



Heritage of India

A series of explorations of the World Heritage sites of India as adjudged by the World Heritage Committee of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).

VICTORIA TERMINUS

The British ruled India for close to 400 years, and those were the most important years of World History, when the World was discovered, industrialized and transformed. The British have left a profound impact on India wherever you look, starting from English language, Cricket, the Constitution, the Bureaucracy, the Parliamentary system, the complex law structure the Civil Services and the fascination Indians have with white skin. Most of what we see today in modern India is the legacy of what the British left us. Among these, the largest in material terms is of course, the Indian Railways.

No one can deny the part the British played in creating the Indian Railways. They envisioned it, planned it, engineered it and instructed the poor Indian labourers how to build it. However, there is a common

misconception that the British gifted India the Railways. Nothing could be more wrong. The British did not build the railways out of love for India or for the prosperity of poor Indians. They could not have cared less.

They needed to govern this huge, disconnected and diverse country efficiently and to do so, they needed stuff to be moved around the country quickly. Like mail of the Empire, troops for war against native princes and to subdue rebellions and of course the plethora of officials who were ruling the country.

They saw how hugely successful the Railways were in England, and decided that India with its vast hinterlands and huge population was perfect for them to build an extensive Railway network using which they could exploit the country to the maximum. They saw the railways as a tool to consolidate their power and control over the Indian population. Letting the Indian

populace use the trains was just one of the small mercies extended by the British to the Indians.

The Railways were a way of life during the days of the British Raj, and that is where the glorious history of the Indian Railways come from. Being sure that they would probably govern India forever, British Railway companies in India invested heavily in India with the latest locomotives and equipment, laying lines everywhere and expanding existing ones. It is said that the facilities available on trains in India were better than even those available in England! But they stopped investing after 1930, and by the time of independence they left behind with aging locomotives and rolling stock, a rusting and decaying track system and a run-down dilapidated and accident prone network. What appears on these two pages are notes made by scholars spread across different parts of the world and different centuries.

Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus, was declared a UNESCO "World Heritage Site" in 2004. Situated at the D.N. Road of Mumbai, the terminus was earlier known by the name of Victoria Terminus. It is one of the historic structures in the city and forms a very important part of Mumbai suburban railway. Along with that, Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus is also the headquarters of the Central Railways of the country.

The consulting British architect Frederick William Stevens (1848-1900) an English architectural engineer who worked for the British colonial government in India designed the station. He received about Rupees 16 lakhs (US\$32,199.3) as payment for his services.

The terminal was built over 10 years, starting in 1878, according to a High Victorian Gothic design based on late medieval Italian models. Its remarkable

stone dome, turrets, pointed arches and eccentric ground plan are close to traditional Indian palace architecture. The Victoria Terminus is an outstanding example of the meeting of two cultures, as British architects worked with Indian craftsmen to include Indian architectural tradition and idioms thus forging a new style unique to Bombay. It cost £260,000 when it was finished in 1888, the highest for any building of that era in Bombay. The station was named "Victoria Terminus" in honour of the Queen and Empress Victoria; it was opened on the date of her Golden Jubilee in 1887. This famous architectural landmark in Gothic style was built as the headquarters of the Great Indian Peninsular Railway. Since then, the station came to be known as Bombay VT.

In the early days, the area on which VT stood was called Bori Bunder. This area was a landing place for boats, and was used for loading and unloading of duty-free goods and other produce. Bori Bunder

The wood carving, tiles, ornamental iron and brass railings, grills for the ticket offices, the balustrades for the grand staircases and other ornaments were the work of Indian students at the Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy School of Art, Mumbai. (JJ School of Arts)



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THE most remarkable thing about Victoria Terminus is that this grand structure, with its sculptured ornamentation, architectural curiosities and prestigious status as a UNESCO World Heritage site, is first and foremost a fully functioning railway terminus. In the heart of south Mumbai (Bombay), this venerable building - which still goes by the name VT despite being renamed Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus - handles more than 10 lakh commuters every day and houses the headquarters of the Central Railway; no mean achievement for a structure that is 118 years old.

Frontier Mail



The most defining feature of the British India Railways was certainly the cult status accorded to certain important trains. Those days, was accorded depending on the trains on which the elite and high officials of the British Raj travelled regularly. At the forefront of this was the Frontier Mail, running Bombay Baroda Delhi Lahore Peshawar, taking travellers deep to the edges of the Empire. Having only First and Second Class it was the elite of the elite of the trains in India with the most exuberantly opulent comforts. It was supposedly punctual to the dot and when it arrived in Bombay, the entire station would be lit up. The Indian Railways of today decided to do away even with the name and the successor of the train today runs as the Mumbai Central - New Delhi Amritsar Golden Temple Mail, one of the slowest trains on the Mumbai Delhi route.

(alternatively "Bori Bandar") was one of the areas along the Eastern shore line of Mumbai, which was used as a storehouse for goods imported and exported from Mumbai. In the area's name, 'Bori' mean sack and 'Bandar' means port or haven (in Persian); So Bori Bunder literally means a place where sacks are stored. In the 1850s, the Great Indian Peninsular Railway built its railway terminus in this area and the station took its name as Bori Bunder. For Victoria Terminus, about 80 acres had to be reclaimed from the harbour side. As early as 1861, the Bombay Government had entered into an agreement with the Elphinstone Land and Press Company to reclaim two-thirds of Mody Bay, of which 100 acres were to be given for the construction of VT.

The station stands as an example of 19th century railway architectural marvels for its advanced structural and technical solutions. The skyline, turrets, pointed arches, and eccentric ground plan are close to traditional Indian palace architecture. Externally, the wood carving, tiles, ornamental iron and brass railings, grills for the ticket offices, the balustrades for the grand staircases and

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other ornaments were the work of Indian students at the Sir Jamsetjee Jeejebhoy School of Art, Mumbai. (JJ School of Arts)

All the sides of the building are given equal value in the design. It is crowned by a high central dome, which acts as the focal point. The dome is an octagonal ribbed structure with a colossal female figure symbolizing Progress, holding a torch pointing upwards in her right hand and a spoked wheel in her left hand.

The centrally domed office structure has a 330 feet long platform connected to a 1,200 feet long train shed, and its outline provides the skeleton plan for building. VT's dome of dovetailed ribs, built without centering, was considered as a novel achievement of the era. The interior of the building was conceived as a series of large rooms with high ceilings. It is a utilitarian building and has had various changes required by the users, not always sympathetic.

A statue of the Queen was installed over the main entrance of the building and it stood there for many years. It was removed at some point in time - no one seems to recall by whom or why - and is now untraceable.

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Excerpted from the paper “Railways and Famines in Colonial India”
by Daniel Keniston Massachusetts Institute of Technology 2/2/2007

The expansion of railways across India was a major and dramatic undertaking that revolutionized cargo shipments across India. From 1860 to 1920, the total mileage of railways in India increased by an average of 594 miles per year. By 1910, only Germany, Russia and the United States and more miles of functional railroad track than India, and India's railroad length at the time (32,099 miles) was dramatically higher than comparable developing countries such as China (5,092 miles), Argentina (17,429) or Mexico (15,350). (Hurd, 1975).

Two essential facts stand out concerning the expansion of railways during this period: First, the spread of railways across India during this period was a true revolution in transport technology. Prior to advent of railways, most trade in India had been conducted along rough and poorly maintained roads, at best through bullock carts, and at worst carried manually on the heads of porters. Bullock cart transportation was both more expensive and much slower than train shipment: in the 1900's, the charge for transporting about 37 kilograms for about 1.6 kilometres by a bullock cart was 1.75 pies (there were 192 pies per rupees), while the rate for railroad transport was .18 pies. (Derbyshire, 1987).

The second distinct aspect of railway development in colonial India was that despite the seemingly large opportunity for profits in railway building, the development of railroads in India was primarily by government policy and subsidies. Thus, the government of India entered into contracts with potential builders of railways in India, guaranteeing, among other things, that the government would subsidize the railways such that they would earn a minimum 5% return on their capital and that, on demand, the government would buy out any railway at the cost of the full capital invested, regardless of the profitability of the railroad. Given these major concessions, the government of India reserved the right to determine the routes of railways, their construction types, and their rates. Between 1850 and 1900, after which the railways generally began to be profitable, the Indian government paid railway shareholders £50 million. (Thorner, 1951) Thus Thorner concludes, “In general, it is not too much to say that, except for the shareholders, virtually no one acquainted with railway matters has been pleased with the way they have functioned.”

Why then, did the Indian government take an interest in funding railway construction in India (albeit through the taxes paid by Indians themselves)? Three major reasons have been advanced: First, railroads had a major military importance. Troop movements had been a major difficulty for the British during the 1857 rebellion, and much of the inspiration for railway construction may have originated in the effort to facilitate troop movements in the event of another rebellion, or a Russian invasion via Afghanistan. (Macpherson, 1955) Secondly, the British constructed railroads to serve their commercial interests, primarily in using India as a source for raw materials: “The pattern of India's rail expansion was one of connecting the principal ports with the major agricultural hinterlands and urban centers in order to draw goods out for export and to provide markets for imports.” (Hurd, 1975, pg. 267) Thirdly, the British may have built some railroads explicitly for the purpose of famine alleviation. The Famine Commission of 1880 (a body of administrators and experts constituted after the severe famines of 1876-8) suggested the construction of several additional railway lines for the purpose of famine alleviation.



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On 16th April, 1853 the Great Indian Peninsula Railway operated the historic first passenger train in India from Bori Bunder to Thane covering a distance of 34 km, formally heralding the birth of the Indian Railways. The train between Bori Bunder and Thane was 57 minutes it was a distance of 35 km apart.

Originally intended only to house the main station and the administrative offices of the Great Indian Peninsula Railway, a number of ancillary buildings have been added subsequently, all designed so as to harmonise with the main structure. A new station to handle main line traffic was erected in 1929. The original building is still in use to handle suburban traffic and is used by over three million commuters daily. It is also the administrative headquarters of the Central Railway.

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Adapted and exerted from "Fire-Carriages" of the Raj The Indian Railway and its Rapid Development in British India, by Amit K. Sharma, University of Alberta

Railway promoters active in Britain were well aware of the military utility that a railroad network could provide in colonial India. In 1844 Rowland M. Stephenson, one of the earliest promoters, began to endorse the construction of the so-called "Mirzapore" railway route that would link Calcutta to Delhi, Bombay, and Madras. He claimed that the "first consideration" for such a railway scheme would be the "better security... of the entire country." His proposed railroads would strategically pass through all areas of military importance. Throughout the 1840s, other promoters also voiced military justifications for the development of a railroad network in British India. ...

While railway promoters and their allies campaigned in London, the Indian government began to view the construction of a railroad network as central to maintaining a military policy of expansion, annexation, and defense. Warfare against the Sikhs during the mid 1840s had revealed the inadequacies of military transportation on the subcontinent. British authorities were aware that military supplies and manpower could have been mobilized far more efficiently if a railroad connecting Calcutta to the North-West Provinces had existed.

Following the British conquest of the Punjab, James Andrew Broun Ramsay, the Marquess of Dalhousie and Governor-General of India at the time, sought to initiate large-scale railway development. He viewed the railroad as an effective means to bind together old territories as well as newly-conquered ones and in doing so, to secure British military power in colonial India.



The Victoria Terminus is crowned by a high central dome, which acts as the focal point. The dome is an octagonal ribbed structure with a colossal female figure symbolizing Progress, holding a torch pointing upwards in her right hand and a spoked wheel in her left hand.



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Today Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus is the busiest railway station in India, serving as both a terminal for long distance trains and commuter trains of the Mumbai Suburban Railway. The station's name was changed to its present one in March 1996 but it still continues to be referred to as VT (a short

form of Victoria Terminus) by the masses. The Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus has 18 platforms - 7 are for locals trains and 11 are for long distance

RESTORATION PLANS

Although VT was declared a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2004, the honour is double-edged; if the building is not maintained its status could be withdrawn, but maintenance and restoration is difficult. Funds are, of course, an issue, but so are the logistical implications of carrying out

repairs on a heritage structure that is in intensive public use.

The increased demands of office space, commuter traffic, age and pollution have damaged the building's aesthetics. However, skilful restoration and sensitive management of the Central Railway are ensuring that the stained glass, vaulted roofs and Maw and Minton tiles are beginning to reinstate themselves in all their glory. ■

Excerpted and adapted from , "The Indian Railway Story" by Vadkhus on the internet

Trains in British India had four classes: First, Second, Third and Fourth. First Class was defined by its incredible luxury with wonderfully appointed plush carriages with electric lights and fans, wood-work and panelling, ultra-luxurious interiors which included carpeting, royal-size beds/berths, showers, quarters for the servants and all. Some even had rudimentary Air-Conditioning. A big block of ice could be bought from the platform and that would be lowered into a slot in the floor, and fans would be directed at it for cooling effect! Only the most distinguished Europeans could travel by First class. Today's "elite" First Class AC would seem like a general compartment compared to these. And unlike those of today, the then first class carriages did



The opulent First Class, for exclusive use Only the most distinguished Europeans

not have corridors. Each cabin as it is called today was a separate room or suite which would have its own door on either side of the carriage which could be used to step onto the platform. Each carriage (coach/compartment) could consist of many such rooms. This was luxury at its best, a kind of opulence that is not seen probably anywhere in the world on general trains today. Many trains had restaurant cars as well, known as Bistro to day, which could put to shame any 5 star restaurant of today, where you could snack upon the best delicacies, Indian or European or whatever you fancied. Most trains had bars aboard and you could even get iced beer on call!



The Third class plain carriages with wooden benches, with no lights, fans, toilets or even bars on the windows, filled with dirt and filth. The Indians were allowed only to travel by third or fourth class

Second class was probably a little less luxurious but still. It had seating with padded cushions for seats. Third class was plain carriages with wooden benches, with no lights, fans, toilets or even bars on the windows, filled with dirt and filth. Fourth class carriages were basically just empty boxcars with windows without even benches, usually crammed with people and worse than the Third Class. They were filled with people to the brim just like the General Second compartments of today. Only they were far worse and neither the other passengers or the Railways cared about them. Indians, wretched as they were seen by the British overlords were allowed only to travel by third or fourth class while their overlords traveled in luxury in First and Second class. The Third continued as the dismal original Cattle Class until it was abolished post-independence in 1955.