

THE FIRST RUNNING OF A RAILWAY LOCOMOTIVE IN INDIA

—P. K. MISHRA

A locomotive engine conveys an idea of calm concentrated power. There is no straining at starting: a touch is given, the wheels revolve, and the immense mass rolls on without trembling or undulation.

The snorting of the Iron Horse was heard on Indian ground, when the steam locomotive imported from England by the contractors, Messrs. Faviell and Fowler, was tried on the line at Byculla, on the 23rd February, 1852. It would be the first running of a Railway locomotive in India.

Thousands upon thousands had gathered at the spot to witness the historic event and the greater part gazed with an expression of wonderment, not unmixed with awe, at the smoking, hissing machine, as it stood at the entrance of its shed, ready for action; and as it moved slowly onwards, this expression of countenance changed into one of gratified surprise, as if they had scarcely expected that the huge affair could be got into motion.

An eye witness account of the first run, capturing the intense excitement and frenzy is given below:

“There ! She is moving! She is moving! ” Burst from their lips, and a group of Beloochees cried “ Shabash ! shabash ! ” A loud whistling was heard , a cloud of spray well like a shower on the crowd , and the engine moved on her way , first (so to speak) at a walking pace, then at a trot, and latterly at a speed of about 15 miles an hour . Crowds of the natives ran after her for a time, pressing all round her, and scarcely leaving the line clear; but not the slightest accident occurred. “

The starting place was on that portion of the line near to the Government printing office, and the locomotive ran from this (a distance of about two miles) to Parell, where she stopped for some time , probably to give the Governor Lord Falkland an opportunity of looking at his namesake (she was called “ The Falkland ”), though the Governor didn't make an appearance.

The first Engine was named “The Falkland,” a compliment which was subsequently acknowledged with an ungracious slight by His Lordship, who, too indifferent to care about presiding at the public opening of the first Railway in India, left Bombay on the very eve of the occasion.

“It might be fancy, but I could not help thinking that I detected on some of their faces (on those of my Beloochee friends for instance) an expression which, translated into words, would be: “This is magic. Where is it all to end?”

A second trip, similar to the first, was performed, a lady being among the passengers on the occasion. On both trips there were a few slight stoppages to rectify small matters; but the engine appeared to be in perfect mechanical order.

The engine stopped a few paces from the shed to adjust matters; and several gentlemen, including Mr. Malet, political secretary, and Mr. C. Forbes, C. S., took the opportunity of ascending her, and continued on her for the trip.

First impressions that were created by the appearance of the wonder of the age were delightfully captured in a Railway brochure authored by Dr. Buist. Dr. George Buist (FRSE FRS FRSSA FGS LL.D.) , a Scottish journalist and scientist, was the Editor of The Bombay Times and Journal of Commerce which his successor Robert Knight renamed as The Times of India .

“The first snort of the iron horse dispelled all these illusions, and amongst the more intelligent even of the lower orders seemed to clear the whole mystery away: the intent of all and every part of the scheme became at once apparent, and the results seemed completely to justify all the labour and outlay that had been incurred.

The Duke of Wellington once declared in Parliament, that at the close of the Peninsular war he could have gone anywhere and done anything with the army, so lofty was its confidence, so high its discipline and matchless its power; and these few words seemed to embody the conceptions of the native in reference to the locomotive-with such a machine he might go anywhere and do anything with a swiftness that surpasses the fleetest Arab : it possessed a power to which that of the elephant was nothing, which acquired speed and force as it flew along, and seemed no more likely to become weary or worn at the end of a thousand than of a single mile of journey.

The first feeling of Europeans who had not before seen a locomotive, on observing the monster with its enormous train move off so sweetly and softly, that it seemed as if it might have tugged along the fort itself without inconvenience, was to take off their hats and cheer-the triumph seemed perfect and complete; the more phlegmatic native first stared in amazement, and next gave utterance to such sentiments as those we have ascribed to him."

The Engine had made its first start from that little coppice, Phipps's cart, the curious gravel bank, which is now obliterated from the surface of the Byculla Flats, and the daily scene there became a perfect fair; people assembled in thousands to witness the new monster, and were attended with every accessory to show that the occasion was regarded by them as one of rejoicing, and of extraordinary interest and attraction.

How amusing would it be, could one collect a tithe of the naïve observations, crude ideas, wild conjectures, and odd queries of that uninitiated multitude ! No longer did the natives lag behind our progress, but eager to go ahead they made liberal offers to the Contractor to charter waggons by the month upon a commercial speculation of their own. – The Bombay Times

Commissioning of Engine:

This engine was kept on the rails, near Bycullah, being made ready for commissioning. She had to be dragged along the public road by 200 coolies before keeping it on the rail, with their incredulous look of astonishment, when told, that in a few days she would be able to pass the race course swifter than fastest Arabic Horses.

She was of the most improved construction, styled the "Tank Engine, carrying her boiler, fuel, and water entirely upon the same frame. Four wheels were coupled to the cranked driving shaft, placed in the centre, not a usual mode of reason for communicating the motion, but it had been found to answer exceedingly well.

"She has been landed six days, and every exertion is being made to prepare her for work by the end of this week." --**Telegraph, Feb 17, 1852**

Falkland deployed in Material train

The locomotive engine Falkland was immediately put to work for carrying ballast and it could be seen at work every morning between the haystacks and Sion. A clarification was issued when it was mentioned in some quarters that the locomotive was employed in transporting rubbish.

" She is not, as stated, employed in transporting rubbish from one part of the railway to another: there are two short track lines that strike off the main branch at the bridge just behind the house of Mr. Wells, veterinary surgeon, a little beyond that of Mr. Dickinson, and stretch into a large mass of sand and shale gravel. This furnished the ballasting material from Sion towards Bombay, which the engine was employed in transporting."

The service portion of the railway was laid down in such a way that the engine had to never drag the load, while keeping the speed within limit. The contractors had been fortunate in falling in with the vast mass of loose and easily removed material now being removed; it seemed to have been a sand-bank left by an eddy in the sea, and was scarcely even now the height of high water—were the sluices indeed opened, half the road between Byculla and Parell would be navigable every spring tide.

Translation of Steam Locomotive and Railway in local languages: Search for suitable words

There was a raging debate to select suitable Hindustani word for Steam Locomotive, the chariot of fire, and various names were being discussed. Some people had started calling it "Ag-Boat, which was not considered apt.

"By what name is a railway locomotive to be known among the natives? This is not an utterly uninteresting question. They have already commenced to call her "Ag - boat , " which is the name given by them to a steam - vessel ; but this is absurd . It is suggested

that the proper appellation would be "Bauf-ka Rutthee , " which means a steam - chariot . Now is the time to settle this important matter. If the term "Ag- boat" is allowed to prevail at this time , it will infallibly stick ."

Having christened the Engine, it then became a public question what vernacular name should be given to an Indian Railway.

There is the ugly, but curt and business-like "Railway." In France, they have the nasal and lambic compound-word Chemin-de-fer. The Italians have chosen for themselves the stately and classical Strada Ferrata ; while the Germans have been no less mindful of the peculiarity of their natural tongue in the adoption of the grammatical, but very uneuphonious Eisenbahn.

The definition of all these words is identically the same, except in the case of the English name, which is somewhat more exact, and no difficulty should be experienced in constructing corresponding proper names in Hindustani, Mahratti, and Goozeratti.

Dr. Buist suggested the following vernacular translations of "A Railway" and "A Locomotive."

English	Mahrathree	Goojratee	Hindoostani
A Railway	Lokhundee Rusta	Lohdano Rusto	Loheka Rusta
A Locomotive	Vafe Chee Garee	Baf Nee Garee	Bhap Kee Garee

We shall be glad, if these names be thought worthy of general acceptance, but should they not pass successfully through the ordeal of criticism, let us hope that some better ones will be suggested by higher vernacular authority and taken into general use.

Mr. Faville was requested to print the name on each side "Agnée-ruth" or "fire carriage," in the Mahratta and Guzerattee languages.

"There is no word in those languages to express the meaning of steam, or it would have been more properly named "steam carriage."

"Falkalnd" becoming a major tourist attraction

The curiosity of visitors continued unabated as thousands assembled daily to witness the engine draw up a steep incline twelve waggons loaded with blast. They would watch with extreme curiosity and much astonishment, driver guiding the motion of such a large and powerful "horse," and the shrill whistle which it would blow if the crowds did not clear the way.

The crowds who flocked daily to witness the performance between Byculla and Parell were not content with viewing by the side of the rails. They would come dangerously close to see the locomotive at close quarters and would get out of the way, only at the last moment when the hissing monster was within a few yards of them.

“Unless some work be provided for the police, we are afraid there will shortly be some on a grand scale for the coroner. This is a most dangerous practice and should be put to stop before some frightful accident calls the attention of authorities to it, in a manner not to be denied. The contractor should be provided with a party of police to keep people off the line and a board should be stuck up in some conspicuous place, warning trespassers that they will be taken into custody.”

Crowd trying to see and get feel of the locomotive would inch perilously close and would take serious umbrage over all efforts to keep them away.

“We deeply regret to hear that on more than one occasion obstructions have been wilfully placed on the rails- no doubt by people who felt aggrieved at a bit of coke having been thrown at them. In such a state of affairs, it is high time that the police should be ordered to look after the line and keep it clear.”

It was expected that after deployment of police for some period, people would soon get used to the sight of locomotive and allow it to perform its useful labour in peace, and the police assistance would not be required to any considerable extent, or for any great length of time.

“At present the engine is a nine days’ wonder and all Bombay goes to see it.”

Finally twelve men with sticks, headed by a European, were constantly employed to keep the crowds back, and from interfering with the progress of the works. And the Rail Company issued the official press release: *“Every precaution was adopted by the contractors to prevent accidents, and hitherto successfully, as not the slightest injury had occurred to anyone.”*

Some enterprising locals had taken advantage of the press of visitors, who spent hours near the railway, to put up a booth for the disposal of various creature comforts, such as palm-juice (toddy) and cakes. **--Bombay Telegraph 1852**

“The native population appear to evince great interest in the “Fire Chariot,” as they name her, and crowd round to have a look. The weight and massive character of the whole was quite at variance with their notion of speed”

Earth work and laying of track

The whole of the earthwork and masonry in the contract of twenty miles, being executed by Messrs. Faviell and Fowler, was in a forward state, and it was expected that the whole of that description of work would be completed by the commencement of next monsoon, in June.

There was also considerable progress with the ballasting and laying of permanent way. About ten miles of single line had already been laid, and the contractors were working to complete the ballasting of the remaining thirty miles more rapidly. This

locomotive was imported from England, to draw the ballast in waggons to distant parts of the work, where that material was not procurable. —Allen's mail 1852

RAILWAY TO TANNA – Running of the First Inspection Special

The first steam trip along the railway to Tanna(Thana) took place, , on Thursday , November 16 , 1852, when the engineers and directors, with a party of their friends , enjoyed the first opportunity presented them of inspecting the line through nearly the whole of its length, making it as first running of inspection special in the country .

The running of first inspection special received advanced press coverage, actual event taking place two days earlier:

“The First Locomotive for Tanna starts from the Boree-Bunder on the 18th of November, at noon, with a party : the passenger carriages not being yet in order, trucks will be fitted up temporarily for the occasion . The train is expected to reach Parsick Point about one P. M.: the party will tiffin in the tunnel, and, after spending the day in examining the magnificent scenery, around , return to Bombay about sunset.”—Allen's Indian mail 1852, page 708

The expedition was at first instance of Mr. Faviell, the contractor, who made available, the only working locomotive-the Falkland ballasting engine, which has been at work since February last. The Great Indian Peninsular Company's own engines had arrived but were under commissioning and were expected to be ready only before the formal opening of the line planned in February 1853. Three engines and several carriages of GIPR had arrived in September 1852 by ship Charles accompanied by six European engine drivers.

The rails had not yet been laid down all the way to Fort George - they stopped short opposite the Sepoy lines, and the passengers were appointed to meet the train at noon, opposite the Boree- bunder. A tender had been very neatly fitted up with awnings and curtains for the occasion, and everything was snug and comfortable as any provisional arrangement whatever could be made.

A little after twelve o ' clock the party started. It consisted of Major Swanston, Captains Crawford , Baynes , Hunt, and Barr , Messrs . Dickinson, Spencer Compton, Le Geyt, Howard , Lumsden , Malet, Scott Berkeley , Verral, Dr . Buist, Jugganath Sunkersett, Cursetjee Jamsetjee , Manackjee Cursetjee Furdonjee , Shapoorjee Dhunjeebhoy , Dadaboy Manackjee, Venaik Row Jugganathjee , & c . & c .

“From the Boree bunder the Railway proceeds from Boree Bundar to Tanna village , and the latter the very difficult continuation across the river , including the viaduct and the two passes the lofty precipice of Nowrojee Hill . Here the public road twice crosses it nearly at right angles, where the huge gates were seen to do the double duty of shutting up the railway, or cutting off the public road, according as they were in one position or another.”

After passing under the Mazagon viaduct , opposite the Sudder Adawlut, which was crowded with people , and which commanded an excellent view of the line, and also of the engine and its train on both sides , the railway describing a very graceful double curve of large radius, and then crossing the Byculla road near the bishop 's house, and passing under the still unfinished viaduct , and across the temporary public road beyond , which not being provided with gates was protected by a strong body of police , it so reached the flats near the race- course .

“From the curious gravel bank called Phipp's Cart it stretches along the flats to Sion over a dead uninteresting level for the space of six miles in almost a perfectly straight line. At Sion it passes under the public road and along the base of the hill, on the summit of which is an old Marathi fort and a Portuguese church contiguous.”

Here it was joined by the Mahim branch, which was an unimportant fishing village those days, but would soon be transformed by the Railway into a port of importance. The branch was about ten miles in length, and had just been completed. From this the line swept across Sion marsh , the embanking of which at one time threatened to be very troublesome- - the material thrown in sinking amongst the mud , which afterwards rose up , forming a little island on each side along the line.

“Immediately adjoining and nearly parallel to the railway , we have the Sion - causeway on one side , and full in view two miles off the magnificent work of the like kind constructed by Sir Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy , and first opened in 1844 .“

The railway now bent considerably to the right, and passed through a long line of salt pans. It entered Salsette, and encountered the only formidable obstruction on the line ; a beautifully wooded ridge traversed by an open cutting about half - a - mile in length , and about 120 feet across where it was widest , and about fifty feet in depth .

Here the fire - steed stopped, and took a vast quaff from the cellar close by. The locomotive after quenching its thrust resumed its onward journey and covered the nine miles in eighteen minutes; the speed at one time being above fifty miles an hour, and the average thirty miles per hour. From this, for the next fourteen miles, the line was perfectly level, the rails being laid along the surface of the ground, with merely so much embanking as to save them from the risk of flooding during the rains.

The country for a considerable distance was open on both sides, and the view extremely beautiful. To the left were the low rocky wooded ridges of Salsette-woodlands and richly cultivated fields, hamlets and cottages, filling up the intervening space .

On the right, parallel to, and close beside, the railway , for about eight miles , is the salt water creek called the Tanna river, and just beyond are the magnificent ghauts. The railway, on approaching Tanna , becomes embowered under magnificent trees. On entering the village, it turns rather quickly round towards the viaduct, by which it

crosses the river , which is here divided into two by a long and rocky island. The channel on the Tanna side is shallow, and arches here are of moderate span.

On the mainland side, the channel was deep and narrow, and an iron bridge, somewhat on the tubular plan, eighty - six feet in span, permitted the shipping to pass under it . The whole viaduct from shore to shore, including the part over the river, was about 1,000 feet in length, the ferry way about forty above the high water mark. From this the line ran along the base of the hill , at a distance of about three miles , right on to the projecting spur of Parsick Point, which it penetrated by a tunnel, which was about a hundred yards in length .

The next four miles of the line which were constructed lay between Tannah and Perseek Point, and comprised the two large Viaducts and Embankment across the Tannah Creek, and the two Tunnels through the spurs of the Godadunghur Hills. It was let in April 1851, for the sum of Rupees 341,407, to Messrs Wythes and Jackson, and would be completed in December 1853. The extension to Callian 87 miles was let to the Parsee contractor, Sri Jamsetjee Dorabjee, in May 1852 for the sum of Rupees 165,851, and would be finished in April 1854. The Railway would be finally opened as far as Callian on the 1st of May 1854.

On the other side , the traveller would find himself passing for about a mile along the margin of Callian river, surrounded by some of the most magnificent scenery in the world , when a second tunnel was encountered, and no further difficulty presented itself till the village of Callian where the line came to an end.

Construction

The construction of Railway had formally started with the turning of first sod, as on the 31st October, 1850, but very little was done for the next eight months, till Messrs . Faviell and Fowler at one end, and Mr Jackson at the other, took matters in hand. Since then, matters had proceeded with great celerity, and a work which took the India House and the Court of Directors eight years to talk about, had begun and was expected to be finished in about twenty months.

Such is the difference between saying and doing, when the sayers are high – salaried public men, paid by the year -the doers, private individuals paid by the piece, and who are remunerated as they work.

Although one of the largest works upon the line was already in progress, and Messrs Faviell and Fowler lost no time in founding their establishment in this country, it was not until after the close of the monsoon of 1851, that operations could be actively begun along the whole contract ; but the rapidity with which every valley was exalted, the rough places made smooth, and the various bridges rose into existence, soon proved to everyone how real was that project which had so long been the mere gossip of the Presidency. On the 18th of February 1852, when the first Locomotive Engine was started by the Contractor to assist in the construction of the line, their so-called

apathy was roused into eager curiosity and enthusiastic delight, as they witnessed the wonderful performances of that fleet and powerful machine

The construction of line from Boree Bunder to Tanna village was entrusted to Messers Faivell and the very difficult continuation across the river, including the viaduct and the two tunnels was entrusted to Messers Jackson, both of whom would complete their job with highest satisfaction to their employers.

Beyond Tanna the engineering difficulties are very great, requiring the closest attention; and only such a really practical professional as the present engineer appointed to that part of the work (Mr. Clowser, C. E.), could surmount such obstacles as are presented. In a short distance of about three miles occur two viaducts and two tunnels, both of which, in their respective parts, are formidable undertakings.

Snakes abounded on the line: the cobra di capello, and a small dark snake, were very common among the stones; the former is an object of worship, and both have a deadly bite. Under these and many other difficulties, however, the double line of railway was being completed from Bombay to Tannah.

The main bulk of the works between Bombay and Tannah would be finished in a single season, but in consequence of the occurrence of the monsoon of 1852 as well as some delay in the transport of the permanent way materials from England, and in the provision of all the needful appurtenances, it was not until the 16th of April 1853 that Bombay had the good fortune to enrol upon its Chronological Table the public opening of the first Railway in Asia.

The entire cost of the Railway from Bombay to Callian would finally amount to £8,800 a mile while the average cost upon English Railways had been about £34,000 per mile.

The line at first was meant to have been a double one; it was afterwards resolved to be a single line, with a double embankment; ultimately the original idea was fallen back upon, of having a double line to Tanna and a single line from thenceforward on.

One line was laid down complete to Tanna, and the second was in rapid progress. The viaduct would still require six months for its completion. Work was going on smoothly at the Tannah Viaduct; the masons were dressing and scabbling; the bricklayers turning their arches; the bamboo-coolies toiling up the stages with their heavy loads; the women grinding chunam, and carrying the lighter materials to the groups of workmen.

Here the engine stopped, and the party proceeded on foot to the other side, where they were taken up in covered trucks drawn by horses to the tunnel, which was not yet quite complete to be traversible on foot.

The upper drift was open, but the rock required to be cleared away for about seventy feet. A splendid tiffin was laid out under the further end of the tunnel, where about sixty gentlemen (European and native) sat down .

After partaking tiifin, and spending some time the whole affair was wound up and the party embarked on covered trucks drawn by horses to retrace their journey back to Bombay.
--Bombay Times ,1852

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