiated a price and made our way through Old Delhi's bustling lanes to (Old) Delhi Station or Delhi Junction. In those days, steam engines from Saharanpur and Moradabad still made a few rounds in a day into Delhi, not only on stopping passenger trains but also on one or two expresses. The Rajasthan MG lines still had a single line coming from the west along the circular railway line which terminated in a bay platform with two tracks in Delhi Junction. The capital was still served by a number of MG Expresses, i.e., the Pink City Express to and from Jaipur via Rewari while the New Delhi Station was 100% broad gauge.

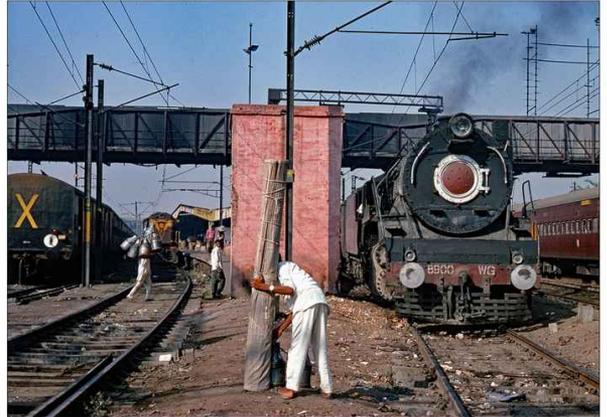
The classic Indian railway station bustle accompanied by sounds and smell met us like a cacophony as we made our way from the rickshaw to the station entrance, trailing a tail of touts, 'ticket agents' and porters all hoping for business





and loudly trying to get the attention of the two western tourists. There was no central apron inside the station then. Very long BG platforms ran along the rail side of the station building complex, connected by a central footbridge. A set of points, midway along the platform allowed empty engines to run round their trains through a central track with no platform access and arriving or departing trains could utilize this centre track to move through the station, if an empty rake was blocking part of a platform.

Along the platform, huge bundles wrapped in jute were stacked awaiting loading into the luggage vans. We made our way down the platform designated for the 9.45 departure of 308 Passenger train to Moradabad. The timetable allowed full 6 hours for the 154 km. with more than 20 stops. We were of course excited to see if the train was in fact steam hauled. There was no engine attached yet, even though departure time was only minutes away. Far away in the maze of tracks a black square was smoking. A Moradabad steam engine was on its way from the shed to couple up to its train. WG 8900, built by Krupp in Germany in 1954 and allocated to Moradabad, looking in good optical and mechanical order, arrived and coupled up to the head of the train. The crew was happy to see two foreign photographers and stepped



down from their engine, offering us a cup of tea from their food box.

At the end of the platform, we paused briefly to discuss if we dared cross the tracks. However, everyone else seemed to wander freely, not at all like in Europe, and we made our way across rails and points to get to the best possible location for the WG departure shot on the Moradabad train, the crew of No. 8900 waving to us as the train pulled out. We walked back along the platform and found at newsagent, where we purchased current copies of the NR and WR regional timetables and the October issues of Newman's Indian Bradshaw, no. 1532, at a price of Rupees 40!

Compared to our dinner that night, which cost us Rupees 17 each, the timetable was quite an investment! We had brought photocopies of the most recent issues of World Steam and Continental Railway Journal and started copying and marking the trains to and from Delhi that had been seen as steam hauled by the recent visiting enthusiasts. A luggage trolley next to the newsstand came in handy as an impromptu desk. Looking up from the paperwork without any warning whistle we suddenly saw an approaching passenger train hauled by a WP in the center track, and only just got our cameras out in time.





The arriving train came to halt at the far western end of the platforms. The WP was No. 7041 from Saharanpur, built by Wiener Lokomotivfabrik in Floridsdorf, Austria in 1957. After taking a few pictures of the WP in the platform we waited for the next train to arrive from Saharanpur via Meerut, the 2 DS Pass. which duly arrived, and on time, but hauled by a diesel. The driver confirmed that the train was usually steam hauled, but told us that the WP had failed before coming onto the train in Saharanpur and had been replaced by a diesel. An MG express arrived from Rewari, but of course diesel hauled. As there were no further BG arrivals that were likely to be steam we left Delhi station around noon.

After another ride through the congested streets of Old Delhi, we continued through the capital by motor rickshaw via Safdarjung Tomb, which we visited briefly, to the Railway Museum, where we spent two hours studying the many exhibits. Unfortunately, in spite of our visit being on a Sunday, neither the Patiala monorail nor the miniature train were running.

After finishing our tour of the museum, we just found time also to visit the Red Fort for a quick look before dusk. Going back to our guesthouse by bicycle rickshaw as the sun set we had already gathered a lot of impressions and felt we



were slowly adapting to Indian traffic. We had a nice 'thali' in one of the restaurants in Main Bazaar and retired fairly early.

Monday morning, we were packed and ready to go in front of the ITB at 7. Official opening time was at 7.30, the sales clerk's computer was up and running by 7.41 and the paper pass in my hand by 7.59. Our planned train was due to leave at 8.00! We just made it, and the AC conductor soon managed to fit us in for our journey north. The Indrail Pass helped us jump the quotas!

By dusk we had caught our first WLs in Jalandhar....

***This is the fourth and final chapter of my 1993 travel journal. For reading the whole story in the right order, the reader may go from here to the May 2023 issue, then to August 2023 and finally to the January 2024 issue of Rail Canvaz.*

All photographs provided by the author & are copyright protected.



This creative is a very emotive work by P. Sampath Kumar done during one of the four art camps organized at the Bangalore City station. He called it "Between The Arrival and The Departure".

COVER STORY



When Empathy Meets Dignity

A STORY OF RAILWAY PORTERS

Sudhanshu Mani



A distinguished former officer of Indian Railways, he is widely acclaimed as the 'Father of the Vande Bharat Express,' having spearheaded its conceptualisation, design, and development during his tenure as General Manager of the Integral Coach Factory (ICF). Over a prolific career spanning nearly four decades, he has held several pivotal leadership roles, including DRM at Bangalore & Railway Advisor in Berlin. A mechanical engineer by training, his professional journey reflects an enduring commitment to innovation, indigenous engineering, and technological self-reliance, aligning closely with the ethos of the 'Make in India' initiative. Beyond his engineering accomplishments, he is also an author, consultant, and a keen art enthusiast, seamlessly blending technical excellence with creative and intellectual pursuits.

It has been years since those endless weeks of Covid lockdown, yet the memory has not dimmed. The silence of cities, the fear in the air, the arguments over timing, restrictions and economic cost – all of it has blurred with time. But one image refuses to fade: the haunting spectacle of millions of migrant workers walking barefoot on highways, carrying bundles, children and shattered hopes. Numbers and projections can be debated; this human tragedy could not. It was a wound to the nation's conscience. Governments – both central and state, had the machinery, the information, the mandate. Yet, when it mattered, confusion reigned – should workers stay, should they leave, would they be cared for or abandoned? In the end, the dignity and livelihood of millions were trampled and even today, one wonders whether the enormity of that damage has been fully understood.

I recall it now, not merely to relive that anguish but to set the backdrop for this story – one that shows how the absence of empathy can wound society and how, conversely, a little empathy in governance can become transformative. When administrators choose to act with humanity, the outcome cannot only be just better policies but stronger people, stronger institutions and a stronger nation.

This story is about the porters at stations of Indian Railways (IR) – the men the British taught us to arrogantly call 'coolies'. A much-maligned lot, whom the Indian middle class often dismisses as ill-behaved and intrusive. We haggle with them for a handful of coins, blind to the sight of the human beast of burden walking beside us. We gloat when we beat them down by ten rupees, yet never pause at the spectacle of three tiers of luggage swaying

Courtesy: The Patriot



Courtesy: Google Stock Images

dangerously on a bent human neck. Their sweat and strain are usually invisible to us; our bargain is paramount, more gratifying.

For years, this bothered me – not out of empathy, I confess, but because I thought the sight was ugly and gave our stations a shabby look. In 2005, at Secunderabad, where I served as Additional Divisional Railway Manager (ADRM), the division arranged ten airport-style baggage carts with the help of the DRM and placed them on platform no. 10 for use by passengers free of charge, as at airports. Within days, the porters quietly damaged them, fearing for their livelihood. The idea collapsed and we tucked it away for another day. I did have a resolve that if ever I got a more conducive chance, I would revisit the issue once again with proper strategy.

Five years later, that chance came at Bangalore Division, which I headed as the DRM, with its four major passenger stations – City, Cantt., Yesvantpur, and Krishnarajpuram. This time, the lesson was clear; piecemeal measures would not work. We needed to do three things—provide carts in large numbers, improve infrastructure for their use (smooth passages, functional lifts) and most importantly, bring the porters onboard. It was never about appeasing the middle class or their stingy bargaining – it was all about upholding the dignity of labour.

Arranging 300 carts across four stations required around ₹50 lakhs – money the railways had no provision for. I turned to the corporate sector, using goodwill to source carts under Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), though at that time railways had no framework to accept CSR support. Since this was for the upliftment of porters, not well-paid employees, we could convince many large



Airport-style hand carts in 4 stations of Bangalore division in 2011

companies. Banks too pitched in. Infrastructure was the easier part; the real challenge was convincing the porters themselves. Poor, illiterate, scorned for decades, they were deeply suspicious. Why would the DRM, who symbolized the same system that ignored them, suddenly care? With more passengers now using trolleys, their earnings had already dwindled. These new carts looked like the last nail in their coffin!

The breakthrough came through outreach. We met them at stations, listened to them, spoke to them as equals. At first, they refused to believe us. But slowly, trust began to build up. I remember two meetings in my chamber with over fifty porters crammed inside. For them, it was unprecedented – to be treated with dignity, offered tea, spoken to as stakeholders rather than nuisances. Their two elderly leaders, men long past retirement age but still labouring because poverty offered no retirement, looked at us with deep scepticism. Their wrinkles were not from laughter or mirth but from

decades of toil and contempt; No, Mr. Gratiano from the Bard's *The Merchant of Venice*, spare me the wisdom that, 'with mirth and laughter let old wrinkles come'.

We made it clear: fares would not change. They would still charge passengers the same, only now the burden would be borne by wheels, not their spines. More importantly, the carts would belong to them, entirely under their control. That assurance began to soften their resistance.

The porters eventually agreed, though not without misgivings. We launched the pilot at Bangalore City. I told my Station Superintendents personally that once the project was fully launched, any head-loading would be deemed their failure and they would face the music. The first batch of carts was handed directly to porters by the sponsoring organizations. At the launch, a journalist asked me, "If passengers still pay the same fare, what is the benefit to them?" My answer was simple: "The

The author with Porters & airport-style hand carts in 4 stations of Bangalore division in 2011





Courtesy: Somsuhra Das

benefit is to the country. A country that does not show empathy to those who give their blood, sweat, and tears – a country that does not honour the dignity of its labour force – cannot march proudly to be developed country. By giving these porters dignity, we were affording greater dignity to ourselves”.

The initiative worked. The stations in Bangalore division became the first on IR to eliminate head-loading. The porters, once suspicious, now extended genuine respect, not the grudging reverence born of hierarchy, but something heartfelt. For a while, it was a true win-win: cleaner, modern stations and labour treated with dignity.

But history is fickle. Within months of my transfer, the system began to slide back. Carts lay abandoned and porters returned to head-loading. Perhaps the idea was ahead of its time, perhaps I failed to build safeguards for continuity, or perhaps railways –

Courtesy: Somsuhra Das



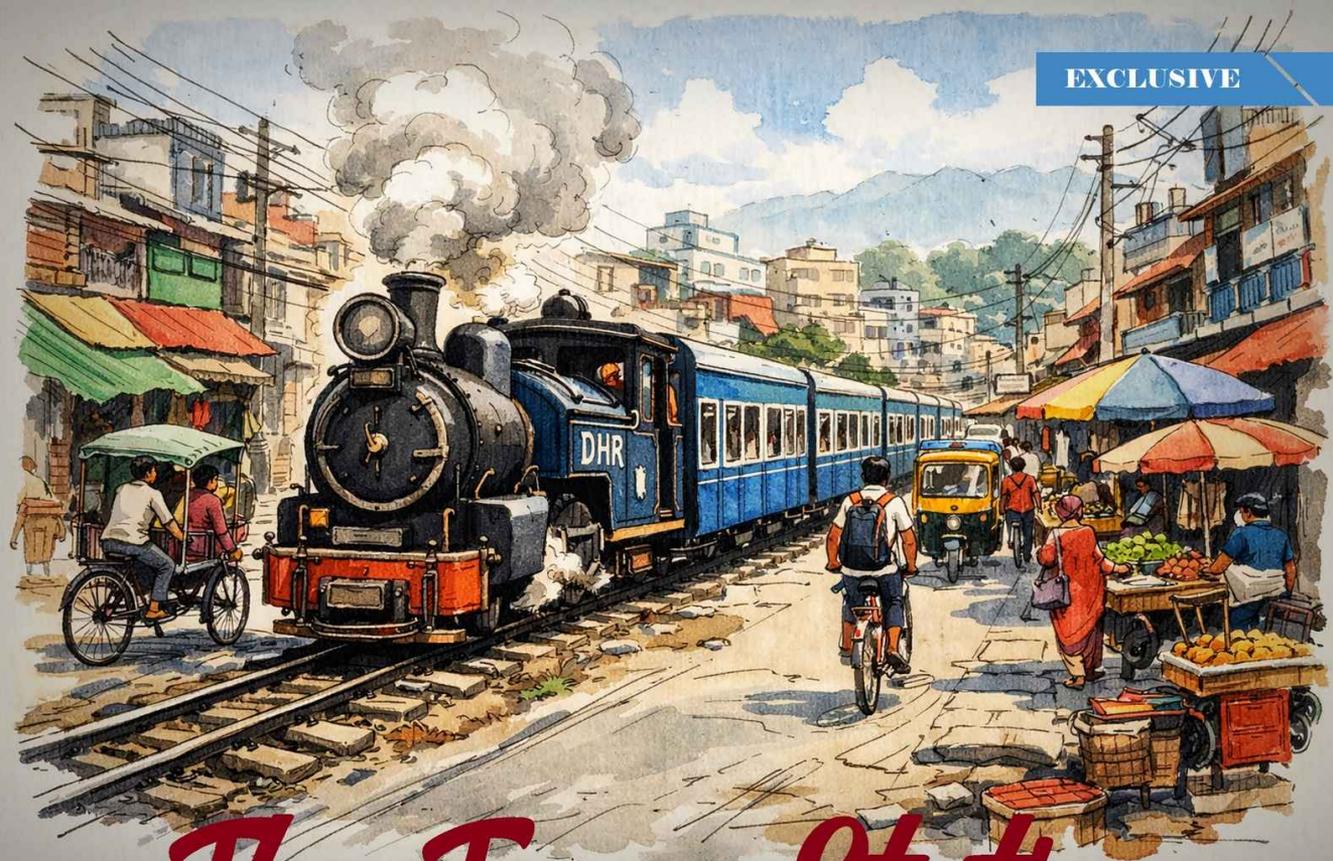
Courtesy: porterbuddy.com

forever obsessed with merely running trains, not always too well – never cared enough for anything beyond. And so, the same old sight returned: men bent double under baggage, dignity defeated.

And yet, the story does not leave me. In 2019, years after retirement, I travelled by train – very rare for me, since I usually flew to manage time better, from Bangalore Cantt. to Chennai. As I stepped onto the platform, pulling my trolley, a porter picked it up and walked beside me. I acquiesced reluctantly, thinking it a wasted ₹200. He stayed until the train arrived and carefully placed the luggage in my coach. I tried to pay him. He looked at me and said, in broken Hindi, “Don’t I know you, sir? No porter in Bangalore will ever take money from you”. Before I could gather words, he slipped quietly to the platform and the train pulled away....

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The Town Station & A MYSTERIOUS LINE



Joydeep Dutta

A Professor at the Department of Economic Sciences at the Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur. He has been previously a faculty member at the Department of Mathematics and Statistics at the same institute. He was the founder head of Economic Sciences. He has been a lifelong railway enthusiast and primarily interested in diesel locomotives. However as a resident of Siliguri since his childhood he remains fascinated by the DHR. He has several articles on various aspects of railways and also a book co-authored with S. M. Sharma (IRSME) on Indian ALCO diesels to his credit. He is one of the founder members of the Rail Enthusiast Society and it's current Vice President.

My previous writeup "**A Train Without a Toilet**" published in January 2024 issue of Rail Canvaz can be considered as a precursor to this memorable. As usual, railway historian Terry Martin always occupies my thoughts and appears here as well because without him, this story is not complete.

The "Town Station" is the nickname of Siliguri Town. This is what the local people refer to the station. My first views of the Siliguri Town station came while crossing a level crossing near it on a cycle rickshaw, along with mother. What caught my attention was the station canopy, though the station appeared to be in derelict state. I observed that we crossed over a pair of tracks, one meter gauge and the other narrow gauge, and these were the tracks connecting New Jalpaiguri with Siliguri Junction, the other two major stations serving the area. The town station on the other hand seems abandoned and small compared to the other two. Just as we crossed the level crossing, our rickshaw puller Mokhtar, started racing on the Hill Cart Road, and there I observed a disused narrow-gauge line suddenly appearing on the right and then suddenly vanishing from view and getting covered by the asphalt road once we reached the main traffic circle, opposite to that. Truly intriguing and full of mystery! I asked my mother about it and she was clueless. After filling our bags with jam, bread, biscuits, butter and some other goodies from the famed Kamala Stores in Bidhan Market, Mokhtar started pulling us back home to the quaint little railway town of New Jalpaiguri.

Soon we were back to traffic circle and the mysterious line again appeared on the left. Though small shops lined up one after another, parallel to the line, this time there were vendors who

seemed to be from the hills, sitting on the line with boxes made of cane containing either fifty or hundred delicious oranges from Darjeeling. My mother asked Mokhtar to stop the rickshaw and started bargaining for buying a box of oranges, while I contemplated about the whereabouts of the mysterious line. Many puzzling thoughts might have crossed my mind but I clearly remember concluding that this must be relic of the shunting yard for DHR, since town station was the terminus on the plain.

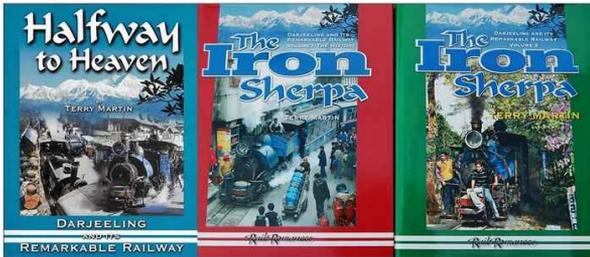
I thought how stupid I was, and that I should have figured it out immediately. The truth was revealed later at a medical store. The Kurseong medical sits right in the heart of the town of Siliguri. Once I was there with my mother who was buying some medicines and suddenly my attention was drawn to a photograph adorning one of the walls of the store. It was a heroic B-class steam locomotive hauling a train passing by the same medical store in which I am standing. I asked one of the older salesmen as to whether there is or was a train line here. He told me that the Darjeeling railway which started from Siliguri town cut through the town and went passed this medical store and across the Mahananda river to Sukna and then onto Darjeeling. The line was closed he said in the early 1960s and I returned home with the memory of that photograph. The thing that I remembered from the photograph most were the two people perching on the front of B-class steam locomotive.

By that time, I had already taken my first DHR journey from Siliguri town to New Jalpaiguri and had thought of the

person perched up in front of the locomotive as a 'free rider'. This photograph at the medical store confirmed that it was not the case. They were actually sanders who kept on sprinkling sand on the tracks and as the little locomotive went up the hills in order to increase the adhesion. Now after so many years, I still consider it among the most difficult jobs in the world.

Darjeeling Himalayan Railways, like many of the loved railways over the world, has its fair share of admirers, fans, mere onlookers, historians and books. Among its many historians the one that notably stands out is Terry Martin. His wonderful books, "Halfway to Heaven" and "Iron Sherpa" are one of the most definitive volumes on the hill railway of Darjeeling. When Terry was researching the "Halfway to Heaven", I was fortunate to take him around the Siliguri region trying to find hidden relics of the DHR. I pointed him to the mysterious line of my childhood, which was only visible only at few places by early 1990's, as it was covered by asphalt. On that winter morning of early 1993, Terry was amused to see this and he told me the toy trains loaded with passengers and freight rolled down, that line, and onward to Sukna, over the wooden bridge, on the mighty Mahananda. Then as we moved towards the "Town station", he told me that after independence when the Siliguri Junction started operating officially, passengers from Darjeeling ended their journey there and freight trains by-passed the junction and steamed into Siliguri town. I then realized that in the photograph at the Kurseong medical store, it was indeed a





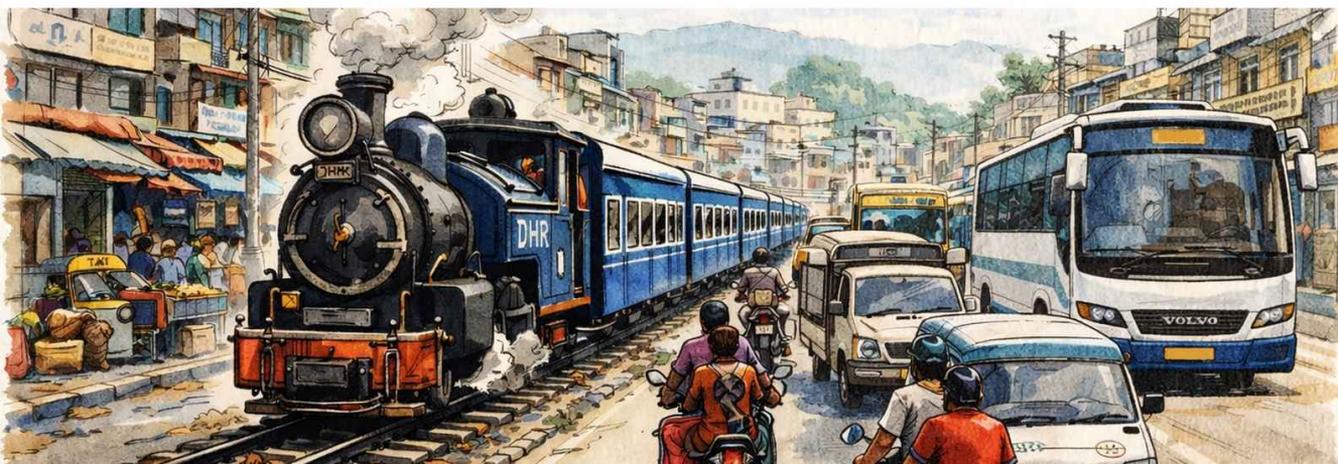
freight train, though we don't really see the train.

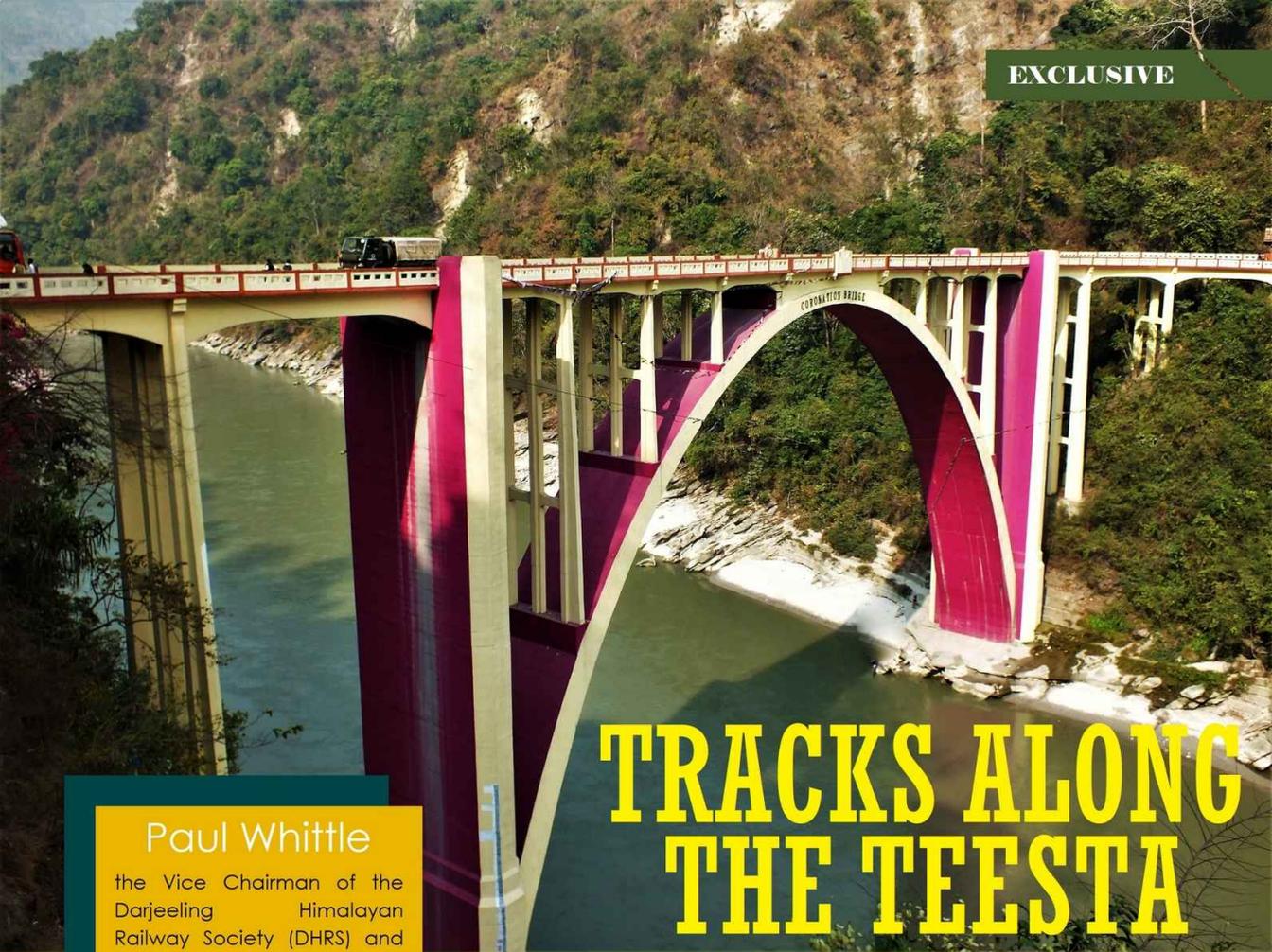
Terry, asked me if I know of any photograph of a train passing through the busy town of Siliguri. The answer was of course known to me and I still remember Terry's smile when he saw the photograph at the medical store. It took me almost an hour to convince the owner of the store, that he be ready to part with the photo only for an hour. He took Terry's identification documents and provided the photo and also specifically advised us to go to a particular photography shop where a new negative of the photo can be made. We rushed to the photography store and the photo was taken out of the frame and a new photo was taken so that a new negative can be developed. We were lucky and we returned the photo back to its true owner. Terry was all smiles and vowed to put this photograph in book. He kept his word and I was delighted, when I got to see the photo in the complementary copy of the "Halfway to Heaven" which Terry had sent to me. I am deeply grateful to him for acknowledging me in the book. After returning the photo I walked back with Terry along the Hill Cart Road towards the Siliguri Town station and soon came to the alignment of the mysterious line. Some part of it still visible though the asphalt has covered a major part of it. This line, as Terry told me, was closed when the narrow gauge extended to New Jalpaiguri from Siliguri Junction to through Siliguri town, in 1964. The year 1964 was very important for the Siliguri area and the Northeast Frontier Railway. That year also saw the return to the rails of the magnificent station of New Jalpaiguri, which was the first broad gauge station in the Siliguri area to become fully operational. That year also saw the re-introduction of the



Courtesy: Sanjoy Mookerjee

legendary "Darjeeling Mail", which during the days of the Raj, travelled all the way from Sealdah in Calcutta (now Kolkata) to the Siliguri Town. As we reached the Siliguri Town platform, we started talking about how the ambience must have been during those early days of the DHR when the Darjeeling Mail rolled in from Sealdah on misty morning and people of all types rushed towards the narrow-gauge platform to take their places in the train without a toilet for the torturous climb to Darjeeling. I imagined that during those days too there must have been vendors selling tea to the tired travelers and how fresh one must have felt sipping a cup before starting for Darjeeling. Knowing the yard layout of the then Siliguri Town station, I often wondered where did they stabled the rake of the great mail train before it resumed its journey back to Sealdah. Terry was indeed sad to see the derelict state of Siliguri town and wondered why such a historically important station would face such a fate. As we roamed around the station, I narrated to him my first experience of travelling on the DHR from this very station. To our delight, the down train or 2 down from Darjeeling pulled into the station with a puffing B class in the front and our boyish cup of joy was full. The B-class no longer comes to Siliguri town and neither Terry will ever walk along his favorite DHR, but memories of both will linger on in my mind as long as I live.





TRACKS ALONG THE TEESTA

Paul Whittle

the Vice Chairman of the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway Society (DHRS) and also, he is a member of several UK steam railways and the Wey and Arun Canal trust. Started his professional career in banking, latterly became a human resources manager. He served the Territorial Army, Royal Signals for 34 years. He has written and published the history of his regiment and is a keen military historian apart from having a great interest in heritage transport as well.

Mr Whittle & his partner Sue

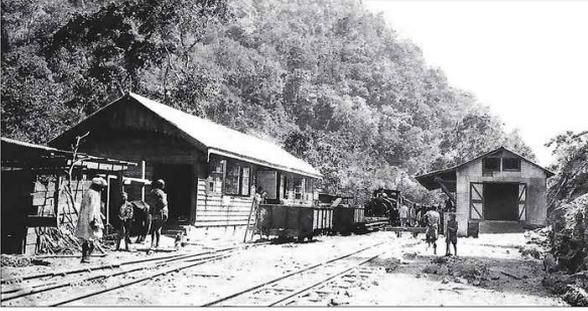


The DHR Route To Kalimpong & Sikkim

The 55-mile route of the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway (DHR) is understandably world famous. Fully opened in 1881, it transformed travel, tourism and the economy of a formerly isolated region.

Lesser well-known are the two former DHR branches, both 2-foot gauge and originating in Siliguri. Opened in 1915 and heading west for 67 miles was the level, straight route to Kishanganj with trains normally hauled by two 'C' Class Pacific locomotives. Today, the route still exists, but now electrified and broad gauge, after conversion from 2ft gauge to metre gauge in 1949 and then to broad gauge under 'Project Unigauge'.

But heading north from Siliguri had been the Teesta Valley line. Following the treaty of Sinchula in 1865, the town of Kalimpong had been absorbed into British India after a long period of hostility with the Bhutanese. The subsequent peace and stability rapidly led to the town becoming a major trading centre. By the early 1900s this was exceeding 12,000 tons annually with mule trains bringing goods south from Sikkim and Tibet. Not surprisingly, the DHR authorities recognised the potential for a rail link down to Siliguri – and they were encouraged by the government who donated the land for the entire route free of charge.



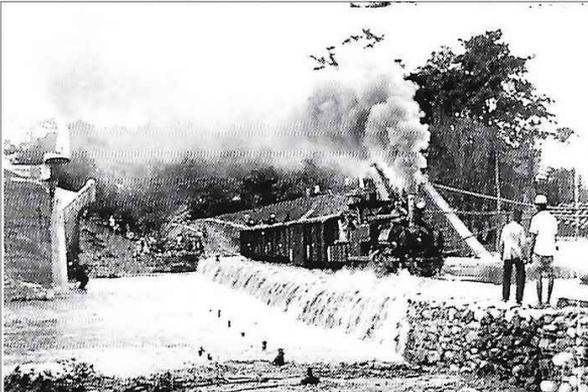
Sevoke Station c1915 towards Gielle Khola (DHRS)

Construction started in late 1912 reaching Sevoke by March 1914, aided by level terrain and using the formation of an existing cart road. This phase also included building (at DHR expense) a junction station (Siliguri Road) with the 'main line' to Darjeeling. At that time, the Terai forest area was populated by large herds of elephants and in the jungle besides the tracks, there were also tigers and black panthers.

However, constructing the rest of the route was vastly more challenging. Heavy blasting was needed to level the formation, numerous landslides slowed progress washing away newly built sections, and the First World War delayed the supply of bridging and track materials. Nevertheless, after overcoming immense engineering difficulties, on 29th September 1915, the line reached the hamlet of Gielle Khola, the end of a narrow and very busy trade route leading north to Rangpo. Named Kalimpong Road this was to be as far as the 29-mile railway would ever reach. There had been optimistic plans to extend the line to Gangtok and a survey of the route was done in the winter of 1917-18. But this ambitious plan failed to materialise, the high costs of construction no doubt being a prime reason.

Whilst the terminus was indeed on an adjacent road

Sevoke River Causeway (Glyne Gladstone)



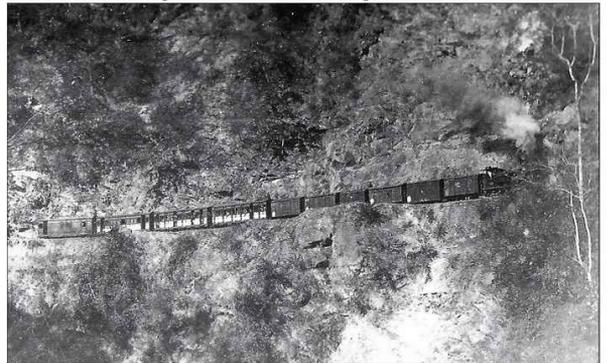
Sevoke Station Late 1930s (P Tiller and M Metz)

to Kalimpong, the town was actually seven miles away and 3,000ft up a mountain! The solution was a ropeway opened in September 1930 by Lady Stephenson, the wife of the Governor of West Bengal, and with the first pannier to arrive carrying a basket of flowers for her. The ropeway proved a reliable and efficient mode of transport, capable of carrying 10 tons per hour and with the rail/ropeway transfer at a siding at Rilli, south of Riyang.

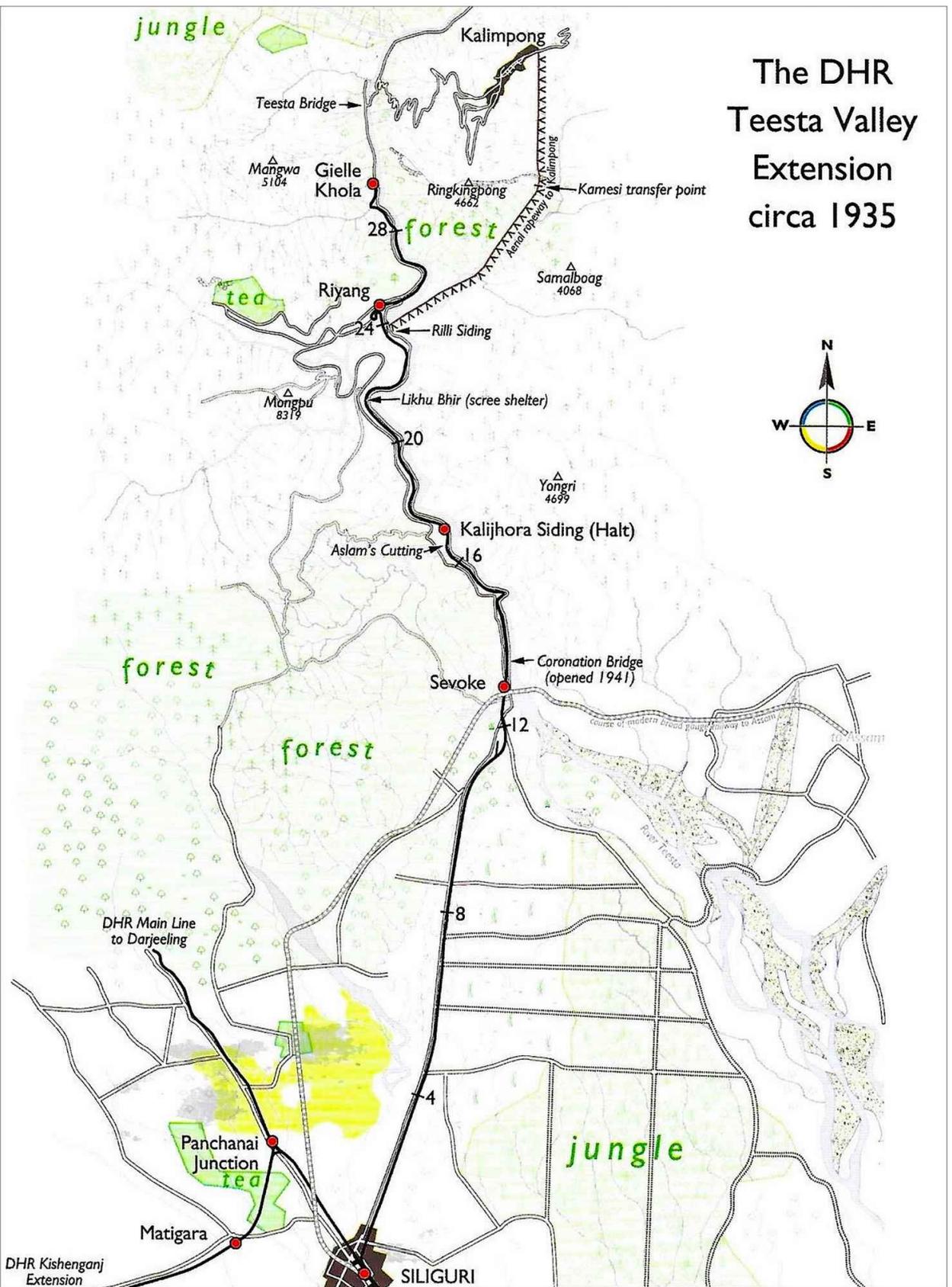
The railway had been intended primarily for freight traffic and so it proved with annual tonnages of at least 30,000 tons per year. The main imports were grains, other food supplies, salt and building materials whilst exports were oranges, cardamoms, potatoes, timber and wood from Sikkim and Tibet.

In contrast, passenger traffic was difficult to attract – the company made efforts to do so, but whilst the journey was undoubtedly very scenic, the line did not lead anywhere that a traveller would want to linger before the return trip. Average passenger journeys per year were 15,000 although this increased significantly with military personnel during WW2. Despite this, a daily scheduled service of one mixed train normally remained sufficient.

Up Mixed to GK in Sevoke Gorge Late 1930s P Tiller and M Metz



The DHR Teesta Valley Extension circa 1935





B Class at Kalijhora mid 1930s (DHRS)

Keeping the line operational, especially in the monsoon period, was a constant challenge and the devastating floods of early August 1937 caused much damage, washing away a road and rail bridge over the Sevoke river near its confluence with the Teesta. Until the rail bridge could be rebuilt the trains ran across the river on a temporary causeway of caged boulders; this was built with remarkable speed and trains were using it by the end of the month.

Sadly, it was on 10 – 11th June, 1950 that Mother Nature dealt a killer blow to the railway when a cyclone and torrential rains caused massive and widespread damage along the entire route. At Rilli, the ropeway was wrecked and at Gielle Khola all traces of the road, railway and settlement collapsed into the river. Despite widespread representations and protests, the newly independent nation decided it could not afford the rebuilding costs. The then metre gauge line from Siliguri through Sevoke catered for some of the traffic, but it is only now that

Timetable 1942 (DHRS)

TEESTA-VALLEY EXTENSION.				
UP TRAINS.			DOWN TRAINS.	
Stations.		41 Up Mixed.	Stations.	42 Down Mixed.*
		H. M.		H. M.
B. & A. Ry. Train	...Arr.	6 40	Gielle Khola ...	...Dep. 16.
Siliguri Junction	...Dep.	6 57	Riyang ...	... 16 40
Siliguri Road	... "	7 1	Rilli Siding ...	... " 17 5
Sevoke ...	... "	7 07	Sevoke ...	... " 18 23
Rilli Siding ...	... "	9 11	Siliguri Road ...	... " 19 8
Riyang ...	... "	9 25	Siliguri Junction ...	...Arr. 19 10
Gielle Khola ...	...Arr.	9 55	B. & A. Ry. Train	... Dep. 20 20

*From 1st June to 30th September, 42 Down will leave Gielle Khola at 16-30 arriving Siliguri at 18-38 hrs.

Teesta Valley Extension Timetable 1942



RIYANG RAILWAY STATION KALIMPONG

Photography by Kalimpong Stores Kodak

Riyang Railway Station (Kalimpong Stores)

the impending completion of a new broad-gauge line to Rangpo will give Sikkim its long-sought connection to the national rail network.

Today, there is little remaining evidence of the Teesta Valley line although the ledge it ran along can still be discerned in many places, and the stumps of abandoned bridges still poke above the river's often turbulent waters.

Abandoned Bridge 2012 (Paul Whittle)



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Darjeeling Mail

Through The Twists & Turns of Re-Routing

Anamitra Ghatak

The original intent to introduce a "Darjeeling Mail" was for connecting the then national capital (Calcutta) to the hill town of Darjeeling on a fast and reliable train journey. The heritage narrow gauge railway from Siliguri to Darjeeling (known as Darjeeling Himalayan Railway or DHR) came into being in 1881; giving the opportunity to establish a rail-only route with a gauge transfer at Siliguri Jn. A broad-gauge connection between Calcutta and Siliguri was also under construction at this time.

In 1915, the Hardinge Bridge was opened for train traffic on mighty river Padma to provide the direct rail connectivity between South and North Bengal. The same bridge with double track Broad Gauge accommodation was being used by Kolkata - Dhaka Maitree Express. This is when a train from Calcutta-Sealdah could reach the northern bank of Paxi (Pakshi) and eventually get to Siliguri.

On a 1931 version of railway timetable, Darjeeling Mail was found operating under the Eastern Bengal Railway's ownership. 1 Up Darjeeling Mail would depart platform #5 of Sealdah at 8:16 PM and arrive Siliguri Junction at 6:15 AM,

taking approximately 10 hours to complete the journey. In the opposite direction, 2 Down Darjeeling Mail would complete the journey starting from Siliguri at 8:45 PM and arriving Calcutta Sealdah at 7:00 AM. The timetable shows scheduled halts at Ranaghat Jn. (skipping Naihati Jn.), Poradah Jn., Ishurdi Jn., Nator, Santahar Jn., Hili, Parbatipur Jn., Saidpur Jn., Haldibari and Jalpaiguri. This train clearly took today's Gede - Darshana and Nilphamari - Haldibari BG connectors to complete its journey. A provisional halt at Barrackpore was also mentioned as 'when required' stop. The longest halt was Parbatipur Jn. (20 minutes). There was a second train; 15/16 Sealdah Siliguri North Bengal Express, running on the same route with a 12+ hours' schedule with additional halts at Barrackpore, Naihati Jn. etc. Clearly, there was the need for two overnight trains between Calcutta and Siliguri back in 1930s itself. Both these trains had respective DHR connections to Darjeeling with through ticketing options.

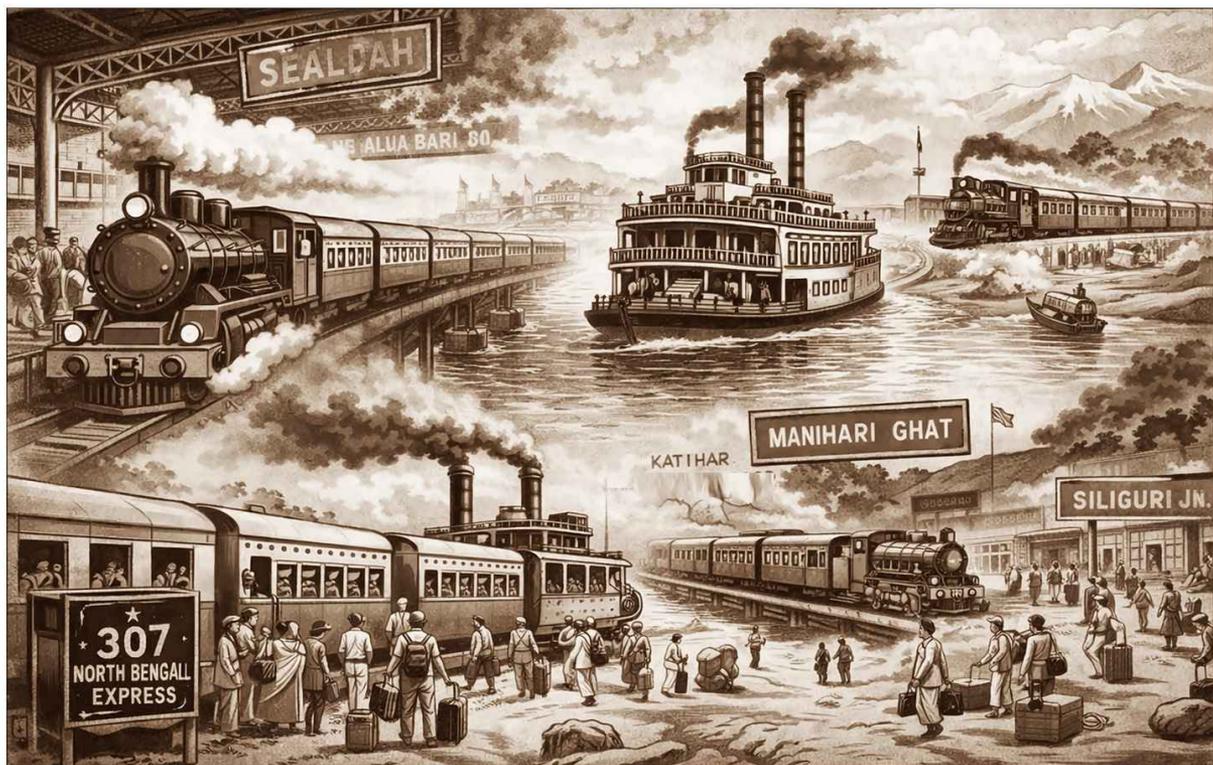
As two world wars were fought in the first half of 1900s and eventually India's independence came through with major

shift in administrative jurisdictions, Darjeeling Mail most likely stayed on course and helped with carrying allied troops during the war. Troops were heavily present on various locations on Darjeeling Mail's path; Barrackpore, Roosevelt City (later Kalyani), Cooper's Camp to name a few. As per 1947 timetable, Darjeeling Mail had slight adjustments made to its schedule; leaving Sealdah at 8:00 PM and arriving Siliguri at 6:10 AM. By this time, Barrackpore was added as a halt and Nator was removed.

In the 1955 Eastern Railway timetable, there was no mention of Darjeeling Mail. However, a 401/402 East Bengal Express (1st, 2nd, 3rd class accommodation) was found to be running between Calcutta Sealdah and Parbatipur Jn via Gede-Darsana border. At the same time a 307/308 North Bengal Express (1st, 2nd, 3rd class accommodation) was found to run between Sealdah (Departing at 10:30 AM) and Sakrigali Ghat (Arriving at 5:55 PM) near Sahibganj. An hour after arrival at Sakrigali Ghat, a steamer would take the passengers to Manihari Ghat to the northern bank of river Ganga by 7:35 PM. Manihari Ghat was served by a convenient Meter Gauge 307 North Bank Express, leaving at 20:25 hrs. and arriving at Siliguri Jn. by 5:30 AM. As an alternative, the leisurely 519/520 Manihari Fakirgram Passenger would depart at 10:15 PM, arriving at Siliguri Jn. by 9:20 hrs. next morning. Both the trains took the Katihar - Barsoi - Aluabari Road - Siliguri Meter Gauge connector that was the main line to Assam. As we could see, the end-to-end journey time

between Sealdah and Siliguri increased to 19 hours due to this detour and break of journey. The sole reason for taking this route would have been to avoid two international border crossings and the lack of a railway bridge over Ganges. That said, pulling baggage through the sand banks of the river between the train stations and the ferry stations was not fun. It was also stated by old-timers that there were porters and food vendors to let the passengers relax and use refreshments during the ferry break. Being a temporary station that had to be re-adjusted for the course of the river, Sakrigali and Manihari Ghat station did not have proper platforms or amenities; making it much harder for the elderly. Farakka barrage was not thrown open to road and rail traffic until the 70s. In the meantime, Indian Railways was looking for a faster option.

In the 1961 Bradshaw, we still find 401/402 East Bengal Express providing direct connectivity between Calcutta Sealdah (departing 3:55 PM) and Parbatipur Jn. (arriving 7:10 AM). There was a connecting PH-1 Parbatipur Haldibari Passenger that left Parbatipur at 9:10 AM and arrived at Haldibari by 1:45 PM. And finally, the 167 Haldibai - Siliguri Meter Gauge Passenger would start from Haldibari at 5:30 PM and reach Siliguri Jn by 7:30 PM. Please note that Haldibari to Siliguri was converted by this time to meter gauge from broad gauge for operational convenience of Northern Frontier Railway (NFR). On return, one could catch the 162 Haldibari Passenger from Siliguri at 7:10 AM and





arrive at Haldibari by 9:30 AM. Then the HP-2 down passenger would leave Haldibari at 2:20 PM, arriving at Parbatipur Jn by 6:40 PM. This would further connect to 402 East Bengal Express, departing Parbatipur at 9:45 PM and arriving at Calcutta Sealdah by 11:42 AM next morning. Of course, this route involved two sets of customs/immigration checks and hence must have been less popular than the North Bengal Express + Sakrigali-Manihari Ferry + North Bank Express combination.

Unfortunately, after 1965 war between India and Pakistan, the connections between Indian and East Pakistan railways got snapped. As a result, the East Bengal Express had to be discontinued. However, in 1964; before the war broke out, Eastern Railway brought back the big ticket 'Darjeeling Mail' with train number 43/44.

In the 1966 Timetable, we found the new avatar of 43/44 Darjeeling Mail with a stable schedule. It left Sealdah at 12:45 PM. After traversing the regular route via Howrah-Bardhaman Chord, Barddhaman, Bolpur-Shantiniketan, Rampurhat and Nalhati Jn., this train would terminate at Farakka (ferry) station at 7:36 PM. A connecting steamer would leave Farakka at 8:20 PM to drop the passengers off at Khejuria Ghat steamer station by 9:00 PM in the northern bank. The pairing train, that was also called 'Darjeeling Mail' (NFR Train number 11/12) would depart at 9:50 PM from Khejuria Ghat and travel to the newly constructed New Jalpaiguri (NJP) station, arriving at 5:10 AM. The interesting part was that there were multiple halts for this train in the

NFR territory that included Chamagram, Khaltipur, Jamirghata, Malda Town, Old Malda, Samsi, Bhaluka Road, Harishchandrapur, Kumedpur Jn, Barsoi Jn., Krishnaganj (later Kishanganj) and Aluabari Road. Though it still truncated into a ferry and two separate trains dotted with halts, this train brought down the Sealdah to NJP journey time to just 16 hours and 15 minutes. This was made possible by establishing Farakka-Khejuria (West Bengal) ferry by discontinuing Sakrigali-Manihari (Bihar) ferry and choosing the faster broad gauge route via Malda Town instead of Meter Gauge link via Katihar.

As discussed earlier, in 1975, the Farakka barrage and railway connections were up and running. As a result of direct railway connection via Farakka barrage, a direct 43/44 Darjeeling Mail had permanently discontinued the use of ferry and sealed its 7:15 PM departure with NJP arrival at 8:00 AM; the schedule this train would roughly follow through the next 25 years till the end of the millennium without much experimentation. The rake length was 12 to 15 coaches despite the continued inclusion of all upper and lower classes at high demand. It operated with a regular maroon or maroon-cream livery rake that was not distinctive when compared to contemporary other mail or express trains.

After the reincarnation, till the early 90s, Darjeeling Mail used to get an Asansol based WAM-1 electric locomotive from Sealdah to Barddhaman Jn. Thereafter a WP and later a WDM-2/ALCO locomotive was to be provided for the

unelectrified route. Once the old vacuum brake rake was replaced with Air-Brake rakes in the 90s, the WAM-1 had to be discontinued. At this time, Darjeeling Mail would run with Barddhaman (Bardhaman/Burdwan) ALCO from Sealdah to Barddhaman. This loco would be swapped with another Barddhaman ALCO for the rest of the journey. The same ritual followed in both Up and Down directions so that Sealdah Division could rotate diesel locos from Barddhaman Diesel Shed.

By year 1999, Darjeeling Mail became a sluggish overnighter between Sealdah and NJP that would still consume 11 hours (departing at 7:15 PM and arriving at 08:15 AM) by making numerous halts and helping convenience-matters like mail and cash delivery, diesel locomotive rotation between Sealdah and Barddhaman, separate slip coaches for Haldibari etc. These were alongside a good amount of illegal smuggling activities plagued with chain pulling and unloading goods on the way. Darjeeling Mail, despite its lax schedule was running late and gathering the ire of passengers.

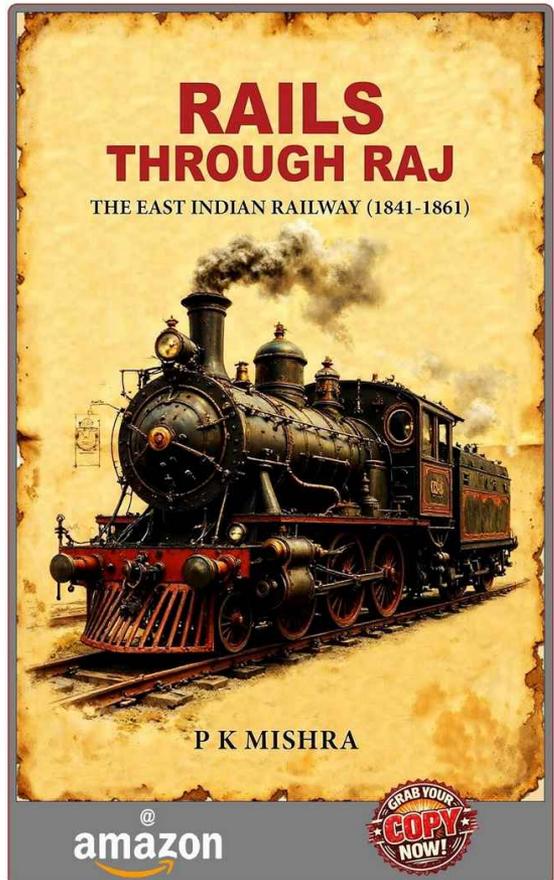
The good news started to flow in year 2000, when additional services from Kolkata to North Bengal were introduced. Two new weekly trains from Sealdah; the Uttar Banga Express to New Coochbehar and the Kanchankanya Express to Alipurduar Jn. were tabled to run via the less congested BAK (Bardhaman-Azimganj-Katwa) loop. These two trains became immediately popular with passengers as a sigh of relief from the perennially waitlisted Darjeeling Mail. These trains were later made daily services and re-routed via SBG (Sahibganj) loop, adding more to the overnight passenger capacity between Sealdah and North Bengal.

In the 2000 – 2005 timeframe, a few other developments on track capacity expansion were showing results on Sahibganj Loop. The route was gradually being patch doubled and thrown open for commercial traffic. This is when there was an opportunity for 3143/3144 Darjeeling Mail to be upgraded to Superfast status. Eastern Railway and NFR did a commendable job to re-invent Darjeeling Mail's timings into a crack-superfast that would leave Sealdah much later (10:15 PM) in the night and take approximately nine hours and thirty minutes to complete the journey with a new train number: 2343/2344. It was a significant reduction of running time (3 hours and 30 minutes shaved off). Many wayside halts were eliminated to pave way for a 24-coach rake to fit the existing platform length. Many railfans called it a blessing in disguise; Darjeeling Mail was no-longer halting at Bidhan Nagar Road, Dakshineswar, Ahmadpur Jn., Sainthia Jn., Pakur, Kumedpur Jn., Barsoi Jn., Dalkholha, Aluabari Road Jn. etc. to help the train get an uninterrupted run. The haulage of Barddhaman based ALCO locomotives and loco swapping en-route was discontinued by assigning the neo-superfast a state-of-the-art Siligiri (NFR) based WDP4 locomotive. It was a new Darjeeling Mail that looked like, was scheduled for and deserved the respect of a superfast.

From the year 2010 and after, Indian Railways' focus shifted to electrification. After 2015, the entire Patna/Howrah – Guwahati route was approved for rapid electrification. Finally, in year 2020, the entire Khana – NJP route was electrified and was thrown open to electric locomotives. As was expected, Darjeeling Mail was one of the first trains to run end-to-end upto NJP with electric locomotives. With its 24-coach load, it was given a WAP-7 link.

In the year 2022, Darjeeling Mail was granted a 22-coach modern LHB (Linke Hoffsman Busch) rake. While the LHB coaches have been gaining popularity for three decades on Howrah-New Delhi mainline, this is the first time Darjeeling Mail was permitted to run at 130 kmph on the Dankuni Jn. to Khana Jn. stretch.

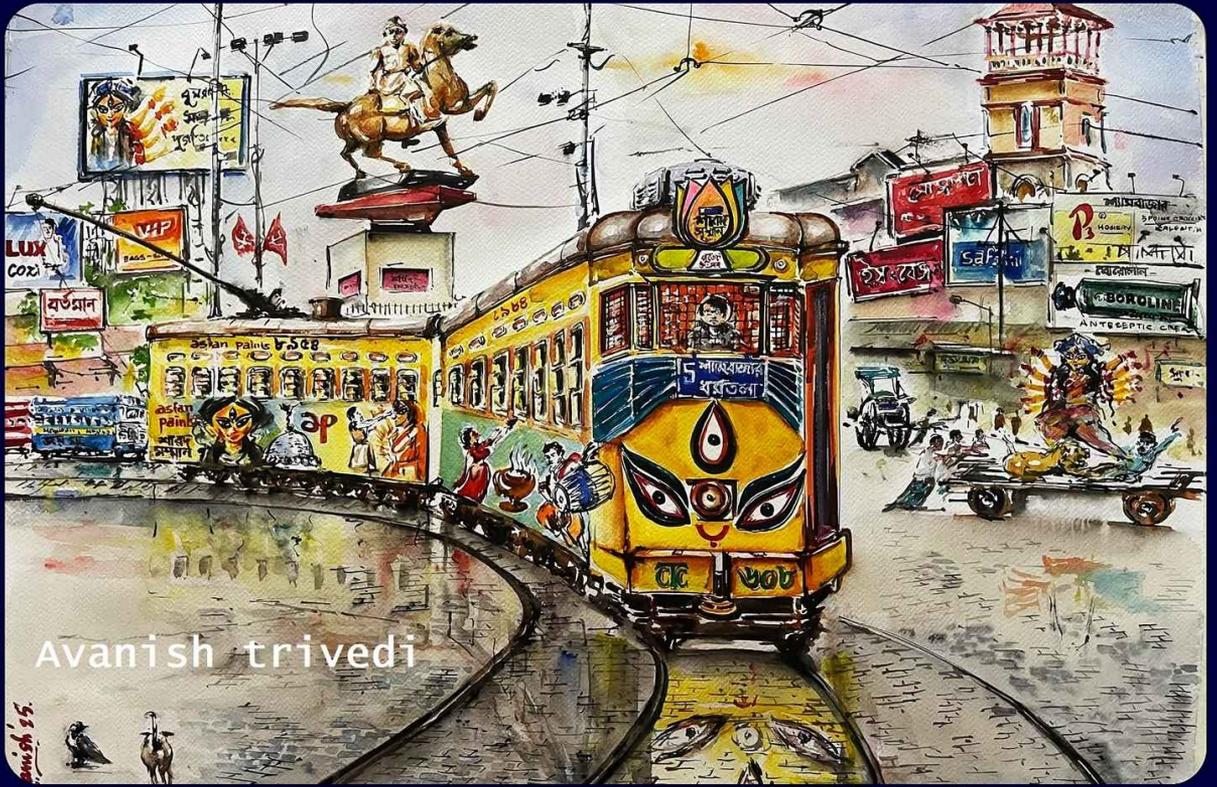
Today, Darjeeling Mail is not only one of the fastest overnight connections between the state capital and the largest city in North Bengal, it is the living legacy of a bygone colonial and post-independence era that continued to adapt to and reflect to the political, economic and social priorities of Bengal. This is the reason Darjeeling Mail is still the first choice for many to travel between Kolkata metropolitan and Siliguri and will continue to remain so.





Avanish Trivedi

Sketches



Avanish trivedi



Bipul krishna biswas



My Childhood Train Journeys

Kunal Gupta

Part - II

Friends, I have already shared my run in with the trains during my early childhood days in the previous part of my essay. This time, I shall be continuing with my further explorations and adventures of yore. As a rail enthusiast, I always felt the cardinal need to take a ride on the Circular Railway ravishing the beauty of the Hooghly River but could not quite make it owing to my school and studies thereof. Finally, during the 1984 Durga Puja (students were not supposed to study in those 4 days of the great festival), I, along with a friend of mine decided to give it a try. Both of us

were barely 14 years old that time. Our nearest station was Bagbazar which incidentally was the terminal station. There was a train at 9.35 am and we home around 8.40 am walking down to Bidhannagar Road station – a 10 minutes' walk. We waited patiently for the bus to take us to Bagbazar Bata (the bus stop) from where we were to walk down to the station which was another 10 minutes or so. We went on waiting for the bus which refused to show up. We were getting impatient. I had around Rs. 5 in my pocket and I presume so did my friend. Finally, at 9.15 am, the bus serving route

number 201 turned up and we got down at Bagbazar Bata at 9.28 am. We didn't have much idea where the station was and on enquiry realized it is going to be a tough task catching the train if we walk. So, we started running – it was quite some distance – we crossed the famous Bagbazar Sarbojonin Puja and then out of nowhere sprung up a tramline and then a tall boundary wall. Suddenly there was a diesel shunter honking and then we realized on the other side of the wall is the train line with the top portion of the train visible – the sad part was that it had started moving. We didn't know where the station entrance was and where the ticket counter was but we knew we can't miss this train – as such trains in this route were sparse and during puja time many trains remained cancelled. We crossed the road, looked at each other, scaled the wall – luckily the gap between the wall and the track was not much and we took a plunge – jumped inside the train – it was not exactly a 'Sholay' movie scene but two teenagers panting and gasping for breath. Thankfully, it was a very slow train and we could land inside safely though with minor bruises. The compartment had few passengers but the ones inside were trying to figure out what we were up to. We were not in a position to speak – still panting. The next station Sovabazar we got down and asked someone where the ticket counter was – we were told towards the loco end – we started running again but before we could reach there was a loud honk and the train started moving (we must have got into one of the rear compartments initially). There were a couple of Ticket Checkers (TC) who were boarding the compartment and we politely told them we have not been able to buy tickets and in the next station we will get one – they smiled and let us in – kids we were. And then started the next round – the two TCs told us that they will fine us – we were shit scared – we tried to reason stating that we have not been able to buy tickets and in the next station we will certainly buy one. This was possibly the first compartment from the loco and number of passengers was much more – everyone started enjoying the show – two of us pleading and two of them refusing to budge – the next station came and went – we were with them only. A few passengers even pleaded – they are young kids, leave them. Well finally, one of the TCs came up with a solution – we will penalize one – so you have to pay a penalty of Rs. 11 – that was the best possible solution. We were helpless – we searched for our pockets and both put together could manage around Rs. 9. Yes, that is what we had. The TCs did not relent. We looked at the other passengers requesting for their help – finally a co-passenger came up with Rs. 2. One of the TCs cut a challan (receipt) and told us very curtly next time you are travelling please do ensure you have tickets – little did he know our story of how we got into the moving train from the wrong side. The train came to a halt and we had reached the terminal station Princep Ghat. Both of us realized that we did not even see the river from the moving train even for once – we missed Babughat, Eden Gardens and what not. We came out of the station thanking the Good Samaritan – once we came out of the station, we realized we



don't have even a single paisa in our pockets to head back home. My aunt stayed at Hastings which was roughly 2 km from this station and we decided to walk down – get some cash and go back home. The 'Good Samaritan' decided to accompany us – he wanted his money back. We walked all the way to Hastings as my aunt gave me some cash and handed over Rs. 2 to the person who had walked for around 2 km with us! She gave some more to my friend and asked him to go home and then I went back to my aunt – after all she owed an explanation. My first experience in Circular Rail has been so bad that in all these 40 years I have availed it only twice and only when compelled to!

In between there was one trip to Gaya by Doon Express. My first journey to Puri had been in 1986 – a must visit for any Bengali worth its salt. Nothing much to write about barring multiple loco changes at Kharagpur followed by Khurda Road. However, in 1988 there were back-to-back railway trips – one to Lucknow and then to Ranchi. The first one was with my parents in Himgiri Express – a train which had by then become just another train in IR shedding its past glory. We left Howrah late at night and next morning found ourselves in Madhupur. This train has tremendous slack and station after station till Patna we were kept waiting in

stations for a long long period. Another train to North Bihar was with us in an adjacent platform in Jhajha which got precedence over us. Things started changing after Patna – it was June and it was that hot. The cold drinks from the pantry were getting exhausted before it could reach our 2nd class sleeper. After some time, all the windows were shut – it was too hot to handle. We reached Mughal Sarai (now Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyay Nagar) and then onwards to Varanasi. The train finally picked up speed after that and we reached Lucknow around 7.30 pm or so. Our return journey was also by the same train and class. The train was delayed by an hour or so and the 3 sleeper coaches hardly had any markings to identify which one is ours. All 3 were crowded to the hilt – getting inside was a challenge and finally we reached our allocated berth after quite some time with no place to move actually. Expectedly, another family was occupying our berths and with great difficulty we were able to vacate them. I was about to check the time after I could sit in the berth only to realize the wrist watch was missing. The train in the return journey was not that bad though. I remember the near nonstop run from Asansol to Howrah and still remember the train slowing down and coming to a near halt in Durgapur to allow someone to get down.

After exactly 3 days, I was again traveling to Ranchi enroute Netarhat – this time with my friends, a first of its kind tour. It was Ranchi Hatia Express from Howrah departing at 9.35 pm. We left home at 7.45 pm and we were traveling to the station in one of our friend's car. We should have reached Howrah station by 8.30 pm at least but traffic had other plans! For people accustomed with Howrah station, there is always a Burrabazar and an MG Road which many of us call by its earlier name of Harrison Road. We were badly stuck in a procession followed by a massive traffic jam. At around 9 pm, we ditched the car and started walking. We reached the Howrah Bridge which for whatever reasons was relatively empty and hopped into a tram as in those days trams used

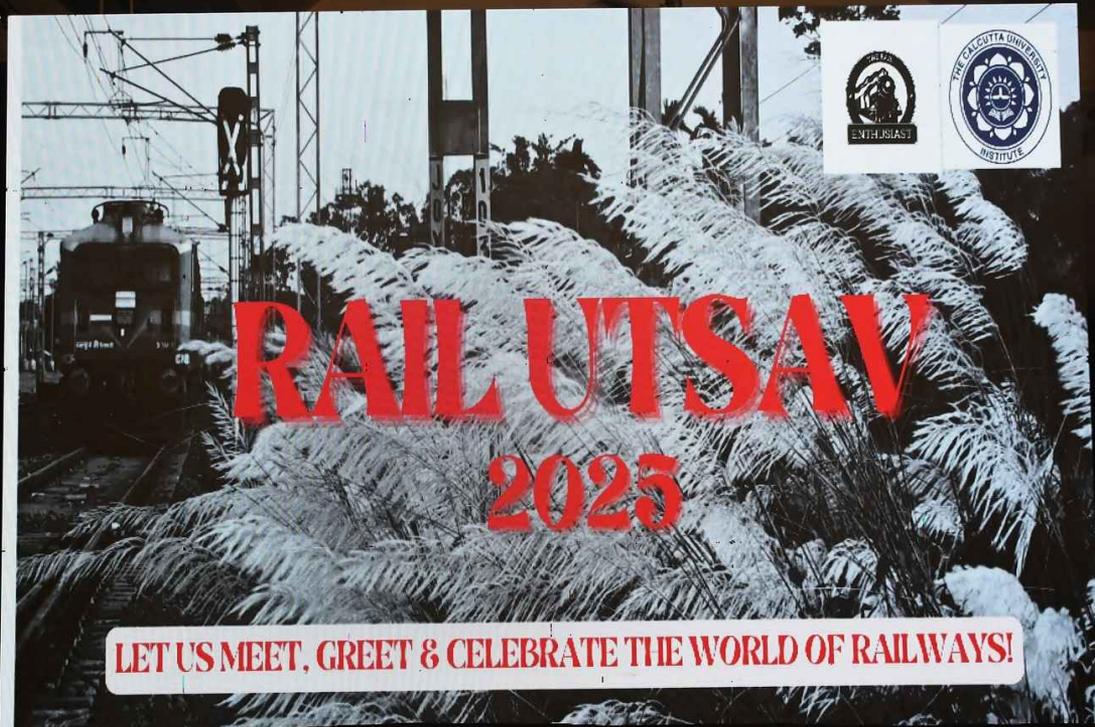


to run till the station. We reached the other side of the river and realized it was around 9.25 pm which made us to start running. We didn't know which platform it was but Howrah station was then only a standalone complex with the new complex still a far cry and the South Eastern Railway trains used to start from the double-digit platforms (not double discharge). We reached the designated platform and to our surprise the reservation list displayed the names in hand written Hindi – a language over which none of us had major control. Anyways we managed to sneak into the right compartment just on time and in a minute or so it started moving. The rest of the journey was quite eventful, more so after we reached Ranchi and more precisely our road journey to Netarhat but that is beyond the purview of this write-up. The return was also by the same train (actually that was the only train in this sector then) – all 4 of us were tremendously tensed since we knew the Joint Entrance Examination results were scheduled to be out that day. Nevertheless, that is a different story again!

I still treasure these little experiences with trains before I attained adulthood. These encounters have remained etched in my memories along with some others as my mother often mentions about an incident where I had once hopped into another empty local train in Howrah station, only luckily to be retrieved in no time!

The next 4 years of my life were local train journeys as a daily passenger during my engineering days and occasional overnight travels with friends and relatives. Subsequently, during my higher studies period in Bangalore and numerous travels thereafter to all parts of the country as a working professional, I have undertaken many more train journeys. For all long-distance travels, I have maintained a log of journeys and all the stations I have been to. I must admit that the list is quite an impressive one. May be, I shall share some of these travelogues another time.





Planning & Preparation

Somsubhra Das

The 'Rail Utsav' has its roots to an invitation of some members of the Rail Enthusiasts' Society (RES) to the Calcutta University Institute on its Foundation Day, i.e., 31st August of 2025. **Mr. Soumitra Pal**, the Retd. Justice of Calcutta High Court who also happens to be the President of Calcutta University Institute along with being a member of RES, had initially hatched a plan about a holding an informal railway meet at the Calcutta University Institute Hall. His brainchild was accordingly nurtured into a larger spectrum and scale which ultimately prospered as 'Rail Utsav'. **Mr. Sanjoy Mookerjee**, Ex-Financial Commissioner, Railway Board heading the Eastern and North Eastern (E & NE) Chapter of the RES played the role of chief protagonist in making the event see the light of the day. But all did not fall in place in a jiffy!

John Lennon said, '*A dream you dream alone is only a dream. A dream you dream together is reality....*' An event of the magnitude of Rail Utsav demanded focus and commitment backed by relentless efforts to visualize the

framework. As usual, the execution part would have to come later. As the E & NE wing of the RES decided to make the proposal a reality, weekend meet ups or meetings soon became the norm. The meeting venues got changed from Retd. Justice Pal's place to Mr. Mookerjee's backyard, from the iconic Coffee House to the posh Calcutta Club but the agenda stayed the same. With every meeting came some eating, of course without losing sight of what we were striving to achieve. While individual mention of the services rendered by the 'Core Members' is often considered to be unjust but their contribution in pulling off such an event without any blemish was noteworthy.

Mr. Soumitra Pal needs special mention for being the pioneer to arrange such a programme at a venue which is wrapped in heritage and culture. Without his being at the helm of the Calcutta University Institute, Rail Utsav might not have happened at all within such a short notice. **Mr. Sanjoy Mookerjee's** intent and experience did the rest. The meetings were chaired by Mr. Mookerjee and Mr. Pal with

regular attendees in **Mr. Souroshankha Maji, Mr. Kaushik Majumdar, Mr. Arkopal Sarkar, Mr. Akash Ray** and yours truly. During the several interactive sessions, it was finally and unanimously decided that the event would be structured in such a way so as to accommodate **Mr. Vinoo N Mathur, Mr. Sudhangshu S. Dey, Mr. Prashant Kumar Mishra, Mr. Sanjoy Mookerjee, Mr. A. Siddiqui, Ms. Aashima Mehrotra, Mr. Souroshankha Maji, Mr. Atulya Sinha, Mr. J.L. Singh** and **Mr. Debasis Mukhopadhyay** as speakers, specifically in that order. The credentials of these distinguished speakers would be made known from the follow up article covering the event.

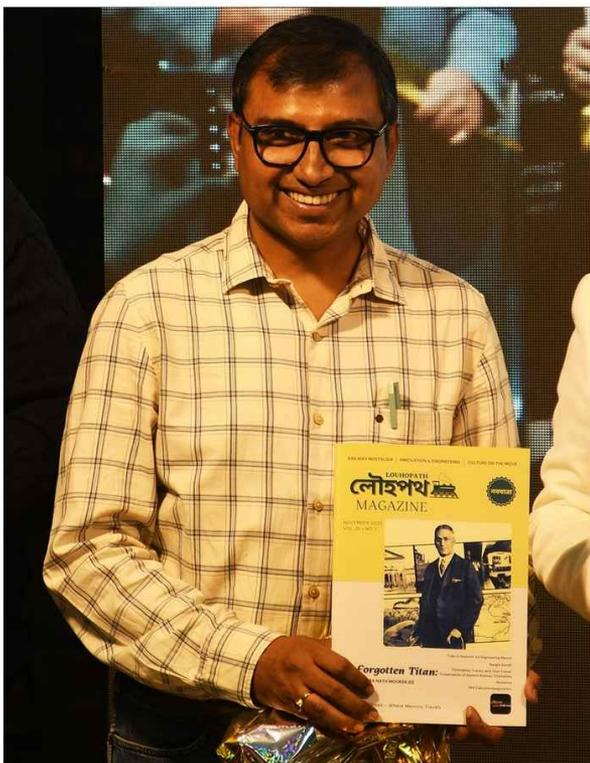
Mr. Kaushik Majumdar, member of RES was soon identified as the 'Backroom Boy' for the event who would provide logistic support; though his role was not limited to that only. Mr. Majumdar had long been striving to publish an e-Magazine in the lines of **Rail Canvaz**, a free e-Journal which is published over the last five years from the house of **Team TrainTrackers** whose members are also members of the Rail Enthusiasts' Society. But his new magazine was to have a distinct core and would be based on the impact of railways on society. Likewise, many names were suggested until we zeroed in on **Louhapath** – The Iron Path. It was decided that the magazine's inaugural copies would be funded by the RES. Getting a magazine published has its own challenges and no wonder the challenge got bigger as the magazine was hailed to be a bilingual one, a first of its kind, in the field of

ferroequinology. Office commitments, as expected, came in the way only to be overcome by devoting some sleepless nights for the cause.

The Book Exhibition and Sale part of the event demanded special attention. **Mr. J.L. Singh**, Secretary, RES along with **Mr. Sanjoy Mookerjee** were instrumental in getting things done as they contacted most the Zonal Heads for their respective Coffee Table Books, if any, for Display and Sale in the event. Individual authors were also lopped in for the said purpose resulting in a display of some rare railway literature. Some notable and rare books that were put on display and sale included –

- *The Railway Children* by *E. Nesbit*
- *Kangra Valley Railway, Kalka Shimla Railway, South Eastern Railway, March to New Millenium, The Blue Chip Railway and Jodhpur Railway* by *R.R. Bhandari*
- *BNR, A Legacy, Freight Legacy of BNR and Iron Ore, The Railway Story* by *G. K. Mohanty*
- *Building Bridges & Black Beauties and Indian Railway Buildings* by *Vinoo N. Mathur*
- *The Roaring Journey, Garden Reach, A Railway Story (Editions 1 & 2) and Revival of Bayer Garratt (2 Vol.)* by *Saibal Bose*
- *More Miles More Smiles* by *J.L. Singh*
- *Train to Darjeeling & Other Railway Tales, Howrah Junction, Assam Mail, Samar Shome's Diary and Girin Babu! Tea* by *Sanjoy Mookerjee*
- *Dark Cloud & The Silver Lining and Rear Window* by *Sudakshina K Mookerjee*
- *Genesis of A Railway Terminus* by *Soumitra Pal*
- *The Great Indian Railway Atlas* by *Samit Roychoudhury*
- *Soul City* by *Preeti Roychoudhury*
- *Odisha, The Railway Story* by *Dilip Kumar Samantray*
- *Indian Railways* by *Gurcharan Das*
- *Third Class on Indian Railways* by *Mahatma Gandhi*
- *Train to Pakistan* by *Khushwant Singh*
- *A Short History of Indian Railways* by *Rajendra B Aklekar*
- *Rail Nama* by *Late D. Roychoudhury*
- *The Great Train Journey* by *Ruskin Bond*
- *Story of Indian ALCO Locomotives* by *SM Sharma & J. Dutta*
- *Philatelic Handbook on I.R.* by *Vikas Singh*
- *Mahatma Gandhi & The Railways* by *Dr. Y.P. Anand*
- *Line Clear to India* by *A. Rana Rao*
- *Romance of the Railways* by *S. Parthasarthy*
- *Symphony of Progress-Saga of ER* by *P. Kumar & S. Majumdar*
- *Bharater Biswa Aitijyasthal (Bengali)* by *Sutapa Joti*
- *Indian Railways' Journey with Coal, 1855-2023* by *Ashim Kumar Maitra*
- *Transformation, Transportation from DFCCIL*
- *Vibrant Edifice, Rail Travel from Zero Mile, Train, Tracks & Tales from Eastern Railway*
- *2002 Artways (2 Volumes)* from South Eastern Railway

Along with these epics, several issues of **THE RAIL ENTHUSIAST** Magazine of RES, old and new, were on sale





and flew off the racks in a whisker.

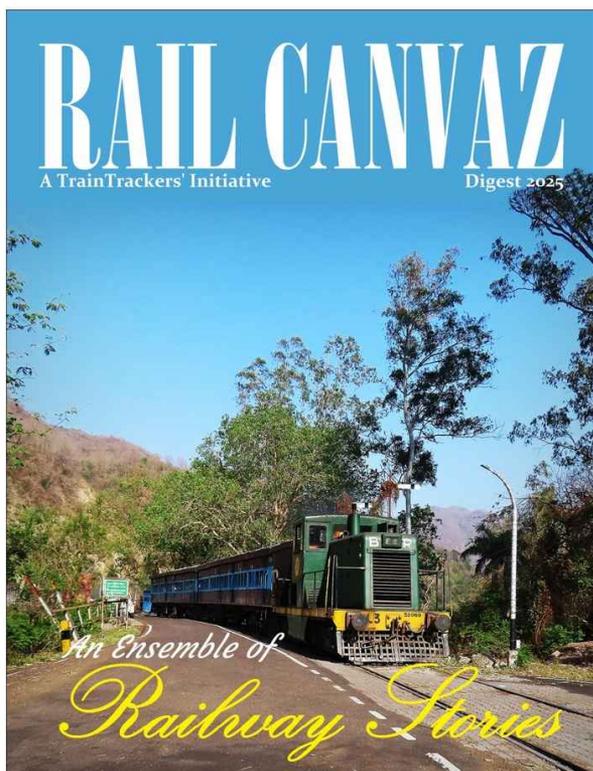
While things slowly started to get aligned for Louhath, the bulk of the logistics part remained unresolved. At this very juncture, M/s. Cubex Advertising stepped in. This was Mr. Kaushik's another discovery. **Mr. Tirtha**, heading the firm led from the front, right from planning to meeting our requirements. He soon assumed the bigger role from being a contractor supplying materials to being an event manager. From installing LED Walls to readying standees, from printing flexes to printing magazines, from synchronization of logistics to creating uniquely designed signages, he did it all on his own accord, never requiring a push from the end of the organizers in us. His calm presence coupled with true assurance enabled execution of the highest level.

As different facets of the event begin to settle, it was time to nominate members who would carry out different functions during the event. **Mr. Akash Roy**, Associate Member of Team TrainTrackers and member of RES along with **Mr. Anubhab Chakraborty**, member of RES were assigned with the task of looking after the 'Book Exhibition' Stall which hosted many rare books based on railways. **Mr. Anamitra Bose**, member of Team TrainTrackers and RES was given responsibility of the 'Book Sale' Counter which involved handling cash and other modes of payment for the sold-out books. Yours truly



was entrusted to oversee the smooth functioning of the Book Exhibition cum Sale counters along with other responsibilities from time to time. **Mr. Arkopal Sarkar**, member of Team TrainTrackers and RES with **Mr. Sabyasachi Ghosh**, member of RES were at the helm of matters involving Registration and issue of Food Coupons.

Besides being in the thick of things, the participating members of Team TrainTrackers had their own task cut out. **Rail Canvaz Digest** - an ensemble of railway stories published in several issues of Rail Canvaz free e-Magazine, was to come out along with the team's Railway Calendar of





2026. Mr. Rudranil Roychowdhury, one of the co-founders of Team TrainTrackers and member of RES had been upto this twin challenge and without any doubt, he came out with flying colours as both the **Rail Canvaz Digest** and **TrainTrackers Calendar 2026** were inaugurated in the event by the special dignitaries present. Crafting and curating a Railway Calendar was no mean task. Time was the biggest hurdle that was surmounted with intense sessions with the Vendor and finalizing designs to get the desired output. Both the products garnered tremendous appreciation, not only from the dignitaries but also from the event attendees.

With nearly everything done and dusted, it was 'Dress Rehearsal' on the day preceding the event which too went off well. The 'Dry Run' of syncing logistics went about without any hiccups. Preparation had reached its peak as 'Book Exhibition', 'Book Sale' counters along with the counter for 'Rail Model Show' by the **Precision Model Works (PMW)** were ready. PMW is makers of high-quality scale models and miniatures, offering a wide array of Indian Railways models which are fabricated in high resolution 3D printers and then handcrafted with the utmost care by a team of skilled craftsmen. **PMW along with the Calcutta University Institute and TrainTrackers had been designated partners of the event. The Indian Railway Finance**



Corporation and Besco Limited had also been roped in as official event partners.

In the middle of all these preparations, the Guests of Honour and Dignitaries for the programme had been selected and suitably requested for their august presence to light up the occasion. Prominent print media houses had also been sent requests to cover this one-of-a-kind event. e-Cards for invitation along with formal invitation cards had been sent to the invitees in due time. Meanwhile, the Gift Hampers of guests and attendees along with arrangements of refreshments had also been finalized and taken care of. The staff of the Calcutta University Institute also rose to the occasion and provided every possible support on all days, be it a holiday or not. Kudos to all the stake holders and those who voluntarily came up to make the event a success.

Rail Utsav was truly like 'Living a Dream', not for the efforts that we had put in but for all the success it met as it could veer away from being weighed down by the burden of expectations that usually accompany such events of tall order. Rail Utsav has thus remained a programme which was executed without a single glitch and achieving that was no child's play. Paying attention to every intricate detailing, be it for the photos used to represent the theme of the event or for the protocols maintained to provide an ambience of ease and comfort to the higher officials of our national carrier, held the key to succeed. Participating members of Team TrainTrackers along with a few members from RES had been instrumental in running the show without any setbacks.

The essence of Rail Utsav continues as the event unfolded through the following article by Mr. Tapan Pal.





When the Festival Unfolded

Tapan Pal

The Planning and Preparation Days of Rail Utsav as elucidated by Mr. Somsubhra Das in the article leading to the instant one ultimately made way to the D-Day. As referred earlier, the Eastern and North Eastern Chapter of the Rail Enthusiasts' Society had planned to organize **RAIL UTSAV 2025** on Sunday the 30th November, 2025 from 1:30 PM to 8:00 PM at the Calcutta University Institute Hall in Kolkata. It may sound a bit out of place about the name of the event but one must be versed about 'why' and 'how' this event took place before opting for a foregone conclusion. So, first things first.

Why do we need festivals? Could we not pursue our passion quietly? The answer is a big 'NO'. We, rail aficionados, need

to keep contact with fellow rail aficionados from every corner of the country, as in the fast-changing world of Indian Railways, we need to keep ourselves updated all the time. Holistic railfanning is an academic hobby, needing intellect, labour and application of the head to prove that the thing on the shoulders is not just a showpiece. So, we need festivals to promote multiculturalism in railfanning, build social cohesion, to give emotional fillip, to celebrate traditions, to connect people to their heritage and strengthen communities through shared experiences and a sense of belonging.

The event took off with **Mr. Sudhangshu S. Dey**, President of The Publishers & Booksellers Guild and **Mr. Soumitra Pal**, Retired Justice and President of Calcutta University Institute



jointly inaugurating the **'Book Exhibition'**. 'Rail Model Show' by the Precision Model Works (PMW) was also part of the initiative and equally impressive. PMW is a 3D printing and custom model making firm that produces models of Indian Railways in various formats. Model Railroading has very limited presence and exposure in India and the firm aims to fill that gap by introducing accurate scale models (in 1:87 scale) of Indian Railways rolling stock. Their flagship electric locomotives, WAP7 and WAG9, not only look accurately detailed, they also run!!!! A true ode to craftsmanship.

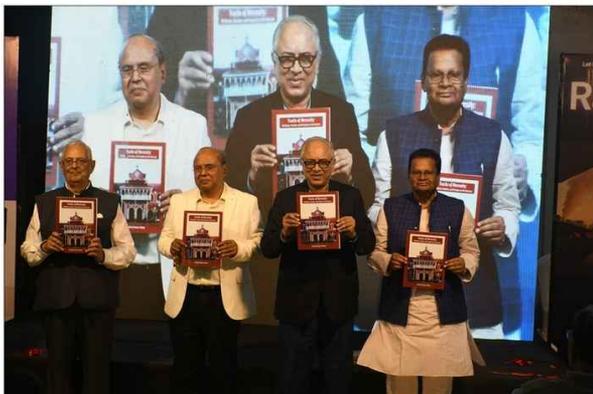
After lighting of the Ceremonial Lamp, came the **'Welcome Address'** by none other than **Mr. Vinoo N Mathur**, President, Rail Enthusiasts' Society. Precisely, the society has been instrumental in helping the railways to identify and conserve heritage assets. It organizes international conferences, publishes books and magazines, conducts railway heritage tours for its members and encourages the young and old to know and love railways. Mr. Mathur's address was followed by **Mr. Sudhangshu S. Dey's** speech who tried to correlate technological advancements in railways with contemporary the Bengali Literature.

The next presentation was 'Overview of The East Indian



Railway Company's Legacy' by **Mr. Prashant Kumar Mishra**, General Manager, Modern Coach Factory of Raebareli along with being a noted 'Rail Historian'. Mr. Mishra elucidated that the legendary East Indian Railway (reporting mark EIR) was founded on 1st June, 1845 and stretched from Howrah to Ghaziabad including Lucknow and Moradabad. Its Chief Engineer was 'First railway engineer of India', George Turnbull (2nd September 1809 – 26th February 1889), who had declined a British Knighthood. The London times thought it to be the 'most perfectly managed railways in the world' and its financial viability (Operating Ratio in the range of 65 and 35) ignited the imagination of a whole lot of companies growing up like mushrooms to lay tracks here, there and everywhere in the subcontinent. Mr. Mishra further added that on 1st January, 1925 the British Indian Government took over the management of the EIR and divided it into six divisions – Howrah, Asansol, Danapur, Allahabad, Lucknow and Moradabad. PK Mishra also explained how daunting was the task of laying track and building bridge, needing about 100 British Civil Engineers and 1,18,000 Indian workers; and how the newly laid tracks acted as a catalyst for social change and reshaped the economy of Eastern and Northern India. Railway was a catalyst for industrialization, a force that would dissolve old societal structures like the caste system and integrate India





into the modern world. Mr. Mishra truly took the listeners back to those days of yore when the railways started as a rudimentary mode of transport only to assume gargantuan proportions over the years!

But it was not about the talks only as diversity was the forte of Rail Utsav. The next event lined up was 'Book Release'. As many as five books were released by the dignitaries on the occasion which included –

1. **The Highway of Hindostan: The East Indian Railway 1841 – 1871** by *Prashant Kumar Mishra*
2. **Tracks of Necessity : Railways, Famine and Empire in the Deccan** by *Prashant Kumar Mishra*
3. **Louhpath** – The Iron Path, an e-Journal, conceptualized by *Kaushik Majumdar*, member of the Rail Enthusiasts' Society
4. **Rail Canvaz – Digest 2025** which is a compendium of selected articles published over five years in the free e-Journal the 'Rail Canvaz' by *Team TrainTrackers* who are also member of the Rail Enthusiasts' Society
5. A **2026 Table Calendar** by *Team TrainTrackers* adorned with photos of Indian Railways taken by the members of the said team.

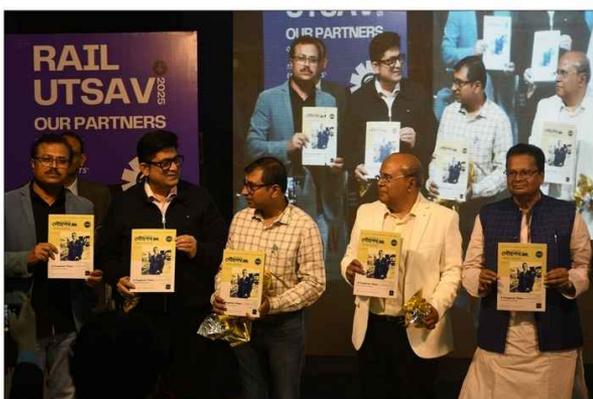
This special occasion was presided over by **Mr. Sanjoy Mookerjee**, Ex-Financial Commissioner, Railway Board who



also felicitated the Guests of Honour and Dignitaries that included the nominated speakers along with the renowned philatelist **Md. Mujibullah** who also is the Managing Director of Stamwiz Enterprise.

After the book launch session, it was time for some brain storming session in **Quiz Time**. Quizmaster **Mr. A. Siddiqui** took the stage to enlighten us thereby emphasizing the fact that railways is a subject too vast to know all. Still there were winners who rose to the occasion to bag the mementos.

Many of the questions and trivia posed during the quiz sessions were from the legacy and heritage front of our national carrier; thus, it was apt for **Ms. Aashima Mehrotra** – the Executive Director (Heritage) of Railway Board to take center stage to deliver a keynote on Railway Heritage Conservation. She emphasized about the fact that the Indian Railways is a 'Living Legacy' and in its eventful journey of 172 years (April 16, 1853, Bori Bunder to Thane – Till date) it has crossed many a milestones; and we owe a liability to our future generations to document them, archive them and showcase them. She highlighted an interesting point that modernity and heritage are not a contradiction and Indian Railways is utmost sincere in its effort to preserve heritage. But Railways cannot do it without wider societal perception and participation; as Railways does not own the

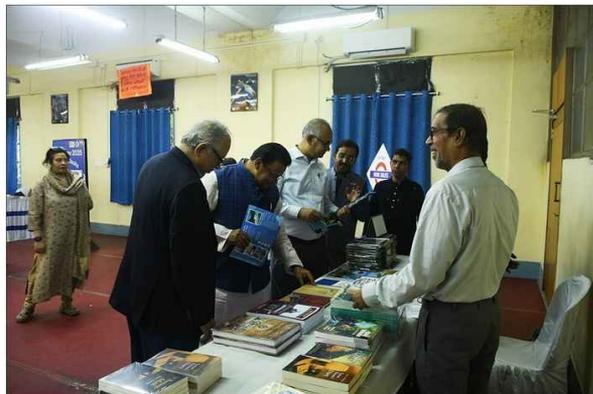
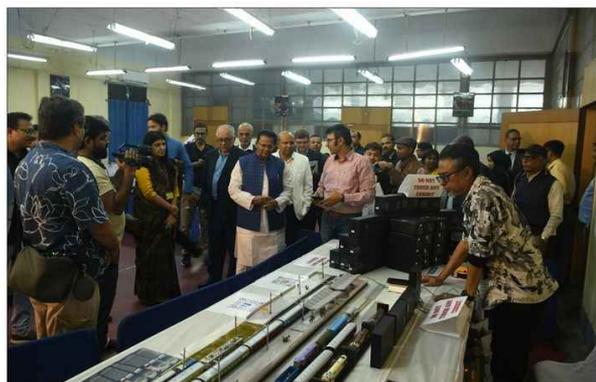






heritage property – it belongs to the Nation, its people. Railways is just custodian of that property who passes them on to the coming generations consisting of both the tangible and intangible components like folklore, oral history etc. that all are part of it. She stated that a joint consultative mechanism involving local stakeholders like local communities, journalists and representatives from relevant government departments such as culture, tourism and meteorology is on the pipeline. Ms. Mehrotra, however, thanked the Rail Enthusiasts' Society (RES) in its endeavor to encourage young minds to develop interest in rail history and heritage. Her session was followed by 'Tea Break'.

Somehow, 'Tea' and 'Darjeeling' are synonymous words, especially in and around Bengal. Thus, the Tea break got the audience flocking again the counters of 'Book Exhibition' for the Books, Magazines and Calendars launched a few minutes ago at the event. The Darjeeling Himalayan Railway Society had set up its stall by then selling mementoes containing specimen of coal, tea leaves and souvenirs along with some of their books. Thus, the tea interregnum was a justified one as it came as a welcome break with food packets that would hold the participants in good stead for the rest of the programme. The latest and older issues of the **RES Magazines, Rail Canvaz Digest, Louhapath magazine** and **TrainTrackers Calendars** started flying off the counters



along with other books of railways on sale.

The audience had to be shepherded back for the impending session by **Mr. Suroshankha Maji**, a Freelancer Rail Researcher, who made a wonderful presentation on '200 Years of World Railways and 100 Years of Railway Electrification in India'; chronicling the events with commensurate changes in technology to make where Railways is now. The pictorial representation of various milestone events weaved a sense of nostalgia amongst the listeners.

The talk was followed by 'Once Upon a Track: Glimpses of Railway Fiction' by **Mr. Atulya Sinha**, the Ex-Principal Chief Administrative Officer at the Rail Wheel Plant in Bela. He explained the historical socio-economic and socio-cultural background in which railroading flourished. Railways spread across the globe in the nineteenth century – a time when changes were taking place everywhere. With increasing industrialization and urbanization, there were significant increases in number of employed people. As educated passengers travelled longer distances by train, there was a huge demand for books and periodicals. Consequently, a new market arose for bookstalls on railway platforms as Wheelers and Higginbothams came to India!

Meanwhile, railways started getting featured in novels and





short stories written by popular authors such as Leo Tolstoy, Charles Dickens, Anton Chekhov, Guy de Maupassant, Mark Twain, O Henry and Arthur Conan Doyle. In the twentieth century, authors like E Nesbit, Agatha Christie, Pearl S Buck, Wilbert Awdry, John Masters, Khushwant Singh and Ruskin Bond followed the tradition of railway themed fiction. In a rapidly changing world, many contemporary writers continue to produce railway fiction in various forms. Thus, trains became a powerful and versatile symbol in world literature, representing everything from the relentless march of fate and the transformative nature of travel to the confined spaces of suspense and the anxieties of modernity. They serve as settings for mysteries like Agatha Christie's 'Murder on the Orient Express,' symbols of industrial progress or destruction as in Émile Zola's 'La Bête humaine' and vehicles for personal journeys and life changes in works like Leo Tolstoy's 'Anna Karenina'. Trains represent the unstoppable force of fate, particularly in tragedies where characters are moving towards a predetermined, often tragic, end. Mr. Sinha analyzed some of his personal favourites, and 'The Railway Children' – a children's book by Edith Nesbit (15th August, 1858 – 4th May, 1924) and his interpretation of the story with tangential reference to the life and lifestyle of the author and the 'feminist' outlook of the story taught us a lot.

Rail Utsav was not about discussions on books, history and railway literatures only. It is a widely known fact that many rail enthusiasts are philatelists as well and railways and stamps have come together on more than one occasion. **Mr. J.L. Singh**, Secretary, RES thus made the next presentation on 'Rail Philately' which was jointly prepared by him and **Mr. Vikas Singh**, Joint Secretary of RES. Rail Philately is a popular hobby for its historical significance, documentation of contemporary art and design of a country, global connection and thematic collectables. Rail Philately tells stories about railways of a country – its gauge, propulsion, loco types, scenic routes, clientele and so on. He shared many interesting anecdotes. The topic was very close to Mr. Singh's heart as it had lots of steam locos whose salient features were explained as well.

The holistic session by Mr. Singh paved way for some 'Movie

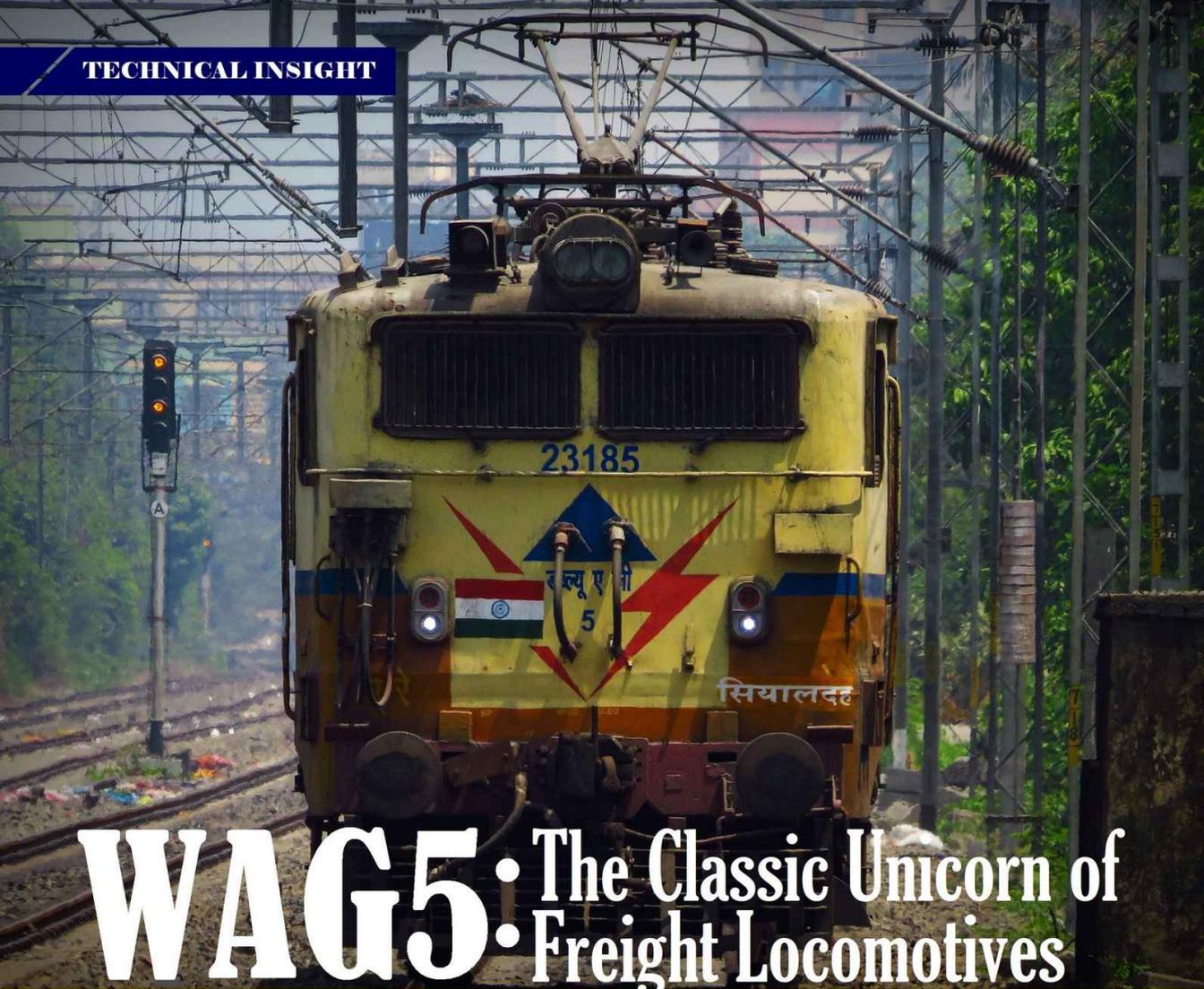
Magic'. The screening of **RAIL CINEMA** – a chronological compendium of rail sequences from Indian Cinema by **Mr. Sachin Susheel**, director and cinematographer captivated the audience as iconic songs, sequences and scenes of Bollywood flicks and other genres that brought back the reminiscences from those yesteryears.

This movie connection with trains, but from a completely different angle, was taken forward by **Mr. Debasis Mukhopadhyay**, Veteran Journalist and a Member of Rail Enthusiasts' Society. Though, it happened to be the last talk of the day, it was by no means less as the topic that was embarked on was 'Trains in Ray's films'. By 'Ray', we need no introduction. He emphasized that the first train rolled in Howrah on 15th August 1854 was faithfully documented in Bengali Literature which also carefully recorded its changes with emphasis on rail-society interface and the same applies to films as well. Mr. Mukhopadhyay's analysis of Apu Trilogy, frame for frame, with liberal screening of snippets, widened our horizon of perception of the legendary trilogy. Throughout, he pointed out, that Ray has used 'trains' as a symbol for education, enlightenment, emancipation, critical thinking. That made trains a powerful and recurring symbol in the Trilogy, as an interface between rural and modern life, a childhood wonder, the duality of separation and reunion. In Pather Panchali, a train is an object of magical curiosity for the children which is an eternal truth. In Aparajito, it marks Apu's physical separation from his village and his mother; and in Apur Sansar, train became the separation point for Apu with his wife, Aparna. Later, a train journey symbolizes the potential for reconciliation between Apu and his son. After marriage, Apu started living near a railway yard, with train sound providing a perpetual relation to his childhood. After death of his wife, trauma led Apu to a suicide attempt. The train's connection with death has been etched into consciousness of Apu from his childhood since the discovery of the train was juxtaposed to the death of Indira. After this resourceful deliberation, we neared the end of this wonderful 'Utsav' which showcased nearly every tangible aspect of ferroequinology.

The event concluded with a Vote of Thanks by **Mr. Samir Goswami**, the Ex-Chief Public Relations Officer, Eastern Railway. **Mr. Atulya Sinha**, touted as the Master of Ceremonies, who conducted the entire session finally announced the epilogue inviting appreciation from all present in the audience.

Buoyed by the stupendous success of Rail Utsav, who knows, we may just be in for something bigger in the coming days....

All photographs used in both the articles related to Rail Utsav - 2026 were provided by Aishik Bhattacharya & are copyright protected.



WAG5: The Classic Unicorn of Freight Locomotives

Anamitra Bose

The era where steam traction still ruled the branch lines of Indian Railways and diesel monsters were ruling the prestigious duties of mail/express. Behind the steam hustle and puffle and the meery chugging of diesel ALCo locomotives, few railway enthusiasts noticed the silent footsteps of our own indigenous electric locomotives towards their grand success. The electric locomotives, marched with flying colours with various superfast express of their time: Geetanjali Express, Super Deluxe Express, Coromandel Express, CSMT Punjab Mail, Frontier Mail etc. Apart from the passenger domain duties, the Chittaranjan Locomotive Works built WAM4 were pushed into freight duties too.

The engineers and railway board felt the need of a rugged and quite a powerful locomotive class with high tractive effort, i.e., exclusively for freight duties. The idea of a WAG class i.e., BG AC electric locomotive dedicated for freight, has already been in the country for a while. But most of them were imported either from European 50 cycles group or from

the Japanese consortium. Among these, the WAG1 laid the foundation of AC electric traction in the subcontinent with the advanced French machinery but was difficult to maintain. The WAG2 from Japanese consortium was quite successful and hauled the then freight loads with ease. But these also failed to meet the expectations of the Railway board in the feasibility perspective. The Ministry and the Member Electrical of the Railway Board decided to import a new locomotive class which was meant to be mass produced by Chittaranjan Locomotive Works (CLW) by procuring indigenous parts. WAG3 was procured by the railways from European 50 cycles group. WAG4 locomotive class were being produced by CLW based on the design of WAG3. But both these locomotive classes were again falling short of the expected hauling power due to the monomotor bogies.

By that time, a locomotive class indigenously produced by CLW proved to be showstopper for its time. The hauling power, easy maintenance, simple machinery caught the



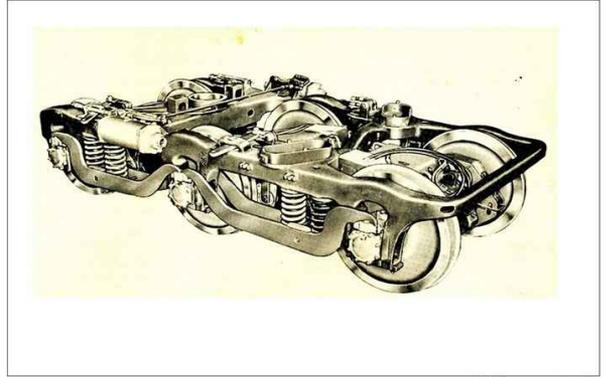
A WAG5 class locomotive

attention of engineers and crew at the same time. The locomotive was WAM4. The sheds all over the country were finally relieved and happy to home a reliable and powerful electric locomotive, which can compete with its diesel counterpart, WDM2. WAM4 were found capable of both hauling the superfast trains as well as heavy loaded freights. Specially the parallel combination of six motors gave a very satisfactory output during goods haulage. The WAM4B class was specially designed for this purpose. After few years of WAM4 proving it's worth in the Indian soil, RDSO and CLW decided to sow upon the success story of this amazing compact loco for dedicated freight haulage purpose. This is the first footstep towards the birth of India's first successful dedicated freight locomotive.

The six traction motors supplied by Alstom were connected in parallel to give maximum kilowatt output at the rails. The overall weight of the locomotive was also increased to maximize the tractive effort required to kick start a heavy load. This was done with a tradeoff with the maximum permissible speed which was now limited to 100 kmph. After months of experimenting and toiling with electrical, the engineers and other technicians saw light at the end of a long tunnel. The AC electric freight dedicated locomotive was about to hit the tracks and it was classified as - WAG5. The nomenclature followed the usual sequential method as present for the electric locomotives. It would be beneficial if we look into the mechanical and electrical components in detail to understand the key factor of the success of these beasts.

Mechanical Mantra

The major success factor of the WAG5 was its bogie - rugged, strong, and very simple to maintain. The WAG5 was fitted with ALCo asymmetric tri-mount Co-Co bogies. The bogie was derived from the most versatile diesel locomotive WDM2. The ALCO tri-mount Co-Co bogie is a TRIMOUNT rigid bolster, swivel type, three individually motored axle bogies. Each of the three axles is driven by an axle hung nose



A Tri-mount bogie

suspended traction motor. The tri-mount bogie consists of a single piece cast steel frame, which has a conventional bogie pivot (swivel bearing) carried in the cross member located between the leading and middle axles and two load bearers which are carried in the cross member of the frame between the middle and trailing axles. The weight of the locomotive is transferred to the bogie at the pivot and two load bearers to form a three-point support. This tends to minimize weight transfer due to tractive effort or braking force and tends to maintain a higher factor of adhesion in service.

The shell of the WAG5 is an interesting story of innovation and result of the excellent minds of IR at that time. CLW adopted the conventional shell of WAM4 as the shell structure of the WAG5. The dimensions of the locomotive matched exactly with it's predecessor WAM4. Road numbers started from 23000 to 23293 and the WAG5Bs had circular glass panes and horizontal louvers on it's both sides. A WAG5 of this design looked exactly similar to the WAM4 except the performance output. This type of shell sidewalls had two major problems- 1) The heat generated by the traction equipment cannot be ventilated through the horizontal louvers 2) The rainwater easily sipped into the machine room through these louvers. So CLW decided to

WAM4-type shell with horizontal louvers





Modified shell with vertical louvers

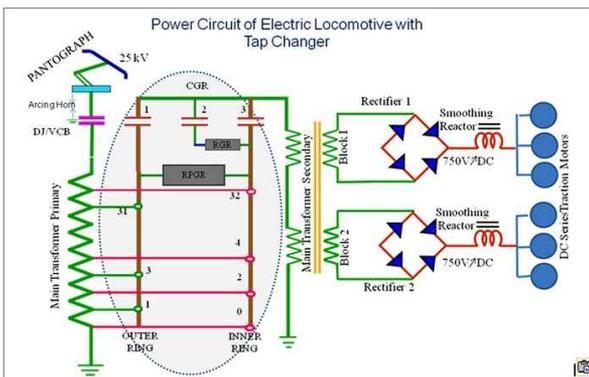
implement a new type of shell with vertical ventilator louvers and small window panes at the top of each louver pane. This type of shell design overcame most of the drawbacks posed by the WAM4 type shell. These newer design shells performed and suited to Indian conditions very well that the later conventional locomotives adopted the similar design.

Electrical Excellence

These extravagant beasts had the major reason of success in the Indian soils was its proven and simple electrical equipment. The first stage of any electric loco is to draw traction from the supply wires. In India, the standard AC traction maintains a single phase 25Kilovolts 50Hz supply. The AC locomotives are designed and standardized to work in this voltage range.

The first step to collect voltage is the Pantograph of the locomotive. Traditionally since inception WAG5s are fitted with standard single pan AM-12 of Stone India or IR-01 of Contrasy's Pvt Ltd for regular operations. Recently Western Railway has augmented many of its WAG5s with WBL-85HR pantographs for working in high rise OHE section.

From the pantograph, the traction is supplied to the transformer through the Vacuum Circuit Breaker (VCB) or the DJ, and a series of relays. The Vacuum Circuit breaker is



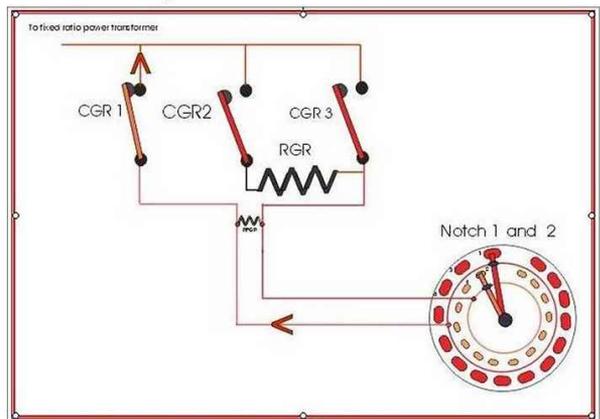
the main circuit breaker of the electrical locomotive and it trips to cut off the electrical connection to the machineries from overhead during any emergency.

The running force behind the motive power of the conventional single-phase locos are the DC traction motors and the whole set of transformer and Tap-changer together. While the first one keeps the wheels rolling and make the locomotive run, the latter one is the main secret of seamless operation of motive power and required speed of the loco. The presence of tap-changer as the main control equipment of traction power in these conventional locomotives, has led to their name 'tap-changers'.

Transformers: The transformer in WAG5 locomotives is composed of two separate transformers wound on a single steel core and is rated at 3900 KVA. This reduces space requirement and improves magnetic coupling. The first transformer on the primary side that receives the 25KV AC single phase voltage is a autotransformer with thirty-two tapings which are then connected to the tap-changer. Here taps mean leads or connections provided in various parts of the transformer winding. Changing one tap to the other necessarily changes the turns ratio, thereby regulating the output voltage of the auto-transformer. The tap-changer equipment is placed on the primary or high-tension side which makes the equipment compact due to less current. The secondary side of the transformer has fixed turns which gives a constant voltage to its output.

Tap-changer: Tap-changers are the main control equipment of the tractive effort in the conventional locomotives. As each tap is placed in different windings, the tap gives different voltage outputs. This is properly utilized by the tap-changer to efficiently change the voltage fed to the traction motors, by changing the selector of the tap-changer at different taps on the transformer. In locomotives, the tap-changers used are On-Load Tap Changers which maintain the flow of current to traction motors during tap-changing transition.

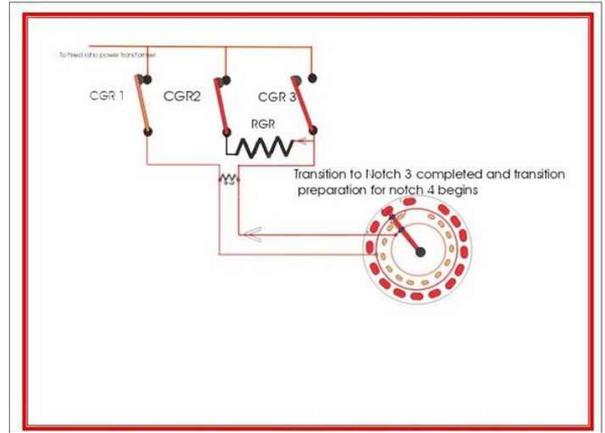
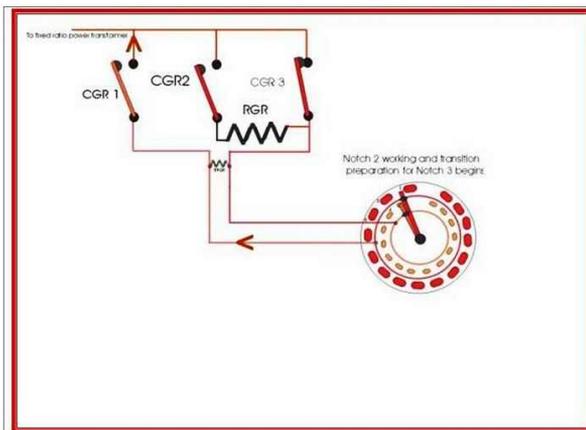
In 32-taps tap-changer used in a WAG5 locomotive, the 32 taps terminate on two concentric circles of tap contacts. The two contact rings surround these concentric circles. There



are two selector arms-- one long and one short to make connections between outer contact circle and outer ring and another one to make connections between inner contacts and inner ring. The outer ring is connected to transition contactor CGR1 and inner ring is connected with another transition contactor CGR3. There is another transition resistance RGR placed between these two whose insertion into the circuit, during transition of notches, is done by central contactor CGR2.

The tap changers need to fulfill some basic prerequisites: 1) The current should continue to flow during transition also, 2) Two taps should never be directly shorted to avoid mishap.

The whole tap changing operation is carried out in the following process: In scenario 1, The long arm connects Notch 1 contact to outer ring which in turn is connected to CGR1 contactor which is closed at that time. Therefore, the current flows through Notch 1 contact and the locomotive is at the lowest powered level. At this moment, the short arm is connecting the Notch 2 contact to the inner ring which is connected to CG3 contactor which is open, therefore no current flows but the tap-changer is ready to be up-notched to Notch 2. In the second scenario after few moments of the first, the transition begins from Notch 1 to 2. The CGR1 gradually opens and at the same time CGR2 closes and comes into picture and thus pulls the transition resistor (RGR) into the circuit. This resistor helps to maintain the flow of current during the transition phase between two notches and also avoiding shorting two taps at a time. In third scenario, the CGR3 gradually gets closed and thus Notch 2 is activated and CG2 gradually opens to make the resistor open circuited. Meanwhile, the preparatory phase for Notch 3 is happening as the long selector arm is moved from position 1 to 3. As the CGR1 contactor is opened, no current flows and no arcing happens during this arm movement. Now tap changer can move to Notch 3 stage following same process when CGR1 gradually opens, CGR2 closes and transition happens and again CGR2 opens and CGR3 gets closed to completely activate Notch 3.



The whole process of tap-changing and gradually notching up from 0 to 32 happens within 11-13 seconds and follows the same procedure of selector arm movement and contacts. The similar process of regression happens in opposite procedure. The CGRs have a common driving shaft with rotating cams to provide seamless transition and maintain proper sequence. Two important auxiliary components of the whole tap-changer are air servo motor and auxiliary cam group switches.

Rectifiers: The next major stage of converting OHE traction to motor-consumable voltage is the rectification i.e., the conversion of output from secondary side of transformer's AC voltage to a constant DC voltage. This is achieved by two separate units of Silicon-based bridge rectifiers. Each rectifier unit consisted of a bridge rectifier consisting of 64 silicon diodes in each bridge. The silicon diodes were of type S18FN350. Diodes are the most basic form of power electronics equipment which can conduct electricity in only one direction thus converting Alternating current fluctuating from positive to negative to a pulsating DC voltage. The basic bridge rectifier consists of 4 diodes with each diode in 4 bridges. During positive half cycle, diodes 1 and 3 in parallel bridges are in ON condition and thus current flows. While during negative half cycle of input, Diodes 2 and 4 get turned ON to give a positive DC voltage. Thus both the half cycles of AC gives rise to positive DC voltage through a bridge rectifier. A bridge rectifier is highly efficient and has Maximum Inverse Potential enabling it for high-voltage uses.

The output of each rectifier unit is fed to a smoothening reactor or chokes (SLn) which converts pulsating DC voltage to a constant DC voltage ready to be supplied to the traction motor.

Traction Motors: The traction motors of the tap changer locomotives are typically DC series wound motor. These traction motors run on DC voltage and windings are series wound; these are best suitable for traction purposes. The speed-torque characteristic can be varied easily altering the connection of traction motors. These motors produce very



TAO659

high torque during starting from zero and the torque gradually decreases with increasing speed. This results in making locomotive start easily with heavy loads from idle position, even in gradients. The WAG5 had six traction motors with three motors per bogie configuration, resulting in every axle as powered axle and the locomotive was in Co-Co wheel configuration.

At first, WAG5s were provided with the same wonderful traction motors of the WAM4—the TAO659 traction motors made by Alstom then CLW. The TAO659 traction motors are DC 6-pole series wound motors giving constant output of 585KW and starting current of around 1100 A. The traction motor used the plain sleeve suspension bearing, which later became the main reason for the unreliability of TAO659 motors in the long run. The armature and stator also underwent many modifications, as days progressed and load demand increased. These Alstom traction motor WAG5s were classified as WAG5A.

Gradually, TAO659 motors were found incapable to cope up with the heavy freight demands and thus CLW went for a heavier, more powerful and an easy-to-maintain traction motor. They adopted the Hitachi HS15250A traction motor for this purpose. The HS15250A traction motor is also a 6-pole series wound traction motor having a higher continuous power output of 630 KW and starting current of 1350 A. These traction motors had roller suspension which in turn made the maintenance much easier. The traction motors' performances were proved to be satisfactory and owing to its reliability CLW adopted this TM as their driving power for the future tap-changer locomotives. The WAG5 locomotives having Hitachi motors were classified as WAG5H.

In following years, RDSO and CLW came up with the development of rolling suspension for the TAO659 motors. Thus, the locomotive sheds and workshops started the process of changing the suspension type of TAO659 motors from sleeve suspension to roller one, in the line of Hitachi motors. The armature winding was also modified to improve the reliability. This conversion processes of adopting the pros



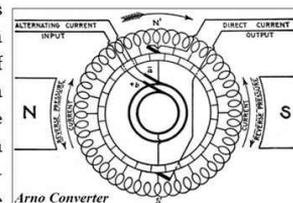
Asansol based WAG5H class locomotive

of Hitachi TMs in TAO659 motors was known as TAOchi (TAO for Alstom, chi for Hitachi) conversion. Thus, the WAG5s which had TAO659 traction motors were modified, rather TAOchi-fied. Many sheds began to classify them as WAG5TAOchi and some remained as the WAG5A. In today's world, most WAG5s having TAO659 motors are now having TAOchi traction motors.

The conclusion for traction motors should not be complete without the details of gear ratio. The 21:58 gear ratio of WAM46P was modified by CLW to 15:62 for yielding better starting tractive effort and also continuous power output of 3900 horsepower but in tradeoff of limiting the Maximum speed to 80 kmph. Many WAG5H having HS15250A motors also featured 18:64 gear ratio. Some WAG5s, though were retained at 21:58 ratio to perform mixed operations. Also, at the later part of their tenure, some WAG5s were regear to 21:58 for performing coaching duties.

Auxiliary Machineries: The auxiliary electrical equipment in the locomotive like the blower, compressors and exhausters needed three-phase Alternating current to work. For this purpose, there was a Arno rotary converter in the locomotive. A Arno converter is basically a squirrel cage three phase induction motor, with no mechanical loads on its shafts, while an extra winding on its' rotor to generate the phase of the 3 phase output voltage. In an induction motor, the rotating field in the stator induces a field in the squirrel cage rotor, at "slip" speed less than the stator field. This rotor field is utilized to generate three phase power, with the help of the extra winding in the stator. This three-phase power is delivered to various auxiliary components of the locomotive.

Gradually when the WAG5s were in Mid-Term Rehabilitation (MTR), most of them were fitted with much efficient static converters. The static converters were chosen to supply stable 415V 3-phase AC output to the

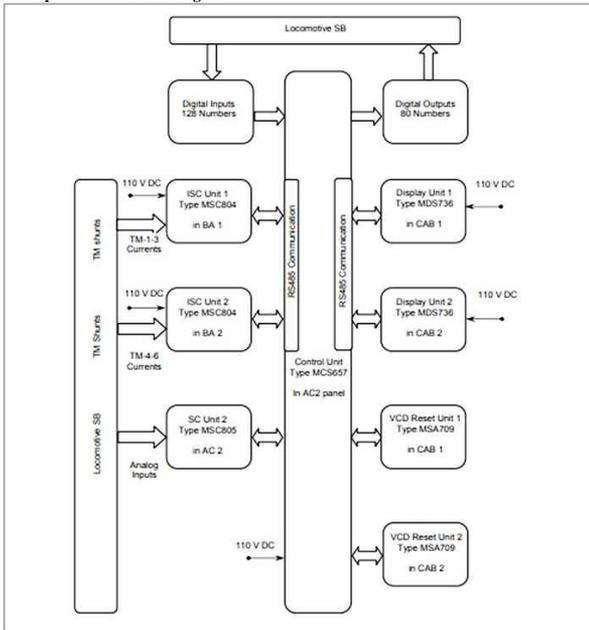


auxiliary machineries and also static equipment and battery charger. The conventional locomotives are fitted with 180KVA static inverters made by various firms like Siemens, ABB, Medha, AAL etc. The static converters are made using a half-controlled phase bridge rectifier at the input, a DC link filter and a three phase IGBT (Insulated Gate Bipolar Transistor) based PWM (Pulse-Width Modulation) inverter. All functions of the converter are controlled through 32-bits Digital Signal Processor (DSP) together with an ELPD and host of digital gates and signal amplifiers. The static converters had some major advantages over ARNO converters are much stable 3-phase supply, high efficiency (>90%), less energy consumption, low maintenance, soft starting etc.

Microprocessor: The control circuit is the heart of the locomotive, performs the controlling both the power circuits and auxiliary circuits. The control circuits can be further sub-divided into three parts: Traction power control, Auxiliary machine control, light and fan control. In conventional locomotives, control is achieved by permutation and combination of relay contacts, switches and auxiliary contacts of the contactors. As these relays have mechanical moving parts and large number of contacts which reduces reliability and increases complexity. To overcome these problems, microprocessor-based control and fault diagnosis system has been developed for conventional locos and has been fitted in the WAG5s during any major schedule.

It performs logical controlling of the locomotive by continuously monitoring and analyzing the digital and analog inputs. It also checks for any abnormality in the operation and displays the fault condition on the display unit fitted in both the cabs of the locomotive. The system is equipped with

Microprocessor Circuit Diagram



a real-time clock and a non-volatile memory to log the fault records in real-time.

There are mostly two types of microprocessor systems in electric locomotives: Medha made MCS 657 and Stesalit made FDCS 9648. These microprocessor systems contain the following units: 1) Control Unit 2) Signal Conditioning Unit, 3) Intelligent Signal Conditioning Unit (Medha) / Current Sensing Unit (Stesalit) one per bogie, 4) Display units one in either cab 5) Potential Transformer (Stesalit) 6) VCD reset unit (Medha). The function of control unit is to analyze the digital and analog input values from various parts of the locomotive and check the healthiness of the locomotive. The digital outputs are calculated based on the logic in the processors. The digital outputs, high or low, are sent out through digital output cards. Any abnormality is displayed on the display units. The emergency situation like set current limit of traction motor is crossed, OHE over voltage; the auto-regression or DJ is tripped by the defined logic. All the faults are logged into a non-volatile memory. The Intelligent Signal Conditioning Unit converts the 110V DC inputs from each traction motor to machine defined low voltage. The display unit is used to display status of the loco, any fault message and the current notch position.

Brakes: The WAG5B units were only air-brake locomotives. But most of the WAG5s built later had both vacuum and air brakes to make the locomotive able to haul both vacuum-braked and air-braked rakes. The compressors were mostly supplied by ELGi and exhausters by Northey. Interestingly, many WAG5s had a rheostatic braking which was signified by the class WAG5RH.

In conventional locomotives, apart from pneumatic braking there is a very technologically interesting braking method: Rheostatic Braking. The main electrical equipment involved in the Rheostatic Braking is the Dynamic Brake Resistor (DBR). In Rheostatic Braking, the six traction motors are brought for braking effort rather than tractive application. When the Rheostatic Braking is applied, the armature and field windings get separated from the circuit. The six armatures of the traction motors are brought in parallel configuration and the six field windings are now in a series circuit combination. The field windings are applied with a high negative current from Rectifier Block 1, as a result the armatures also are fed with a negative voltage. As a result, a negative torque is generated which helps in braking application. The current generated in the armature is made to flow through a Resistor Bank, which dissipates the energy



generated due to this negative current as heat energy. Depending upon the type of Cooling of Brake Resistor and placement of DBRs, there are mainly three types of DBR: 1) Vertical DBR, 2) Roof mounted Naturally cooled DBR & 3) Force Ventilated Air Cooled DBR. In WAG5 locomotives, the Dynamic Brake resistors found are first and second types. The vertical DBR is placed inside the locomotive machine room and the resistors are cooled using a Dynamic Brake Motor Blower also known as MVRF. These help to radiate the heat generated inside the resistor banks. In the initial vertical DBRs, the blower motor was of DC series type and it was operated using the negative current generated by the armature of the traction motor during braking. It did not require any separate source of voltage. But it was found maintenance worthy and ineffective at times. So gradually, vertical DBRs had a AC 3 phase induction motor as the blower which was operated with the help of auxiliary voltage either by ARNO converter or Static Inverter outputs. The naturally cooled Roof mounted DBRs do not require any blower motor and are traditionally more reliable than vertical DBRs.

Classifications

The most versatile locomotive with maximum number of sub-classes with its various nomenclature throughout India happens to be the WAG5. Many railway enthusiasts have long confusion regarding the WAG5 subclasses. A brief discussion about these would be helpful. Disclaimer: Many rarely occurring sub-classes have different meanings in different documents and thoughts.

WAG5A: The WAG5s having Alstom traction motors i.e., TAO659 traction motors and later with TAOchi traction motors are widely classified as WAG5A.

WAG5B: The WAM4Bs which turned to be a revolutionary loco class exclusively for freight, were classified as WAG5B locomotives.

WAG5D: The WAG5 locomotives having Dual brakes: both Air brake & Vacuum brake, and were known as 'Ghat

WAG5A class locomotive



WAG5B class locomotive

Specialists'. Mostly, Vishakaptnam (Waltair) Electric Loco Shed held these sub-class locos.

WAG5E: The WAG5s having only air-brakes, some of them were classified as WAG5E.

WAG5H & WAG5HA: Both of the sub-classes denote the WAG5s having Hitachi HS15250A traction motors and were built by Chittaranjan Locomotive Works.

WAG5HB: These WAG5 locomotives were built by Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL) under the specifications of RDSO. All the locomotives had Hitachi motors, therefore 'H' suffix and 'B' for BHEL. All of them are homed by Jhansi. Only WAG5HB #24000 had WAM-type shell and others had the standard WAG5 shell.

WAG5HE: The WAG5 locomotives having Hitachi traction motors and only air brakes.

WAG5HP: The WAG5H locomotives which were regeared for coaching duty, in the situation of lack of WAP locomotives. They had their MPS upgraded to 100/105 kph.

WAG5HR/WAG5RH: The WAG5 locomotives which had Hitachi traction motors and rheostat braking. But this

WAG5HP class loco for coaching duties





A WAG5D class Locomotive



A WAG5E class Locomotive



A WAG5HA class Locomotive



A WAG5HB class Locomotive



A WAG5P class Locomotive



A WAG5HE class Locomotive



A WAG5P class locomotive

classification is now almost obsolete as many of the WAG5s are now Dynamic Brake Resistor fitted.

WAG5P: These locomotives had Alstom traction motors & upgraded to 21:58 gear ratio, similar to WAM4, for doing passenger and even mail/express duties. Many of the locomotives even had clearance for 110 kmph, but mostly were 105 kmph restricted.

Being one of the most successful locomotives of the Indian Railways, and flag-bearer of the electric goods locomotive segment, WAG5 locomotives were produced in massive numbers from 1984 to 1997. Around 1150 units were produced out of which most were by CLW and 74 of them, 24000-24074 were manufactured by BHEL. These locomotives were getting homed at most of the electric locomotive sheds of the country. With time, the locomotive proved its excellence with its power, simplicity, ruggedness and most importantly, simplicity. Over the years, many modifications have been carried out on these locos. The TAOchi conversion, being one of them and was immensely successful. The other project was to make WAG5 a thyristor-controlled locomotive, in replacement of the tap-changer. The

WAG5RH class locomotive



WAG5HR class locomotive

advent of the age of power electronics has already knocked the door of Indian Railways, so RDSO along with the help of Electronics Corporation of India Limited (ECIL) and Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) started the conversion of one WAG5 locomotive of Bhusawal numbered #23026 into a thyristor controlled loco. Trials were carried out from 1997-98, but many problems were floated up. The major of these was the interference of frequencies with the signaling equipment. Finally, even after many trials, the project was dropped and the locomotive was reverted back to a tap-changer one.

Gradually, with the advent of the masterclass locomotive of CLW- the WAG7 and the advent of ABB three-phaser locomotives, the WAG5 locomotive was not favored by most of the crew and engineers, because of the frequent stalling of the locos with heavy load. Even twin WAG5s failed to cope-up with the increasing freight demand. Around 2017, Railway Board instructed every railway zone and made WAG5 multiple unit (MU) formation mandatory for all mainline freight operations. The initial WAG5Bs were already in the scrap auction by then and the original WAG5 locomotives were also counting their last days. Few of them across India are converted to Dual-mode shunting locomotives (can run both under OHE and battery). Many of the older beasts are now relegated to piloting duties of yards and departmental duties.

The days of the variety are long gone, so are the beautiful liveries of WAM4 and WAG5s. WAM4s are already extinct. So every electric locomotive enthusiast wants to cherish the last few days of these classic and colourful beasts rumble on tracks with glory, and in the chapter of electric traction in India: WAG5 will remain as a flag bearer locomotive.

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Courtesy :

1. Khalid Kagzi, IRFCA
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The Sleeper Renaissance of Vande Bharat

Somsubhra Das

The long wait for the Sleeper Version of the Vande Bharat semi high speed train is finally over. **17.01.2026** – a date that will forever remain etched in the annals of Indian Railways for it being the day on which the maiden **VANDE BHARAT SLEEPER (VBS)** of the nation was inaugurated by the Hon'ble Prime Minister amidst much fanfare. The media has been long abuzz with the probable introduction of the VBS. Speculations touched sky about its route as expectations surged with every trial run of the VBS rakes until the Ministry of Railways dispelled all doubts by announcing its arrival. Just like the prestigious 'Rajdhani Express' genre of trains which got introduced from Howrah for New Delhi, way back on 3rd March, 1969, the first VBS of the country also followed suit for it hitting tracks from Malda Town of West Bengal for Kamakhya of Assam. A simultaneous inauguration of the VBS from the Kamakhya end for Howrah was also done. Thus, history was rewritten as West Bengal became the cynosure of introduction of esteemed services of our national carrier. Now, what sets the VBS apart from its Chair Car version, read on to discover more.

The VBS rake is a 16-coach consist flaunting a saffron shade. The design of the snout has been modified a bit making it look distinctly different from its chair car version though the other exterior aesthetics remain same but for the markings of the class of travel and other details. The interiors can be defined as flush rather than plush keeping in mind the requisites of daily travel. The state of the art design is characterized by clean, smooth and uninterrupted surfaces as cabinets and panels sit perfectly in-line with the surrounding frame. The monotonous colour scheme of the berths has made way for some vibrant hues with very soft resins. The panel for charging electronic gadgets (Mobile/Laptop Charging only) accommodated 3 Pin Sockets along with the USB ones with a reading light for every passenger – both operable by twin switches. The positioning of the charging points for the Lower Berth though invites some hazard during opening/closing of the middle berth in 3A Class and needs more prudent thinking. The tray for keeping bottles and food has been well modified though its dimensions have been cut short. New and smart looking hanging hooks have been installed to fit with the ambience.





Warm yellow ambient LEDs touted as Mood Lights outlining the regular lights lit up the space nicely and have been provided with separate switches. Air-conditioning vents have ergonomic designs to match the overall pattern. The berth ends have been contoured with smooth rounded corners and the steps to climb the upper berths have got sturdier but with a touch of elegance. The space for baggage under the berths has remained same. The coach attendants have been provided with a berth which is much friendlier and useful. Spaces have been earmarked for holding bedrolls, handling wastes among others. The overall design is modern, minimalist and contemporary which present a seamless, uncluttered look. All the window curtains have been done away with blinds that combat light and heat to a great extent but this design may become the bone of contention amongst the co-passengers. However, curtains to shield the privacy of passengers from the open aisle as is existent in 2A Class, have been retained. The 1A Class, as always, brings that element of comfort, luxury and opulence is no exception here either. It creates an ambience of high-end comfort and quality with an additional new feature of electrochromic glass on the cabin doors that enables the boarder to press a



button on the door to see the person waiting outside the coupe before letting anyone inside – a feature par excellence. The washrooms of 2A and 3A Classes are spacious just like the chair car version of VBs while the ones of 1A have the customary designs including the shower enclosure separated from the rest of the washroom by a curtain. The passages inside the 2A and 1A though seemingly looked to be narrowed down. A 'Dog Box' has been provided for pets. The rest of the features including 'Talk Back', etc. remain similar to the chair car version of VB. For a change, the Bedrolls have seen a major makeover in respect of quality and design.

Switching to the technical front, the 16-Car rake of Vande Bharat Sleeper is made by the Bharat Earth Movers Limited (BEML)-Medha consortium. BEML is a 'Mini Ratna PSU' under Ministry of Defense which produces world class metro coaches for Mumbai, Kolkata, Bangaluru etc. independently or as a subcontractor and MEMUs, coaches for mainline IR. The rake consists of 4 basic units of DTC/NDTC-MC-TC-MC. The Motor coach houses the traction converters and traction motors while trailer car houses the transformers and auxiliary converters. Traction converters, auxiliary converters, transformers, TCMS is supplied by Medha,







Motors by TSA-Medha consortium and Brake equipments and electronics by BEML. The Vande Bharat Sleeper is also energy-efficient that houses features like regenerative braking that help reduce power consumption.

Shifting our focus back on the event, the Hon'ble Prime Minister along with the Minister of Railways with other dignitaries flagged off the coveted service at around 13.25 hrs. from Mada Town, in and around the Inaugural Run Schedule. As mentioned earlier, the other inaugural service was also given a go ahead by remote from Kamakhya. The onlookers, participants and boarders were excellently handled and managed by the on-duty security personnel despite the security blanket for obvious reasons. Both the rakes were gorgeously decorated with flowers and tricolor balloons. The Malda Town station premises after a major facelift donning the 'Amrit Bharat' scheme was wonderfully decked up and decorated which included lighting up the complex for the grand occasion with all useful signage in place.

The railway authorities had taken excellent care of the Social Media Influencers, Media persons, VIPs, School children

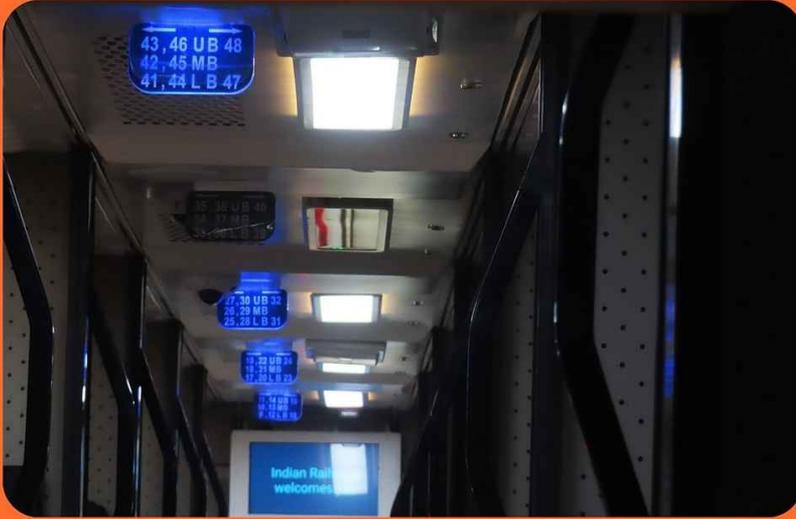


among others. From the issuance of passes to serving excellent quality food onboard and every other aspect went off smoothly. Hospitality was prioritized at all levels. The overall journey experience was as smooth as one would expect. The train left Malda Town amidst all the media attention and elaborate ceremony. As it crawled past the reaches beyond the platform stretches, scores of people could be seen flocking the surroundings to witness the history that's been made that day. Enthusiasm was at its peak as commons across all ages, caste and religions waved in glee and sheer joy to see the train in action. Every station enroute had men, women children, mostly armed with cell phones, crowding platforms to catch a glimpse of the train. Similar scenes were witnessed for the Kamakhya-Howrah inaugural special VBS. Going by the 4.30 am arrival scenes at the Howrah Station which welcomed the train with an RPF Band playing live in the presence of hundreds, it would not be exaggerated to mull that the appeal of VBS amongst the masses is already steadfastly growing. Encouraging scenes were also seen at Kamakhya on the arrival of the Malda Town-Kamakhya inaugural special service. Truly, a new era of rail travel has begun.

Heartfelt thanks to the authorities of Northern Frontier Railway along with others who pulled off the event with flying colours. The maiden commercial run of the VBS from the City of Joy to Kamakhya via the Gateway of the Northeast has started on the auspicious day of 23rd January, also marking the birthday of one of the most loved sons of Bengal – Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose while the one from Kamakhya to Howrah was started a day earlier.

The VBS is a new chapter in India's journey toward modern and comfortable long-distance rail travel. It seamlessly combines indigenous technology with global standards of safety, speed and passenger comfort as it reflects India's growing self-reliance in railway manufacturing sector. The well-designed sleeping berths, improved suspension for smoother rides, modern toilets, automatic doors and enhanced noise and vibration control are a symbol of progression and advancement. Advanced safety features such as the KAVACH system and fire-detection mechanisms further ensure a safer travel experience. Its high acceleration and higher operational speed will significantly cut travel time, making rail travel more competitive with road and air transport.

The Vande Bharat Sleeper, a proud 'Make in India' milestone, is surely set to conquer all frontiers with consummate ease and usher a new overnight travel experience for the citizens as it showcases India's technological progress and presents a vision for the future of rail transport.





KOLKATA METRO EXPANDING ITS WINGS

Somanko Tiru

Part-I



Somanko Tiru, resident of Jharkhand, was born and raised amidst the vibrant cultural milieu of Kolkata. A professional accountant by vocation, he holds an academic degree in Science and Technology—an educational foundation that complements his profound passion for the world of railways. A true rail enthusiast at heart, Somanko is deeply devoted to the study and appreciation of railway systems, with particular interests spanning Electric Traction, state-of-the-art Rolling Stock technologies, and the evolution of modern Ticketing Systems. His engagement with the subject is not merely casual but reflects an intellectual pursuit and admiration for the technological and operational grandeur of the Indian Railways and beyond.

India's First Metro - Kolkata Metro is running since 1984 but the rate of route expansion is slower than the newer Metros of the country due to various factors. As they say, **'All is well that ends well'**, even though there are more new sections to come up in the future, the last set of Kolkata Metro Inaugurations did connect the two most important Railway Stations with the City's Airport, a much-needed connection.

It was on 22nd August 2025, when the Noapara - Jai Hind Airport stretch (Yellow Line), the Sealdah - Esplanade stretch (Green Line) and Hemanta Mukhopadhyay (Ruby Hospital More) - Belegghata stretch (Orange Line) got inaugurated. The flagging off was done by the Hon'ble Prime Minister in presence of the Minister of Railways and the Chairman and CEO of Railway Board among other important dignitaries. It took almost 41 years of the City's Airport to get Metro connectivity since Metro started rolling in the city. The other two sections which got inaugurated are equally important. With the opening of Sealdah - Esplanade stretch of Green Line, Sealdah Station got direct Metro connectivity with Howrah Station and Howrah got direct access with the City's IT Hub. If we see the Orange Line, even though a lot is left for the total completion of the line, the inauguration of the latest stretch gave the commuters from extreme south to get access to the Metropolitan City via Bypass from Metro from Kavi Subhash after alighting from EMU at New Garia. It also provides connectivity to the various multispecialty hospitals situated across the Eastern Metropolitan Bypass.

As planned, the Hon'ble Prime Minister along with other dignitaries was at the Yellow Line



for the inauguration. Simultaneously, the Green Line and Orange Line stretches were also set to be inaugurated. The Metro Authorities had sent invite to various stake holders, including Rail Enthusiasts, for the inauguration. I had the opportunity to be in the 'Inauguration Programme' at Belegkata for Orange Line. SDGM/Eastern Railway, Shri Deepak Nigam and other dignitaries were present. MR - 415 was decorated beautifully for the occasion. Motorman - Saugata Ghanti, CLI - RR Sinha and



other crews were entrusted with the 'Inauguration Special'. There were school children from various schools, like Kendriya Vidyalaya, Salt Lake 1 and others. Commercial staff from Sealdah Division was present to attend the invitees. The flagging off was done by the Hon'ble Prime Minister, post 4 PM. We took a ride by the 'Inaugural Special' to Hemanta Mukhopadhyay and back to Belegkata. The route of this line covers the high skyscrapers, top hotels of Kolkata along with Science City which are located across the Eastern Metropolitan Bypass, presenting breathtaking views from the Metro. The stations of Orange Line which got operational in this opening include VIP Bazar, Ritwik Ghatak (for Uttar Paanchanan Gram), Barun Sengupta (for Science City) and Belegkata. Well, the opening of this stretch personally benefitted me as VIP Bazar became the nearest metro station with respect to my residence.

Post-inauguration of this stretch, the data shows there has been a steep increase in passenger footfall in Orange Line compared to the time when only Kavi Subhash to Hemanta Mukhopadhyay was operational. Had the Blue Line station of Kavi Subhash was not closed due to some infrastructure issues, the footfall would have been more. Once Kavi Subhash on the Blue Line becomes operational after the reconstruction work, it will be easier for many commuters to communicate with the other part of the city from this Orange Line.

With the opening of this stretch, as per plan, Belegkata to Jai



Hind Airport remains the only unfinished part. Once completed, this will be one of the most popular routes of Kolkata ferrying passengers beyond the city limits.

We are keeping our finger crossed for early completion of the approved and under-construction sites of the Kolkata Metro which will help the daily commuters with a hassle-free and seamless transfer across the 'City of Joy'.

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KOLKATA METRO

EXPANDING ITS WINGS

Arkopal Sarkar & Anubhab Chakraborty

Part-II

There was an eerie excitement in the atmosphere as, for the first time, Kolkata Metro reached the Airport. The construction of the Yellow Line began in 2015 and took nearly ten years for this short stretch to be inaugurated. On 22nd August this year, the line was finally opened and commercial operations began from 25th August onwards, connecting the Airport with the northern and southern suburbs.

On the glorious day of 22nd August, we, along with several reporters and metro staff, gathered at Jessore Road Metro Station, as the inauguration of the entire stretch was planned from there. After some time, Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi arrived and formally inaugurated the entire Yellow Line. After the ceremony, we, along with other metro officials, entered Jessore Road Metro Station to explore the modern facilities the station offers. The station is equipped with advanced luggage and baggage screening machines, new and improved AFC (Automatic Fare Collection) gates, and an entirely refreshed atmosphere. Usually, metro stations in Kolkata look quite similar—unattractive trains within a cheaply designed station environment have been a daily reality for commuters. This stretch, however, is completely different. Every station on the Yellow Line offers a majestic interior with refined architectural design, well-ventilated spaces, and all essential safety measures for emergencies.

We then explored the station from one end to the other, discovered several new features, and took a short ride from Jessore Road to the Airport. It took around three to four minutes to reach the Airport. The Airport Station was equally impressive. It will house four platforms—two currently operational for the Yellow Line and two reserved for the Orange Line towards Barasat. India's largest underground metro yard will also be located here. All these salient features make the Airport Station uniquely significant.









KOLKATA METRO

EXPANDING ITS WINGS

Rudranil Roy Chowdhury

Part - III

For years, the Esplanade–Sealdah section remained the missing keystone of the East–West corridor—its progress slowed by fragile soil strata, high water tables, heritage structures, congested commercial zones, and the ever-pulsing arteries of central Kolkata. Bowbazar, in particular, became a symbol of the project's trials, where tunnelling beneath century-old buildings tested engineering limits and public patience alike. That this stretch now stands completed is not merely a matter of kilometres added—it is the triumph of perseverance over geology, history, and urban density.

22nd August 2025 marked a quiet yet momentous turning point in Kolkata's urban transport history. With the formal inauguration of the long-awaited Esplanade–Sealdah section of the East–West Metro (Green Line), the city witnessed the completion of perhaps the most technically challenging and socially disruptive metro stretch ever attempted in India.

The inauguration marked by restrained dignity rather than spectacle—appropriate for a project whose value lies in service rather than ceremony. With the Hon'ble PM flagging off the services, signalling the operational unification of two of the city's most vital nodes:

- **Esplanade** — the colonial heart and transit nucleus of Kolkata
- **Sealdah** — one of India's busiest railway terminals and a lifeline for suburban Bengal



With this, the Green Line ceased to be a fragmented experiment and emerged as a truly functional east–west urban spine. Inside the inaugural special service, there was a perceptible sense of anticipation—shared quietly among commuters, rail enthusiasts, and metro staff alike. As the train glided out of Esplanade towards Sealdah, it did so with the confidence of a system finally made whole. The acceleration was smooth, the ride remarkably silent—a stark contrast to the chaos that once reigned above ground during construction years. Passing through the infamous Bowbazar stretch, and onward, the tunnel felt less like a subterranean passage and more like a carefully chiselled artery beneath the city’s living memory. The ride carried a different emotion—one of reflection. As the train retraced its path westward, it was impossible not to think of the years of uncertainty, the stalled progress, the headlines of setbacks, and the scepticism that once surrounded this corridor. Yet here it was—operational, efficient, and already blending into daily life. The brief journey felt like a compressed lesson in Kolkata’s evolution: from colonial boulevards to crowded bazaars, from river-fed soil to steel-lined tunnels, all stitched together by rail—once again.

The Esplanade–Sealdah section is not just another metro link. It completes the core East–West Metro corridor, dramatically reduces surface congestion in central Kolkata, provides direct, reliable access between two major transit hubs, stands as a benchmark for complex urban tunnelling in India. More importantly, it restores public faith that even the most difficult infrastructure challenges can be overcome—with time, resolve, and engineering discipline. As the train finally rolled back into Esplanade, one thing was clear: this was not merely a ride—it was a passage through history, hardship, and hope. The Green Line’s Esplanade–Sealdah stretch is now open, but its true journey has just begun—carrying millions beneath a city that has waited patiently above. Kolkata moves east to west once more—quietly, efficiently, and finally uninterrupted.





Amrit Bharat in Motion

A Swift Nationwide Rollout Redefining Long-Distance Rail Travel

Rudranil Roy Chowdhury

In a remarkably short span of time, Indian Railways has scripted an unusual chapter in its contemporary operational history — the near-simultaneous inauguration of multiple Amrit Bharat Express services across disparate regions of the country. Rarely has a new class of train been inducted with such geographical spread and tempo, signalling not merely an addition to the timetable but a deliberate policy statement on affordable, modern long-distance travel.

Conceived as a next-generation non-AC intercity and overnight service, the Amrit Bharat Express occupies a carefully judged middle ground. Push-pull operation with locomotives at both ends ensures better acceleration and punctuality, while refurbished LHB-derived coaches bring improved ergonomics, enhanced safety systems, bio-vacuum toilets, LED lighting, charging points and passenger information systems — amenities once restricted to premium categories. Yet, crucially, fares remain accessible, preserving the democratic ethos of Indian Railways.



Eastern India: Bengal Steps into the Amrit Bharat Era

West Bengal has emerged as a major beneficiary in this rollout, with three significant Amrit Bharat services inaugurated on the same day itself.

The Sealdah–Banaras Amrit Bharat Express reconnects eastern India with one of the subcontinent's oldest living cities, offering a modern yet affordable option along a corridor steeped in history and demand. Passing through the industrial and cultural heartland of Jharkhand and Bihar, the train has quickly positioned itself as a preferred alternative for students, pilgrims and migrant workers alike.

Equally strategic is the Santragachi–Anand Vihar Terminal Amrit Bharat Express, linking the Kolkata metropolitan region directly with the National Capital Region. Santragachi's growing role as a long-distance terminal is further reinforced by this service, easing pressure on Howrah while offering a fast, no-frills east–north axis.

Photo Courtesy: Rudranil Roy Chowdhury

Featured here is Santragachi - Anand Vihar Terminal Inaugural Special





Perhaps the most ambitious of the trio is the Santragachi–Tambaram Amrit Bharat Express — a sweeping east-to-south traverse that binds Bengal to the Chennai suburban network. Stretching across multiple railway zones and linguistic regions, this train stands as a quiet testament to railways' enduring role as India's great unifier.

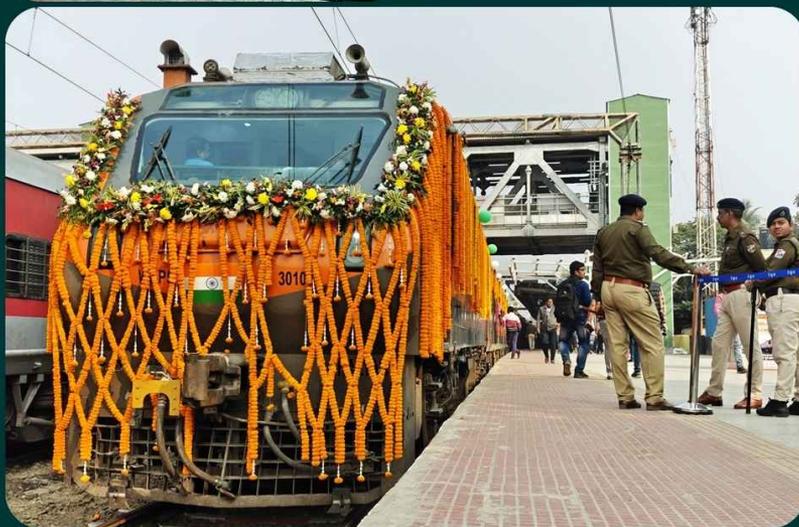
Southern Surge: Kerala and Tamil Nadu at the Forefront

Southern India, particularly Kerala and Tamil Nadu, has witnessed an equally notable concentration of inaugurations.

The Thiruvananthapuram Central–Mangaluru (MAQ) Amrit Bharat Express strengthens coastal connectivity along the Konkan–Malabar belt, serving a region where long-distance rail remains indispensable. Complementing it is the Thiruvananthapuram–Charlapalli Amrit Bharat Express, linking Kerala's capital with Telangana's expanding urban landscape and industrial zones.

Another key addition is the Thiruvananthapuram–Tambaram Amrit Bharat Express, which integrates Kerala directly with Chennai's suburban rail

*Photo courtesy: Arkopal Sarkar & Akash Ray
Featuring here SRC-TBM & SDAH-BSBS Inaugural Specials*





Ashwin Anil
TVC-MTQ Inaugural Spl.



Ashwin Anil



Kamatham Sirish
TVCN - CHZ Inaugural Special



Ashwin Anil

TVC-TBM



Ashwin Anil



Ashwin Anil
TVC-TBM Inaugural Special



ecosystem, facilitating smoother onward dispersal for passengers heading deeper into Tamil Nadu. Together, these services underscore a conscious effort to enhance north-south and inter-peninsular mobility, particularly for passengers who depend on sleeper-class travel yet expect contemporary standards of comfort and reliability.

Beyond the Initial Six: A Broader National Canvas

Beyond these six prominent inaugurations, Indian Railways has also flagged off additional Amrit Bharat services on long and demanding corridors elsewhere in the country, extending the concept to western and northern India. While routes differ, the philosophy remains consistent — high-capacity, modern non-AC trains tailored for long distances, designed to absorb heavy demand without escalating costs.

As these trains settle into their schedules and passengers grow accustomed to the new standard, the Amrit Bharat story may well be remembered not for a single inaugural run, but for the moment when modernity and affordability finally began moving together at scale.

Photos courtesy: Mallar Banerjee

Featuring here KYQ-ROK Amrit Bharat Inaugural Specials along with some AB WAP5 locos





Sohan Ahmed

Toronto's impressive suburban transit is serviced by the double decker GO trains, across 7+ branch lines running as far as 120km out of the city. Here is a Lakeshore East line service bound to Oshawa, led by MPI MP40PH-3C Locomotive 637 in the penultimate hour of the day.

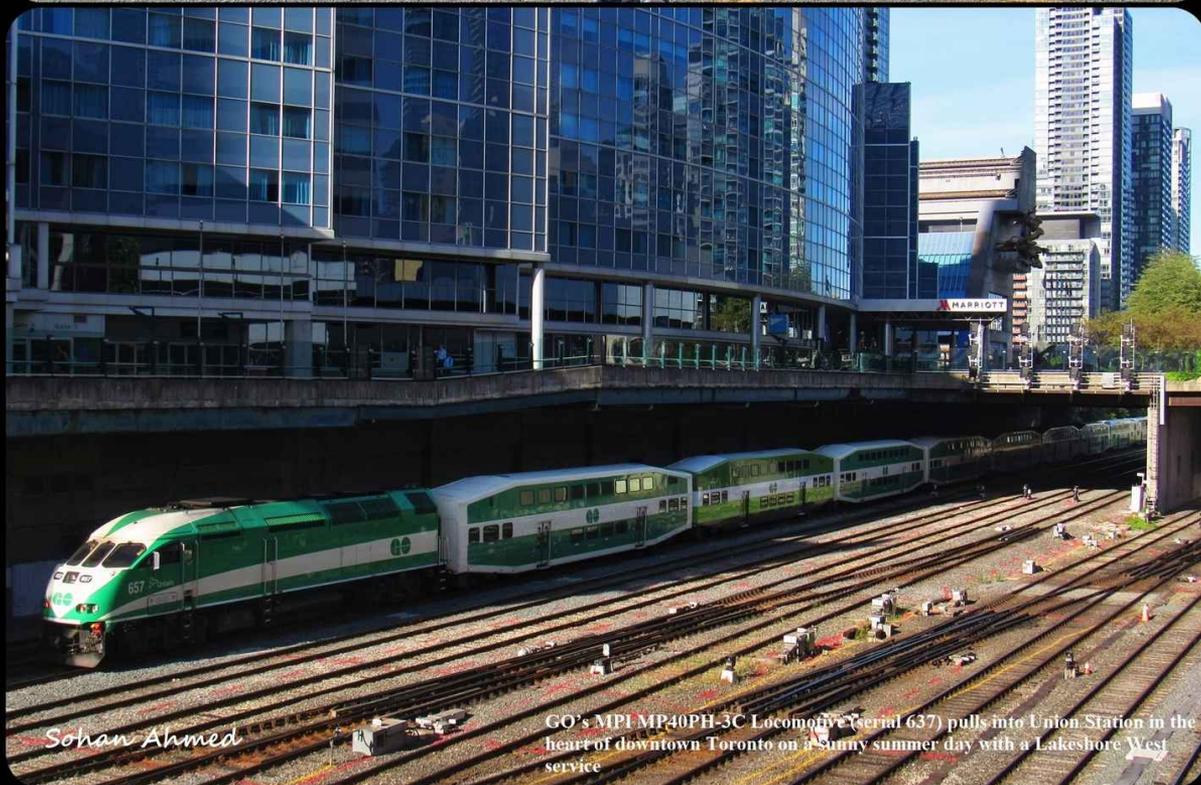
Photo Junction



Sohan Ahmed

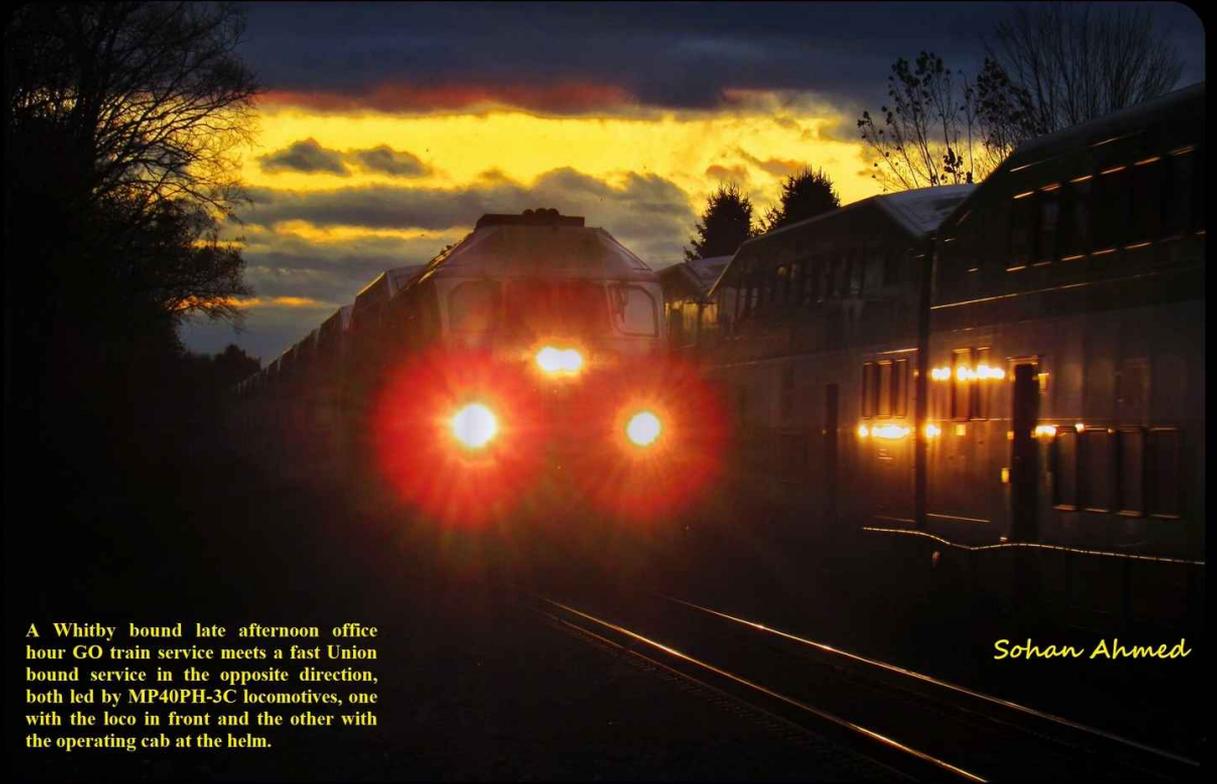
A railway enthusiast from a very young age, SOH's train has taken him from the tracks of Eastern Railway in Calcutta to Bangalore and then across North America. A chemical engineer by profession working up his way in the petroleum industry as an engineering lead and with a forever soft-corner for trains in every part of the world that life takes him to like in this picture. Seen here is a series IX bi-level cab car of Toronto's GO transit, only used to operate the engine at the rear.

Sohan Ahmed



Sohan Ahmed

GO's MPI MP40PH-3C Locomotive (serial 637) pulls into Union Station in the heart of downtown Toronto on a sunny summer day with a Lakeshore West service



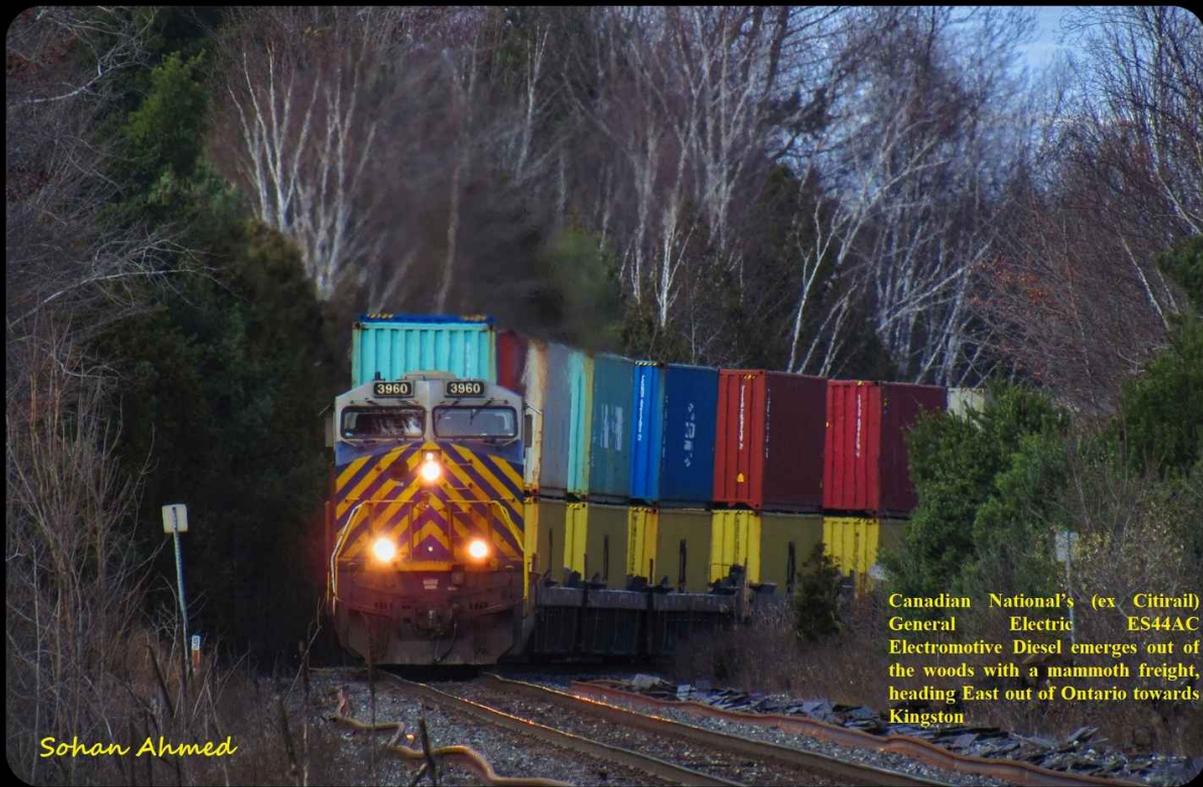
A Whitby bound late afternoon office hour GO train service meets a fast Union bound service in the opposite direction, both led by MP40PH-3C locomotives, one with the loco in front and the other with the operating cab at the helm.

Sohan Ahmed



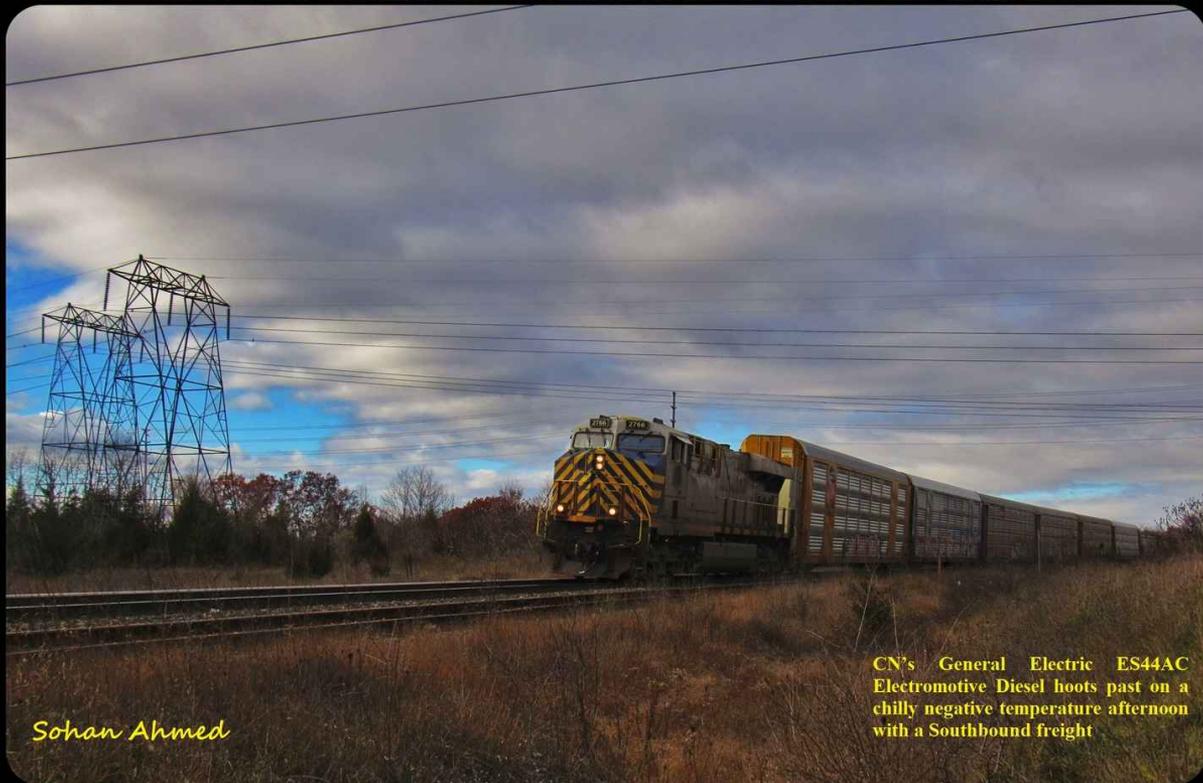
EMD GP39V triplets rest in the siding at Hamilton, with BNSF 2968 coupled to two CN locomotives

Sohan Ahmed



Canadian National's (ex Citirail) General Electric ES44AC Electromotive Diesel emerges out of the woods with a mammoth freight, heading East out of Ontario towards Kingston

Sohan Ahmed



CN's General Electric ES44AC Electromotive Diesel hoots past on a chilly negative temperature afternoon with a Southbound freight

Sohan Ahmed

NEWS STATION

Bed Linen facility for Sleeper Class in Southern Railway

Starting this 1st January 2026, Southern Railway started what is a first of its kind service in the form of supplying the Sleeper Class passengers with bed rolls. This will be an on-payment on-demand service for the passengers travelling in Sleeper Class of trains belonging to Chennai Division. The benefits will be enhanced comfort, better hygiene and increased revenue for railways. The price catalogue is as follows :

Rs 50 - Bedsheet, one pillow with pillow cover

Rs 30- One pillow with pillow cover

Rs 20- One bedsheet

Initially trains like Nilgiri Express, Thiruvananthapuram SF, Mangalore SF, Mannargudi Express, Silambu Express, Alleppey Express etc. has seen the implementation of this service. If it gets successful and feasible, it will be extended to other trains and other divisions.

Myanmar Launches Its First Battery Powered Locomotive

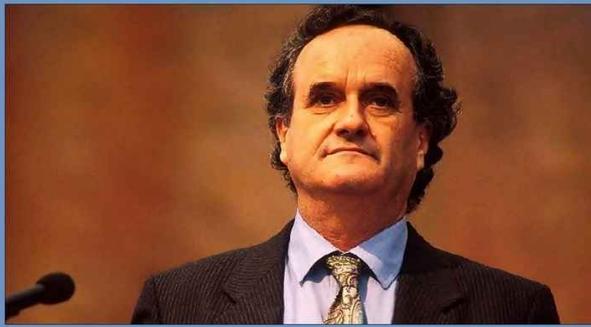
In November 2025, Myanmar introduced its battery powered locomotive to haul regular passenger services. The locomotive was modified from India made ALCo YDM4 metre gauge diesel in Myanmar Railways' Naypyidaw facility with technological support and materials from China National Heavy Machinery Limited. More such 11 locomotives are planned to be pressed into service. The first locomotive started its journey with 5 passenger coaches in the 270 km long Naypyidaw - Mandalay line.

Bangalore Metro Starts Trial Runs on Pink Line

The Namma Metro started trials on the Pink Line with the new trainsets from January 10. The Pink Line is the fourth line of the silicon city to become operational and connects Kalena Agrahara to Nagawara and extends 21.39 kilometres having 18 stations. The trial was conducted in a 7 km long elevated section between Kalena Agrahara to Tavarakere to access track conditions, signalling systems and other systems. The trainsets used are state-of-the-art 6-coach trainsets manufactured by BEML, compliant with GoA-4 UTO standards, enabling driverless operations. The Green Line and Violet Line is already using BEML made trainsets.

Kavach Operational In Gujarat For The First Time

As a part of the expansion of Kavach (TCAS) technology, Kavach 4.0 was successfully commissioned in the 96 km long stretch of Western Railway from Bajwa (near Vadodara) to Ahmedabad. The infrastructure included 23 towers, 20 Kavach huts, 196 km of optical fiber cables (OFC) and 2872 RFID tags. The first train to run with this technology is Sankalp Fast Passenger with a WAP7 locomotive at its helm.



Adieu Sir Mark Tully: The Englishman Who Never Left India

Sudhanshu Mani

Sir William Mark Tully passed away on 25 January 2026.

KBE. Former BBC Bureau Chief in India for two decades. A BBC journalist for over thirty years. Winner of numerous awards. Author of nine books.

All this is known. All this will be written, recorded, archived.

And yet, none of it quite captures the man.

In the days following his passing, I read deeply moving obituaries written by friends whom I admire. Rajendra Aldekar, journalist with *Mid-Day* and chronicler of India's rail history and heritage. Deepak Sapra, one of the most outstanding alumni of my railway alma mater and author of the much-loved *The Boy Who Loved Trains*. Incidentally, Sir Mark wrote the foreword to their books, as he did to mine, *My Train 18 Story*. Reading their tributes stirred something personal in me. I felt compelled to write, not merely because Sir Mark was a towering journalist, but because he had left an indelible imprint on my own life and thinking.

What truly set Mark Tully apart, what made him singular and irreplaceable, was not just what he reported, but how and from where he reported. He did not merely cover India. He belonged to it. He consciously stepped away from the BBC's often distant and patronising gaze and chose instead to look at India from within, as one of its own. He wrote not as a foreign correspondent passing judgement, but as a deeply involved participant, guided by affection, humility, and an unyielding moral compass.

Mark Tully once said it was his karma to live in India. He believed this country had shaped the way he lived, the way he thought, and the way he understood fate. Very few outsiders ever acknowledge India with such honesty. Fewer still allow it to change them so completely.

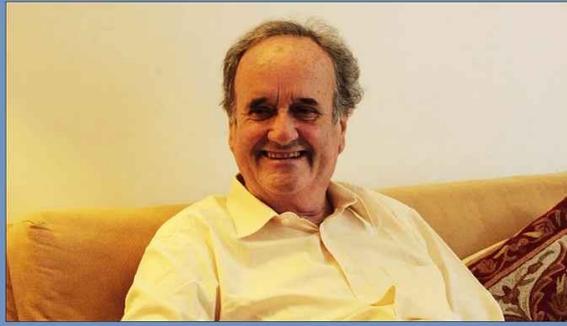
Among his many works, *No Full Stops in India*, which was his first work that I read, *stands* apart, not merely as a book, but as a worldview. It is journalism, autobiography, travelogue, and social analysis seamlessly woven together. It refuses easy conclusions. It resists tidy summaries. It insists that India cannot be boxed into headlines or reduced to convenient theories. The title itself is a declaration. India has no full stops. Its stories do not end neatly. Its contradictions coexist. Order and chaos walk side by side. Tradition and modernity argue, collide, and yet somehow embrace.

Mark Tully's greatest strength lay in his refusal to simplify India for foreign consumption. Instead of explaining India away, he allowed its complexity to breathe. His observations were shaped by insight and lived experiences, by patient watching and quiet listening. For anyone who wishes to understand India beyond clichés, *No Full Stops in India* remains essential reading.

His journeys along the Grand Trunk Road were, in many ways, journeys through India's bloodstream. That ancient highway was not merely a reporting location. It was a living archive of centuries. Along it, he encountered faith and commerce, decay and renewal, rupture and continuity. Through his writing and documentaries, the Grand Trunk Road became a metaphor for India itself, always moving, always layered, carrying history without being imprisoned by it.

If one thread ran quietly but persistently through Mark Tully's life, it was his love for trains. That love began in the misty hills of Darjeeling during the war years, when he could not return to England. As a schoolboy at the New School, he travelled daily on the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway. Decades later, he recalled it with undimmed wonder: "How could I ever forget the DHR? It was the train that took me to school every day."

The narrow-gauge line, the loops and zigzags, the patient little locomotives climbing steep gradients, this was not merely transport. It was an initiation. The train passed through markets, tea gardens, and crowded streets, dissolving the boundary



between railway and town. That was where his lifelong romance with Indian trains began.

When he later returned as BBC's India chief, that relationship deepened. He believed the best way to understand India was to travel by train, preferably in sleeper class. There, strangers shared food, arguments, opinions, and silences. Languages mingled. Social hierarchies blurred. A railway coach became a moving microcosm of India.

Mark Tully often compared Indian trains to Indian life itself. Sometimes late. Often chaotic. Occasionally exasperating. Yet always collective, and always capable of sudden, unexpected beauty. His affection for steam engines was especially poignant. To him, they were living beings, breathing, sweating, struggling forward with dignity. Their disappearance saddened him deeply.

In many ways, his relationship with trains mirrored his relationship with India. Rooted in childhood, sustained by curiosity, and carried through life with enduring love.

I became a fan of Mark Tully not merely because he was a great journalist, but because he was, in spirit, more Indian than Indians. He neither romanticised India nor dismissed it. He respected it enough to criticise it honestly, and loved it enough to defend what deserved defending.

On 24 February 2019, writing in *Hindustan Times*, Mark Tully argued forcefully that Train 18, later known as Vande Bharat Express, should not be dismissed as elitist. He recognised it as an ambitious and indigenous effort by the engineers of the Integral Coach Factory, Chennai, after decades of sterile debate within Indian Railways on the need for modern trains.

When that very team was later humiliated and victimised by a venal and jealous section of senior railway officialdom, Mark Tully spoke again. On 12 January 2020, he wrote with rare moral clarity about what the Train 18 episode revealed about India. He condemned the lack of respect for achievement, the misuse of vigilance machinery, and the culture of fear that discourages initiative. He warned that such treatment would encourage a dangerous habit within government organisations: the habit of doing nothing, agreeing to nothing, risking nothing.

His words cut deep because they were true. And because they came from someone with no personal stake, only a stake in India's future.

His writing on Train 18 emboldened me to meet him at his Delhi home. He received me with warmth and grace. He listened with care and understood fully, even as I emptied a copious number of chilled beers that kept appearing on the table, courtesy Gillian, his gracious partner. With characteristic generosity and courage, he offered to write again on the subject, which he did, fully aware that the powers that be would not take kindly to such forthrightness and that it would further estrange him from them. From that moment grew a relationship marked by kindness, encouragement, and a shared concern for Indian Railways and the health of Indian institutions.

He agreed to write the foreword to my book *My Train 18 Story*, and did so with extraordinary insight. In it, he placed my experience within a larger national malaise: the colonial legacy, rigid hierarchies, fear driven bureaucracy, and what Inder Malhotra once called the Abominable Indian No Men. With precision and compassion, he showed how initiative is punished and conformity rewarded, not only in the railways, but across Indian governance.

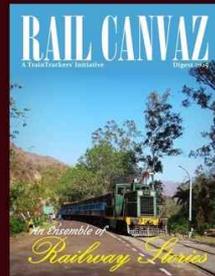
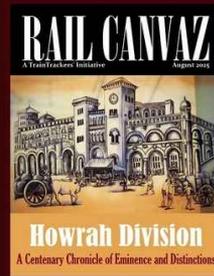
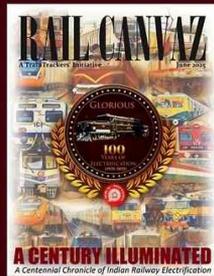
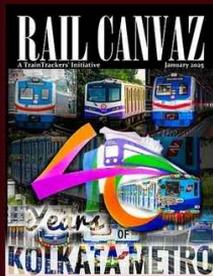
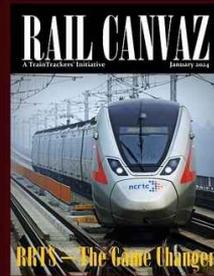
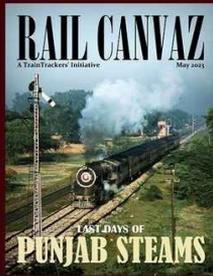
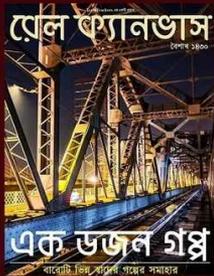
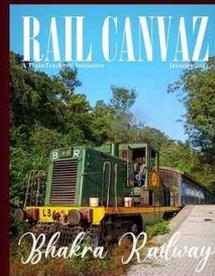
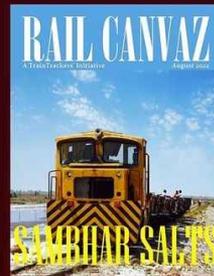
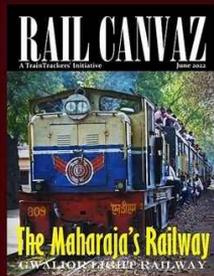
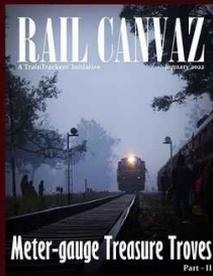
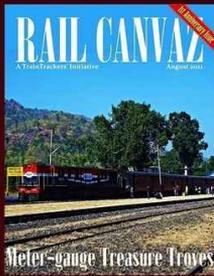
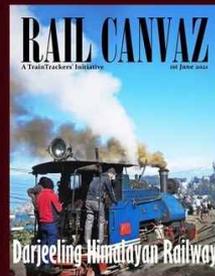
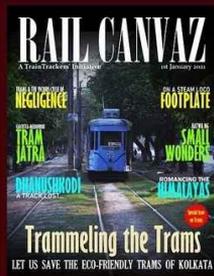
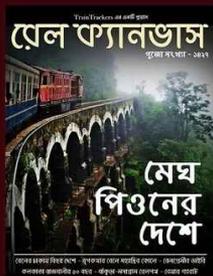
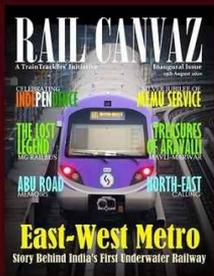
Sir Mark Tully's passing is not merely the loss of a legendary journalist. For me, it is deeply personal. It is the loss of a moral voice, a generous mentor, and a fellow traveller.

From now on, every train journey will carry his presence for me. In shared compartments, in the rhythm of wheels on rails, in the stubborn persistence of Indian Railways despite everything, I will sense his spirit: curious, patient, empathetic, and endlessly in love with the journey itself.

Adieu, Sir Mark Tully. You did not merely write about India. You walked its roads, rode its trains, shared its silences, and earned your place within its heart.

And to borrow from Shakespeare, a line that seems written for him:

"His life was gentle; and the elements so mix'd in him, that Nature might stand up and say to all the world, This was a man."



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