

FIRST TRAIN TO BHAUGULPORE

- P.K.MISHRA

‘We find ourselves standing on the bank of the great Ganges, at that point at which it is in the interests of Commerce, that the tedious and uncertain navigation of its lower waters should be exchanged for a short and secure land carriage.’--

Synopsis: After connecting Rajmahal, the ancient capital of Bengal, with Railway on 15th October 1860, EIR decided to connect Bhagalpur, next major centre of trade and commerce in the region, with Railways by 15th October 1861.

More than 71 thousand workmen would work every day in constructing Bhagalpur and Rajmahal line against all odds, under most adverse conditions, difficult terrain, virtually impregnable mountain ranges, swampy marsh land ravaged by diseases and wild animals. Indefatigable exertions of company engineers even at the cost of their health and lives were legendary. On October 4th, 1859, R. J. St. George, resident engineer of Colgong had drowned while trying to cross a flooded valley between Kahalgaon and Pirpanti.

Date of 15th October for public opening of both sections was chosen by EIR for two reasons; first was to allow the embankments to subside and consolidate during rainy season and to observe the effect of the floods on the high embankments & the water passages, and second was to tap maximum passenger traffic during Durga Puja.

On the 25th June 1861, a special train left Howrah for Bhaugulpore at 5-17 A. M on trial trip. Railway Officers stationed en-route would join the special train at Rampur hat, Teenpahar, Sahebgunge and Colgong. It proceeded rapidly on its way along the old line at express speed, arriving at Burdwan at 7-11 A.M., Ramporehat at 9-24 A.M. and the Teenpahar Junction at 11-29 A.M.

Here another carriage, containing a number of the Railway Officers and their friends from Rajmehal, was added on to the train, swelling the total number of the excursionists to about forty and after a delay of 16 minutes, at 11-45 a.m., the train, preceded by pilot engine, left the Teenpahar Junction and sped along the new line at the rate of 25 miles an hour.

At 12-55 P. M. the train arrived at Sahebgunge; and sumptuous tiffin, laid out in the bungalow of Mr. W.E. Orr, the Assistant Engineer Sahebgunge, awaited the visitors. 158 years later, I would get an opportunity to resurrect and restore these heritage riverside bungalows to their former glory.

At 1-45 P. M., the train left Sahebgunge, and after passing the swampy Terai land, appeared the imposing view of historic Teliagarhi Fort, first mentioned in the writings of Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang in 645 AD, when he saw the lofty bricks and stone tower not far from the Ganges.

During the Turkish dynasty rule in Delhi, Malik Ikhtiaruddin-bin-Bakhtiar Khilji marched towards Bengal and Assam through Teliagarhi pass. In 1538, Sher Shah Suri and

Humayun came face to face for a decisive battle near Teliagarhi. It would again become the seat of a fierce battle between the rebellious Prince Shahjahan and Ibrahim Khan. Teliagarhi was also the last scene of Siraj-u-dowlah's struggle for supremacy.

Only ruins of Teliagarhi fort were remaining during construction of Railways. Strong fortification with excellent masonry and mortar would pose huge challenge to EIR engineers in breaking down one of the gateways through which centre line of the proposed rail alignment passed.

The train reached Colgong and after waiting five minutes to water the engine started for Bhaugulpore at 3-30 P. M., and arrived there at 4-17 P. M., completing the entire journey between Howrah to Bhagalpur in 11 hours including detention of 2 hours 24 minutes.

The special train arrived at Bhaugulpore, amidst a complete ovation and tumultuous welcome. More than ten thousand people had assembled to witness the arrival of chariot of fire. Repeated cheering greeted the train as it pulled up to the temporary platform. It was a scene of intense excitement, the picture of amazement and wonder approaching terror.

At 8 P. M., the whole party, including all the ladies of the Station, sat down to a grand dinner at the house of Mr. Heenan, resident engineer of Bhaugulpore. Eighty people sat down altogether, and every one testified their appreciation of the hospitality by their unusual mirth and hilarity, which was kept up till a very late hour accompanied by several toasts and countless speeches.

The next morning, at 11 A. M. the train left Bhaugulpore to return to Howrah. Several of the ladies and residents came in the train for a few miles, and returned to Bhaugulpore by their carriages.

The absence of the Chief Engineer, Mr. Turnbull, was sorely missed, as he was convalescing at Darjeeling on account of his health. He would have been proud to witness the journey being completed in less than 11 hours, which would earlier take more than 108 hours in most wearisome condition.

History: A contract was signed between the East India Company and the East Indian Railway Company on August 17th, 1849, entitling the latter to construct and operate an "experimental" line between Calcutta-the existing seat of power of British India and Rajmahal- the old capital of Bengal, one hundred miles long at an estimated cost of £1,000,000, which would be later extended to Delhi via Mirzapur. Sixth half-yearly general meeting of EIR held on, August 16th, 1853, ratified the extension of the line from Rajmahal to Allahabad and Delhi

The East Indian Railway line to Rajmahal was opened on the 15th October 1860 with much splendour. A train, containing the Governor General and his Excellency the Commander, Lieutenant Governor of Bengal and other distinguished guests invited by Mr. Palmer, the agent of East Indian Railway company, started from Howrah at 8 o'clock in the morning. His Excellency the Governor General of India, Lord Canning gave a historic speech at Rajmahal on the occasion:

“ We began this day’s journey at a spot washed by the tides of the Bay of Bengal, and within a stone’s throw of the anchorage of some of the noblest ships which, to the furtherance of commerce and all its attendant blessings, the skill and enter prise of our fellow-countrymen have launched upon the ocean. We have ended it in an inland district 200 miles off, where not only are the uses of the great highway of nations uncared for and unknown, but where the very name of the ‘ black water ’ is a word of mystery and terror. “

After connecting Rajmahal with Railway on 15th October 1860, EIR decided to connect Bhagalpur, next major centre of trade and commerce in the region, with Railways by 15th October 1861. Rail connection to Munger and Patna was planned for 31st January 1862 and 15th June 1862 respectively.- **Progress Report Of Railways in India, Exhibiting Their State on the 31st December 1860- A. G. Goodwyn, Major, Under-Secy to the Government of India, P. W. Dept.**

This required construction of 24 miles of track between Teenpahar to Sahebgunge, 26 miles of track between Sahebgunge and Cologong and laying of 19 miles of track between Colgong and Bhaugulpore, to complete connectivity of Bhaugulpore with Howrah at a cost of Rs 78638 per mile with total estimated cost of Rs 60, 55,131.

(Earthwork & rock cutting- 7 lakhs Rs, brickworks-8.43 lakhs Rs,Ballast-6.4 lakhs Rs , permanent way materials -22.4 lakhs Rs ,cost of laying P.Way-4.43 lakhs Rs, fencing -1.71 lakhs, construction of road side station-1.27 lakhs, construction of Bhaugulpore Station-1.5 lakhs, turntables and others-0.77 lakhs Rs, bridges -0.67 lakhs Rs,contingencies-5.5 lakhs)

- Railways (India): Return to an Order ... Dated 12 July 1853

George Turnbull, Chief Engineer of EIR in his half yearly report dated 12th February 1861 had stated that line up to Bhaugulpore would be ready before the end of June but advised to start operations only after observing behaviour of line and embankments during rainy season.

“Although the Line will be, as I formerly reported, in a workable condition up to Bhaugulpore, before the end of June, yet it will be advisable, as in the case of the Colgong Division, to postpone opening for public traffic until after the rains, so as to allow the embankments to subside and consolidate. It is also desirable that we should have the opportunity of observing the effect of the floods on the high embankments and the water passages.”

Before the laying of rail lines in the region, journey to Bhagalpur from Calcutta was extremely difficult for lack of roads. One had to take the circuitous river route from Hooghly to Rahmahal in river Bhagirathy and then travel upstream in River Ganges to reach Bhagalpur. No steamer could go within 10 miles of Bhaugulpore during most of the time in year. One account of such arduous journey undertaken in 1858 is given below:

“Three years ago we had occasion to go to Bhaugulpore by Palkee Dak at this season of the year. There were no other means of conveyance by land, so there was no choice in the matter.

We started from Hooghly, and, owing to the swollen condition of the nullahs, and the flooded state of the country, we were three days and nights reaching Rajmehal. From Rajmehal we travelled by the day time only, and were occupied three days more in reaching Bhaugulpore. It was a drearisome journey of six tedious days and three wearisome nights, and, considering the inclement season of the year, was something of a feat. For 108 long hours had we to suffer the torture of remaining in a recumbent position, occasionally varied by the excitement of trying to keep oneself dry every time a storm came on ; for the roof of our Palkee leaked, and although our highest ambition has always been " a cot beside a rill," still on this occasion we would have willingly foregone our wishes to the proximity of the prattling and pattering music of the waters, above and around us."

Even during most favourable conditions, people could travel at three miles per hour. Those were steady going times when people travelled at the steady going pace of 3 miles an hour; and, one would arrive at Bhaugulpore, tired and exhausted, after having been 108 hours in a Palkee, :

"If anyone had told us that three years afterwards we should have travelled to the same place by a shorter route in eleven hours, or one-tenth the time, with scarcely any fatigue to speak of, we should have doubted the sanity of the prophet. Yet so it has turned out on the 25th June 1861 we travelled by Railway Train from Calcutta to Bhaugulpore in eleven hours."

Rail connectivity between Calcutta and Rajmahal, in 1860, would avoid the five hundred and twenty eight miles of a long circuitous route of rapid & ever tortuous Bhaugerrutte, long labyrinth of Soonderbunds, which would be navigable only eight months of the year. The river traffic was extremely dangerous due to frequent ship wrecks and loss of large amounts of property.

"The Railway train would, with certainty, perform in ten or twelve hours what now takes the steam vessel, on the average, as many days, and what is only precariously accomplished by the heavily-laden country boat in a month." - **Indian Railways as Connected with British Empire in the East-By Sir William Patrick Andrew**

It was also expected that, as the Railway extensions are opened out for traffic, a vast amount of good will be effected beyond that of merely providing an outlet for the traffic of the country, creation of spirit of enterprise, and the flagging zeal of those already embarked in commercial undertakings, stimulated to a degree hitherto unprecedented.

"True enough that, up to the present time, little has been developed in this way; be awakened, and the most satisfactory one that has yet presented itself is the erection of ail extensive silk factory in one place, an indigo factory in another, and the clearance of jungle for cultivation—all in close proximity to the Railway Line. These are examples that might be followed with advantage, and they certainly will be imitated to a great extent before long; but the openings of further extensions of the different Railways are indispensable to give a wholesome stimulus to such enterprises."

The opening of the Line to Rajmehal had unquestionably conferred an immense benefit on the Railway Company. It was equivalent to doubling their fleet. All the Railway Steamers could now start from Rajmehal, and thus, by avoiding the tedious and circuitous route of the Soonderbunds, during the dry season (eight months in the

year) could make two trips to the North-west during the same time previously occupied by them in making but one.

On the 25th June 1861, a special train, consisting of two carriages and two brake vans, containing a large party of the Railway Officers and their friends, left Howrah for Bhaugulpore at 5-17 A. M on trial trip. Railway officers stationed en-route would join the special train at Rampur hat, Tinpahar, Sahebgunge and Colgong.

“It proceeded rapidly on its way along the old line at express speed, arriving at Burdwan at 7-11 A.M., Ramporehat at 9-24 A.M. and the Teenpahar Junction at 11-29 A.M. Here another carriage, containing a number of the Railway Officers and their friends from Rajmehal, was added on to the train, swelling the total number of the excursionists to about forty.”

Rajmahal was connected with Railways on 1860 and several Railway officials were stationed there. After a delay of 16 minutes, at 11-45 a.m., the train, preceded by pilot engine, left the Teenpahar Junction and sped along the new line at the rate of 25 miles an hour.”

Construction of line was being done against all odds, under most adverse conditions, undulating terrain, virtually impregnable mountain ranges, swampy marsh land ravaged by diseases and wild animals. It was a constant struggle to survive in those conditions. Indefatigable exertions of company engineers even at the cost of their health and lives were legendary.

More than 71 thousand workmen (excavators, brick makers, bricklayers, labourers, carpenters, sawyers, and blacksmiths) were working everyday in constructing Bhagalpur and Rajmahal line in South Beerbhom, North Beerbhoom, South Rajmahal, Central Rajmahal , North Rajmahal, Peerpointee and Bhaugulpore Divisions/Districts of EIR.--“Statement of daily average of number of workpeople employed on the construction of the several divisions of the line of railway for the 12 months, from 31st May 1859, to 31st May, 1860”.

Important engineering officials involved in construction of Bhagalpur line were namely:

District Engineers were: J. Parry –Beerbhoom, Rampore Haut, J. E. Wilson - Beerbhoom, T. M. Vigors –Rajmehal, R. Henan - Bhaugulpore;

Resident Engineers were: W. D. Latimer – Pakour, C. H. Denham - Rajmehal
G. A. G. Glinn - N. Rajmehal, H. C. Levinge – Colgong, F. Burr – Colgong and
A. C. Bell - S. Beerbhoom, Cynthia.

Assistant Engineers deployed in construction of rail lines up to Bhagalpur were:
J. Wyatt – Nulhatee, A. J. Whalley – Burdwan, J. H. Seiveking - Bhaugulpore
J. C. Sharp - S. Beerbhoom, T. E. Dunn - N. Beerbhoom, C. J. Hampton - N. Rampore
Haut ,W. J. Bernard - N. Plusa, F. G. Brooks - S. Rajmahal, E. S. B. Pereira - S.
Rajmahal ,W. A. D. Anley - N. Rajmahal, W. E. Orr - Central Rajmahal Sahebgunge,
G. A. G. Anley - Central Rajmahal, R. A. Williams - Central Rajmahal, G. R. Long -
Colgong

The work would be executed in different districts by EIR engineers and private Contractors:

1. South Beerbhoom district- 45 miles, executed departmentally under supervision of Mr. Sibley CE , Engineer of EIR
2. North Beerbhoom district, up to Colgong - 139 miles by Messrs. Nelson and Co.
3. From Colgong to Bhaugulpore - 80 miles by Messrs. Macintosh and Co

- The Railways of India by Edward Davidson

Proceedings of Messrs. Nelson and Co were tardy and unsuccessful, and before long the works were taken out of their hands by the railway company. Messrs. Nelson and Co. would later go bust.

The rail line had to traverse the unhealthiest and deadliest of the Rajmehal range.

"The Rajmahal Railway has been driven through a land of tigers & cholera, the labourers have had to battle with the deadly miasma of jungle, the growth of centuries and in some instances have been carried off in broad daylight by wild beasts whose lands, undisturbed for ages have been intruded by the stranger with his iron road".-
"Rajmahal, its Railway & historical association by John Brunton"

Seetapahar Cutting was so frustrating that official Contractor of the line abandoned the work in utter despair and work had to be finally completed departmentally by EIR engineers. The work of constructing Railway lines between Burdwan to Rajmahal was awarded to Nelson and Co, Railway contractor in India, who partially built 121 miles in Rajmahal and then went bankrupt.

"There was much difficulty in collecting and retaining labour, as visitations of cholera were common, and the dreaded disease was most destructive in its effects upon gangs of men brought from a distance. This method of procuring labour the engineers were forced to adopt, as the inhabitants of the Rajmahal hills, the Santhals, were unwilling to work in any numbers upon the railway ; and this unwillingness or inaptitude for labour, combined with high banks and some deep rock cuttings at Seetapahar, made the execution of this portion of the line peculiarly tedious."—**Railways of India by Edward Davidson**

Seetapahar Hill was one of the most beautiful landscapes in Lower Bengal those days captivating the eyes; rising chain of hills, extending, as they appeared in the soft twilight of grey dawn, in a graceful curve to an almost interminable distance.

"Before you, spreads a vast wooded plain, relieved ever and anon by gently swelling undulations, and stretching far away, till bounded by a thin line of blue hills scarcely visible, and rising like dim spectral apparitions through the misty haze. Here imagination might almost realize one of those grander scenes described by the Poet, where "Woods beyond woods in rich luxuriance glow."

In 1779, Mr. Cleveland, Collector of Bhagalpur & Rajmahal had successfully attempted the pacification of the hill tribes and ushered peace and order in the unruly region which was highly disturbed and ungovernable due to repeated incursions of hill tribes. An epitaph was erected in the memory of Mr. Cleveland for this rare achievement of

winning heart of inhabitants of the Jangal Tarai of Rajmahal without any bloodshed. The inscription is as follows:—

“To the Memory of AUGUSTUS CLEVELAND, Esq.,

Late Collector of the Districts of Bhagalpur and Rajmahal, Who, without bloodshed or the Terrors of authority, Employing only means of Conciliation, confidence, and benevolence, Attempted and accomplished, The entire subjection of the lawless and savage Inhabitants of the Jangal Tarai of Rajmahal,

Who had long infested that neighbourhood by their predatory incursions, Inspired them with a taste for the, Arts of civilized life, and attached them to the British Government by a Conquest over their minds, the most permanent as the most natural Mode of dominion.

The Governor-General and Council of Bengal, in honour of his character and for an Example to others, have ordered this Monument to be erected. He departed this life on the 18th day of January, 1784. Aged 29.”

-- Handbook of the Bengal Presidency:

1882

George Turnbull in his first half yearly report for the year 1861 had stated that the works on this length of North Rajmahal district of 25 Miles were in so forward a condition that it would be possible to open it for public traffic early next May, if it be thought that there was any advantage in doing so.

“The Sahebgunge Station, however, cannot be ready by that time, nor before the middle of the month, when it would be available as a temporary terminal station for the accommodation of the Purneah and Darjeeling traffic. As it will be unadvisable, for causes which I shall immediately explain, to attempt opening to Colgong before the 15th of October next, the question comes to be this, whether it would be profitable or worthwhile to open a short length of 24 miles up to Sahebgunge at an earlier date.”

By end of August, 1861, Main building of Sahebgunge Station would be roofed and plastered inside ; platform wall built ; a 42-foot turn-table fixed and in working order ; ash-pit finished ; pump-house, well, and cistern are in a forward state; six temporary bungalows with out-houses completed, and two more, and also two barracks and a Dak bungalow, in progress.

Special train in its maiden run was cruising at 25 mph in newly laid tracks with a piloting engine in advance. Before proceeding far, a tremendous storm of rain came on, and the speed of the special train was slackened, as it was impossible to see more than a few yards ahead. This storm continued for the great part of the way to Sahebgunge. At 12-55 p. M. the train arrived at Sahebgunge, the new changing Station, and up to which point the Railway was to have opened that day.

Sumptuous tiffin, laid out in the bungalow of Mr. W. E. Orr, Assistant Engineer Sahebgunge ,awaited the visitors ,and the manner in which the hospitality was appreciated might be imagined from the fact of its requiring fifty minutes to do it justice.

At 1-45 p. M. the train left Sahebgunge, and its pretty bungalow on the hill overhanging the Ganges, destined to be the nucleus of a large and thriving town, which must sooner or later gather around it Railways create towns as they create new sources of traffic, and perhaps few prettier spots could be selected for erecting such a new town than the above-named place.

The bungalow of Assistant engineer Mr. Orr, would be a nominated bungalow of AEN, in future and four more such bungalows would be constructed over the banks of the river Ganges subsequently. 158 years later, I would get an opportunity to witness, resurrect and restore those beautiful bungalows to their former glory in 2019 while working as DRM Malda.

Sahebgunge, a new town established by Railway, would become a model municipality of Bengal.

Leaving Sahebgunge Station, the special train pursued its course along the new hue, traversing the base of the hills skirting around the spurs and into the bays in graceful curves, disclosing at every turn a charming variety of beautiful and extensive scenery. On the one side were the hills towering sometimes almost perpendicularly above, on the other was the wide expanse of the broad rolling Ganges, swollen by the floods, flowing on in its majestic course.

“It was enough to make the heart of the greatest dolt leap for joy, and judging from the exuberance of every one's spirits, the change from the un-drained and odoriferous ditch was heartily enjoyed.”

After passing the swampy Terai land, imposing view of historic Teliagarhi Fort greeted the special train.

Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang in 645 AD, mentions about the fort of Teliagarhi, when he saw the lofty bricks and stone tower not far from the Ganges. *A continuous history of the district is available from the 13th Century when Teliagarhi became the main gateway of Muslim armies marching to and from Bengal. During the Turkish dynasty rule in Delhi, Malik Ikhtiaruddin-bin-Bakhtiar Khilji marched towards Bengal and Assam through Teliagarhi pass. In 1538, Sher Shah Suri and Humayun came face to face for a decisive battle near Teliagarhi.*

On 12th July 1576, the battle of Rajmahal was fought and the foundation of the Mughal rule in Bengal was laid. Teliagarhi and Rajmahal would again become the seat of a fierce battle between the rebellious Prince Shahjahan and Ibrahim Khan, where Shahjahan emerged victorious.

Only ruins of Teliagarhi fort were remaining during construction of Railways, 1216 years after the visit of Hiuen Tsang. Strong fortification with excellent masonry and mortar would pose huge challenge to EIR engineers in breaking down one of the gateways through which centre line of the proposed rail alignment passed. :

“The first point of interest that attracted attention was the ruins of the old Teleaghurree Fort. This is a very old, and was at one time a most extensive fortification. It is placed

on the spur of a hill abutting on an old bed of the Ganges, and is stated to have been occupied in olden times by a gang of freebooters, who obtained their living by levying black mail on all vessels passing down the river. The spot for the fort is well chosen; but the citadel is badly situated, being commanded by a higher hill behind. In those days, however, there was no artillery.

The fort is faced with stone, and the masonry is excellent; the mortar was so good and had set so well, that though centuries had elapsed it seemed to have only hardened by time, and was as hard as the stone itself, the greatest difficulty being experienced in breaking down one of the gateways through which the centre line of the Railway passed."

Importance of Teliagarhi was beautifully captured in one of the despatch of Illustrated London News:

"Next is the Gate of Teleaghurry Fort, through which passes the line of railway. Teleaghurry is a place of some, note. From its strong natural position it was the last scene of Siraj-u-dowlah's struggle for supremacy. On one side bounded by the Ganges, whose current washed its walls, it had on the other an impassable range of hills the jungle on which resisted any attempt at advance. The citadel was on a rock, going sheer down to the river; and the east and west sides, which were not naturally protected, were hemmed in by walls built of strong brickwork faced with stone, Siraj-u-dowlah thought the place impregnable, and ordered it to be held against Meer Jaffir's".

So unhealthy was the Rajmehal district considered that the Government of India had issued instructions to serve out quinine daily to the Europeans employed therein. Government of India liberally supplied the quinine gratis.

"Some of the Engineers have expressed dissatisfaction with the regulation, on the plea that they could not remain out so long in the sun, as the quinine affects the head and renders one more liable to sun-stroke."

Rajmahal range was not only an impregnable mountain range full of swampy marsh land ravaged by cholera and miasma of jungle but it was a haunting terrain too:

"A mystic spell, too, seems to hover round the place, and, at times, when not a breath of wind is stirring, when all lies motionless, and "no voice or sound is heard," the awful stillness that reigns around leads you to imagine yourself among one of the knolls or sleepy hollows haunted by the fairies, spirits, or demons so graphically described in tales of legendary lore. It is, in truth, a most ghostly and unearthly place, and just such a spot as the hermit or recluse might select to end his days alone. Here, unfriended, lonely, "apart from the busy haunts of men," he could throw aside the world and forget it entirely—forget all the past as a fevered and troubled dream, and devote himself in solemn seclusion to the worship of his Maker."

The special train crossed the ruins of Teleaghurree fort and the hills began to recede except for, a few scattered ones standing out on the right at Peerpointee and Colgong.

“On passing along the bridge over the Muttrapore valley a sigh naturally escaped us in memory of one who had long been happily associated with this division, and who was accidentally drowned in the foaming torrent beneath.

On October 4th, 1859, R. J. St. George, resident engineer of Colgong had drowned while trying to cross a flooded valley between Kahalgaon and Pirpanti. - **Handbook of the Bengal Presidency by John Murray.**

An epitaph in memory of R. J. St. George is still there in the cemetery of Bhagalpur.

Between Ramzanipore and Colgong the scenery was still more beautiful and variegated, and the patches of cultivation here and there resembled in a great measure the happier scenes of home. On arriving at Colgong, 50 miles from the Teenpahar Junction, three cheers were given to Mr. Vigors for having brought the train safely over his division.”

T. Vigors, Esq., the district engineer at Rajmahal, was staying in a house, built over the “Sungee Dullan,” or Stone Hall, an ancient building, constructed by Raja Man Singh, General of Akbar, commanding a beautiful view of the river Ganges at Rajmehal.

“It is said to have been built by Bolaram, brother of Krishna, after his war with Banasur, but its origin is more modern and it was constructed by Raja Man Singh, General of Akbar for his residence and now it is being used as residence of District engineer.”--
Illustrated London news, April 18, 1857

The paper, London Daily, describes the difficulties faced in field, challenges in removing rocks in cuttings, bridging the treacherous rivers and how the indomitable English perseverance and talent could overcome all these obstacles.

“The state of the line from the junction near Burdwan to Rajmahal is most creditable to all concerned. Great must have been the difficulties overcome, bad black cotton soil in some places that melts away under the influence of homoeopathic doses of water, and becomes converted into black mud, heavy and deep cuttings in others, cuttings that make a non-professional man shudder to his heels when he thinks of the masses of ponderous rock blasted and removed, rivers with almost uncontrollable streams that think lightly of rising to fabulous heights in a few hours, and that have beds broad enough for artillery practice-grounds ; then again every conceivable article, whether for Railway purposes or for food, have had to be brought from great distances, some of which can only be measured by thousands of miles.”

“But by the indomitable English perseverance, talent and kindness, all these difficulties, and many others besides, have been overcome; and lastly, the constructors of this great work have had to contend against an enemy more powerful and more to be dreaded than any of those yet mentioned; but by patience, care, and kindness, even this great difficulty has been overcome; and this was sickness amongst the workmen along the line, for the engineers, whose time and patience are so thoroughly occupied and tried whilst carrying out their great design, could still find time to administer to the wants of their humbler workmen, amongst whom cholera has lately created foul havoc.”- --London daily news, Monday 10 September 1860

George Turnbull, chief engineer of EIR, in his report dated 12th February 1861 had given detailed status of work in progress of different divisions along with their expected dates of opening. It was indeed extremely creditable on the part of Railway engineers to complete the works within the target.

“In my last Report I hazarded an opinion that it was possible a line might be laid through to Colgong before the end of next March. This will be nearly realized, and it seems now likely that, with the exception of half a mile of the heavy embankment at Mutrapore, the Rails will be continuous for the passage of an engine before the end of next April. I would not, however, recommend that the Line should be opened for traffic until the end of the rainy season, or until about the 15th of October next. “

The reason of this delay was, that some of the embankments were very heavy, and the highest of them were not even yet complete, and have had no rainy season over them; some were composed of the well-known black earth found in low swampy grounds, and great subsidence of the banks would certainly occur after the first heavy rains, and they would continue to settle down all through the rainy season.

"So that, in maintaining the running road not only would a ruinous amount of ballast be expended but we should be in constant fear of accidents, and would have to submit to the disagreeable necessity of stopping the traffic for intervals of a week or ten days, until the way was restored to its proper level and condition. The station works at Searmaree and at Colgong are in an advanced condition, and are making fair progress.”

Work would be subsequently completed as per projections given by Turnbull:

“An engine and train ran over this division on the 25th June, but the road was ready for it on the 18th of June, only six weeks later than I anticipated in my Report of January 1860. The exact date would have been kept, had it not been for a severe outbreak of cholera among the laborers, which almost stopped all operations for a considerable time. The works on this division are heavy, both in embankments, cuttings, and brickwork: all are calculated for a double Hue of rails; the cuttings are all well drained, and everything is finished in a most work manlike and permanent manner. There seems nothing to prevent this part of the line from being opened for public traffic on or about the 15th of October next, as I anticipated, except the minor but essential matters of fencing, signals, and watering apparatus: these are, however, being pushed on to completion as fast as possible. “

Mr. Turnbull acknowledged the contribution of railway engineers and company officials in constructing the line: *“The completion of the Line to Rajmahal, within the specified time, was not effected without great difficulty, and I cannot bestow too great praise on the Engineers and other servants of the Company for their energetic and unwearied exertions in pushing on the works. Without these exertions, continued as they were in some places night and day, for many weeks, the desired end could not have been accomplished. I embrace this opportunity of recommending them to your most favourable notice.”*

At Colgong, Captain Stanton, Messrs. Heenan, Harris, Levinge, and others joined the party, and after waiting five minutes to water the engine, the train started for

Bhaugulpore at 3-30 p. M., and arrived there at 4-17 P. M, making the run of 19 miles in 47 minutes, or about the rate of 25 miles an hour.

This speed over a line along which no engine had run before, over high embankment recently thrown up, and but imperfectly consolidated, and during the rainy season, was without doubt highly creditable to the engineers who had to work under most adverse conditions, sickness and premature grave constantly staring them in their faces with no pensions to look forward to.

“At one season of the year it is almost deserted. The natives die off rapidly, smitten by those destroying scourges of the jungles, fever, ague, and cholera, nor do the Europeans escape unscathed. Sooner or later the miasma tells upon their constitutions, however robust ; and we have more than once travelled through this spot, and found the Europeans all laid up, and the place almost deserted by the natives.

It is but a poor offering that the pen can bestow such an enterprising spirit being on those of our countrymen, who have worked upon this portion of the Railway, to say that, knowing as they do, that certain sickness, and possibly a premature grave, stares them in the face, the disinterested devotion that they have displayed in the cause of their employers is worthy of some noble reward. And this the more so, as they have no pensions to look forward to if overtaken and disabled by ill health ; and since the most liberal of the Insurance Companies has refused to grant Insurances, wherewith some provision might be made for the future.” -----**February 1, 1861. THE ENGINEER'S JOURNAL.**

Half yearly report of Turnbull, dated 12th February 1861, stated that all important and difficult works on Bhagaulpore Division-24 miles long section, were nearing completion. Rails would be connected through from Colgong to Bhaugulpore, fit for the passage of a ballast engine before the end of March. There was still, however, a deficiency of ballast to be supplied.

“Although the Line will be, as I formerly reported, in a workable condition up to Bhaugulpore, before the end of June, yet it will lie advisable, as in the case of the Colgong Division, to postpone opening for public traffic until after the rains, so as to allow the embankments to subside and consolidate. It is also desirable that we should have the opportunity of observing the effect of the floods on the high embankments and the water passages.

The Bhaugulpore Station works are well advanced, and there seems no doubt that they will be quite completed by the time the Line is opened for public traffic, which I think, should take place simultaneously with the opening the 15th of October next.”

With all these conditions fulfilled, there is, as I have said, a probability of the works being completed on the dates indicated. In such immense operations unforeseen contingencies may arise, beyond our control, to retard completion and disappoint our hopes ; nevertheless, judging from the progress made within the last twelve months, and considering the very efficient staff of

Executive Officers on the works, I feel some confidence in my expectations, that the periods I have mentioned will not be very much exceeded.

I have the honor to be, Gentlemen,

Your most obedient servant,

(Signed) GEORGE TURNBULL,

Chief Engineer.

Camp near Monghyr,

12th February 1861.

The heavy works on the main line connecting Bhagalpore were subsequently completed; these included upwards of 100 millions of cubic feet of earthwork, and 2 millions of cubic feet of brickwork on the 24 miles. The permanent way was all laid, but the full complement of ballast was not yet spread. There was, a stock on hand prepared, which was sufficient to complete the whole length.

*“Here the railway is traced on the high land between the deeply inundated districts in the interior and the Ganges ; and though the ground is higher, within a few miles of the great river where the railroad has been constructed, than it would have been more inland ; still the line at intervals has to cross the spaces through which the flood waters, confined for the most part by the raised margin of the great river, find a channel at intervals to the Ganges.”- **The Railways of India by Edward Davidson***

Where the bank was exposed to the force of waves of a large expanse of inundation, the slopes of the bank were made three to one, as a precaution against denudation. Besides the usual amount of culverts, some heavy bridges were also constructed, which proved to be works of unusual difficulty. The foundations had to be sunk very deep into a soft silt of unknown depth, and huge labour had to be deployed in excavating the wells of the foundations.

At the Coah, Geroah, Ghogah, and Chumpun rivers, similar bridges were provided, consisting of five spans of 60-foot girders, but though difficult and troublesome to construct. Forty flood-arches of from 15 to 20 feet were also constructed.

Train had started Howrah at 5.17 P.M. and reached Bhagalpur at 4.17 P.M covering entire distance in 11 hours.

“The entire distance from Teenpahar to Bhaugulpore (69 miles) was thus ran in 4 hours 32 minutes, from which deduct 1 hour 1 minute for stoppages, will leave 3 hours 21 minutes of actual running time, being at an average speed of 20 miles an hour. With the exception of two or three places on high embankments, the road was in excellent running order, and sometimes a speed of 30 miles an hour was attained.

“There would be no difficulty whatever in opening this line for traffic a month hence, provided that all the minor arrangements of station, accommodation, &c, were complete. Taken as a whole, it is in very much superior order and in a far more finished condition to what the Rajmehal line was in when Lady Canning came down, before the Railway was opened to the public.”

Official timing record of the run from Howrah to Bhaugulpore is given below:—

Howrah ...	Left	5 17		
Pundooah . . .	Arrived	6 13	detention 5'	Left 6 18
Burdwan ...	Arrived	7 11	detention 26'	Left 7 27
Gooskarah ...	Arrived	7 55	detention 7'	Left 7 62
Cynthia ...	Arrived	8 47	detention 8'	Left 8 55
Rampore hat	Arrived	9 24	detention 13'	Left 9 37
Moradoi	Arrived	10 7	detention 8'	Left 10 15
Teenpahar	Arrived	11 29	detention 16'	Left 11 45
Sahebgunge	Arrived	12 55	detention 50'	Left 1 45/
Seamaree			detention 6'	
Colgong	Arrived	3 25	detention 5'	Left 3 30.

Bhaugulpore ... Arrived 4 17

“The whole distance from Howrah was therefore run in 11 hours, from which deduct 2 hours 24 minutes, leaves 8 hours 36 minutes of running time. The average speed from Howrah to Burdwan was 44 miles an hour, from Burdwan to Teenpahar 40 miles an hour, and from Teenpahar to Bhaugulpore 20 miles an hour.”

Arriving at Bhaugulpore, a complete ovation and tumultuous welcome awaited the visitors. *There was the usual graceful triumphal arch of evergreens, and as the train passed under it, and the whistle of civilization sounded, the natives came flocking out in thousands to see the new wonder.* In a very short time more than ten thousand people assembled to witness the arrival of chariot of fire in the station.

Repeated cheering and hurraing greeted the train as it pulled up to the temporary platform, and the breaking of cocoanuts, the noise and bustle of the crowd, the screaming of the native chowkeydars in keeping the crush back, combined to form a scene of intense excitement.

“The picture of amazement, and wonder approaching to terror, expressed on the faces of the untutored natives, would have supplied fine subjects for an artist.”

The carriages, buggies, and conveyances of the residents at the station being kindly placed at the disposal of the visitors; everyone went off to the place of rendezvous—resident engineer Bhaugulpore, Mr. Heenan's house.

One or two unfortunate victims of misplaced confidence, who were unable to obtain seats, and who had disappeared no one knew where, dropped in toward the close of the evening, seated with supreme magnanimity on the top of a bullock hackery.

The bullocks, a fine pair of beasts, were evidently quite aware of their precious freight, for their gait was slow measured and dignified. In a short time everyone had settled down in their places, and it is no small praise to the unbounded hospitality of the residents at Bhaugulpore to say that, although forty people were thrown suddenly upon their resources, more than half of whom were perfect strangers, all met with such kindness, attention, and comfort as would have been shown to old and valued friends.

“In fact, to such an extent was the kindness carried, that several were very nearly drowned by it, i. e. in the swimming bath, which was of an unusual depth. Here the Judge was specially careful in creating several new C. B. ships, and appeared to take delight in bestowing these honours with profuse liberality.”

At 8 P. M., the whole party, including all the ladies of the Station, sat down to a grand dinner provided by Messrs. Vigors and Heenan, at Mr. Heenan's house. Eighty people sat down altogether, and every one testified their appreciation of the hospitality by their unusual mirth and hilarity, which was kept up till a very late hour accompanied by several toasts and countless speeches.

The next morning, at 11 A. M. the train left Bhaugulpore to return to Howrah. Several of the ladies and residents came in the train for a few miles, and returned to Bhaugulpore by their carriages.

Owing to the very heavy and continuous rain throughout the night, it was considered advisable to proceed with caution, nevertheless the road was found to be in very fair order, and: along the low banks and cuttings a high speed was attained. The train arrived at Burdwan at 8 P. M. At Sahebgunge the train was delayed for some time, owing to the ballast engine being out on the line.

The absence of the Chief Engineer, Mr. Turnbull, was sorely missed, being away at Darjeeling on account of his health. It would have been gratifying to him to have been present to see, not only his promises kept, but even anticipated. According to Mr. Turnbull's last report, the line to Bhaugulpore was not promised to be really ready for traffic till October. Three months in anticipation of this promise a train had run over it at good speed, and in perfect safety.

Trial trip from Howrah to Bhagaulpore as appearing in George Turnbull's half yearly report of August 1861 from Darjeeling, is given below:

“I already reported on a former occasion that a trial trip was made from Howrah to Bhaugulpore on the 23th June in a successful manner. The train left Howrah at 5-15 A. M. and reached Bhaugulpore at 4-15 p. M.: thus accomplishing the distance of 204 miles in 11 hours, or at an average speed of 24 miles ; an hour. But if we deduct the 2 hours and 36 minutes of stoppages, the real average speed was 30 miles per hour. The train returned to Howrah next day.

I remain,
Gentlemen,
Your very obedient Servant,
GEORGE TURNBULL.
Darjeeling,
9th August 1861”

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