

RAIL CANVAZ

A TrainTrackers' Initiative

1st January 2021

TRAMS & THE VICIOUS CYCLE OF
NEGLIGENCE

ON A STEAM LOCO
FOOTPLATE

CALCUTTA-MELBOURNE

**TRAM
JATRA**

KATWA NG

**SMALL
WONDERS**

DHANUSHKODI

A TRACK LOST...

ROMANCING THE
HIMALAYAS

Special Issue
on Trams

Trammeling the Trams

LET US SAVE THE ECO-FRIENDLY TRAMS OF KOLKATA

Our journey began on Independence Day, 2020. Buoyed by the overwhelming response from readers and blessed with kind words of appreciation from the men who matter for our inaugural issue, we, from the house of TrainTrackers, present our second issue of Rail Canvaz. 'Trammeling the Trams' – as the name suggests, is an issue dedicated to the plight of volatile state of affairs of the Trams in Kolkata – the only Indian city to host them. A small incident would help us comprehend the fact about the fast disappearance of this mode of transportation from the streets of Kolkata. On a pleasant Sunday afternoon, a little boy murmured, "Papa, what's that trundling across the streets like caterpillars?" Daddy knew the answer and so was the bystander in me – a Tram. As I witnessed the unfolding of that dramatic scene at Esplanade where the young, inquisitive eyes oozed out exclamations of amazement and joy, I got transported to my childhood days when I had probably asked the same question to my father decades back and remember having to make him wait for hours until my favourite tram (Burn Standard models) arrived for taking a ride.

The other facet of this incident is swallowing the bitter pill of a hard reality which depicts nearly the end of road for this eco-friendly transport. The 'never-seen-before' surprise for that small kid on seeing a tram bears testimony to the predicament of trams in the city....

In our pursuit along with CTUA (Calcutta Tram Users' Association) to reclaim the lost glory of trams which stand at the edge of extinction, this special issue strives to remind the importance and heritage of trams along with the elements of romanticism and nostalgia that defines this 'slow transport'.

The crowded College Street, the ever-busy Esplanade terminus, the fog-wrapped Maidan in winter, the gigantic Howrah bridge, the aesthetic thoroughfare of Bidhan Nagar, the Southern tip of Joka-- all were once adorned by the sweet tingling of bells, the motor sounds, wooden seats of the Trams. A wonderful mode of public transport, serving the citizens for centuries and fascinating millions. Gradually, it fell prey to dereliction and negligence from many levels. To hear many stories of the heydays of Kolkata Trams, flip through the pages and get lost in nostalgia that is commonly associated with Trams! To start things off, trAnspOrt hObO explains briefly how the tramway system was set up in the City of Joy ("**The Rise Before the Fall**") and rapidly spread its wings to the farthest corners of the city before corruption, mismanagement and malicious intent almost brought it to a grinding halt. He follows it up with "**The Vicious Cycle of Negligence**", where he lists several reasons and the people involved in actively bringing down the tramway system in Kolkata. Unless we sit up and take note, trams in Kolkata may soon become a thing of the past and be relegated to museums or in scrap yards, leaving behind just precious memories.

Roberto D'Andrea, a tram conductor (or connie, as they are commonly referred to) and driver from Melbourne describes the sequence of events that led to the commencement of the first-ever "**Tramjatra**" friendship event between Kolkata and Melbourne and how he, along with members of CTUA, campaigned for Kolkata trams to be preserved for posterity. Dr. Debasish Bhattacharyya sums up the special tram issue by mentioning some very pertinent points as to why the trams of Kolkata deserve the prestigious tag of World Heritage from UNESCO ("**An Enduring Legacy**") and how this could help save the tram system in the city. Sanjoy Mookerjee rounds things off for trams with his beautiful depiction of working trams across the world in "**Tram Tweets**" for our Photo Story section.

This issue not only focuses on the quintessential trams - we also dedicate six articles to our first love, Trains, which we hope, would surely make an interesting read. Avisekh Roy puts up a memoir on the erstwhile Katwa-Ahmedpur NG Railbus in "**Small Wonders**" and describes his first brush with an NG train ride.

JL Singh lights up the *Legend Speaks* section with some thrilling experiences he encountered while travelling onboard a steam locomotive and shares them on the article, "**On a Steam Locomotive Footplate**" which will take you back to those early days of railways in the nation. Then there is Justice Soumitra Pal who digs deep into his memories to conjure up a masterpiece – "**Train to Dhanushkodi**". Join him for the journey on the whilom alignment across time and space. In *Technical Insight*, we have Anamitra Bose guiding you through the latest cult



1st January 2021

RAIL CANVAZ

Vol. 02 No. 01

This is an electronically generated free copy of e-magazine with no printed version, conceptualised and created by TrainTrackers. For any magazine related queries please mail us at : railcanvaz@gmail.com

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of Indian Railways - the Alstom made WAG-12B locomotive. Go through the "**Blue Whales from Madhepura**" and discover the various aspects of the nation's first twin section electric locomotive as he dissects and takes you through the ins and outs of the giant.

To round off, there is an article "**Shakuntala Railway – an escapade into history**" on the Shakuntala Railway telling tales about the forgotten British-owned vestige while the Kangra Valley Railway comes alive with the "**Romancing the Himalayas**" article.

Our News Station and Photo Junction sections bring out the latest developments and showcase some amazing photos from ferroequinologists across the nation.

Signing out with best wishes for **A Very Very Happy New Year 2021** to all the readers of Rail Canvaz from Team TrainTrackers. May this new year bring hope, prosperity and relief from year long pandemic the entire human race is going through.

Cheers to life and happy trainspotting!

Somsukhra Das
Subhadyouti Bose

Testimonials

"Rail Canvaz is fabulous!
Hearty Congratulations to
the entire team...."

SANJOY MOOKERJEE
Ex-Financial Commissioner
Railway Board

"Very professionally
done!!!"

PRASHANT KR. MISHRA
Additional General Manager
South Western Railway

"Great work indeed!!!"

RAJENDRA B. AKLEKAR
Senior Assistant Editor at Mid Day, Mumbai
Eminent Writer

"Congrats
TrainTrackers
Team!!!"

J L SINGH
Secretary
Rail Enthusiasts' Society

"Lovely magazine. I
particularly enjoyed the
Marwar Mavli MG article.
All the best for future
issues...."

VIKAS SINGH
Philatelist & Author of
Philatelic Handbook on Indian Railways

"Excellent compilation of
information presented in
very interesting mode.
Very enjoyable...Regards"

BISWANATH DEWANJEE
Chief Engineer
Kolkata Metro Railway Corporation

"Lovely working with you,
Rail Canvaz e-magazine!
Excellent design and
content...."

APURVA BAHADUR
Technical Writer & Rail Enthusiast
Member of IRFCA

"Superb! Great Initiative!
Great Timing!!
Congratulations!!"

MAYANK TIWARI
Executive Director (Mechanical)
Railway Board

"What a fabulous collection
of articles and photos. It
will keep me quiet for
hours and I would also love
to see the next issue about
your delightful Kolkata
trams. Very Best Wishes!"

PAUL WHITTLE
Vice Chairman
Darjeeling Himalayan Railway Society, UK

"Congrats! But I believe
these magazines should be
on the news stand
competing with auto
magazines. The article on
3-phase locos was written
beautifully...."

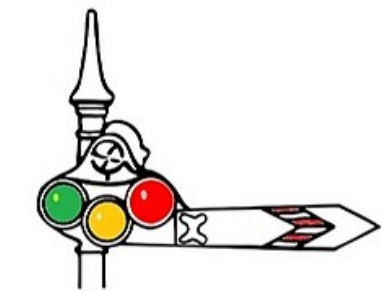
JOYDEEP DUTTA
Professor
IIT, Kanpur

"Amazing work!!! I started
reading the part on the
East West Metro and KMRC.
Great story of the first
under water railway. Full
of great achievements and
big failures...."

Y B SHARMA
Rail Enthusiast

"I think it should be made
subscription based for
sustainability. Really
came out well!!!!"

SUBHABRATA CHATTERJEE
Rail Enthusiast



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1st January 2021 Issue

inside stories

Cover Story

Trammeling the Tram

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trAnspOrt hObO follows up with this enthralling story about how a motley bunch of administrators bunched together in order to destroy a perfectly functional tram network and how efficient they have become in passing the buck.



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An Enduring Legacy

Dr. Debasish Bhattacharyya, a professor at CSIR - IICB, stakes a claim to UNESCO to bestow its World Heritage status on the Calcutta Tramways. Read the article to know why the Calcutta trams deserve this honour & what obstacles it has been facing in order to survive in today's world.

Legend Speaks



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On a Steam Locomotive Footplate

JL Singh, the author, is an engineer by qualification, a railwayman by profession but, most importantly, a rail enthusiast at heart. He is at present the Secretary of The Rail Enthusiasts' Society and the Editor of its magazine. Get transported to those days of steam action as the author churns out experiences from his illustrious career during his years in the national carrier.

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Shakuntala Railways

Subhadyouti Bose explores the lesser known branch line of Murtizapur to Achalpur, also known as the Shakuntala Railway. Find out the interesting story behind the owners of this Raj-era relic and travel on this route with the author to savour the historical aspect of this rather quirky railway line.



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Small Wonders

Meet the explorer in Avisekh Roy as he takes us to the idyllic charms of rural Bengal and accompanies you to one of his favourite smaller gauge journeys – the erstwhile Katwa-Ahmedpur NG route. Experience the journey through a bucolic Bengal.

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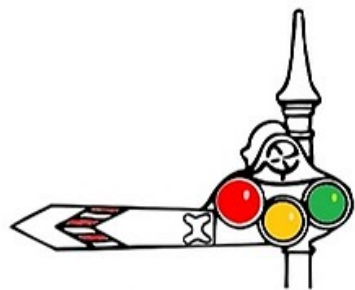


Photo Story



Tram Tweets

The author, **Sanjoy Mookerjee**, is a retired Financial Commissioner (Railways) and an ardent rail enthusiast who has penned several books and articles on the railways. Presently, he heads the Kolkata Chapter of the Rail Enthusiasts' Society. The iconic trams across the various cities of the globe come alive through his engaging storytelling.

Exclusive



Calcutta-Melbourne Tramjatra

Ding ding!! **Roberto D'Andrea**, a retired tram driver and conductor from the South Melbourne Depot in Australia, wheels in with a first person account while reminiscing how he helped forge an unbreakable bond between two countries sharing a colonial era tramway system, in an effort to protect an invaluable piece of heritage.

Technical Insight



Blue Whales from Madhepura

The Nation's first twin section electric locomotive is here to enthrall the inquisitive minds of ferroequinologists. **Anamitra Bose** helps you find out why and how these locomotives are set to rule the freight sector of IR.



Train to Dhanushkodi

Remember the alignment that vanished from the Railway Atlas of the nation? **Soumitra Pal**, the Retired Justice of the Calcutta High Court and the present Chairman of West Bengal Administrative Tribunal, author of several books and a rail enthusiast to the core, tells about his very own story when he had undertaken that journey across the sea....

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Romancing the Himalayas

The beauty of the Kangra Valley Railway still remains second to none when it comes to the hill railways of the nation. Explore the unmatched beauty and the journey alongside the colossal Dhauladars with **Somsubhra Das**.

inside stories

A large, dark, and somewhat rusted steam locomotive is the central focus of the image. It is positioned inside a vast, industrial workshop with a high, arched ceiling supported by a complex network of steel beams. The locomotive's front is visible, showing various mechanical components like the smokestack, boiler, and wheels. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights and deep shadows, emphasizing the scale and industrial nature of the scene.

LEGEND SPEAKS

On A Steam Locomotive Footplate

- J L Singh

I embarked on my first footplate when I was a Special Class Railway Apprentice (SCRA) at the Indian Railways School of Mechanical and Electrical Engineering at Jamalpur in the state of Bihar. I was then in my final year of apprenticeship and the year was 1969. The SCRA scheme was a method of induction into the railways as an engineer and was peculiar to the mechanical engineering department. When the railways were first set up in India, all officials at the senior management and engineering disciplines were British. At the start of the 20th century, a few Indians were also inducted to these levels but their number was exceedingly small and they were usually those who had received their education in Great Britain. As the freedom struggle gained momentum, there was a demand that the higher echelons of the administration and technical personnel be drawn from Indians, particularly those who had received their education in India.

A century back, the only engineering disciplines available were civil and mechanical. With relentless pressure from the likes of Madan Mohan Malviya and Gopal Krishna Gokhale, the British finally agreed to induct Indians at the higher levels. While they had no difficulty finding Indian civil engineers as there were two good civil engineering colleges (one at Lahore and another at Roorkee), it was felt that there

was no good mechanical engineering college in India. Thus, it was decided to train the mechanical engineers in house through the SCRA scheme. The scheme was launched in 1927 and continued till the last batch was recruited in 2015. After independence, recruitment as an SCRA was done through the UPSC.

Coming back to my first footplate, it was a cold January day in 1969. The Locomotive Workshop at Jamalpur was then in its heydays and turned out more than 30-35 steam locomotives after a Periodical Overhaul (POH) each month. During POH, the loco was stripped down completely and all components and parts examined. Worn out and broken items were replaced or repaired. Bulk of the new items were manufactured in the workshop itself as it had 4 foundries, a forge shop, a smithy, a large machine shop, its own power plant and support shops like a rolling mill and a bolt and nut shop. At the end of the POH, the locomotive was like a brand-new machine, ready to take on the challenges of train operations. The most common locomotive being handled by the workshop then was the Broad Gauge WG class. My first footplate was on a WG.

I do not remember the number of the loco now but it was a fairly new Chittaranjan-built loco on its first POH. Normally,



'WG' class broad-gauge freight locomotive...

Photo by: Anjan Roy Chowdhury

POHes were scheduled every 3½ years. The loco had just been turned out from POH and was steamed up for the first time after going through its repair cycle. It was on a trial run from Jamalpur to Kiul and back, a total to and fro distance of 90 kms. One of my batchmates and me were on the loco as part of our training. Apart from the engine crew of a driver (now called a Loco Pilot), a First Fireman and a Second Fireman, we had a Loco Inspector and a Workshop supervisor on the loco. It may appear to be a large number but the WG footplate is quite large and although a little cramped, the 7 of us managed the journey quite well. Unfortunately, after a gap of more than 50 years, I do not remember the names of any of the engine crew or the inspectorial staff who were on the footplate with us.

The first advice we were given was to tie a handkerchief on our heads. If we did not, there would be so much soot in our hair that even washing would not remove all of it. The rest of our co-footplaters had all tied handkerchiefs except the Loco Inspector who was wearing a golf cap. He was a veteran Anglo-Indian of the Eastern Railway. We were waiting in the Jamalpur yard for getting the line clear to proceed towards Kiul.

The trial was taking place at night. It was around 23.15 hrs when we received our line clear and the signal was lowered. A shrill whistle that deafened me as I did not expect it to be so loud, shattered the stillness of the night, the driver opened the throttle and we were on our way. This was a light engine trial and we had no trailing load.

We picked up speed and we moved quickly towards the first station, i.e. Dasharathur / Dasharathpur, about 6 km away. While the engine crew was busy working the loco and the inspectors were noting all parameters of the locomotive, us apprentices got our first lesson on how tough a steam loco footplate is. The Loco pilots of the diesels and electrics that had just about started then do not realize how well-off they are. Riding on the steam loco was in no way as smooth as that on the present-day machines and at the end of a trip, you were totally shaken up and rattled. If you had taken a



Fireman's call of duty...

Photo by author

heavy meal before a steam footplate, you would probably throw up. With fire burning in the firebox, you would imagine that the loco would be a warm place. It is; you get a blast of heat each time the firebox door is opened to shovel in more coal. However, the loco is open on all sides. Thus, cold winter air at around 5-10°C hits you on one side and a gust of heat from the firebox on the other. It is like having one leg in an oven and the other in a refrigerator!

One experience any old-timer traveling by train would have had is getting coal dust in your eyes. This is even more pronounced on a locomotive. At the end of this ride, my eyes were sore with this dust hitting you at regular intervals. Later in my working life when I had to do frequent footplates, I got myself a pair of zero-powered glasses to save my eyes. I also got myself a golf cap and used it regularly.

I do not remember details of the trip except that at one of the stations en route, perhaps Kajra, we had a halt of more than half an hour to allow the 14 DN Upper India Express to cross, this being a single line then. In spite of this stoppage, we completed the run to Kiul in good time and were there by 01.30 hrs. the next day. After 3 hours at Kiul, we set back for Jamalpur and reached there on the dot for breakfast.

After completing my apprenticeship, I was posted to Western Railway as an Assistant Mechanical Engineer on Probation for a period of two years. During the first of this 2-year period, we were sent for training to various establishments of the railways where mechanical engineering activity took place like the Production Units, RDSO, Diesel and Electric Loco Sheds and Workshops, etc. In the second year, we spent on our own allotted railway, which in my case was Western.

My second footplate took place on the Ajmer-Abu Road Meter Gauge line in 1971. It was now summer (the month of May) and the locomotive was a YP at the head of the Delhi-Ahmedabad Mail, the most prestigious train then on that route. The driver was an Anglo-Indian named Hyman. He was attired in a white shirt and trousers and wore a white peak cap with the BB&CI logo proudly perched on it. I do not remember the loco's number but this was an Abu Road



Photographed by author



YP class meter-gauge passenger locomotive...

Photo by Somsabhra Das

based engine and worked on a link assigned to driver Hyman. In the steam days, locos were often assigned to drivers as owing to a matter of chance, the time requirements of a steam loco more or less matched those of a human being. Drivers became very possessive of their locos and looked after them like their own babies. They would spend their personal money to get the brass items on the loco polished and when the loco went for a POH, went on leave so that they did not have to work on any other loco. The driver invariably spent time at the maintenance shed to get repairs done to his satisfaction. Unfortunately, it is not possible to assign diesel and electric locos to a single driver so that the sense of "my loco" is not there.

The first experience on this trip was the opposite of my first footplate. While you blew hot and cold on that trip between the cold air and the firebox heat, this trip had only one feeling – heat, heat and more heat. This was a day journey in summer and the dry Rajasthan atmosphere / ambience dehydrated you even before the journey started. The loco crew carried a *chhagal*, a bag for carrying water. At each station, the station staff took away the empty *chhagal* and gave a new one brimming with water to the crew. I am sure that even if there were two *chhagals*, we would still have been short of the need for water; the dehydration was so strong. At Marwar Jn. the loco had to be watered, so that we had a 10-minute halt. The driver got some tea from the station in a kettle and kept it on top of the firebox door so that it remained hot. When the piping hot tea was served a little later in *kulthars* (earthen cups), I realized for the first time that even hot tea on a steam loco in the desert of Rajasthan in summer is cooling.

MG locos are much smaller than their BG cousins. In spite of no extra persons except me on the footplate, the area did feel a little cramped. Also, at Jamalpur, I was looking only at the mechanical aspects of the locomotive while now I was a full-fledged railway man and looked at other areas also. I noted that apart from driving the loco, there are myriads of other activities. For example, the crew had to look out for signals. The driver looked ahead from the right of the loco while the First Fireman stood on the left. Whoever spied the signal first



The steam loco pilot's view...

Photo by author

gave a loud and clear call of its aspect, while the other acknowledged. A fairly difficult task was the picking up of the token. In those days, you got your line clear by being handed over a metal token that ensured that there was no other train on the section. At stopping stations, a staff member from the station came over and handed over the token at the end of a large metal ring, and took back the ring with the token that the crew had picked up at the last station. At run through stations, the First Fireman picked up the token at the end of its ring with his arm. A member of the station staff held the ring at the right height and leaning out of the loco, the First Fireman picked it up with his outstretched arm. At 75 kmph, this is not easy and can be quite hazardous. On BG where speeds are higher, the locos normally carried a token pick up rod that picked up the token on the run from a contraption at the station designed for the purpose. The old token with the crew was thrown from the running train at a designated spot on the platform. I noted that the First Fireman had a bandage wrapped around his upper arm where the token ring used to hit when he picked it up. This was to protect the arm from getting hurt.

I also noted that the engine crew exchanged hand signals with station staff as they ran through. They also exchanged signals with the guard of the train after starting from each station. All this while, the Second Fireman was not idle. He sat on top of the coal stack in the tender and broke the larger pieces of coal to the correct size. He also shovelled coal from the back of the tender to the front for the convenience of the First Fireman. I learnt later that some of the long-distance

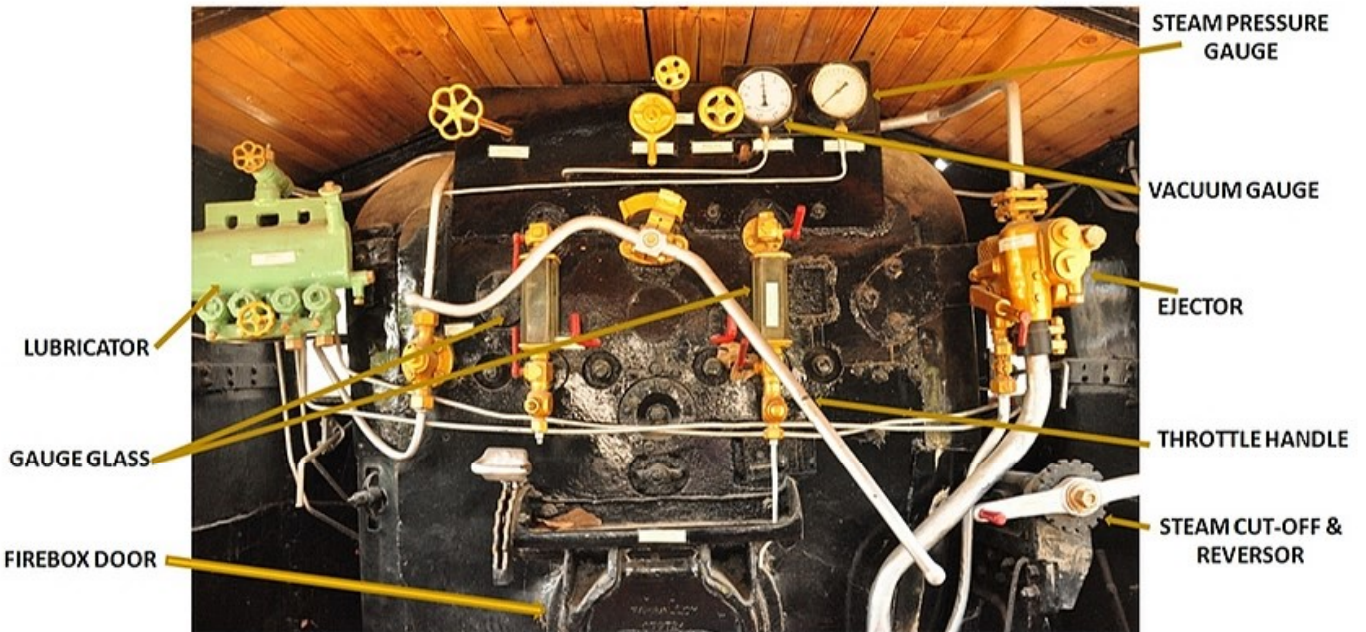


Boiler sneak-peek (front end).....
Photographed by Somsubhra Das



Boiler sneak-peek (cab end).....
Photographed by Somsubhra Das

Typical Steam Loco Controls



trains like the Frontier Mail on BG had two First Firemen as it was very difficult for one person to shovel the amount of coal required over the long period.

Driving a diesel or an electric is child's play for a good driver. It is like driving a car with automatic gears and no steering wheel. The areas where a driver has to be good are, knowing at what rate to notch up so that he can accelerate without slipping or raising the current to high levels, and he must be good at braking so that he can stop exactly where he wants. Stopping a train, specially a heavy goods train, is not like stopping a car. You have to start braking at least a kilometre before your actual stop and the last fifty meters or so need a lot of fine tuning of the brakes so that you stop exactly where you want. In the steam days, the vacuum in the train pipe (those were the days of vacuum-braked trains) was created through a device called an ejector on the locomotive. Braking was also done through the ejector. With efficiency of the ejectors being no where near that of the latter-day compressors and expressers, braking was far more difficult on the steam locos.

Braking apart, the steam driver and his fireman had to ensure that the steam pressure was correct. For this, you had to ensure the correct quantity of coal being shovelled into the firebox and being distributed equally over the firebed. Uneven distribution would affect the heat generated and the final pressure. You also had to ensure that the boiler water level was correct for which you pumped water into it

through a device called an injector. The top of the firebox had a set of metal plugs that had a lead alloy packed into it. If the water level fell and the firebox top became dry, the lead alloy would melt and steam would start blowing into the firebox. Drivers had to make sure that his lead plugs never fused. I do not remember the exact punishment but if the lead plugs of a loco fused due to shortage of water, the minimum punishment of the driver was reduction in seniority.

Another aspect all drivers, whatever the traction mode, have to know well is the road. This means that he must know well the nature and layout of the track - where the signals are, what type of gradients it has, location of tunnels, bridges, level crossings, etc., signalling at stations, permanent speed restrictions, and so on. For this, before a driver is booked to work a train, he must travel on the footplate and learn the road. He must make at least 3 trips by day and a similar number by night in both directions. That is why, on my first few trips on a section I had not footplated earlier, I was always amazed how the driver or the assistant could spy a signal when I had no clue that it even existed. That's the result of knowing the road.

As my career in the railways progressed, I did less and less footplates on steam locos and increased those on diesels. As a member of the Territorial Army, I even worked trains, all diesels, independently as a driver. But that is a story for another day.



Shakuntala Railway

An Escapade into History

- Subhadyouti Bose

Let me narrate you a story about one of the hitherto unknown quirks of Indian Railways. But, in order to give you a complete picture of what I am about to tell you, I need to take you at least a century and a half back from now! In 1857, Killick, Nixon and Company Limited was set up in Bombay (now Mumbai), which in turn created another company called the Central Provinces Railway Company Limited (CPRC), also based in Bombay and was incorporated in 1910. The primary objective of the CPRC was to link the far-flung cotton growing regions of the Central Provinces of those days to Bombay which would then allow the transfer of cotton and other crops and spices to the United Kingdom. The CPRC was a joint venture with the then British Government in India, which executed several other railway infrastructure projects under the aegis of Killick, Nixon and Company. This story is about one of the lines that the CPRC owns, something which very few people know about; much less care about the historical importance of more than a century old company, something that still exists to this day!

In the hot and arid hinterland of the Vidarbha region, in the Indian state of Maharashtra, exists a small wayside junction station called Murtizapur on the broad-gauge Howrah

(Kolkata)-Mumbai trunk railway route. It is at this very station that a small toy-train departs every morning, chugging away in two separate directions, one towards Achalpur (earlier known as Ellichpur) and the other towards Yavatmal (earlier known as Yeotmal), connecting these two towns to the local hub of Murtizapur, which was then used as a loading point of goods that was to be sent to Bombay for further shipment to the overseas. This railway route came to be known as the Shakuntala Railway, definitely not to be confused by the mythological character Shakuntala, made famous by the Indian poet, Kalidasa. The tracks were laid and operated by the Great Indian Peninsular Railway (GIPR), following which, services began on the Yavatmal section in 1903, while for the Achalpur section, people had to wait for a decade more, (i.e. in 1913) before the commencement of goods and passenger services. Prior to the nationalization of the railways in India in 1951, there were no less than 42 separate railway entities across the country, mostly belonging to the various small states that existed across the country, e.g. the Nizam's Guaranteed State Railway (NGSR), the Oudh and Rohilkhand Railway (ORR), the Bombay, Baroda, and Central India Railway (BB&CI), the Gaekwar Baroda State Railway (GBSR), to name just a few. All these

separate railway systems were brought under one unit and separate zones were created to facilitate administration of such a huge railway system.

A really unique feature about the Shakuntala Railway is the fact that the Indian Railways does not own this track. The Shakuntala Railway was never brought under the umbrella of I.R. and continued to exist as an individual unit which had a private owner, the CPRC, now a small company consisting of just five Board of Directors and no employees on their payroll. The Central Railway (CR), on behalf of the IR, operates and maintains this track. CR signed a contract with the CPRC after India gained independence, according to which it is responsible for the track maintenance as well as running of passenger services on the route. As per the contract, the Railways are supposed to share 55% of the revenues it earns from the entire route, i.e. Achalpur to Yavatmal. Usually, this contract used to get renewed every ten years. However, it is unknown if the railways have renewed the contract with CPRC since the route is already undergoing gauge conversion. Although unoperational now owing to gauge conversion from narrow gauge (762 mm, 2' 6") to broad gauge (1676 mm, 5' 6"), this is perhaps the only railway line that had a private owner and possibly the only one that belonged to a British firm. In the last few years, however, CPRC has reported no income whatsoever from its railway route. The reason behind this is the fact that Central Railways have handed them a bill amounting to almost ₹19 crore as the expenditure incurred by it for performing track maintenance, price for fuel that power the diesel engines as well as other infrastructure related works on the entire route. This has hugely upset the income-expenditure balance of CPRC from this track as the profits earned from this route totaled only ₹2 crore (for December, 2012), thereby throwing them on the possible verge of bankruptcy. It has been learnt that CR has not renewed the contract that was due for renewal after 2016 with CPRC, due to the latter's inability to pay the dues to the Indian Railways. According to last known

reports, CPRC have denied any liability with respect to track-related expenditures on its behalf and have said that the responsibility of performing as well as pumping-in of funds towards the upkeep of the route rests solely on CR. On the other hand, CPRC have alleged that the contract with CR is still valid and have requested the latter to either buy the track or pay whatever they owe CPRC and clear the deadlock. Although this line was built keeping in mind the transport of cotton and other materials to Bombay, there is no freight movement on this line today, which has further dented the earnings of CPRC to a huge extent. The entire route was mainly used to transport cotton and other agricultural produce from the interior parts of the region. However, many poor people who could not afford buses, which are much costlier over the train, used to avail the passenger train from either ends of the route and reach Murtizapur.

I travelled onboard the Shakuntala Express to Achalpur from Murtizapur back in November, 2016, before it closed down due to the impending gauge conversion. I was accompanied by my elder brother, Somsubhra Das, who regularly joins me on escapades such as these. I had reached Murtizapur from Hyderabad on a chilly evening and went straight to my pre-booked retiring room, located on the platform itself, after having a quick dinner. My brother was onboard the Ahmedabad bound superfast express from Howrah and was supposed to reach by midnight. Once he alighted from the train, we quickly bade each other good night and tucked in our beds since we were excited to see what was in store for us the next day.

My brother is an early-riser and the following morning was no exception. He woke up by half-past-five and both of us were out of the retiring room by six thirty. Before checking out the narrow gauge part of Murtizapur station, I purchased tickets for my destination of the day, Achalpur, onboard the now defunct Shakuntala Railway. I had paid a princely sum of ₹20, which allowed me an once-in-a-lifetime opportunity

Murtizapur DLS

Photo by Somsubhra Das



The defunct turn-table @ Murtizapur DLS

Photo by Somsubhra Das



to be a part of this Raj-era relic. Armed with a valid ticket, I then made my way towards the narrow gauge platform which is adjacent to the broad gauge platforms. The narrow gauge platform does not resemble a major terminus in any way. On the contrary, the platform looks like one of the many small wayside stations that dot this line from here to Achalpur. Right beside the platform is the Murtizapur Diesel Loco Shed (DLS), which houses and maintains the engines that run on this route. Prior to using diesel engines on the Shakuntala Railway, this route used to be served by steam locomotives. Some reports mention the usage of a ZD steam engine, built in Manchester in 1921, on this route and was first put in service on 1923. On April 15, 1994, steam engines were phased out and were replaced by diesel engines. Some attribute this to the fact that since the entire region is a parched, rain-shadow region, availability of water was a major issue in these parts. In order to do away with the hassles of procuring water to run the steam engines, they were substituted by diesel traction. We sauntered towards the shed and found several locomotives in various stages of disrepair. Even back then, some locomotives were awaiting condemnation since most of the routes that these small workhorses used to serve diligently were uprooted sequentially. During the heydays of the smaller gauges in this part of the country, ZDM-4 class locomotives were used in routes like Kurduwadi-Miraj (As part of the Barsi Light Railway (BLR) route between Miraj and Latur, a distance of 325 kilometers. The Kurduwadi-Miraj portion of the BLR was converted to broad gauge in 2002), Pachora-Jamner (opened in 1919, a total distance of 56 kilometers, still in operation, as per last reports), and Pulgaon-Arvi (opened in 1917, covering 35 kilometers, closed in 2008), all in Maharashtra. Most of these routes were operated by CPRC but have now either become defunct or have been converted to broad gauge. Apart from the Pulgaon-Arvi route, another route (Darwha-Pusad, opened in 1931) faced closure a few decades later since it was unprofitable. In this regard, the Shakuntala Railway is a miracle on its own as it survived for so long in

Scene inside Murtizapur DLS

Photo by author



A Murtizapur based ZDM4a gearing up for duty

Photo by author

the face of ownership, management and maintenance issues.

The tiny narrow gauge platform was somewhat crowded since two trains depart almost simultaneously to their destinations. Perhaps this is one of the few stations, at least where narrow gauge was active that a scene like this could be seen. I deposited my backpack on one of the overhead luggage compartments inside one of the tiny coaches of the Achalpur-bound train. On the adjacent track, the Yavatmal-bound rake had already been shunted and a locomotive attached in front of it. The locomotive powering my ride to Achalpur was a ZDM-4A class loco with road number 200, adorned in a beautiful light blue-white-dark blue livery. The loco got attached to the rake at around 0645, half an hour before departure. The scheduled departure was 0715 hours but we left Murtizapur only around 0800 hours. I think punctuality is not an issue on this route as long as trains were running since the line used to connect some really distant villages and hamlets in the region to the larger towns and villages. Many villagers' livelihoods were largely dependent on this train since this was the cheapest mode of

Morning scene @ Murtizapur junction

Photo by Samsubhra Das



transportation, but not necessarily the fastest, from the interior reaches of Vidarbha. For some tribal villages located beyond the terminus of Achalpur, this once-daily train is the only source of connectivity with civilization and is therefore heavily patronized by poor and marginalized people.

The two ends of the Achalpur section are separated by a distance of 76 kilometers. There are 10 stations between Achalpur and Murtizapur, mostly small wayside halts. However, some larger towns have stations like Lakhpuri (12 kilometers from Murtizapur), Daryapur Banosa (Banosa in railway parlance, 22 kilometers from Murtizapur), Anjangaon (26 kilometers from Achalpur) and Pathrot (17 kilometers from Achalpur) exist on the stretch from where a relatively greater number of people board and deboard from the train. According to the train's schedule, this is supposed to be covered three and half hours. In reality, it takes much longer than the scheduled time primarily because of two reasons - almost all the level crossings en-route to Achalpur are unmanned and this means the guard/khalasi has to get down from his compartment, close the gate and wait for the train to pass the level crossing following which he opens the gate and returns to his compartment. This procedure is repeated at each and every level crossing on this route and the process takes at least five to ten minutes at each crossing, thereby adding to the overall journey time. Secondly, the track is in a state of extreme disrepair, due to which, the maximum permissible speed of the train on this route is limited to 30 kilometers per hour, although the loco pilots rarely go beyond 25 kilometers per hour (less than 10 kilometers per hour on small bridges and viaducts), owing to the poor condition of the track. However, these issues do not deter the huge crowds that take this train daily to Achalpur and back to Murtizapur in the evening. On the day I travelled to Achalpur, all four compartments including the guard compartment were literally chock-a-block. A large number of people had boarded the rickety coaches from Murtizapur, and within minutes of departure, almost everybody had



Trudging through....

Photo by author

found either a place to sit or stand, as per their wish. I, meanwhile, had found myself a nice place to stand right at the door, expecting to take a lot of photographs of the terrain that we were now traversing since our departure. Instead, the crowd just kept increasing since just a paltry number of people deboarded at the intermediate stations while a comparatively larger number of people kept on boarding, thus increasing the passenger count inside the compartment. After a certain point of time, the crowd kept pushing and shoving each other in order to gain a toehold in the overcrowded coach and that was not a pleasant experience. In hindsight, I think the railway authorities could have increased the number of coaches that would allow all legitimate, ticket-paying passengers to travel comfortably and definitely not packed like sardines in a small container! Moreover, since the tracks see little maintenance on this route, thorny bushes and shrubs had grown right next to the tracks and if anyone is not careful while peeking outside, he/she might get injured from the prickly thorns! After a while, I had given up trying to photograph anything and just stood at the door watching large fields of cotton go by, interspersed with fields of mustard and groundnut. This, indeed, was a welcome respite from the thorny bushes!

At around forty minutes past noon, the train gingerly pulled into Achalpur, delayed by two hours. It had taken more than four and half hours to cover the distance, at an average speed of just 17 kilometers per hour! I felt joyful and happy at having completed this journey and before I got down at Achalpur, I managed to have a casual conversation with some of the local folks who travelled with me. The locals said they undertake this trip every alternate day, shuttling agricultural produce from local farms to larger vegetable markets at Murtizapur, Amravati and Nagpur. Some elderly passengers even spoke about the days of steam and how the train used to stop literally anywhere as passengers just used to wave their hands, as if hailing a bus or tram! I am sure this practice continues in the present day, judging from the

Murtizapur

Photo by Somsuhra Das



fact that almost twice as many people disembarked at Achalpur as compared to the number of people who boarded the train at Murtizapur.

As the staff at Achalpur uncoupled the loco from the rake, it proceeded to reverse itself and attach to the rake on the other end and prepare for the return journey to Murtizapur. There was already a healthy crowd waiting at the platform to board the train and once all the passengers onboard had disembarked, a swarm of people got in and almost everybody settled down and made themselves comfortable. On a neglected and largely ignored line like this one, it is given that not everybody who travels on the train will purchase a ticket and board. Due to a shortage of staff, it is virtually impossible to check each and every ticket on a crowded passenger-filled train like the one I had just travelled on and this loophole is used by some willful freeloaders, who despite having the means to purchase a ticket choose not to. However, there are also a few passengers (during my trip to Achalpur) who looked to be in abject poverty and sustain themselves on practically one square meal a day. But, the number of these passengers is substantially low, compared to the willful defaulters.

I count myself really fortunate to have visited this route when it was operational both ways (Achalpur and Yavatmal). Due to a shortage of time, I was unable to travel to Yavatmal

from Murtizapur, although my trip on the Achalpur section allowed me to be a part of history before it closed down in the narrow-gauge format. However, numerous other railway enthusiasts, both in India and abroad, as well as lovers of heritage and historical lines such as this were aghast when on 2nd May 2019, CR formally announced the closure of this route for the purpose of gauge conversion. One only hopes that conversion to broad gauge will not only increase the sectional speed on this route but also usher in prosperity in this rather economically backward and drought-affected region and give the local populace a chance to grow at par with people living in relatively larger regional towns and cities. A railway system can be deemed successful if the people who rely on it grow along with it and not exploit those who depend on it. Therefore, only time will tell if the lost glory of this historic piece of track is restored once conversion is complete and much faster engines as well as better facilities are provided to the common man, without making him loosen his purse strings much.

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Small Wonders

When Small is Beautiful

- Avisekh Ray

Being the only child to a man who worked for a PSU, the scope for any social gathering and mingling was very limited. Sources of amusement included watching the unloading of coal laden rakes near our township and occasions when we would travel to our native Shrirampur (20 Km. from Bandel Junction) to meet the rest of the family. Yes, you can say that 'joy' for me, meant the railways from a very tender age! With the passing of days, my love for the railways blossomed and grew more and more until it became a passion.

As a student, I was never up for a history lesson but things weren't same if it meant railway history. Soon after the internet spun a web around the globe, history and facts were just a click away – within one's palm's reach. This was the time I got acquainted with the fact about the existence or co-existence of different gauges in our nation – very different from the one I am used to. Predominately three gauges made up the railway atlas of India – the **Broad Gauge** at 1676 mm (5' 6"), the **Metre Gauge** at 1000 mm (3' 3.5") and the **Narrow Gauge** at 762 mm (2' 6") & **Toy Gauge** 610 mm (2'). Later on, some metro alignments of the country use **Standard Gauge** as well at 1435 mm (4' 8.5").

As of 1947, our country had almost equal and lion's share of Broad Gauge & Metre Gauge network whereas the narrower version accounted for the rest. The year 1992 is usually marked as a watershed year – it is in this year that the railways had come up with "Project Unigauge" which implied beginning of the end for the then diversity of gauges.

My native state of West Bengal too boasted of such diversity, southern part of the state only had NG besides BG while the northern half had all the three. In those days, private players had their very own railway systems spanning across various parts of the south Bengal. The **Martin Light Railways** had their presence across Barasat – Bashirhat (converted to BG now), Howrah – Amta (earlier from Howrah Maidan and converted to BG with a change in alignment), Bargachia – Champandanga and Howrah – Sheakhala. The last two routes were closed in 1970s and were not revived. Another significant operator was the **McLeod's Light Railways**. They had their presence as the erstwhile BDR or the Bankura – Damodar Railway (Converted to BG and extended to Masagram on Howrah – Burdwan Chord line). The Kalighat – Falta Railway (closed in late 1950s due to losses, presently

the "James Long Sarani" in Kolkata) was also an important flank of the company. The Burdwan – Katwa (already converted to BG and opened to traffic in 2018), Shantipur – Krishnanagar – Nabadwip Ghat (conversion in progress with Shantipur – Krishnanagar part already opened for traffic) and Ahmadpur – Katwa (converted to BG) completes the list.

My first brush with narrow gauge happened to be the Katwa – Ahmadpur NG stretch. Just after my boards in 2012, I was given the liberty to venture out in the world of the railways, even though my mother would accompany me but I wouldn't mind, if it wasn't for her support, I probably wouldn't have covered the journey that I had undertaken till date. Still, it took a lot of convincing from my side to undertake the trip.

Finally, the day had arrived! On 24th December, 2012, I, accompanied by mom, set out for this magical trip with the early morning hues as witness. Excitement had got the better of my sleep the previous night. It seemed that Christmas has arrived a day before and my present.... well, your guess is as good as mine, this narrow gauge rail journey which I was about to embark on.

Back then, the Bandel – Katwa stretch wasn't yet doubled with 80 percent of it being single which implied crossings! Even though I don't mind being on a train longer than scheduled stay but on this instance, I wasn't exactly enjoying at all. I was getting anxious wondering, "What if I miss my train from Katwa? All this will be in vain then...." Fortunately, we reached Katwa in the nick of time with the clock tickling around 9.50 – a delay of an hour or more! It was my first visit to Katwa even though I have spent years of my life in Burdwan district, yet I hadn't been here before.

Also, in the midst of all this, I should also let you all know that Bandel – Katwa section is a food heaven too, you will get almost everything here and you may learn a thing or two

NG switch lever @ Katwa

Photo by Rudranil Roy Chowdhury



about some food items which you didn't know ever existed. It was, as if, one just couldn't deboard this train empty stomach, no matter what your budget is.

At Katwa, I was a bundle of mixed feelings – anxious, nervous, happy, confused.... The first question that crossed my mind was, "Where is my narrow gauge train?" As far as my eyes could fetch the distance, it's all BG. Not being able to locate the proper premises triggered an enormous amount of uncertainty and unrest but thankfully, a good Samaritan, guided our way to the destination.

Ohh! This settlement even though smaller in nature, was independent of the BG. It had its own infrastructure such as booking counter, running staff, and rolling stock. But, yet again, the million-dollar question popped up in my mind, "Where is the train? Have I missed my train?" While booking our tickets, I enquired from the personnel about whereabouts of the train. He replied, "It hasn't arrived yet" but it was already 10.25 and the scheduled departure was around that time only. I guess this is Indian Railways, so you cannot expect much punctuality from it, I thought, without knowing much about operation difficulties then.

Katwa used to be a railway junction located in the then undivided Burdwan district of West Bengal spanning connections with Azimganj Jn., Bandel Jn., Bardhaman and Ahmadpur Jn. On conversing with fellow passengers, it came to light that this particular train actually gets held up everyday just before Katwa in order to make way for its BG counterpart coming from Azimganj.

Actually, just after Katwa, towards the north, one needed to cross the Ajay river to proceed any further and the bridge that would ferry across was a dual gauge one – both narrow and broad gauges shared the same structure and at times the controller was left to choose between the two. On most instances, the big brother would get the order of preference.

The Dual-gauge bridge over Ajay River

Photo by Arkopal Sarkar





Distant Signal @ Katwa outer

Photo by Sourosankho Maji

It was overcast with slight drizzles and that too in December. One can imagine the fantastic ambience! We sipped in the tea in a mud pot to keep the spirits high. At last, a ray of light was visible; literally some entity was making way over the tracks towards us with its headlamps on. As it grew closer, I was baffled at the sight of it! "What is it? This looks more like a bus than a train", I murmured. Further confirmation from fellow passengers cleared my doubts – it was the carriage that would take us to Ahmadpur. I was awestruck. Hit with this strange feeling, I wasn't sure whether to board or just stand there admiring a different species. A knock from my mother brought me back to the senses. Still a bit puzzled, we hopped into our scheduled chariot. My mother took the window seat, as she was still struggling with sleep while I felt alive like never before. It still feels surreal that my maiden NG journey ended up by travelling in a "railbus"! Within minutes of its arrival, we were ready to depart. It's time to rumble as they say in boxing! Now with every other formality taken care of, this bus.... oops, I mean train, I mean "railbus" whistled off to

Rail or a bus !!!

Photo by Rudranil Roy Chowdhury



The power head...

Photo by Rudranil Roy Chowdhury

unknown terrain.

"I am really doing it at last!" I wondered, almost amazed at the surroundings which my train had nested itself into by then. We slowly started to drift away from the BG, even though the BG could be seen far away but it was out of reach by now. Our first halt, "Nabagram Kunkrahati" had arrived. We had a scheduled stop there. The railbus moved further into my unexplored world as the semaphores guided our way. I don't think we ever exceeded 20 kmph at any point of the journey as our wheels were rolling at a slower pace than I am used to. But all this while, dissolving myself into beauty of the countryside didn't make me care much – the slower it was, the merrier it got!

I do not recall all the stations in a chronological order but I do remember "Labhpur" and "Kirnahar" very vividly. Labhpur was probably the most picturesque station in the entire stretch laden with century old banyan trees. One could feel its rustic nature that turned back the hands of clock. All in all, everything seemed to be in perfect symmetry, overcast

Ready to depart @ Katwa Jn.

Photo by Rudranil Roy Chowdhury





The then lifeline...

Photo by Sourosankho Maji

skies provided for the perfect contrast for the green paddy fields – the greenery got even richer and my eyes had never been soothed with such comfort before.

Kirnahar was another important station enroute; I can still clearly recollect that Kirnihar station hosted a crossing point. Our train halted there for a considerable amount of time thereby giving us scope for some refreshment there. At places, the alignment almost ran through mud while thatched huts of the villages lay in close proximity – perhaps symbolic, as to how 'close to heart' this track was to the villagers. At each halt, there was boarding and deboarding in sufficient numbers, though mostly without proper travel authorities, yet the users had a unique sense of belonging for this smaller gauge commute. The natives' love for this train perhaps exceeded the admiration one possesses for their personal vehicles.

The journey still feels like a dream from which I don't want to wake up but as they say that all good things must come to an end, so it did. In matter of moments, at least to me, but actually around 3 hours since commencement of journey, we had surfed past Ambalgram, Pachandi, Nirogram, Niro, Komarpur, Jnandas Kandra, Kumarardanga, Daskalgram, and Gopalpur enroute – all through the heart of a bucolic Bengal. Then, suddenly, we were at Chowhatta. Little did I know during those days of minimal use of internet, that we were all but on the verge of finishing our journey. Still joyfully door plating, the "Ahmadpur Junction" board showed up at a distance as the railbus moved on a curve at a sedate speed inching towards our ultimate destination.

"Oh, this is how, it will end? No issues, I will be right back again..." I thought, as our railbus came to a stand-still. After de-boarding, I was a bit shaky, still fresh from the excitement; I couldn't believe that my wish had become a reality. I indulged in taking some snaps of the railbus; mother obliged by taking a pic of mine with the railbus. As little as I could recollect, Ahmadpur had a "Y" track to



Towards the destination...

Photo by Sourosankho Maji

facilitate reversal of the railbus and also homed an abandoned pumphouse which was probably very much into use during the steam era.

Already hatching another plan to come back for another shot at this narrow gauge delight, we moved towards the broad gauge platform to catch the train to Burdwan, being oblivious of the fact that this section would be put to rest for conversion in less than a year's time. Those were the days with no smartphones and zero interaction with social media platform, it was me and myself entirely engrossed in enjoying the pleasantries offered by nature and the journey.... That trip exposed me to a whole new world of possibilities. Travelling truly makes you learn many lessons of life; it enriches your knowledge and gives you experience to deal with the varying aspects of life. So, travel not only to wander but also to wonder!

Thank you mother for your undying support, as without you, I wouldn't have fulfilled my dreams.

Thank you "Ahmadpur – Katwa NG" (1917 – 2013) for such a beautiful journey which would remain etched to my memory forever.

Cover photograph by author.

Ahmadpur NG platform

Photo by Anjan Roy Chowdhury





An Appeal



f/CalcuttaTramUsersAssociation

f/tramjatra



Dear tram enthusiast friends!

Hope you are in good spirits and sound health during these trying times.

We are happy to introduce ourselves as the members of a citizen's group: Calcutta Tram Users Association (CTUA). We are trying to garner public support for the ailing tram system of Calcutta. The association grew out of the Calcutta - Melbourne Tramjatra festivals which have been taking place for more than 20 years. Tramjatra is a tramways friendship between Calcutta and Melbourne and brings together the tram loving communities of the two cities, both of which are rare examples surviving tramways of continuous use outside Europe.

It has been close to 150 years since the first trams rolled out on the streets of Calcutta. During this period, the city's transport sector gradually expanded itself, with the oldest tramway system in Asia playing a pivotal role. The trams were the very first public transport system of the city, coming into existence a good 50 years before the buses appeared. It is a pity that such an illustrious tramway system is being incredibly side-lined and is in serious decline at present. A lack of modernisation coupled with anti-tram policies of the government has pushed it to the brink.

In these catastrophic days of unimaginable pollution and global warming, tramways and light railways have returned to cities across the world to help lower air pollution, global warming, and traffic congestion. New tramway systems have been built in Europe, the United States, Canada, the Middle East, Asia, and Australia. We would like to see Calcutta follow this global trend and play our part in this journey towards modernisation. CTUA believes that a vibrant well-run tramway will help reduce our carbon footprint and address the climate change concerns (one such example is the recent cyclone in the city).

At present, only 4 tram routes are operational in Calcutta with around 25 trams plying on a stretch of around 15 kilometres. The situation was markedly better even ten years ago, when trams plied in 37 routes with around 200 trams covering 61 kilometres. To revive the glorious history of Calcutta's tramways and ensure its modernisation and sustainability, we are seeking support and advice from all quarters. Recently, we have also started the process of opening a constructive dialogue with the West Bengal State Government to find ways of resurrecting and reviving the tramways.

In order to make our voice of support stronger, we are reaching out to like-minded people like you because we feel international voices of protest (even intervention) only can make the State Government realise the importance of Calcutta's tramways which they have treated rather shabbily so far.

You can go through our Facebook page which has additional details about our movement. If you believe that the tramways of Calcutta should be revived and modernised, can we count on a show of solidarity and support from you?

Thank you very much for your support in advance.



Photograph provided by CTUA
Courtesy to its original owner

The Rise Before The Fall

A brief look at how the tramway system developed in the city of Calcutta before it was slowly poisoned

- From the vaults of the trAnspOrt hObO

To many, the Swansea and Mumbles Railway, built in 1804 to carry limestone from Mumbles to Swansea Docks and originally known as the Oystermouth Railway, is considered to be the world's first public passenger railway system. Its purpose for construction is as similar as the purpose of the first tramway network in Calcutta - to transport goods (in Mumbles' case, to transport coal, iron-ore and limestone). The permission to carry passengers along the Mumbles Railway was given in 1807 and on 25th March 1807, the first regular service carrying passengers between Swansea and Mumbles began. However, with characteristics akin to a tramway, in many senses, it was just a modified tramway and just like Calcutta's tramways, it later moved from horse power to steam, and finally to electric trams, before closing down in January 1960.

Calcutta, on the other hand, had to wait another 66 years since the commencement of the Mumbles Railway to carry passengers in order to have anything resembling the same. Thanks to the Justices of Peace - a citizenry, vested with administrative powers within the municipal area of Calcutta, who thought of introducing tramways within the city. Although it was initially conceived to carry goods from the Sealdah railway station to the warehouses along the riverfront, trams became the very first modern public

transport in Calcutta in no time. Although the tramways arrived much later (compared to actual steam driven railways to India) to Calcutta - the then British Empire's second best city, it was the first modern mass transport system that the city of Calcutta experienced - much before cars or buses were introduced or available for the common masses. Strangely enough, in later years, cars and buses kept taking giant leaps with further advancements in technology, but for some reason, the trams were stuck somewhere in between. However, it's not some sheer coincidence that caused it, but a motley bunch of mostly deliberate acts by the policy makers over the years that contributed behind the trams to be stuck in its mid 20th century timeline even though elsewhere on the planet, modern, state-of-the-art trams were already in vogue. But we will talk about the issues plaguing the tramways later. First, let us briefly shed some light on the origin and development of the tram in the city of Calcutta - the rise before the fall!

Attempt I: Appeared like a comet, disappeared soon after

The permission to construct a tramway within the city of Calcutta was conferred by an Act (Act IX) in 1867. But it was not until the push from the Government of India in 1870 that the process of establishing a 'street railway' in Calcutta actually started to roll. It was designed to carry goods from

Sealdah station to the riverfront which was necessary not only owing to the fact that the Hooghly river was still a major hub of water transport, but also due to the fact that almost all the stores, merchant hubs, warehouses etc. were situated along the riverfront. Hence all the produce arriving at Sealdah station had to travel that distance by some means or the other. In the absence of any other transport system within the city, the Justices of Peace had no other choice but to suggest a tramway; especially after the Eastern Bengal Railway's study showed that a tramway to Strand Bank Road and to Bhawanipur would be extremely cost effective. The Government of Bengal also appointed a committee to do a feasibility study with a detailed plan for the report which was submitted on 24th August 1870 and was sanctioned by the Government of India in 1871. Right from the beginning it was decided that the route should commence at Sealdah station and head west towards the riverfront where the numerous warehouses and stores were already dotting the bank - a perfect place where crops or other materials can be stored and at the same time, can be taken away in boats to other parts of the country. Such storage also helped in getting the produce to Howrah station from where the East Indian Railway trains carried the goods further out onto the country.

The Justices, in principle, agreed to the plans sanctioned by the Government of India, but "preferred to have the tramways under their own direct control and management". They also suggested that the tramway should run from Sealdah via Bowbazar to Armenian Ghat and then should head north towards Sovabazar and up to Chitpore Bridge.

However, the Government of Bengal sanctioned only the Sealdah station to Armenian Ghat portion of the plan and although only about ₹1,00,000/- was initially sanctioned, the line was completed in February 1873 at a marginally higher cost of about one and half lakh rupees. Shortly after, the first tramway route was opened for commercial runs on 24th February 1873. On the day of the inauguration, the service started with three tram cars with each of them were pulled by two horses. However, only after a few months into the operation, it was closed down on 20th November of the same year after incurring a loss of ₹500/- per month. One of the main reasons for the failure of this first attempt was transportation of passengers instead of goods. With the operating cost fairly high and miniscule earnings, the tramway just couldn't sustain its rise as the first mass transport system of Calcutta for long. Right after the closure, on December of 1873, it was decided that the tramway along with the rolling stocks will be sold off to one Mr. MacAllister at "cost price".

Attempt II: The actual rise as a mass transport

It was not too late before the next attempt in constructing a tramway system for the city of Calcutta started afresh and in 1878, a group of independent promoters comprising of Dillwyn and Alfred Parrish along with Robinson Souttar

chalked out an elaborate tramway system plan for the city and executed an agreement between themselves and the Corporation of Calcutta in 1879. The agreement was subsequently given effect by the Calcutta Tramways Act of 1880. Soon after, the Calcutta Tramways Company Limited (C.T.C.) was registered in London during the same year.

Eight different routes were sanctioned and were of metre gauge with box section rails which caused much inconvenience to pedestrians and other carriages (these were replaced by girder section rails of conventional type in the 1890s). This second phase had started on 27th October 1880 (officially opened on 1st November 1880) between Sealdah railway station and Bowbazar/Dalhousie although formal inauguration happened on January 1881. Soon, routes along the present-day Rabindra Sarani and Chowringhee followed suit.



A Horse-drawn tram at Esplanade Row

*Photo courtesy to its original owner
Photo provided by CTUA*

Although use of horses as the motive power was extremely common, the C.T.C., as an experimental exercise for a month, opted for a steam locomotive to use along their Chowringhee route. Upon completion of that period, the C.T.C. conducted a survey among the residents living on the road on which the steam locomotive was running and with mostly in favour of steam traction, it was permanently adopted. However, owing to a few accidents, although none fatal, the steam traction power was subjected to severe regulatory steps and was discontinued from regular service after a year or so.

During the first few years of operation, the routes had single tracks with passing loops. By 1885, 13 million passenger trips were made during the year and with an increase in ridership and service, all routes were gradually made into a double track section. During that period, the concept of 'stops' was diametrically opposite to what we understand by 'stops' today. With no designated place as stops, one could literally board or disembark at will or flag a tram down wherever they wanted. By 1895, the C.T.C. had 186 tram cars, 19 miles of route length and about 1000 horses - most of which performed poorly and suffered a lot under the hot

and sultry Calcutta weather.

With the technological advancements happening at par with the rest of the world in the last decade of the 19th century, the C.T.C. was keen on using electricity as the main motive power; seeing which, in 1896, Messrs. Kilburn and Company submitted a proposal to introduce electric traction system for trams in Calcutta. The C.T.C. appointed a committee in 1897 to oversee the proposal. A draft agreement was accepted in 1899 which stated that horse power should be replaced by electric traction by December 1902 along with converting the entire system to standard gauge.

The contract for the electrification process ultimately rested upon Dick, Kerr & Company, who, under the sheer optimism of the time frame within which the work was to be completed, failed to do so even though the work started in 1900 itself! The very first electric tram car trundled past the Maidan towards Khidderpore on 27th March 1902. The whole work of converting all the eight routes with electric traction was completed by November 1902. Post electrification, and after importing the brand new Dick-Kerr electrically powered trams, Calcutta, for the first time experienced the class system when some ex-horse cars were converted as trailers to meet the demand in busy routes. Some single car tram cars had two classes divided in the same coach. In the next few years, the tram network saw exponential expansion with the present day M. G. Road section connecting Howrah (pontoon) Bridge junction to Sealdah station (directly). The pontoon bridge was not capable of carrying the tracks to Howrah station.



Early electric powered tramcars with trailers

Photo courtesy to its original owner
Photo provided by CTUA

In the meantime, on the other side of the river, at Howrah, tramways spread its wings when the C.T.C. entered into an agreement with the Commissioners of Howrah in 1905 to establish tram routes within the town. By October 1908, both the north and south routes to Bandha Ghat and Shibpur were functional. A stub-terminus minus a loop at Shibpur forced the Howrah trams to be double-ended – with controls at both ends. The Calcutta and Howrah tramway network remained isolated (with separate power stations



Bi-directional trams of Howrah city

Photo courtesy to its original owner
Photo provided by CTUA

generating power for the trams) till the present-day Howrah Bridge opened in 1943.

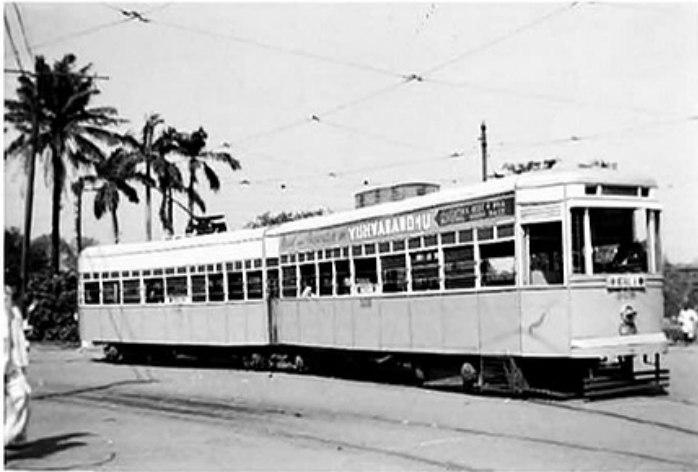
The first half of the 20th century saw more growth of the tramway network in Calcutta with the Rajabazar extension opening in 1910. By 1914, the rolling stocks of C.T.C. consisted of 245 motor cars and 245 trailer cars. However, soon after, the trams of Calcutta met with a new competition - buses, which were introduced in the early 1920s. In fact, the C.T.C. decided to go with the flow and introduced a bus service between Park Circus and the Howrah pontoon bridge in 1920 and continued it for the next five years. It was soon followed by the Park Circus extension in 1925 and the Ballygunge route via Rash Behari Avenue in 1928. By 1931, the C.T.C. was eyeing newer rolling stocks and started off with the purchase of six bogie cars followed by "a fleet of six-axle articulated class".

Starting in 1931, the English Electric Company supplied the first of the newer rolling stocks which kept on being added to the fleet till 1939 and were designated as the K class. At the beginning of 1940, C.T.C. had 139 such cars out of which only five were built in India. It made the C.T.C. to be the

Another beautiful Dick-Kerr electric tramcar with trailer @ Esplanade

Photo provided by CTUA
Photo courtesy to its original owner





A 'K-class' tramcar serving the Behala-Esplanade route

Photo courtesy to its original owner
Photo provided by CTUA

owner of one of the largest fleet of such articulated tram cars anywhere in the world at that point in time. But, not everything was rosy – the concessions granted to the C.T.C. were for a short period of time during the 20th century and every time a concession period expired, there were threats of change in ownership or closure of certain routes where some thought trams are not needed.

The late 30s and early 40s brought in threats of the Second World War, but with Calcutta being a major military base all throughout, it was seen that the tramways were actually carrying more people than ever before. Even during this threat, the network kept on spreading with some very significant extensions being constructed including the Rajabazar to Shyambazar and Galiff Street in 1941, to Howrah station via the newly opened Howrah Bridge in 1943 and in November 1943, an extension from the already existing Park Circus route to Gariahat to meet the Ballygunge route. Along with these extensions during the tumultuous times, 14 new 'L' class tram cars were added to the fleet between 1942 and 1945 and 56 more of the same design were added by 1951.

The post independence era saw further addition to the fleet with 30 sets of equipment ordered from the English Electric

An 'L-class' tramcar @ Nonapukur

Photo provided by CTUA
Photo courtesy to its original owner

The single coach 'J-class' tramcar

Photo courtesy to its original owner
Photo provided by CTUA

Company along with second hand acquisition of some ex-Leicester and Leeds trucks for use in Calcutta. The 1950s saw an enormous change in layout of tracks at Esplanade and by 1953, the terminus at Esplanade had one of the most complicated layout of tracks and loops in the world. This period also marked the beginning of the end for the tramways. With partition resulting in an enormous influx of refugees and subsequent changes in the political sphere and the ending of another concession period for the tramways, a quick understanding was reached through the Calcutta Tramways Act of 1951 and it is understood that the state government in West Bengal acquired a possible right to purchase the tramway undertaking, if needed, by January 1, 1972 or anytime there-after for a fixed price of £3.75 million. But these factors had little effect on the fleet and in 1959, there were 470 units carrying an annual ridership amounting to 40.49 crores. The other important thing that this decade saw was the introduction of route numbers with 1 to 50 being allotted (while only 26 were in use at that time; rest kept ready for future use). Earlier, colour symbols and colour lights were used to denote a particular route which was done owing to both linguistic issues as well as the rampant illiteracy that plagued the teeming millions.

The 1960s brought about new lows with financial constraints and subsequent effects on the whole network. But again, this did not stop the C.T.C. from increasing their fleet strength. 20 new trams and trailers were added along with some articulated tram cars and with the closure of the Bombay tramway network, Calcutta suddenly had the prospect of getting 45 pairs of surplus trucks. With these, a new PAYE (Pay As You Enter) class was created and subsequently, some older ones were also converted into a PAYE class. The infrastructure, on the other hand, had been suffering miserably since the late 1940s and by the 60s, the tracks were in disrepair and that resulted in fewer numbers of tram cars being used – from 413 in 1959 to 361 by the mid 1960s. The sequestration of the C.T.C. by the West Bengal government in 1967 brought about many unpleasant realities including utter neglect, affect of the social turmoil



A 'PAYE' class tramcar

Photo by Rudranil Roy Chowdhury

and age and rampant corruption. The ever changing socio-political scenario of Calcutta in the 1960s just worked as a catalyst to further the process of decaying and buses, for the first time in the history of Calcutta, started to outrun the tramways in every way possible! To further complicate the matter, numerous strikes took its toll on the tramway system while the de-valuation of Rupee contributed to less of import and more of arrangements from other sources. On 19th July, 1967, the Calcutta Tramways Company Act was passed which paved the way for the government to take over the management of the tramway company.

India, and especially West Bengal, was jolted by hundreds of socio-political disturbances in the 70s & it rendered a direct effect on the tramway network. During some of the violent protests, tram cars were also not spared and with the independence war just across the border in the then East Pakistan, the fresh influx of refugees greatly affected all transport systems in Calcutta. To make it worse, another tragedy at the Rajabazar depot in 1974 resulted in the destruction of 44 tram cars. By the mid 70s, the peak turn out of tram cars - number of available tram cars daily, was reduced to a mere 283 although the company had about 440 tram cars in hand. It fell to 225 - the lowest ever back then, in July 1976. However, few "Sundari" (newly designed trams) trams were built between 1974 and 1976 using mostly the ex-Bombay truck stocks. These were six axle articulated cars with motors bought in both from Japan and Hungary.

1970s being the stormy decade, it did not leave the tramways untouched. For the first time in the history of tramways in Calcutta, routes were closed down - more owing to the congestion and traffic lawlessness of other vehicles than owing to a fault of the trams. The two Howrah town routes to Bandha Ghat and Shibpur were closed down in 1970 and 1971 respectively and were formally closed down on paper by a decree by the West Bengal government in 1972. The Nimtala Ghat section in Calcutta was also not spared and was closed down in 1973. The double-ended Howrah tram



A 'Sundari' Tramcar

Photo by Rudranil Roy Chowdhury

cars were inducted into the Calcutta network by modifying them to suit the requirements of the eastern bank of the river. 12 tram cars were pressed into service after the required modifications, while a few were converted as 'Works' cars; the rest were scrapped. But all was not lost as surprisingly, the government had chalked out some new extensions too, including the later date Bidhan Nagar route, Joka route and the 'never-saw-the-light-of-the-day' Salt Lake, Sundari Mohan Avenue, Tollygunge-Jadavpur connection, and Barrackpore/Dakshineswar extension. The Metro railway construction, on the other hand jeopardised many routes and in the absence of a TBM technology, the cut and cover construction curtailed many a route along the stretch on which Metro was suppose to run. It severed the main tram route down south from Esplanade and stopped or curtailed few others. On the administrative side, the last blow to change the ownership was hammered by introducing the Amendment to the previous Act of 1967 through the Calcutta Tramways Company Act of 1978 which made way for the formation of a new company titled The Calcutta Tramways Company (1978) Limited with its ownership lying completely with the state government of West Bengal.

The next decade started off with pomp and grandeur owing to the centenary programme of the C.T.C. and the pumped up funding from the World Bank did carry the tempo all throughout, but in reality, the 1980s saw the last rise in terms of real improvements with some surprises like the Behala-Joka and Bidhan Nagar extensions being actually built and in record time - the first extension for the tramways in the city in many decades. This decade also brought in the much required funding from the World Bank which filled the coffers with a kitty of ₹46.20 crores for trams. This was also a first as World Bank never granted such amounts for a transport improvement project ever before. Under the agreement, C.T.C. was to get 75 new trams, another 60 were to be rebuilt and 105 other tram cars were to be renovated. This paved the way for the induction of



A Burn Standard built tramcar

Photo by Rudranil Roy Chowdhury

the new Burn Standard and Jessop tram cars into the fleet which were done across six years - from 1982 to 1988. It did improve the network in general as part of the funding also improved the tracks and the traction. But, soon after, it slowly fell into the same old sorry picture.

1990s onward, the only boost that the C.T.C. got is when enthusiasts and tram connies like Roberto D'Andrea from Melbourne came in with his group of fellow trammies. As part of the Calcutta Melbourne Tram Festival, tram services were spruced up and got the required attention and maintenance. Since much of the funding from the World Bank was spent behind rolling stocks, infrastructure like tracks and tractions mostly remained in a sorry state. To make things miserable profit-wise, the Howrah station connection was severed which resulted in an overnight slump in earnings from which the tramways never really recovered. To top it all, in a bizarre move, they also experimented with buses which resulted in further loss of revenue due to poor planning. From the year 2000 onwards, there were only cosmetic changes which were made on the

A Burn Standard (Type-II) tramcar @ Maidan

Photo by Rudranil Roy Chowdhury



A Jessop built tramcar

Photo by Rudranil Roy Chowdhury

tramcars. Changing over to fibre glass body did reduce the weight and noise, but not enough for them to be popular once again. In fact, the older wooden trams were lightweight compared to the newest Burn Standard and Jessop made tram cars. These weight issues, starting with the Howrah Bridge, created havoc and resulted in culling of multiple tram routes. The only visible improvements done was with the tracks which were replaced with 52kg rails and proper sleepers, where required. But continuous de-reservation of tracks and rampant concretization only complicated the situation. Flyover construction and subsequent whims and fancies of certain ministers also added to the plethora of issues that had already plagued the tramways. With the onslaught of the East-West Metro construction work, collapse of the Majherhat bridge and weight issues on other bridges in the last few years, the rise of the trams took a mammoth fall from which it is yet to recover.

In an accompanying article, *transport h0b0* mentions the issues that have plagued the C.T.C. during the last 50 years of its operation in Calcutta. Be sure to read the next article in order to get a clear picture of how a perfectly fine tramway system was slowly poisoned by the people in power and almost brought to a screeching halt!

Notes: In the absence of any easily available data or text on the history of the origin and development of the tramway system in Calcutta, we relied heavily on articles published in the *Modern Tramway* magazine from the 1970s & 80s along with other texts on Calcutta in general. We are immensely indebted to Mr. T.V.Runnacles and Mr. G.B.Claydon for their detailed description of the system across multiple articles in that magazine between 1977 - 1982.

A Jessop tramcar converted to fibre-body

Photo by Rudranil Roy Chowdhury





The Vicious Cycle of Negligence

- From the vaults of the trAnspOrt hOb0

Throughout the history, the tramway system in Calcutta has been forced to go through a vicious cycle of negligence, especially during the post-independence years. This cycle of neglect was prudently executed by each and everyone in power across the last 50 years or so. Consecutive governments considered the tramways more as a burden rather than a boon and hence played cheap politics with it as and when needed to further their own vested interests, leaving the citizen of the city feel bereft. This game of dethroning was played so cleverly over the years that the common man often could not even gauge that such a game is afoot. Of course, the common men were not a mere victim either. They have their own share of dirty linen to wash as their excretory attitude and mind-set towards the trams also helped in the process of killing it as a viable mode of environment-friendly mode of public transport. Through the next few pages, let us try to ascertain some of the major issues across the years that resulted in the cathartic situation that the Kolkata trams are in at present. But first, what is this vicious cycle of negligence that we are talking about?

A few years into the Calcutta of independent India, the first

signs of negligence in the tramways slowly started to creep in when the ownership of the then C.T.C. was transferred amid some not-so-happy circumstances. Although it may have been done with some positive intent in mind, in reality, it turned out to be an issue, which, hence on, plagued the system throughout its lifetime. However, this issue, after much legal deliberations, was settled, but not before casting a negative shadow on the whole system. As interest in trams slowly started to ebb away with the advent of the buses and other transport modes like the underground Metro railway, successive governments pounded the tram system with unfathomable neglect which resulted in almost zero modernization.

The utter negligence left the tramway system stagnate at a technological era that dated back to the mid-20th century and hence, neither the rolling stock nor the infrastructure saw much improvement. This decades-long negligence and subsequent public declaration by certain ministers denouncing the tramway system by various means resulted in a change of public perception which is where the cycle of negligence started-

>>>> Successive government's failure to maintain a proper transport system through utter neglect

>>>> Tram service and rolling stocks along with infrastructure fell in disrepair

>>>> Lack of proper maintenance and modernization

>>>> People did not get the desired service and started to shy away from using them

>>>> Patronage as well as the revenues dropped

>>>> Successive governments used the same excuse of less revenues behind not modernizing the system

This is a trick that is still being played and had there been no public pressure, the trams would have had probably stopped running a long time ago. But this was the policy maker's modus-operandi. The common people, on the other hand, were not innocent victims either.

When it comes to the common mass, the cause of the neglect is intermittently related with modern social life where a personal vehicle - a car, is often seen as a symbol of status rather than need and with improvement in social and economic life all over, resulted in a multitude of car buying. Rigorous campaigning and advertisements from various car manufacturers acted as an enzyme and with higher buying potentials, consumers indulged in buying cars rather than relying heavily on public transport.

Now, Calcutta is a city plagued with an extremely low percentage of roads compared to any other city in India. With higher buying powers, people were indulging in buying more and more cars with no or if at all, limited carpooling. This is where they have gone horribly wrong! What the common people do not fathom is, just five cars take up the same space of a two coach tram car where even with the highest capacity, five cars can carry a maximum of 25-40 people (considering some may be an SUV); whereas, a two-coach tram, taking the same space on the road, can carry about

100 people comfortably. To transport the same number of people, one will need anything between 15-20 cars which will take up more road space. For a city like Calcutta with such low road space, public transport can be the only answer and there is no better public transport than trams which creates the least amount of pollution (Calcutta always stays towards the top when it comes to pollution). Unless and until this awareness is etched in the mind of the common masses, the situation will never improve and even if Calcutta comes up with three-tier flyovers and abolishes trams totally, traffic woes will never cease to exist!

1. The first fatal flaw: No proper integration with the existing transport system

If one looks at the tramway network as it was during its heyday, one could see how the web of tracks were weaved throughout the city to give a seamless connection, not only between its own brethren on other routes, but with other modes of transport too. They were also close proximity to the vast number of railway stations all over the city which, if properly planned, could have established an enormous rail-based public transport by creating interchange hubs which could have garnered profits for both the tramways and the railways and in turn, could have generously filled the coffers both for the state as well as for the central governments. It's just a sheer shame that no one ever saw the potential to develop such a network into a functional symbiotic transport system for this city.

With the advent of the Circular Railway in the 1980s, more railway stations came up within the vicinity of the tram network which could have worked wonders for the tramways in Calcutta. Apart from major stations like Howrah, Sealdah, Tollygunge, Majherhat and Ballygunge which already had a tram terminus and/or stop next door for years, stations like Bagbazar, Eden Gardens, Kidderpore, Bidhan Nagar and Kolkata came up in close proximity to the tram network.

2. Is the tramway system a victim of the Metro construction?

Well, actually NO and this is why - although the construction of the Metro Railway is often regarded as a prime factor that determined the demise of the heavily patronised tram routes, it is actually not the prime reason. With no modernization and expansion, it was only a matter of time that other improved transport systems would take over the reins in lieu of the age old, neglected trams on the busiest transit routes. So did the Metro. Conceived in the early 20th century for the city of Calcutta, the underground railway system never went past the initial paperwork and only saw the light of day in the 70s with an improved, modern planning which took another 12 years to actually commence commercial runs in 1984.

However, it has more to do with poor planning that killed the trams than the Metro being the real killer. In fact, the Metro actually helped retain the tram in areas along the Metro route for a little longer than initially conceived. The only route which was closed down owing to a direct impact of the

A route # 36 tramcar with full patronage

Photo by Rudranil Roy Chowdhury





Trams cause congestion ??? Seriously ???

Photo by Rudranil Roy Chowdhury

Metro construction was the stretch between Birla Planetarium and Hazra crossing. It was done owing to the simple fact that back in the 1970s, the construction work was carried out in the 'cut and cover' method and that stretch had no spare space to accommodate normal traffic & trams next to the Metro construction area. For areas, where that space was available, the tram services were kept alive. Thus, routes from Esplanade to Birla Planetarium and Hazra to Tollygunge had trams running even during and after the construction. In fact, under pressure from the public, the Metro Railway had constructed a temporary bridge in front of Birla Planetarium for trams to turnaround on a loop when the direct route to Hazra via J. N. Road – A. Mukherjee Road – S. P. Mukherjee Road was abolished owing to the Metro construction work. Not to mention that several other areas like - M. G. Road – Chittaranjan Avenue crossing, Belgachhia (R. G. Kar Road – Belgachhia stretch), Shyambazar (R. G. Kar Road – Five Point Crossing), B. B. Ganguly Street – Chittaranjan Avenue crossing --- all had special arrangements made for trams to traverse the hollow pit of the Metro construction site.

Much after the Metro construction was done and dusted with, rather abruptly, the tram route to Birla Planetarium, which was not running on the streets but had a private right of way, was abandoned. It was discontinued not for widening the road except much later when the construction of the Park Street flyover forced them to widen, but to use the rest of the space on the western flank of the road as a parking lot. The reason was possibly given in the same line as it is done now - trams creating traffic congestion.

I mean, seriously?

Traffic congestion owing to trams, moving completely on reserved tracks on the other side of the road, which has nothing but vast open expanse of the Maidan as its only companion? Who buys such logic? But, more importantly, who comes up with such logic? Well, it seems, we have candidates for both. And plenty of them to amuse us with



It's not a one-way road, cars breaking rules but still ONLY trams cause congestion

Photo by Rudranil Roy Chowdhury

such hilarious justifications!

The other reason given for this removal is another bluff that has been uttered several times in the past 50 years – you don't need a tram system on top of a Metro route. Well, why do you need autos on tram routes then?

There are several other routes that were impacted indirectly by the Metro construction. The Bentinck Street route was one such example. This is the only stretch of road for which we might agree with the authorities on congestion. But wait!!!!

Trams alone cannot create congestion.

Can they? No! Of course they cannot!!!

The real issue is the layout and sudden change in the width of Bentinck Street itself. After a wide portion of the road, certain stretches of Bentinck Street between Ganesh Chandra Avenue and Lalbazar Junction become extremely narrow and that bottleneck creates all the issues. Trams, as usual, were again used as a pawn to divert attention from the actual cause and were abolished using the Metro construction as an excuse, although it was only about 100 meters of road where the trams were invading on the Metro construction site. But, we should mention here that with a roundabout way already existing via the B. B. D. Bag terminus, the abolition of trams on Bentinck Street didn't impact the network so much except that it lengthened one's journey by about 10 minutes more.

The next phase of Metro construction for the East-West route had a similar impact on the tramway network as after a complete redrawing of the route through the central part of the city, two of the biggest tram hubs - Esplanade and Dalhousie were severely affected. Although Esplanade got away with limited damage and functioned with a curtailed terminus area that severed the Kidderpore route from the functioning terminus, Dalhousie was rendered completely defunct with all routes being out of service. This affected one of the busiest tram routes of the city through Rabindra



A tram derailment at Maidan.... Resembles the current state of Kolkata Trams!!!

Photographed by Rudranil Roy Chowdhury

Sarani towards Galiff Street, Bagbazar and Shyambazar. However, there are signs that this route might be back in 2021-22 once the ground level construction of the Mahakaran station at Dalhousie of the East West Metro is complete.

3. Beginning of the end: A curious case of the Sealdah flyover aka the "hawker-over"

A poor or possibly an extremely productive (for the political party in power, depending on the context) planning while building the flyover in front of Sealdah station to decongest the road led to the abolition of the tram terminus (right in front of the railway station) in the late 70s. The flyover never really crossed any major junction except B. B. Ganguly Street through which anyway, very few vehicles ply. All other roads - M. G. Road and Belegkata Road, have junctions on the flyover instead of crossing and/or meeting the road underneath. In fact, the strange plan left no space for a road wide and free enough for vehicles on the ground level to ply. This extremely poor planning with no foresight never really helped anyone except the illegal hawkers who got a free space as wide as A. P. C. Bose Road under the "hawker-over" to set up permanent shops for eternity. On the other hand, this nonsense of a plan forcefully shifted the whole tram network on top of the flyover. Of course, with no loop or stabling line but with a junction with the tracks coming from M. G. Road, commuters eager to board a tram after alighting from a train now were forced to walk anywhere between 300-500 metres towards the end of the flyover. This abolition of the tram terminus at Sealdah resulted in a sheer drop in terms of patronage and had a direct impact on the revenue - the very first in a series of strange decisions that soon became the new normal.

4. Proposed extensions that could have worked wonders but were never executed

In the 1980s, a surprising extension was the Bidhan Nagar one along with the Joka stretch. However, these planned tram connections and extensions to Salt Lake (extension), Sundari Mohan Avenue (extended connection), Tollygunge-Jadavpur (connection), and the Barrackpore/Dakshineswar (extension) - were never executed.

Amongst them, Salt Lake City, then (and even now) devoid of a proper and comprehensive transport system, could have been the perfect place to have trams running on its streets which are wide enough and do not carry heavy traffic. With almost no traffic, no public transport, no hawkers and no shops queued up on the roadside on certain roads even today, the trams could have been the best transport system that Salt Lake could have had. Since the original plans of the East-West Metro were already on paper since the early 1970s, the tram network in Salt Lake City could have been planned in an intelligent way so that the tram routes would have acted like a feeder service.

Unfortunately, like many other practical plans, this one too died within the red tapes of the files and hundreds of autos were licensed to ply in the township instead. The cascading effect of that is, the major hub for Salt Lake-bound autos block the arterial junction at Ultadanga and often charge exorbitant fares on top of the fixed fare structure. The case with every extension remained so after 1986 as the Transport Department was contaminated with the idea that trams cannot bring in revenue. This has put an end to several other options such as connecting the Kolkata station with a short 200m spur from R. G. Kar Road, which could have solved the Belgachhia bridge closure issue and would have given a

much needed and reliable transport for passengers arriving at Kolkata station.

5. The abolition of the Howrah City tram network

With a sheer increase in population and poor town planning and narrow roads, Howrah always remained clogged - at times for hours on end. Add to that the increased economic power in the hand of the people who went ahead and populated the road with enough cars to complicate the matter further. With inadequate or no train services after the shutting down of the Martin's Light Railways, the roads in the town of Howrah saw a manifold increase in the number of buses. This led to the abolition of the trams on both the routes - Bandha Ghat and Shibpore during 1970-71.

The other reason was competition with buses as both trams and buses (on multiple routes) plied on the same route and with lack of implementation of modern technological innovations for the trams, the situation inevitably gave the buses an edge over the trams. The seamless, eco-friendly connection to Calcutta was snapped and instead of commuters changing to trams at Howrah station (till it was functional), they preferred a direct bus to their destination which led to a further dent in the earnings.

6. Howrah station terminus closure: premature "un-umbilicalization"

Howrah station, since its inception, had the biggest and the busiest transport hub in Calcutta - be it trams or buses or taxis. No wonder that in 1943, the first public transport vehicle to be allowed to trundle across the river on the new Howrah Bridge was a tram! For the next 50 years, trams were a regular feature on the bridge and carried millions across the river. With both Bengal Nagpur Railway and the East Indian Railway - later the South Eastern and the Eastern Railway respectively, using Howrah as their primary terminus for both suburban and long-distance trains, the number of commuters never dipped. The trams, with their terminus very conveniently situated just outside the station

Howrah bound trams now terminate at Howrah bridge approach road itself

Photo by Rudranil Ray Chowdhury



for both the Howrah Town service (till 1970-71) and Calcutta (till 1993-94), managed to carry millions each year till, owing to the reduced capacity of the Howrah Bridge, the tram route was curtailed at the Burrabazar end of Calcutta in the early 90s. It was the second major blow to the profit margin and patronage and literally overnight, the ridership and earnings took a nosedive.

It should be noted that at Howrah, the number of commuters was steadily increasing from the late 1950s with the introduction of electric traction on the suburban routes of Eastern and South-Eastern Railways. The increase in the number of commuters led to the increase in the number of ridership for the trams too. The C.T.C., with the introduction of newer tram cars from Burn Standard and Jessop, did cater to the increasing rush till the 1990s, but within 6 years since the last new tram car was inducted into the fleet in 1988, the umbilical cord to Howrah station, which supplied a much needed supply of profit for the C.T.C., was cut and an enormous pool of revenue dried up instantly.

7. Abolition of the Nimtala section

Another section miserably falling under the infamous excuse of trams creating congestion - the Nimtala route. Posta, Burrabazar and Nimtala areas are dotted with huge markets along with warehouses and stores. Naturally, these areas are either home to or are visited by thousands of poor migratory workers each day. Such an area could have been perfectly served by the trams. Instead, citing congestion and other issues, the Nimtala section was closed down in the early 1970s. In reality, the congestion was caused more by illegal parking of trucks and the disorganised way in which loading and unloading was carried out 24*7, 365 days a year. There are also several allegations that the malingering businessmen of that area also played an important role in removing the tram services as it was their business (loading-unloading from trucks etc.) which was getting hampered owing to frequent movement of the trams. Also, tram traction wires might have created issues with their unauthorised vertical loading of goods onto trucks which had no specific implementation of rules in reality.

8. Abolition of the Gariahat connection

Just like the Sealdah and Howrah stations, Ballygunge station had a tram terminus right next door, which was a boon both for the trams and the railways -

~ perfect for Sealdah's south suburban commuters to hop on or off as per their need;

~ perfect for the C.T.C. which provided arterial tram services on two major roads towards Park Circus and Tollygunge.

This connection between the two routes at Gariahat junction was severed during the construction of the Gariahat flyover. However, in spite of there being a plan to restore the link post construction, it was not done at the behest of a local powerful politician who complained that the noise of the



Ballygunge - Currently only Tollygunge bound trams originate from here

Photo by Rudranil Roy Chowdhury

tramcars creating disturbance during his sleep. And authorities just accepted it!!! This action only restricted the trams to ply towards Rashbehari Avenue which, naturally, pulled the graph down. De-reservation of the tram tracks on Rashbehari Avenue did the rest.

9. De-reservation of the tram tracks

What was done in the name of de-reservation of tram tracks was actually an indirect way of poisoning the tram system. It was done to allow vehicular traffic to have another extra lane on each flank of the road. In reality, the removal of reserved tracks put the tram tracks right in the middle of the road with no designated stops or guarantee of safe passage across multiple lanes of traffic for passengers. As a result, it has become impossible for commuters, especially children and the elderly - for whom the trams were the favourite mode of transport, to board and disembark from the trams and reach the pedestrian path safely. Naturally, it affected the patronage and as a cascading affect, the earnings. Rashbehari Avenue, Deshapran Shasmal Road and Old Court House Street are burning examples of how badly poor

It's dangerous !!!

Photo by Rudranil Roy Chowdhury



planning can hamper a tramway system. Of course, there are many other roads where the tracks are not on the side, but owing to a much narrower road width, others do not see this issue as much as commuters on the above three roads do. Considering the fact that shifting the tram tracks to the side of the roads will incur a considerable amount of investment, an easy way out is designating tram stops with a designated safe passage to the pedestrian path. However, Calcutta Traffic Police's reluctance, resistance and indifference has culminated that idea prematurely.

10. Tram as a polluting agent???

There's no denying that trams do create some nuisance through the loud noise that they create. Yet, most of the complaining souls never look at the real issue - a complete lack of upgradation and zero implementation of modern technologies. Also, concretization of tracks leads to severe increase in noise level which many fail to understand. Strangely, even some eminent environmentalists tend to skip the real reason and blatantly accuse the trams for being an agent of sound pollution.

11. Behala & Joka - Narrow-gauge Rail to Tram to LRT to Metro

The Behala-Joka area of the city is the only stretch in Calcutta to have the prospect of all possible kinds of railway modes - the narrow gauge railway (till 1957 the Kalighat-Falta narrow gauge route of the McLeod & Co.), tram (Joka extension of C.T.C. functional between 1986-2011), LRT (proposed elevated Light Rail Transit to Barrackpore - planned around 2005-06) and the Metro (counter project of the LRT under construction since 2012 but still in a limbo). A surprise was indeed thrown at the people of Calcutta on 31st December 1986, when the Joka tramway extension was opened for the public after the construction was finished in record time. However, this stretch turned out to be the shortest-living tram stretch of Calcutta. With the Taratala Road flyover work at Majherhat, trams were abolished on Majherhat Bridge and the Behala-Joka section became an island stretch with no physical connection with the rest of the network. The proposed LRT to Barrackpore fell through after some preliminary studies and since 2012 or so, the Joka - B. B. D. Bag (later changed to Esplanade) Metro work is ongoing. And for every single construction named above, there is one common victim - the trams, which, even if modernized, could have been the easiest way out at a cost that would have been a fraction of what is being invested behind the Metro.

12. The Bagbazar & Galiiff Street issues

Subsequent legal cases owing to some ownership rights (?) initially stopped the use of the Bagbazar terminus as evidently, C.T.C. had that land on lease. However, close by, the Galiiff Street terminus was a perfect place for trams coming in from both Rabindra and Bidhan Sarani. But, the pressure of traffic at Shyambazar 5-point Crossing forced the



Tram @ Galiff Street depot

Photo by Rudranil Roy Chowdhury

connection from Bidhan Sarani to snap. Then, the selling off of a part of the Galiff Street terminus created some intangible issues. These issues were followed by the East-West Metro construction from 2017, which helped in sounding a temporary death knell to the whole stretch along Rabindra Sarani to stop trams from plying on one of the most profitable routes in Calcutta.

13. Impact of buses and autos on trams

Indiscriminate issuance of licenses to a gamut of private buses along with the already existing government buses affected the tramway network for many years. Although it is undeniable that on certain roads it is unavoidable, there are roads like Bidhan and Rabindra Sarani, which could be made tram-only, while diverting the buses via Chittaranjan Avenue and A. P. C. Road. It seems the policy makers do not learn from past experiences like when the trams in Howrah town fought a losing battle with the buses. Segregating some roads exclusively for trams would have definitely worked wonders for the system.

If introduction of autos on Calcutta streets was a nuisance, then introducing them on a tram route is surely a sacrilege. Elliot Road and Rafi Ahmed Kidwai Road was the only considerable stretch of road in the whole city where trams ruled as the only mode of public transport. However, soon, in a rather bizarre move, autos, and hundreds of them, were introduced on that very stretch which immensely dented the tram earnings. The only saviour is the fact that the fare of the tram is half of that of an auto. Nonetheless, looking at how irregularly trams from Nonapukur and Gariahat are being run on that stretch, it seems that there's a deliberate attempt to let the autos rule that stretch. And why not? After all, some eminent, international award winning urban city planner considers autos to be better for Calcutta than trams!!!!

14. Vote banks and their consequences

The vote-bank politics or simply put, appeasing a certain



Empty auto standing on tram track but still trams cause congestion...

Photo by Rudranil Roy Chowdhury

section of people or a society or a particular body or an area in exchange for votes in an election is an age-old tradition in India. It is a great leveller, since irrespective of who is in power, they indulge in doing it. And all the external issues that have acted as an impediment to the trams across the last 50 years or so are either directly or indirectly related to this. Whether it's giving a license for the autos on a profitable tram route or granting a permit for numerous private buses to run on already crowded streets with enough public transport options – there's always a direct or indirect equation of vote-bank politics hidden behind it. The earlier example of numerous autos plying on the Elliot and Rafi Ahmed Kidwai Roads are burning examples of how vote-bank politics have impeded the revenue of trams in those two routes. With trams now side-lined and unable to be used as a vote-bank factor, it has been superseded by other issues which has impacted the trams further. However, it must be mentioned here that when the East-West Metro work at Esplanade terminus had cleaved the Kidderpore branch of the tramways, it was the same vote-bank politics that forced the government to build a new loop cutting across a bus terminus next to the Shahid Minar that has, to a certain extent sustained the Kidderpore section.

15. Whims and fancies of politicians

This is another crazy and pointless madness that has seen rampant usage in the last 50 years that has practically spared none. Whether it is just a negative mind-set that the political coterie harbours while viewing it as an obsolete mode of transport or considering it to be a leftover imprint of imperialism or simply seeing it as a noise polluting transport mode without addressing the real issues – trams were always treated harshly at the hands of the politicians. Unfortunately, they did not stop at that and used all their powers to create all the impediments that they could to put a stop to tramway works in the city. It is their own deed that gave birth to the "cycle of negligence" which of course has directly influenced the tramway network in the city.



Illegal parking on the wrong side by Autos. Kolkata Police are you blind ???

Photo by Rudranil Roy Chowdhury

16. Whims and fancies of Kolkata Police

This is a brand new pandemic that has been spread much before COVID hit us in 2020, thanks to some extremely intelligent minds within the Kolkata Traffic Police. This is a beautifully scripted drama and a perfect change of baton from the ministers to the police where the police are now accusing trams for every single traffic issues - be it a normal traffic congestion or a broken down bus. If there's a tram track on that road, the police wait till the time a tram comes and get stuck behind that broken down vehicle and presto, pat comes the Biblical excuse! -

"trams are causing the congestion!"

Yes, it is true that trams do stall at times - mostly owing to that "vicious cycle of negligence" more than anything else, but even when they don't, they are forcefully used as a scapegoat. The police do not see the flouting private (even government ones at times) buses or the autos as a trouble maker, but make it a point for the trams. Now, our atypically congruous question to the Kolkata Traffic Police is - has the traffic congestion on Strand Road, North Strand Road, on Howrah Bridge, M.G. Road (in Howrah), G.T. Road, Dobson Road etc. vanished with the abolition of tram routes from those roads?

Anyone? Anyone ready with a fact based answer to our question? No? No comments? No answers? No justification? No excuses? Nothing?

This is exactly what we get when such questions are asked - complete silence or mumbling, inaudible excuses. Even RTIs, loaded with poignant, factual questions to Kolkata Traffic Police often receive no reply. Just goes to show, how fake this whole "tram creates all the congestion" logic is!

17. Employee and employer issues

This is a rather alarming issue. Of late, the government has decided not to induct fresh employees for the trams on a permanent basis. Thus, there is a chance that once all the



This scene is now almost a thing of past in Kolkata...

Photo by Rudranil Roy Chowdhury

current employees retire, the quality and service may touch an unfathomable low. The contractual employees often do not build that rapport up with the system that the earlier employees did and that affects in many ways than one. The present direct employers for the trams are W.B.T.C., under the Transport Department of the state govt. Unfortunately, even if there are pro-tram individuals (there are several of them in reality) within these two bodies, they are often subject to complete alienation within the wing itself as the whims and fancies of the policy makers, driven mostly by the vote-bank system and appeasement, decides all the shots.

There is also another issue that works against the trams. The all powerful bus lobby. The C.T.C. opted to run buses once again after a long gap of 72 years in 1992 to garner some extra profit. Nonetheless, right from the start, the bus manufacturers saw this as a new opportunity and with their "encouragement" the dormant bus lobby became extremely active and started working full time against the trams. The clubbing of W.B.S.T.C., C.S.T.C. & C.T.C. under W.B.T.C. only made the process easier for them by strengthening their agenda against the tramway system.

18. Electric and trolley buses - more new initiatives, more "gains"?

The concept of electric and trolley buses are the new craze for the Transport Department. For them, these are the best replacement for trams. But, it seems, at least in the case of trolley buses, the policy makers neither learnt from the lessons that the Government of West Bengal inculcated back in 1978, when they had experimented with the trolley-bus system for the first time; nor have they applied common sense as to what cost the actual system will incur. E-buses (Electric buses) being the better between these two, are already running in Calcutta. However, neither are as cost-effective as a tram may be. A tram, wooden bodied (not used anymore), metal or fibre-glass made - can have a codal life of at least 25-30 years while getting only the bare minimum care. On the other hand, if proper care is taken along with a



Pre-independence built wooden body trams still going strong @ 2017

Photo by Rudranil Roy Chowdhury

slew of regular maintenance schedules, can extend their overall service life upto 40-50 years. In Calcutta, in spite of an extremely poor track record in the field of maintenance, there are tram stocks which are more than 75 years old. The newest rolling stock (barring the remodelled fibre glass ones) is now 32 years old. On the other hand, whether it's a trolley-bus or an e-bus, it's impossible to have a codal life that goes beyond 10-15 years. Not to mention the enormous amount of e-waste that e-buses will generate which neither can be recycled easily, nor can be dumped just like that. On top of that, the fare difference will be considerably higher for both of these two replacements.

It is taken for granted that these new schemes are the brainchild of the bus lobby within the department, who indulge in it not because of some personal vendetta against the trams (which, sometimes, they develop later on), but mostly owing to some personal "gains"! This has been the story since 1992 when, during C.T.C.'s second tenure with buses, many allege, that those buses were deliberately delivered in a "faulty status" to gain more orders or maintenance contracts. We will not be surprised if later on, it turns out that this practice is still in vogue. However, the Transport Department's own bus lobby is yet to secure a victory as their incapacious agenda of shutting the tram down has fallen flat almost every single time.

19. Frequency and bridge issues

Another deliberate attempt on behalf of the C.T.C. to slowly poison the tramway was by running an irregular service on most of the routes. Except on Route 5 running between Esplanade and Shyambazar, most of the routes suffer from this malaise. And almost all the time, this is deliberately done. With the Kolkata Traffic Police being their best friend in stopping the tram services at the drop of a hat, the anti-tram employees from the C.T.C. always adore such slow service or even shut downs for a few hours. Thus, it is not impossible to see three trams on a particular route running

within a span of 10 minutes. But, just as you are all ready to board the fourth one, bang!!!!!!!, no trams for the next 30-40 minutes or so. Nonetheless, we must also mention that at times, this poor frequency is also a result of employee issues where, often, owing to several reasons, the "reliever" fails to turn up on time while the person who just completed his stipulated duty hours, refuses to employ himself for an extra shift!

The bridge issue started with the Howrah Bridge in the early 90s. The new tram cars from Burn Standard and Jessop inducted in the 1980s after the required funding from the World Bank were an all metal-body affair. Naturally, they were heavy in nature which, starting from the 1990s proved to be the reason behind the abolition of tram services on the Howrah Bridge. Although that's where it had stopped initially, the issue resurfaced with the collapse of the Majherhat Bridge, although trams were not running on them. Instead, this created a rather unpleasant domino effect for the trams. A health check on other bridges and flyovers revealed several other weak structures all across the city. Tram services were halted owing to issues in the bridge at Kalighat, Belgachia and on Sealdah flyover - all had such issues owing to the faulty maintenance procedure and not due to the trams running on top of it. But, as usual, the trams were made a scapegoat and were the only type of vehicle which has been stopped from plying over them.

Trams on Sealdah flyover is now history

Photo by Rudranil Roy Chowdhury



In the north, under similar circumstances, the Tala road bridge had no tram tracks on them but was decided to be demolished to make way for a new bridge. This indirectly affected the Belgachhia bridge, which became a substitute of the Tala bridge and led to severe congestion on the Belgachhia road bridge which carried the tram tracks to Belgachhia. As usual, trams were the only transport which were stopped from plying on the bridge, thereby rendering 31 tram cars stagnate inside the depot at Belgachhia, by making that home defunct for trams at least till the Tala bridge is complete.

20. LRT and Metro-tram coordination

Certain areas of Salt Lake and New Town are just perfect to have the most modern, state-of-the-art trams or Light Rail Transit to operate. But, on one hand, the Salt Lake extension of the Bidhan Nagar route was never executed beyond the paperwork and on the other, even before a comprehensive plan for a Metro or an LRT was made, autos and e-rickshaws and shared vans started plying in the New Town area. There are plans to introduce a Light Rail System in New Town as a feeder service to the Garia – Airport Metro route, but even the basic agreement is yet to be signed and till that is done, we cannot be sure on whether it is really being constructed. Unfortunately, even if it may run on the same standard gauge tracks as the rest of the tram network across Calcutta, it will still remain as an isolated route and since almost every transport plan is executed independently without thinking of integrating them with existing ones, no one will probably think of extending it to the Bidhan Nagar Road railway station via Salt Lake or along the Krishnapur Canal to provide a seamless connection with the busy suburban rail route which could have reduced the over-burden at Sealdah for both Eastern Railway and the East-West Metro.

Epilogue

Although trams are still running in Calcutta, successive governments' ploy of portraying them as an obsolete, noise-making, traffic-stopper mode of transport through extremely active use of the "vicious cycle of negligence" has indeed bludgeoned the thought process of the majority of the people to believe that the trams are really as evil as they are portrayed. Even when tram connoisseur and enthusiast like Roberto D'Andrea and others who come down to Calcutta from far off Melbourne, Australia, to promote the use of the most environment friendly transport that the city of Calcutta could offer, most people shy away and fail to notice how the city languishes owing to the feral nature of the increasing pollution from all the fossil fuel based vehicular traffic. But, sadly, this isn't going to change unless the political class sit up and take serious note of the situation and stop the above issues by breaking the "vicious cycle of negligence" proactively!

Cover photograph courtesy: Rudranil Roy Chowdhury

Current state of Kolkata's iconic Tram system
Photographed by Rudranil Roy Chowdhury





An Enduring Legacy...

Can UNESCO Heritage Tag Save The Ailing Kolkata Trams ???

- Dr. Debasish Bhattacharyya

Keeping aside the numerous exploitations by the British colonizers, Indians are largely indebted to them for the installation of Indian Railways as well as the postal services that helped establish communication between people at both national and international levels. Citizens of Calcutta were additionally fortunate as the city was gifted a finely weaved network of tramways that offered an extremely reliable service to the commuters. In fact, so important was the tram network that the limits of the Calcutta Municipal Corporation were earmarked by the area serviced by the tramways.

Systematic decommissioning of Tramways across the World

In the Indian subcontinent, denser human settlements like Delhi, Bombay (now Mumbai), Madras (now Chennai), Kanpur, Colombo (Sri Lanka) and Karachi (Pakistan) also had tramways of various service lengths. Except Calcutta, all have gone to oblivion. The tragedy for Bombay was all the more severe as they not only had a large fleet strength - they had double-decker trams. In order to be smart, Bombay wiped out its invaluable and unique tramways in the early 1960s to yield space for automobiles. During this mad rush of modernization, neither one single-decker nor one double-

decker tram was preserved. Bombay was not an exception, though. Across the world, during the 1950 - 60s, city after city surrendered to car industries and removed their priceless assets - individually unique and beautiful tramways. However, similar to some selected East and West European cities, Calcutta never did away with its tramways in spite of innumerable hurdles. Historically, there were desperate attempts between 1873 - 1900, to provide mobility to the people and goods, by trams in Calcutta - the then capital of India. Initially, they were horse-drawn which was later on followed by steam-powered. The horses that were used to power the trams could not sustain the oppressive climate of Calcutta as well as the economic (due to high maintenance costs) and other associated technical problems. Electrification of the Calcutta Tramways Company (C.T.C.) routes began in 1902 and by 1905, the whole network, which was mostly confined to north and central Calcutta, was electrified. Since then, C.T.C. never looked back as its rise was steadily upward. Additionally, C.T.C. was well ahead of its time. It had reached the far-flung areas of the city where neither electricity nor too many brick buildings were present, e.g., places like Behala. C.T.C. generated its own power from the Nonapukur Central Workshop. However, this plant was



A 'W-class' tram @ Behala Tram Depot

Photo courtesy to its original owner
Photo provided by CTUA

closed down in 1922 when the city received stabilized power supply from the Calcutta Electricity Supply Corporation.

Growth of tramways in Calcutta

The growth of south Calcutta, particularly in the areas of Ballygunge, Tollygunge and Behala was directed along the tram tracks that were expanded till around 1942. It may be emphasized that the twin city of Howrah had its own electric tramways since 1907. The Howrah and Calcutta tramway systems were connected once the iconic Howrah Bridge over the river Hooghly was constructed in 1943. The bridge also provided a direct connection for trams between the major railway stations at Howrah and Calcutta (Sealdah). The Howrah trams had several unique features that the Calcutta trams never had. Those will be elaborated in an upcoming article. Texts and illustrations of numerous British and European transport related chronicles depict that during this period, the developments of C.T.C. were at par with the overseas systems.

Initially, C.T.C. had single coach cars. Later, because of huge patronage by the citizens, all cars were converted to or imported as 2-car sets. Most probably, since then, the leading cars were termed as first class while the trailing cars

A single-coach Howrah based tramcar

Photo provided by CTUA
Photo courtesy to its original owner



A double-coach 'M-class' SLT tramcar

Photo courtesy to its original owner
Photo provided by CTUA

were called second class. Cushioned seats, fans and partial 2x2 parallel seats offered better comfort to the first class passengers while longitudinally stretched wooden seats having more space for standees and luggage were the features of the second class. The difference of fare was not much but it was significant to the poor. What is noteworthy is the fact that, without the provision of a second class compartment, no first class facility was provided in any tram. This was an inclusion policy that was followed in order to accommodate all. Current introduction of single-coach AC trams in Calcutta where non-AC trams are infrequent is an example of exclusion policy for the poor passengers.

C.T.C. was indeed the lifeline of the city as evidenced from the overcrowded trams. Though it looked terrible, with rampant pick pocketing of fountain pens, money bags and other items of personal use, the journeys were not that odd. First of all, there were no traffic congestions since large stretches of tram tracks were reserved. As a result, movements of trams were uninterrupted. Secondly, air and noise pollution were insignificant, causing the least amount of irritation to the commuters. Thirdly, the passengers generously offered seats to the elderly, women and children. Even those standing on the footboard were supported by

Over-crowded trams @ Dalhousie area

Photo provided by CTUA
Photo courtesy to its original owner



supported by other passengers. Finally and most importantly, it was an ideal place for social interactions – to share their plights, conditions, moments of happiness and sadness. Children travelling in cars now-a-days never get to experience this – what a selfish way to grow up!

All major places that were essential to spend a healthy city life were either on the tram tracks themselves or were supplemented by 5-10 minutes of walking after a tram ride. Examples are endless: Howrah and Sealdah stations for long distance and suburban trains, Ballygunge and Majerhat stations for local commuters, educational institutes like – the Centenary Campus, Rajabazar Science College, Ballygunge Science College – all under Calcutta University; Rabindra Bharati University, Presidency College, all five medical colleges and hospitals, innumerable schools and colleges, the Calcutta High Court and the Alipore Sessions Court; Khidirpur dock area and the river bank; commercial hubs like the New Market (Hogg Market), Burrabazar, Sealdah Market; shopping areas like Gariahat and Shyambazar; the Central Business District including the Bengal Government's main functionality the Writers' Building; places of entertainment like the Zoological Garden (Alipore), Indian Museum etc, a cluster of cinema halls at Kalighat and Shyambazar; and even the crematorium ground at Nimtollah! That's why Calcutta never said good bye to its tramways since its inception.

Is Calcutta Tramways modern?

Let us first ask the definition of a modern tramway system. Aerodynamic look, a rake of five to seven air-conditioned coaches with pneumatic doors, electronically-controlled driving panel, pantographs, LED display boards, shining colorful bodies – do these parameters alone constitute a modern tramway? *The answer is: No!*

These mechanical features are useless until and unless a tramway supports the needs of the commuters. Reserved elevated tracks or 'Tram Only' streets for uninterrupted flow of trams, right-of-way at the intersections, frequently scheduled and informed service throughout the day, safety of the passengers during boarding and deboarding, low fare, interchange facility with trams, buses, metro and suburban trains and ferry services, inclusion of all passengers e.g. passengers having disabilities (not only physically challenged, but elderly people, children, pregnant women are to be included) or carrying luggage (even bicycles are carried in lean periods), connectivity to all major destinations, insignificant cases of breakdown, refund of fare or making immediate arrangements in case of a breakdown, holiday and festival specials – such parameters are integral parts of a modern tramway. These features should be so attractive that the commuters should voluntarily opt for the tramways, ignoring buses or taxis or even personal cars. The shift of commuters from automobiles to tramways having a day-to-day increase of ridership is the true success of a modern tramway. The benefits are obvious – decongestion of roads,



A pre-independence built Overhead Equipment Inspection Tram still in service Photo by Rudranil Roy Chowdhury

roads, elevation of environmental indices leading to a reduction of medical expenses of the people, road safety, unlimited mobility of the citizens – an overall upgradation of the quality of urban life. These benefits justify the provision of subsidy to the tramways.

As per an international transport expert who visited Calcutta several times exclusively to review the C.T.C., remarked that in terms of design and planning, C.T.C. is indeed modern. Aerodynamic model is applicable when the resistance from air is a matter of concern arising from the speed of a train/tram. For the same reason, pantographs might be better but trolley poles are just fine. The hot and humid climate that the city suffers from would certainly prefer AC trams. However, the economical condition of a vast majority of the commuters does not allow them to afford such luxury. Thus, simple non-AC trams are the choice for medium-to-short-distance commutes. Calcutta trams are low-floor, spacious, airy and very cheap. Commuters do not demand any facility other than a cost-effective and reliable service.

However, the attitude of the city authorities towards this eco-friendly mode of transport is rather deplorable. There are

Nearly a century old Rail Scrubber Tram still in service

Photo by Rudranil Roy Chowdhury



three main players who have collectively throttled the C.T.C. – the Transport Department of West Bengal under which W.B.T.C. now operates the trams, the Kolkata Municipal Corporation and the Kolkata Traffic Police. While the equivalent authorities of any city abroad support wholeheartedly and feel proud of their tramways, in Calcutta, the situation is just the opposite. It appears that the said key players are mouthpieces of automobile lobbies (the bus and auto lobby in particular) and are blind to the benefits of an existing tramway. Infrequent services, de-reservation of tram tracks for cars, zero safety measures for boarding and deboarding, truncation of tram tracks to de-link passenger generation points, suspension of services for lame excuses, issuance of permits to run thousands of auto-rickshaws and buses parallel to profitable tram routes, keeping roadworthy trams idle in the depots, intentionally disconnecting the Nonapukur Central Workshop to feeder depots, declaring vital bridges as 'unsafe' to run trams (while other heavier vehicles continue to ply on them) – are just a few among hundreds of reasons that cause interference to regularly run trams in the city. C.T.C. is indeed ancient in terms of the attitude that the city authorities pay to it but not in terms of its necessity and economic viability.

Questionable Political Will

In the pre-independence era, a strong workforce of more than 10,000 people was employed in the payrolls of the C.T.C. These workers belonged to the Calcutta Tramways Workers Union (CTWU), associated with the undivided Communist Party of Bengal. The CTWU was so powerful that they could successfully negotiate for their legitimate demands with their British owners. The union could also paralyze the city when strikes were called for. On the other hand, the union was extremely aware of their social responsibilities. During communal riots in the 1940s, a series of tram depots were converted to shelters to provide safety and meals to the victims. Nobody dared to interfere. In fact, the government ran empty trams for a few days across the city to establish confidence of the citizens towards restoring normal life. Thankfully, there was not a single incidence of vandalism of the trams.

In the 1950 - 60s, when many cities across the World abandoned their tramways owing to lack of far-sight, Calcutta never thought about doing off their own. After independence, when the British shareholders of the C.T.C. left and fresh investment was scarce, the system was first taken over and subsequently nationalized by the Government of West Bengal in the 1970s. This not only protected the job of the employees, the service to commuters was also ensured. It is believed that the inclination of the Bengalis to leftist ideology supported this transformation based on the track record of CTWU. Unfortunately, this was the entry point of uncontrolled corruption in the C.T.C. which later on emerged as a case of 'parasites engulfing the host'.

In the post-independence era, considerable investments were

done on C.T.C. In 1975, 25 new cars were built indigenously at the Nonapukur Central Workshop. Some 200 iron bodied tramcars were procured between 1980 to 88, using financial assistance from the World Bank and service areas were extended to Joka and Bidhan Nagar. However, poor planning accompanied by corruption and a step-motherly attitude towards the C.T.C. rendered all these efforts useless.

By 1980 - 90, it was globally accepted that modern tramways or light rails would be the choice for mass transit in all mega cities. The success of a tramway is its low operating cost. Its construction cost is much lower than most Metro lines while the quality of service rendered and the longevity of the rolling stocks are much better than buses. Ignoring a global resurgence of trams in various forms and the fact that Calcutta already had a fine network of tramways, the then Transport minister of West Bengal, under the leftist regime in 1992, declared that trams are 'obsolete' and that they will face a 'natural death'. To reduce subsidy, he added, C.T.C. will be gradually converted to a bus-operating corporation. It is important to note that it happened at the moment when the flow of money from the World Bank became dry.

When this mindless transformation was afoot, the financial loss of Calcutta State Transport Corporation (C.S.T.C.) was actually higher than C.T.C. no matter which parameter it was measured in. It was observed that practically overnight, many of the repairable and roadworthy tramcars were declared as 'condemned', many of the tram sheds in depots were dismantled to accommodate buses and the most scary part was that, significant portions of land of all depots were termed as 'excess' that were ready to be sold to real estate promoters or business establishments. These so called 'excess' lands were once procured by the C.T.C. to accommodate rolling stocks for future expansion of service areas. It should be noted that all tram depots are located in the prime locations of the city where the price of land assumes astronomical proportions. Incidentally, the blueprint to sell Tram depot lands as drafted by the previous government is currently being implemented by the current one. At present, the number of operating cars and the number of existing routes, route length, ridership and employees – all are at a minimum in the entire history of

As many as 31 working trams are rotting inside Belgatchia depot after forced closure of services showing lame excuse...



Photographed by Rudra and Gay Choudhury

C.T.C. In fact, newly laid concretized tram tracks are visible all over the city but, unfortunately, the trams have almost become an extinct species!

In Calcutta, passenger transport is controlled by private bus operators and auto-rickshaw unions that are invariably supported by political parties. Share of state transport buses may be at most 10 – 15% while for the trams it could be approaching 0%. It is clear that an efficient tramway will undoubtedly benefit the commuters but the vested interests of some other players will be challenged.

UNESCO Recognition Can Act as a Saviour

We are aware that UNESCO World Heritage status has been awarded to the Nilgiri Mountain Railways (N.M.R.), the Darjeeling Himalayan Railways (D.H.R.) and the Kalka Shimla Railways (K.S.R.) under the management of the Indian Railways who operate and maintain them. We have verified that the criteria based on which these prestigious awards were given to these mountain railways are also valid for C.T.C.. Some of the facts are – earlier, the citizens were completely dependent on the tramways for their daily life and as a result, the tramways became a symbol of the city. The involvement was so intense that the tramways were always portrayed prominently in all cultural aspects of the Bengalis like literature, poems, paintings, murals, photographs, films,

advertisements, personal and family memories, a place to socialize, etc. The tramways were an integral part of the overall growth, development and cultural maturation of Calcutta. C.T.C. also played significant roles in the freedom movement of India, maintenance of communal harmony of the city and the leftist movements in both pre- and post-independence eras.

Epilogue

We believe that C.T.C. qualifies for the UNESCO World Heritage status as defined in their website criteria. C.T.C. trams use the same driving controller systems, trolley poles, points-man to change the track and traction, destination boards, foot gongs as they were being used over a 100 years back – thus offering a living demonstration of history. However, it is mandatory that the approach for recognition should originate from the authority/person who owns the property. Sadly, the Department of Transport is more interested in making petty money from selling off the lands of the depots rather than preserving invaluable heritage of the City of Joy. Given the present scenario, is it possible to believe that they will sincerely approach UNESCO for the award as has been done by the Indian Railways? We doubt!!!

Cover photograph courtesy: Rudranil Ray Chowdhury

Another fine example of a century old tramcar modified to a departmental vehicle. It's still in working order and occasionally used for carrying rails or other materials. Photographed by Sagnik Gupta.



EXCLUSIVE



Calcutta-Melbourne Tramjatra

First Contact - 1996 Extending A Hand of Friendship

- Roberto D'Andrea

Calcutta and Melbourne are two rare surviving tramway systems of continuous use outside of Europe. Both cities are a part of a prestigious global tram family along with other classy cities like Amsterdam, Vienna, Budapest, Prague, Toronto, San Francisco and Hong Kong. This is the story of a Melbourne Trammie who helped start an international tram friendship between Calcutta and Melbourne called *Tramjatra*.

Brief History About Melbourne's Tramways

Melbourne is the only true surviving "continuously used" tramways in the English-speaking world! An amazing fact when one considers that tramways were once ubiquitous across all major cities throughout the Great Britain, Canada, the USA, New Zealand and Australia. In the late 1800's, like London, Liverpool, Dublin, Paris, Rome, Lisbon, Amsterdam, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Calcutta, Bombay, Hong Kong, Toronto, Buenos Aires, Rio De Janeiro, San Francisco & New York etc, Melbourne was one of the many cities that built

extensive tramway systems. Booming 'Marvellous Melbourne' as we were called, was a lively city with a grand Central Business District, an 8-hour working day & surrounding suburbs like St Kilda, Richmond, Collingwood, Fitzroy, Brunswick, Carlton, Footscray and Moonee Ponds. In 1885, with the opening of the City to Richmond cable line, work had begun on the world's largest singly owned & technically advanced cable tram network with 75 kilometers of double tracks serving 17 routes. Cable trams consisted of an enclosed saloon car pulled by an open-air dummy car. Drivers were called 'gripmen'. They worked heavy metal grip levers that they attached to moving underground street cables. Conductors sold and checked tickets and were often called 'mind the curve'. Today, Melbourne runs a high frequency tramways with pre-Coronavirus patronage of around 200 million people per annum. There are eight tram depots scattered across Melbourne which are located in Essendon, Brunswick, Preston, Southbank, Kew, Malvern,



One of the famed 'W' class trams of MMTB

Photographed by author

Glenhuntingly. There are large tram maintenance workshops in Preston and Southbank. To preserve Melbourne's tram heritage, a tram museum was constructed in a part of the old Hawthorn Tram Depot and the world famous wooden bodied 'W' Class Tram tracks on the City Circle tramline is operated as a free service. The modern fleet of tramcars vary in style and just like other major tramways, there's a lot of variety - 'Z3' and 'A' Class trams from the 1980s, 'B' Class articulated trams from the 90s, European style articulated 'C' and 'D' Class trams with low floors from the 2000s and today the locally designed and manufactured articulated 'E' Class tram.

A Melbourne Tram Conductor & Driver

I was a Melbourne Tram Conductor and Driver for 10 years from 1989 to 1999. I loved life as a Melbourne trammie and for those of us who played both roles were called 'marmalades'. The South Melbourne Tram Depot was beautifully eccentric! A unique depot with many characters and entertaining tram conductors. We loved serving and helping people. A Tram conductor's life was especially interesting as we were a part of the community and for those

Author with Ken Walker @ South Melbourne Depot, 1993

Photo courtesy: The Age



us that loved a bit of 'tram talk', many passengers became friends. Not only did we sell and check tram tickets, we helped the elderly passengers, mums and parents with prams and young children to get on and off a tram safely, carried tram, train and bus maps in our conductor's bags and gave public transport information and directions. We kept our trams safe and free of graffiti. The South Melbourne Depot had many interesting tram routes covering the north-south axis of the city. Our tram routes have culturally diverse people, full of workers, students and tourists travelling to South Melbourne and St Kilda Beaches. A great place for an entertaining tram conductor, which the South Melbourne Depot had many, like our famous tram poet, Malcolm Just. Melbourne has a lovely performing conductor tradition with circus-style conductors like Frenchie, singing and yarning 'connies' and it was this tradition of the 'performing tram conductor' that we brought to Calcutta. I was also elected as the Australian Tramway Union proxy and was the Union delegate at the South Melbourne Depot and served my fellow trammies as their representative.

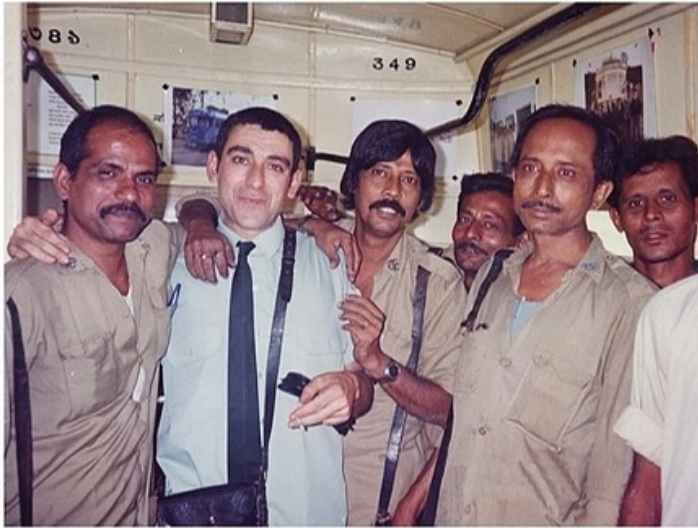
First Day On An Indian Holiday at the Belgatchia Depot

In 1994, I went to India on a 5-week long holiday with fellow trammie and girlfriend Sarah Pears. I landed in Calcutta (now Kolkata) and had a few days by myself while Sarah was in Darjeeling. Before departing, my tram enthusiast friends, nicknamed "gunzels", at the South Melbourne Tram Depot told me about Calcutta's extensive tramway system that was now under the threat of closure. They wanted me to find out what was going on and report back on return to the depot. So, anticipating that I may meet some Indian trammies, I packed in some tram tickets and photos of Melbourne's trams. On the very first day of my arrival on Indian soil, I went looking for Calcutta's trams. While walking down the famous Chowringhee, I could hear trams 'ding ding-ing' in the distance. The very same ding or gong sound that Melbourne's trams make amazed me!! Being magnetized by the sound of the gong, I followed this old industrial revolution urban sound and made my way to the Esplanade

The Famous Mughal Express -
Burn Standard built CTC # 720 modified beautifully during early 90s

Photographed by author





Author with Belgatchia Trammies, 1996

Photo provided by author

Tram Terminus. I was excited to find the trams and watched the trams and trammies for a while before boarding a Belgatchia Depot-bound tramcar. I was keen to tell the trammies that I was a tram worker too, a 'tram wallah' from Australia. So, I did a bit of tram theatre and pretended to drive a tram, ring the conductor's bells and mimicked the sound of the air brakes and compressor. The Belgatchia trammies got it straight away and they seemed to be genuinely excited as well! Experiencing my first taste of Bengali spontaneity, they sat me down and took me to the Belgatchia Tram Depot in North Calcutta. Seeing Calcutta by tram for the first time was colourful and beautiful and on arrival, the friendship and camaraderie showed to me by the Belgatchia trammies was extra special. We spent the rest of the day playing with trams like little children and they showed me around every part of the depot - from the trammies' mess room and conductors' pay-in-tables to the depot shed and starters office. What a treat! On a sad note, the Belgatchia trammies confirmed what my 'gunzel' friends had told me in Melbourne that the Calcutta Tramways was run down and faced closure. Already half of the Belgatchia Tram Sheds had been taken over by buses. Little did I know that on this very day, a tram friendship between Australia and India was born. By sunset, we had swapped addresses and after saying that I would stay in touch, I bid farewell to my new Belgatchia friends. For the next couple of days, I caught many a tram and checked out Calcutta. Sarah arrived from Darjeeling and together we travelled across India on a holiday that was beautiful and special.

South Melbourne ↔ Belgatchia — Friendship Depots

After I returned to Australia, I stayed in touch with my new Calcutta trammie friends and reported back to my South Depot tram mates. To understand more about the history of the Calcutta Tramways Company (C.T.C.), my 'gunzel' friends gave me copies of Modern Tramway, written by T.V. Runnacles, a series of excellent articles, after reading which, I continued to fall in love with the history of Calcutta's



Trammies of South Melbourne Depot & Belgatchia depot with Tram Friendship banner

Photo provided by author

tramways and the city itself. With the feeling that distance makes the heart grow fonder, it was decided that "We need to help our new tram friends". So, along with my trammie and artist friends Mick Douglas and Andy Miller, it was decided that the South Melbourne Depot would form a 'sister depot' relationship with the Belgatchia Depot. We declared that Belgatchia Depot was our friend. By April 1995, South Depot trammies packed a box of gifts for the trammies at Belgatchia Depot, including a painted banner. This was delivered by a holidaying friend of ours, Phillip, who was landing in Calcutta. The sister depot friendship between South Melbourne and the Belgatchia Depot was now formalized.

In the meantime, Mick Douglas had been reading a series of 'Save the Calcutta Tramways' letters sent to the Public Transport Users Association (P.T.U.A.) in Melbourne by a tram enthusiast and activist from Calcutta, Dr. Debasish Bhattacharya. He was writing to the world asking for support in a campaign to save Calcutta's Trams - A tramway SOS message to the world. Mick and I contacted Debasish, offering to help. We wrote to him telling that we had a sister depot relationship with the Belgatchia Depot and suggested that we could come to Calcutta with a pro-tram, travelling tram show. "How about, we decorate a Calcutta tramcar with pro-tram messaging". Debasish wrote back saying he loved the idea and that he would help set things up! We started preparing the travelling tram show, collecting tram tickets, destination rolls, some historic Calcutta and Melbourne tram photos and engaging Bimal Maity from Melbourne's Bengali Association, we started translating Melbourne's famous tram poet, Malcolm Just's tram poetry into Bangla. I booked an airline ticket which would see me arrive in Calcutta with the now complete "Extending the Hand of Tramways Friendship"

travelling tram show in late September of 1996.

Preparing For A Tram Festival

On arriving in Calcutta, I was met at the airport by the legendary tram activist Dr. Debasish Bhattacharya himself. He had been fighting for the survival and modernization of the C.T.C. alongside the various Tramway Workers Unions. After the C.T.C., system had expanded in the 1980s, by the early 1990s, the downward trend was clear when tram routes to Howrah Station and the High Court were closed. The then Transport Minister Shyamal Chakrabarty had publicly stated that C.T.C. tram lines would continue to close. He was replaced by Shri Subhas Chakraborty, who seemed to want to steady the sinking tram ship.

One of my first acts was to visit my trammie friends at the Belgatchia Tram Depot with Debasish, who lives near the Kalighat Tram Depot; we started preparing for the first Calcutta Melbourne tram festival. In the early days, he had organized a meeting with the then MD of C.T.C. & the then Tramway Union leader, to whom we presented a proposal with the Travelling Tram show, following which, we were accompanied to the Writers' Building to take a clearance of the said proposal from the Transport Ministry.

Those early days were all about meeting people and they continued to come forward. A core group of tram activists started coming together. Mick Douglas had given me the contact details of a film maker, Mahadeb Shi. He was also keen to see Calcutta's Tramways survive and modernize and saw clearly of the C.T.C. being a part of Calcutta's heritage and a part of its soul. He had filmed some of the last trams on the Howrah Bridge in 1992 and was starting to make a Calcutta tram film. We met in his studio and started collaborating straight away, and together have been on this most beautiful tram friendship journey ever since. Of the entire core Tramjatrans, it's Mahadeb that I've collaborated the most with across the whole journey. He has documented the whole of Tramjatra and we had fun together filming scenes for his tram film with 'Abinash' at the Gariahat Depot. Debasish introduced us to journalist and environmental activist, Jayanta Basu. Like all 5 of us who are 'core Tramjatrans', Jayanta became a part of a central 'think tank' of five and added great momentum to the tram friendship project.

It was always important for us to "broaden our reach" and pick up some media coverage for which, Debasish introduced me and Mick to the *Statesman* Newspaper's senior journalist Manash Ghosh. Following the nod from the Transport Minister, we fixed a meeting with Manash Ghosh at the *Statesman* office on 3rd October, 1996. I felt so privileged to visit such important Bengali institutions. After the meeting, we were all set with our first-ever *Tramjatra* which would start with decorating a tram at the Belgatchia Depot. The *Statesman* Newspaper published the first of many hundreds of articles written about the 26 plus years of

Australian 'trammy' to boost CTC

MANASH GHOSH

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, Oct. 4. — A tram driver and conductor from Melbourne is here to boost the city's ailing tramways.

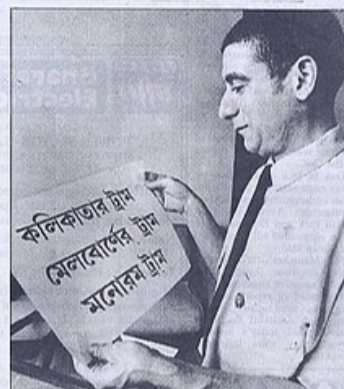
Mr Roberto D'Andrea is in the city to extend the hand of friendship to the Calcutta Tramways and the people of Calcutta.

Attired in his Melbourne Tramways uniform, he will go around in CTC trams from Sunday, spreading the message of friendship between Melbourne and Calcutta and the uniqueness of the tramways of the two cities.

The message: tramways are an excellent form of public transport and are environment-friendly. There will also be a running commentary on Melbourne tramway's life and culture.

Photographs and banners brought from the Australian city will be displayed in trams that he will be travelling, highlighting the similarities of the two cities.

The two 'pleasant' tramways were born around the same time — towards the end of the 19th century.



Mr Roberto D'Andrea, an Australian tram driver, shows his slogan: 'Calcutta's trams, Melbourne's trams, pleasant trams', in Calcutta on Thursday. — The Statesman.

Andrea said. The Melbourne "trammies" want Calcutta to preserve its old tram life and heritage. To commemorate Mr D'Andrea's visit to the city, they pooled resources to print and publish pamphlets of short poems 'Dour Das' (Run) with English originals along with Bengali translations.

The "trammies" also got laminated banners and posters with Bengali slogans.

Bengali residents of Melbourne helped with the translation. Melbourne's arts community also pitched in to prepare the publicity materials.

Both Melbourne trammies and commuters want to help the Calcutta Tramways. "We would love CTC to be alive and kicking. We would like Calcutta trams to be icons of the city like those in Melbourne. Trams are Melbourne's most recognised symbol and the city has the largest tram system outside Europe", said Mr D'Andrea.

The South Melbourne tram depot has already adopted CTC's Belgachia as its sister depot. Mr D'Andrea and his colleagues have asked the Melbourne Tramways to sign a

'Statesman' news paper article about the author - 04/10/1996

Scan copy provided by author

Tramjatra friendship between Kolkata and Melbourne. From newspapers, radio, television and later on social media and on-line coverage, just like the way I'd fallen in love with the friendship shown to me by Calcuttans, the media fell in love with the Melbourne Calcutta Tramways Friendship later to be called "*Tramjatra*". Thank you all for the wonderful and interesting coverage over the years!

A Melbourne Tradition: Painting Arts Trams

Perhaps for the first time in the world, tram workers from two continuously used tramway systems had decorated a tram together. Here we were sharing tram tradition, especially the Melbourne tradition of artists and tram workers painting and decorating trams. Since 1979, Melbourne had a programme of artists painting trams with the likes of Lin Onus, Clifton Pugh, Mirka Mora and Michael Leunig, plus many more high profile artists had painted a Melbourne tram as a part of the "pop art" programme. This programme continues today as a part of the Melbourne Festival. In 1992, trammies from the South Melbourne Depot had painted a 'W' Class tram, numbered 727, with a people diversity theme. So, from the other side of the Indian Ocean, I shared tram tradition with Calcutta and the C.T.C. I was also here to show off our brand of tram conducting at a time when the Victorian State Government was soon to get rid of Melbourne's famous 'connies'. I also wanted to highlight the environmental benefits of having a high-frequency tramways, talk about the global revival of tramways, and with my new found C.T.C. trammie friends, encourage the Government of West Bengal to reconsider the thought of closing down the C.T.C. Two former British colonial capital cities were set to explore our similarities and differences through the medium of our tramways. Why had we both survived the mass destruction of tramways worldwide? There was plenty to talk about and fascinatingly interesting times were to come.

So, with much excitement, the travelling tram show was mounted inside our first tramcar - Belgatchia tram number



First Tramjatra Tramear # 349 of Belgatchia depot

Photograph provided by author

349, a 2-carriage tram with separate 1st class & 2nd class cabins, which will forever hold a special place in my heart. 349 was a 'K' Class tram built at the Nonapukur Workshop in the 1930s. # 349 was decorated with our C.T.C. trammie friends in the tram sheds of South Melbourne's sister depot, the Belgatchia Tram Depot of Calcutta.

Calcutta-Melbourne Tramways Friendship Tram Launch

So, with much fanfare at the Belgatchia Depot, we launched the Calcutta Melbourne Friendship tram on Sunday, October 6, 1996. Our first friendship tram ride was on route 11 between Belgatchia and Howrah Bridge. We had now taken the Melbourne Calcutta Tram Friendship to the tram-loving citizens of Calcutta.

In all, we decorated four trams during the Calcutta Melbourne Tram Friendship Festival in 1996. With around 5 days at each depot, we decorated a Belgatchia 'K' Class Tram, number 349 and tracked on all Belgatchia routes travelling towards Esplanade, B.B.D. Bag and the Howrah Bridge. The 2nd tram we decorated was a Kidderpore 'K' Class tram, numbered 329, which saw us take our friendship tram along the Diamond Harbour Road to Behala and Joka, across town to Ballygunge and on Kidderpore Depot's staple route number 36 from the depot through the beautiful parkland of Maidan and onwards to Esplanade. The third tram we decorated was at the Park Circus Depot. Tram number 340 was another 'K' Class tram. Park Circus Depot's central location meant we could almost track anywhere to Galiff Street, B.B.D. Bag, Esplanade, Gariahat, Ballygunge and Bidhan Nagar. The Gariahat Depot was our last stop and here we were given a beautiful Elephant Tram. 498 'L' Class tram is a Hati Gari with a long nose and tail and here for the first time, our friendship tram became a Durga Tram. The Calcutta Melbourne Friendship tram, friendship conductors, trammies and passengers suddenly became a part of one of India's largest Hindu Festivals which celebrates the Hindu



Tramjatra Tramear # 349 of Kidderpore

Photograph provided by author

Goddess Mother Durga, who is a complex deity that I am still learning about today.

It was time to counter the anti-tram movement that was growing in strength and learn some street Bangla so I could start communicating with some of the tram passengers who spoke little English. One of my greatest joys is tram conducting alongside other C.T.C. trammies who quickly became friends and when we worked the same part of the tram, passengers were delighted to see the green dressed Melbourne conductor and khaki dressed Calcutta conductors side-by-side. The tram gifts were simple. Each passenger received a colourful Melbourne multi-modal Tram Ticket. One of the first Bengali words I learnt was "bondhu" which means friendship. I became a "bondhu Australian conductor" giving out "bondhu tram tickets". I quickly found that Calcutta was a cultural city with a great history. Many passengers spoke fluent English, some a few words and if they didn't, "mime theatre" using my tram hands with body gesturing and sound was the go, and as I'm dressed in a tram uniform, people know that I'm a part of the tram show. In both the 1st and 2nd class tram carriages, there is a women's section. It's a colourful part of the tram with young

Author's interaction with lady passengers...

Photo provided by the author





Tramjatra Tramcar # 340 of Park Circus depot

Photograph provided by author

and old women and often young children in the mix. In a male-dominated society, it's a place I loved conducting in and have enjoyed having some female conversation and company. All the while, the C.T.C. trammies and I were promoting the benefits of having a high-frequency tramways. The social, cultural and environmental benefits of having a well run tram system....and how trams were making a global revival! Tramways are coming back in many cities, so why get rid of them in Calcutta? The images from Melbourne on exhibition inside the friendship trams were colourful and confident. Our conviction was clear. Long live Calcutta's tramways! Tram Zindabad Zindabad!

The next morning, on Monday, 7th October, we hit the tram jackpot! - front page in the Bengali language *Ananda Bazar Patrika* and *Statesman* Newspaper. The local television stations produced news bulletins and a day or two later, from Australia, came our beautiful public broadcaster, the ABC. Edmond Roy was the South Asia Bureau correspondent and he came to do a story for the "Postcards" on the Melbourne Calcutta Tramways Friendship for the highly rated Foreign Correspondent Program. So, not only did we receive plenty of local media attention, but the tram friendship story was heading back to Australia. We could not have dreamt of a better start!

Back To Melbourne

Upon return to Melbourne, there was much excitement at the South Melbourne Tram Depot. They had received my letters and copies of the many newspaper articles of Calcutta. The tram friendship I'd received in Calcutta encouraged us to do the same in Melbourne and apply to decorate a Melbourne 'W' Class Tram as a part of the Melbourne Calcutta Tramways Friendship event - a reciprocal tram festival in Melbourne! So, together with Mick Douglas, Andy Miller and with the backing of South Depot trammies and the local Bengali community, we printed the photos I'd taken and prepared a report for the senior management and the Victorian Transport Minister, Robin

Cooper. On presenting the 'tram report', it was clear that the love shown to me back in Calcutta was melting people's hearts and it wasn't long before we were given the necessary permissions to decorate a 'W' Class tram, numbered 1036. The planned launch would be in early 1997 and coincide with the screening of the ABC Television's Foreign Correspondent Postcard in early February.

1997 Calcutta-Melbourne 'Bondhu' Tram in Melbourne

The sister-depot relationship we had set up between South Melbourne and Belgatchia was working a treat. By January 1997, together with Mick and Andy, we had decorated a 'W' Class Tram (1036) in the tram sheds at the South Depot. Built in 1955 at the Preston Tram Workshops, 1036 was a beautiful wooden-bodied 'W' Class tram and perfect for adding Calcutta Melbourne themes. Just like the tram designs in Calcutta, the idea was simple enough - mount a photographic exhibition inside the advertising racks above the passenger seats and add some branding to the outside of the tram. This time around, we placed the tram symbols from both cities on the tram's side and followed this up with the use of Bangla script to put tram destinations on the tram's windows. The photographic exhibition was in part a personal record of my previous two visits to Calcutta and featured trams and trammies from both cities. Five months after launching our first friendship tram in Calcutta, on Thursday, 6th February, 1997, at the Dudley Street Tram Siding, we launched our Melbourne Calcutta friendship "Bondhu" tram in Melbourne. 1036 looked great in the presence of important dignitaries like, the Transport Minister of that time, Robin Cooper, the Chief Executive of the Public Transport Corporation (P.T.C.), Ian Dobbs, the South Melbourne Depot manager, Vic Foudoulis, *Tramjatra*'s Mick Douglas and a big crowd of tram people that included trammies from the South Depot, as well as members of the Bengali community and a large group of 'gunzels'. After the launch of the Melbourne Calcutta *Bondhu* tram, we tracked it from the City to St Kilda Beach on Route 16. As a symbolic gesture, I was dressed in a C.T.C. tram shirt and Melbourne tram shorts with long socks - a 50/50 version of the tram

A Melbourne 'W' class Tramjatra Tram # 1036

Photograph provided by author





Decoration inside # 1036

Photograph provided by author

conductors' uniform. Like in Calcutta, the "Bondhu" tram was placed in regular service at no extra cost for the tram passengers. Once passengers had entered the tram, they would be greeted by two tram conductors, the regular 'connie' and the Melbourne Calcutta conductor. We engaged with and made passengers aware that the tram they were travelling on is a cross-cultural friendship tram. Many people were genuinely interested and for the two weeks I was onboard the "Bondhu" tram doing a 'connie' meet and greet was not only fun, but advanced the understanding that the tram-loving community of Melbourne had about the tram friendship and Calcutta. Malcolm Just, whose tram poetry was translated to Bangla, joined us and recited his tram poems with the many people who travelled with us. Like in Calcutta, Mick Douglas and I applied to the P.T.C. to have our friendship tram run on as many of Melbourne's routes as possible. After the required permissions were granted, we spent two weeks on the City - St Kilda Beach line. The "Bondhu" tram had a special day touring other tram depots and over the next month, would track on their routes. "Bondhu" ended up at the Malvern Tram Depot and in its latter days as a friendship tram, it could be seen on a number of routes on the 8 to Toorak, 6 to Glen Iris, 72 to Camberwell, 5 to Malvern and 69 Kew to St Kilda Beach.

Australia's publicly funded national broadcaster, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (A.B.C.), screened the "tram postcard from Calcutta" on Tuesday, 11th February, 1997, in the evening, all across Australia. This gave the growing tram fraternity between Melbourne and Calcutta a huge boost and a wider Australian audience now knew about *Tramjatra*. High ratings in Melbourne meant that people were on the lookout for the "Bondhu" tram and we carried full trams with passengers eager to engage.

Bengali Association's Special Day-Out On 'Bondhu Tram'

As a token of thanks to Bimal Maity and Melbourne's Bengali community for the encouragement they gave the Melbourne Calcutta Tramways friendship, by showing support and helping with Bengali translations, we organized a special day on the *Bondhu* tram for them. The members of Melbourne's Bengali community were picked up from the Tandoori Den restaurant in Camberwell. We had a beautiful day together and they recited Rabindranath Tagore poems and songs and



Bengali Association day out with # 1036

Photo provided by the author

came on board the tram with musical instruments which gave the tram a festive feel. They were proud and really happy that Calcutta and Bengali culture was being celebrated in Melbourne.

The Melbourne Calcutta Tramways Friendship was the last great tram conductor act in Melbourne. After all, it was a tram conductor who was central to help start an international tram friendship. The link between Calcutta and Melbourne was a tribute to the people skills developed by the many great Melbourne tram conductors. The Melbourne tram conductor tradition is not dead yet as it now lives with many a Bengali trammie and friend in Calcutta. Although we are critically endangered and there's only a few of us left, we can still be found, in exile, in Calcutta, during a *Tramjatra*! Long may the tradition live. Long live trams, long live *Tramjatra*!!!

Cover photograph provided by the author

The South Melbourne depot trammies, 1997

Photo provided by the author





Tram Tweets

The Quintessential Kolkata Tram

- Sanjoy Mookerjee

The 'Collins' dictionary defines a tram as a public transport vehicle, usually powered by electricity and travelling along rails laid on the surface of a street. Trams differ from trains in two ways:

- ⇒ They are designed to travel on streets for shorter distances, mostly operating within an urban centre and sharing the grade with other forms of surface transport. Trains are however designed to carry larger traffic through longer distances, usually, inter-city.
- ⇒ Tram tracks are laid on road levels, while train tracks are laid a few inches above the ground.

The first passenger tram service in the world was run in 1807 by the Swansea and Mumbles Railway in Wales, UK. These were horse-drawn tramcars running over 8.85 kilometres of standard gauge (1435 mm.) tracks. Subsequently, several sources of power were experimented with. By 1840, London and Blackwall Railway had begun working trams hauled by steel cables within the city of London, along a fixed track.

By 1883, steam-run tramcars were put into operation at Munich, Germany, in 1885, at Karachi, India, and in 1888, in the German city of Frankfurt-am-Main. Around the same period, coal gas operated tramcars started operations at Melbourne, Australia (1886-88), and petrol or diesel driven tramcars also appeared in Karachi, India and Stockholm, Sweden.

*A pre-independence built electric tramcar of Kolkata, India
Photographed by Rudranil Roy Chowdhury*



However, the most popular and clean option for driving trams all over the world was and still continues to be electricity. The first experimental electric tramway was invented by a Russian, Fyodor Pirotsky in the year 1880. To Germany goes the credit of running the first electric tram service at Lichterfelde, near Berlin in 1881, closely followed by Brighton, England in 1883.



The first horse-drawn trams in India were introduced at Kolkata, (then called Calcutta), as early as 1873. The first electric trams in Asia were also commissioned at Kolkata in 1902. This system is still functional, albeit with a much-reduced coverage and with an outdated fleet. Mumbai (Bombay) introduced electric trams in 1907. In fact, it ran double-decker tramcars till 1964, after which the network was dismantled. Other Indian cities which introduced tramways quite early were Nashik, Chennai (Madras), Kanpur (Cawnpore), Delhi and Bhavnagar.

*An original Horse-drawn tramcar survived in Kolkata, India. It was last used during Tri-centenary celebration of Kolkata in 1990.
Photographed by Rudranil Roy Chowdhury*

Typically, tramways over the world operate within a municipal jurisdiction. In Europe, especially in countries like Switzerland, where environment consciousness is paramount, there are instances where trams operate even within village communities. Almost in all cases, the municipal authorities have been empowered by laws, enabling them to legislate rules for the construction and operation of tramways within their area, including speed regulation and safety norms.



*Tramcar in Swiss village of Wil, near Zurich
Photographed by the author*

*A new age tramcar at Esplanade, Kolkata.
Photographed by Rudranil Roy Chowdhury*



In India, the first law governing the running of tramcars was enacted in the year 1886. This Act, called the Indian Tramways Act, 1886 has been succeeded by several amendments and succession Acts all over the country to facilitate the regulation of Tramways, as considered necessary from time to time. In fact, strangely, before enactment of a specific law governing the Metro Railway in Kolkata, even the country's first underground system had to take refuge under the Tramways Act for its initiation!

While most Indian cities have discarded tramways, urban clusters in Europe, America and Australia have witnessed a revival of electric tram networks for their ability to provide clean and comfortable city transportation. Over the past decades, improved technologies piloted by reputed manufacturers across the world have been inducted in several countries to facilitate better tramcar



An Alstom Citadis Low-floor Tram in Melbourne, Australia
 Photograph courtesy : Roberto De'Andrea

riding experience, reduce pollution and save precious energy. With the serious threat of global warming and humanity's commitment to reduce the carbon footprint, tramcars are making a serious comeback into the urban space.

In Asia, China has displayed technology-leadership in urban transportation. It has revived almost extinct tram networks in major urban centres. Tianjin and Shanghai have introduced noiseless, rubber-tired wheels sets. It is also experimenting with hydrogen fuel vehicle tramway.

Keeping pace with the resurrection of tramways the world over, is there a lesson for us to revive the ailing Kolkata network and possibly to reintroduce tramcars in other major Indian cities as part of an integrated, modern, urban transport philosophy? A time has come for all stakeholders to give this proposition a serious thought.



Decades old tramcars plying through the historic Dalhousie Square in Kolkata.
 Photographed by Rudranil Roy Chowdhury

Glimpses of some European Tramways

Prague, the Czech Republic

First Horse-drawn Tram:	1875
First Electric Tram:	1891
System Length:	142 km
No. of Trams:	931 (2019)
No. of Lines:	34
Traction:	Overhead Electric
Gauge:	Standard



Photographed by author

Photographed by author



Helsinki, Finland

First Horse-drawn Tram:	1890
First Electric Tram:	1900
System Length:	96 km
No. of Trams:	182
No. of Lines:	11
Traction:	Overhead 600V DC
Gauge:	Meter-gauge



Glimpses of some European Tramways



Photographed by author

Oslo, Norway

First Horse-drawn Tram:	1875
First Electric Tram:	1894
System Length:	43 km
No. of Trams:	72
No. of Lines:	6
Traction:	Overhead 750V DC
Gauge:	Standard

Potsdam, Germany

First Horse-drawn Tram:	1880
First Electric Tram:	1907
System Length:	28.9 km
No. of Trams:	53
No. of Lines:	7
Traction:	Overhead 600V DC
Gauge:	Standard



Photographed by author

Glimpses of some European Tramways

Frankfurt-am-Main, Germany

First Horse-drawn Tram:	1872
First Electric Tram:	1884
System Length:	67.3 km
No. of Trams:	103
No. of Lines:	12
Traction:	Overhead 600V DC
Gauge:	Standard (Since 1905)



Photographed by author

Photographed by author



Zurich, Switzerland

First Horse-drawn Tram:	1882
First Electric Tram:	1890
System Length:	118.7 km
No. of Trams:	258
No. of Lines:	14
Traction:	Overhead 600V DC
Gauge:	Meter-gauge

Glimpses of some European Tramways



Brussels, Belgium

First Horse-drawn Tram:	1869
First Electric Tram:	1894
System Length:	141.1 km
No. of Trams:	397
No. of Lines:	18
Traction:	Overhead 600V DC
Gauge:	Standard

Photographs and details courtesy:
Mr Asit Baran Das

Amsterdam, Germany

First Horse-drawn Tram:	1875
First Electric Tram:	1900
System Length:	80.5 km
No. of Trams:	200
No. of Lines:	15
Traction:	Overhead 600V DC
Gauge:	Standard

Photographs and details courtesy:
Mr Asit Baran Das



Train To Dhanushkodi

A Track Lost...

- Soumitra Pal

It was early 60s possibly 1963, Puja vacation was drawing near. Father, a legal practitioner in Calcutta High Court, as was his wont before every vacation, scanned the railway map and the time table to chalk out a plan for the annual tour. Mother was consulted. We, my brother and I, were told that we would be heading south; the ultimate destination being Dhanushkodi. We set off according to plan. Madras (now Chennai), Kanyakumari, Madurai, Kodaikanal, Rameswaram were part of the itinerary. We were enjoying every bit of our tour without realizing that an exciting journey – a 23 km meter-gauge rail ride from Mandapam to Dhanushkodi via Pamban, Rameswaram awaited us. Though there must have been other modes of transport, but that would have robbed the thrill of a meter-gauge train ride through a topography, till then unseen. As the passenger train, drawn by a steam engine, left Mandapam station and slowly chugged ahead, it started playing hide and seek with the rocks and the sand dunes. It ran along a very narrow strip of land, an isthmus, with sea on both sides. As the train moved, the land became narrower and the sea waters virtually lapped against the rails till the train reached Pamban Bridge, an engineering marvel,

which would take us across the sea. The train was on the bridge. The boom boom sound reverberated all around to add to the thrill. I ran along the near empty compartment to have a better look from a vantage point. The blue sea – Gulf of Mannar – against the clear autumn sky was dotted with fishing boats. A little later the train entered Pamban station and we had left the bridge behind. After a brief halt, it headed for Rameswaram, the temple town, en-route Dhanushkodi where we reached around noon. Dhanushkodi and Talaimannar in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) stand at two ends of the Palk Strait. In Dhanushkodi, a village, the sea was close by. We had put up near the station. We had our bath and lunch. Father, a master raconteur, told us how Talaimannar, a busy port in Ceylon, barely twenty miles away, could be accessed from the Jetty at Dhanushkodi by steamers, operated regularly by the Southern Railway. The sea was shallow and full of shoals. A partially submerged sandbank – 'Adam's Bridge' – connected the two countries. According to legend, Dhanushkodi was the launch pad of Lord Rama's expedition to Lanka. Locals corroborated that on a clear night the lights of Ceylon could be seen. The

*Pamban Bridge - an engineering marvel
Photographed by Asit Baran Das*





Masonry structures of old Dhanushkodi station

Photo by Subhadyouti Bose

afternoon went well, sea-bathing and building castles in the sand. Much later did we come to know, that in the early part of the twentieth century the erstwhile South India Railway Company (at present Southern Railway), planned to connect Dhanushkodi and Talaimannar by a railway. We returned in the evening but this particular trip, though short, kept us in high spirits.

Several years past since, it was in 1964, we were enjoying our short winter vacation in Midnapore town, near Kharagpur. As usual, we had put up in *Dadu's* (father's uncle's) house in Saheed Pradyut Bhattacharjee Street in Aligunge. With annual examinations over, there was no fixed routine except playing games. However, with the habit of reading newspaper every day, I would at least glance through the headlines. Sports was my area of interest. The newspapers from Calcutta (now Kolkata) arrived late, after mid-day by the Gomoh Passenger – during lunch time. One day while we were table-talking over lunch, the vendor delivered the day's newspaper. The headlines put my father in a state of shock. It was 23rd December. The previous day, i.e., on 22nd December, a severe cyclonic storm had devastated Dhanushkodi. Pamban Bridge, the only link with the mainland, had been virtually wiped off, a six-coach passenger train thrown off the tracks. The railway line from Rameswaram to Dhanushkodi had vanished! There was no sign of the jetty. All communication had been snapped. Thousands had been rendered homeless. We all felt sad at

God's abode....now abandoned

Photo by Subhadyouti Bose



Old Dhanushkodi station complex

Photo by Subhadyouti Bose

the tragedy which befell Dhanushkodi.

Today, though a railway line upto Rameswaram has been re-laid and Pamban road bridge and rail viaduct have been rebuilt, the track to Dhanushkodi is still missing. And with it is missing the charm of a meter gauge rail travel in a splendid surrounding. A track has been lost forever.

Dhanushkodi is now a sleepy hamlet, inhabited by fishermen. They have built huts and depend on fishing to eke out a living. Braving odds, a few intrepid travellers still visit the ruined hamlet at Dhanushkodi. Strategically located, the coast line is guarded by a few paramilitary personnel. The hustle and bustle of travellers of early 60s is gone. It is a forlorn place with the roar of the sea occasionally breaking the silence. There are reports that plans are afoot to build a broad-gauge line from Rameswaram to Dhanushkodi now accessed by road. Result - a glittering railway station and an efficient transport system. The journey would then be fast, but sans the mirth and merriment of the yesteryears.

Relics of a Roman Catholic Church

Photo by Subhadyouti Bose





- Anamitra Bose

What comes to our mind when we hear 2020? The COVID-19 pandemic, lockdown, world-wide crisis, economic breakdown and what not! For Indian Railways also, it was a setback year as regular train operations were halted like never before. But, as clouds have silver linings too, 2020 made the rail enthusiasts & train-spotters of this vast country to witness a blue revolution in the shape of twin-section beasts rumbling down the tracks with various freight duties. Yes, it's the WAG12s we are talking about! The year 2020 ushered in a new era for the freight transportation and also electric traction in Indian Railways. India joined the 'elite' club of nations producing High-Horse Power (HHP) Electric Locomotives indigenously. The feat was achieved by gigantic yet beautiful machine in a blue attire - WAG12Bs are here with **Alstom** showing the way.

The origin and story behind the birth of this loco dates back to 2015 when a new High Horse Power, high speed freight loco was sought for the upcoming Dedicated Freight Corridor Project. Preliminarily, the locos were planned to be imported from Japanese consortium. But due to involvement of very high costs, Ministry of Railways went for a global tender in which giants like Bombardier, Alstom, Siemens participated.

After much deliberation, M/s Alstom of French origin was awarded the contract for supplying 800 electric locomotives based on its global locomotive platform '**Prima 2 T8**'. The Indian version was entirely designed at Alstom India office at Bengaluru and is the first twin-section electric loco for India. Accordingly in 2017, a locomotive manufacturing plant was set up in Bihar's Madhepura to supply all the 800 units in a span of 12 years.

The expected big day came for Indian Railways and Alstom when the first-ever locomotive produced by the ELF, Madhepura was inaugurated on 10th April 2018. The loco class was named as **WAG-12**, numbering **60001** onwards and was expected to be produced serially. Though initially, the locomotive tasted success in its inaugural trial run within the limits of the factory, but soon failures began to creep in with serious issues regarding bogies, coupling between two sections, suspensions, ride quality. Often the loco ended up derailling itself during later trials thereby throwing the future of this loco in disarray. Dark clouds had gathered and speculations had begun as no news of significant development was heard from Madhepura. Interested people, initially enthusiastic about the locomotive, lost hope and



The Alstom Logo...

Photo by Somsubhra Das

thought the ambitious project was all but over. But optimists continued to look for some positive outcome.

After a prolonged delay, atlast the much awaited news came which was not only good but great. Finally, ELF Madhepura rolled out the most powerful locomotive of Indian Railways, the heavy haul specialist Blue Whale of Alstom – all in a new avatar, the **WAG12B**. It satisfactorily passed RDSO trials and was cleared by the Commissioner of Railway Safety (CRS) upto a restricted speed of 100 kmph, which can be upgraded to 120 kmph for high-speed freight consist in near future. In October 2020, RDSO gave a nod for 120 kmph operation of WAG12B making it the fastest ever dedicated freight locomotive of the country. Standing at 4 meter (height) the loco looks like a beast with the proud logo of Alstom to show-off. The newest sensation grabbed the attention from all over the country and media houses made a detailed report on the future of freights. Look wise, the newer WAG-12B was mostly same to its immediate predecessor WAG-12, which was by then christened as WAG12A. But mechanically, it differed to quite an extent. Most importantly, the suffix **B** in WAG12B

The Underframe...

Photo by Somsubhra Das



The goose-neck shaped sole-bar...

Photo by Somsubhra Das

stands for Modified Bogie version of its predecessor.

In stark contrast to the popular belief of a bogie being referred to passenger carriages, bogie of a locomotive or coach/wagon actually refers to the chassis which carries the wheelsets and axle and on which the main locomotive body is mounted. In WAG12A, the sole-bar of the bogie was flat-shaped which was modified to be goose-neck shaped in WAG12B. Sole-bar is the longitudinal beam which runs along the two sides of the carriage supporting the main body of the loco, like in a human body, two knees support the upper part of body and connect them to the legs.

Apart from the bogie, the newer WAG12B version is longer by about 3 metres than its predecessor WAG12A taking the total length to 38.4 metres. Also the traction link has been shifted from below the driving cab to the middle of the locomotive. The WAG12B also has many minor changes in its suspension.

The WAG12B soon after its flag-off and commissioning was put to use in various trunk freight routes of the nation. They

The Underslung Equipments

Photo by Somsubhra Das



were seen hauling heavy BOX, BOBR, BOST type freight loads which are known by their huge motive power requirement, especially when loaded and in graded sections. These operations are smoothly handled by the brain, heart and muscles of the locomotive. By brain, it's meant the control electronics and computer of the locomotive. By heart, it's meant the propulsion and power electronics driving the muscles i.e. the 8 traction motors, 4 in each section of the locomotive. The locomotive is equipped with two high-reach pantographs, one on each section of the locomotive. The pantographs are of type LX3600 from M/s Faiveley Transportation.

The control electronics and computer of the locomotive monitors all the functionalities, diagnoses faults and is based on Train-Control Network (TCN) as approved by International Union for Railways (UIC). The locomotive control system also realises self-diagnoses of systems, and immediately reports any snags or failures to the driver via the console displays. Should a problem be reported, the driver is able to adjust the operating regime to one of the stand-by systems, via the controls on the driving console and maintain the same speed of the train. The automatic eco-driving system makes power and brake applications work perfectly to maintain the desired speed.

The intersection...

Photo by author



The compressor instrument...

Photo by Rudranil Roy Chowdhury

The heart i.e. the propulsion of the heavy-haul locomotive is IGBT-based 3-phase propulsion VVVF drive, ensuring smooth acceleration, high adhesion and energy efficiency. IGBT is a power electronic device used for rectifying, i.e. from AC to DC or inverting i.e. from DC to AC. It is used in the traction converter and auxiliary converter modules of the locomotive for the necessary voltage and frequency requirements for traction as well as other auxiliaries of the locomotive, after drawing the primary voltage of 25KV single-phase AC from the OHE. The traction converters are exclusively for the traction power required by the traction motors, whereas the auxiliary converters feed all the other electrical power demanded by various machineries viz blowers, compressors, cooling units etc. The muscles i.e. the traction motors are asynchronous-nose suspended type, which are best suitable for heavy load hauling. The traction motors, as a whole produce a stupendous 12,069 horsepower or 9KW of motive power. The heavy weighed locomotive produces a tractive effort of about 705 KN in the tracks whilst starting. Tractive effort refers to the net force a locomotive applies to the

A closer look...

Photo by author





Control Electronic Switches

Photo by author

ground or tracks to start with load from zero speed.

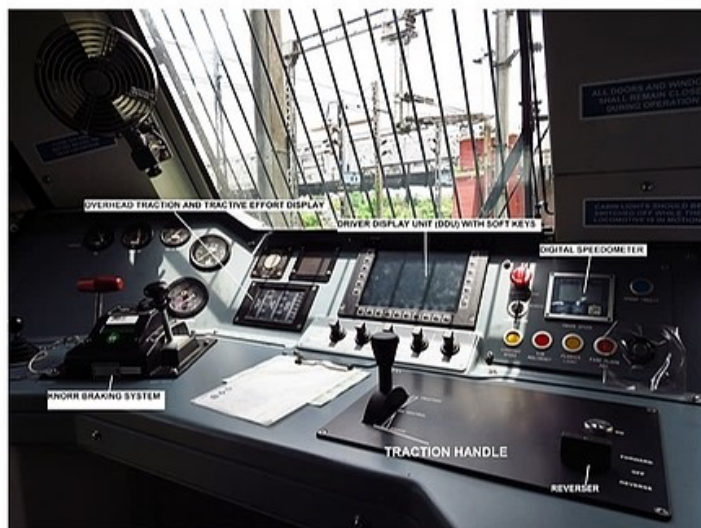
In braking too, these blue monsters have brought a new dawn in world of electric locomotives in India. It uses a unique feature – 'Brake Blinding'. This refers to a technology where the regenerative braking, when found insufficient, blends the pneumatic brake as well to apply the full force of braking. Regenerative braking refers to the electronic brake systems, which also helps in generating electricity and sends it back to the overhead wires with the traction motors now acting as generators. Pneumatic brake is the traditional air braking system present in the locomotives. It has a maximum braking effort of 563 KN.

Two WAG12Bs can be used as multiple units at once, also through radio controls from a single cab of the master locomotive, other being the slave and responding to the control instructions.

Coming to cab, the locomotive possesses an extremely spacious, fully air-conditioned, crew-friendly cab. As of

Driver's cabin

Photo by Rudranil Roy Chowdhury



Driving Panel

Photo by author

freight locos, the crew are bound to work much more hours than passenger trains, the comfortable cab surely gives better working conditions for the on-board crew. This loco variant also has a long-pending demand of a 'crew toilet' in the locomotive itself. For smooth operation and redundancy, all of the internal switches and key are replicated on the Driver-Display Unit (DDU). These are known as soft key and act as a great relief to the crew. It also helps in troubleshooting the locomotive without much hassle. The locomotive also features automatic eco-driving system, minimizing human errors. The two sections are connected through a spacious vestibule gangway for ease of access.

For ventilation, the locomotive has an automatic flap system apart from conventional blowers ensuring uniform ventilation. A Dehumidifier is also provided in machine room to ensure only dry air is used for cooling and ventilation systems. In WAG12B, there are no electrical equipments on roof of the locomotive apart from the pantograph, in sharp contrast to the earlier locomotives' design presently

Dehumidifier machine

Photo by Rudranil Roy Chowdhury



operational in Indian Railways.

Prior to WAG12, the most modern freight locomotive active in India is WAG9 and its variants, which were originally imported from Adrantz, Switzerland in the late nineties. They were upgraded in various technical aspects to best suit the Indian conditions and heavy load demands. The latest WAG9 variants also has IGBT-based three phase propulsion, air-conditioned cab, GPS fitted, higher Tractive Effort etc. In April 2019, CLW rolled out a more high-horsepower version of WAG9, christened as WAG9HH. This version yielded a humongous 9000 HP from a single unit. Now, the question arises, if MUing of two WAG9HH yields 18,000 HP, why WAG12B is at all needed. The answer lies in the principle of operation of DFC: high-speed freight operation. WAG9, due to heavier weight, Co-Co wheel configuration is limited to maximum of 100 kmph. But WAG12B, in spite of its immense weight and high tractive effort, can seamlessly haul high-speed freights at 120 kmph! So, we can say that the usefulness and utility of WAG12B can be fully achieved once the DFC is operational. Moreover, twin-section single locomotive operation tends to give much less stress on the coupling links than the multiple unit operation.

With WAG12B, Indian Railways has registered itself with a different league of locomotives altogether. Earlier, IR believed

in a single locomotive power and when needed, multiple units of the same locomotive class hauled the heavy freight loads. But with the arrival of WAG12B, disadvantages like too much stress on the coupler, energy inefficiency and struggle for achieving high-speed for fast movement of cargo are history now. With Need for Speed in freight operations as well, WAG12B is the answer to High Speed Freight Corridors of the DFCs. Its capacity to haul freights at 120 kmph is indeed a huge leap forward towards the fast and more efficient freight networks. WAG12B is fastest ever freight locomotive of the nation.

With WAG12Bs being churned out in a fast and steady pace out of ELF Madhepura, it is expected to haul the chunk of heavy freight loads including high speed freight consists soon in various nooks of the country. The WAG12B brought a new age of thought process, motive power planning and concept in the Indian Railways. Although being derived from an international platform from the house of Alstom, WAG12B is more Indian now with the modifications it underwent. The monsters of French roots are proving their worth and excellence in extreme conditions of the sub-continent and is expected to achieve new heights in future altogether.

Cover photo courtesy: Arkapal Sarkar

This photograph taken by author won accolades from Alstom India & got rewarded accordingly during an online photo contest organised by Alstom on World Photography Day 2020. This photo ranked in the Top Five among the entries from all over India.

Congratulations from Rail Canvaz Team !!!





Romancing the himalayas

A Journey Par Excellence Through The Kangra Valley

- Somsubhra Das

Mountain railways have always been fascinating and never have failed to catch the imagination of the tourists over ages. Our country is blessed with many such wonders like the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway (DHR), the Kalka-Shimla Railway (KSR), the Nilgiri Mountain Railway (NMR) and the Matheran Light Railway (MLR). The Kangra Valley Railway (KVR) has long been a hidden treasure as it has been undermined and overshadowed by its more celebrated UNESCO World Heritage certified counterparts in the form of the DHR, KSR and the NMR. Even the MLR draws much attention and fanfare due to its proximity to the commercial capital of the nation. But this lack of recognition has never ever got the better of the expectations KVR brings with it – trotting through the thickets of sub-tropical forests, crossing deep gorges and rivers through high bridges and viaducts, passing through the green pastures with grazing cattle – and all these witnessed by the snow-laden Dhauladars which completes the circle. This railway journey truly presents some breath-taking sights seldom found on any other mountain or hill railway rides of the country.

Travelling on the smaller gauges have always been in my bucket list and the KVR is no exception. This time around,

my fellow friend, Subhadyouti Bose had joined me and we started off to quench our thirst. Himachal Pradesh is the home of two mountain railways – the KSR and the KVR. Though KVR kicks off from Pathankot in Punjab but lion's share of the alignment lies in Himachal Pradesh. Our journey started ex Delhi; we boarded the Shalimar Express to reach Pathankot Cantt (Chakki Bank) early morning next day. A deluge of unseasonal rains greeted us and we were forced to wait until it relented a bit. While cooling heels we saw the Jammu bound Rajdhani drop by after the Uttar Sampark Kranti. A pair of Kazipet Alcos then screamed past with some freight duty, clearly throwing caution to the air. Meanwhile the downpour had taken a break and we utilised the opportunity to get transferred to Pathankot by an auto-rickshaw. A 10 minutes ride enabled us to reach Pathankot – a forlorn station marked with a sense of abandonment. Maiden morning lights had begun to take effects as we made tickets for the journey ahead. The sight of the platform signage yelling “KANGRA VALLEY TRAINS” caught our attention.

It was only 5.00 am and time was on our side for a visit to the Narrow-gauge DLS. While advancing towards the DLS



NG platform @ Pathankot

Photo by author

surpassing the NG Coach Care Centre, the path was floundered with wreckage of condemned locos. Those CLW manufactured ZDMs with date of condemnation marked on them was a dreadful sight – death knell had already fallen on them and they were all set to be scrapped as they had completed their codal lives.

Moving past the dead locos, we got to the DLS at last. Some shed officials and workers were enjoying the early morning tea and to my utter surprise they turned out to be more than friendly! They were kind enough to offer us tea and pampered us while keeping our request to have a stroll inside the DLS.

Interacting with the staffers, we chanced upon the prize catch - Steam Locomotive ZB-66. It was this locomotive hailing from the 1950s, which served as a charter service in 2018 for a group of British tourists from Palampur to Baijnath Paprola. As history would have it, steam clattered the Kangra Valley tracks after two decades. The sight of this little gem was enough to make our day.

Relics...

Photo by author



Warrior of bygone era 'ZB-66' steam loco

Photo by author

The DLS was abuzz with a gamut of ZDM4s with varying liveries – some working while some being overhauled – all lined up inside the shed speaking volumes about the bygone golden era of NG. As we got lost amidst those cute machines, a ZDM4A # 233, the loco that was set to haul our train began to proceed towards the platform, reminding us that we must scamper our way back to catch the 6 am service.

The train with eight boxy blue and yellow carriages started off with a sound patronage. Locals thronged the train beyond full capacity. The LP and ALP on duty were pleasant personalities who were utterly surprised to discover that we had come across a good 1900 km. from Kolkata to take a ride on this train. Conversing on, we requested them for a foot plating experience. Being impressed with our obsession, they promised to make us realise our dream from Jwalamukhi Road.

Soon the train left the hustle and bustle of the city and the foothills slowly began to envelope us &, by the time we reached Dalhousie Road, they became omnipresent.

Dalhousie Road

Photo by author





Nurpur Road

Photo by author

Semaphores guided our way into Kandwal ensuring our smooth transition from Punjab to Himachal Pradesh after crossing the Chakki river which acts as the natural boundary of demarcation between the two states. Gliding on, we reached the eye-candy Nurpur Road set amidst a plethora of eucalyptus and other deciduous trees with layers of mountains completing the smoky background. Meanwhile, the moment for experiencing the first crossing with a Pathankot bound train had arrived at Talara.

Moving ahead, came Balle da pir larath. The ticket counter here deserves a special mention which is actually a hut with conical roof covered with tiles – reflection of a unique feature of the rural Himachal. As the train trudged into Jawanwala Shahr, our wait for the second crossing began. One of our co-passengers spilled the fact that Jawanwala Shahr actually happens to be the ancient name and the town is better known as Jawāli. Soon the down train emerged from the sylvan surroundings with people sticking out like bees from a hive!

Crossing at Jawanwala Shahr

Photo by author



Bridging the gap...

Photo by author

The KVR has been a story of magnificent bridges, infact there are as many as 970 of them in a route of 164 km. The girder bridge over the Beas tributary often called Banganga, the Dehar bridge over Dehar Kund and New Ganj bridge over Ganj Kund are the significant ones. The 11-span New Ganj bridge is a site to savour. But the real engineering marvel is the Reond steel arch bridge over Baner Khad between Lunzu Halt and Tripal.

Flipping through the picturesque Nagrota Suriyan, a charming Guler among other stations, our train made it to Jwalamukhi Road. The famous Jwala Devi temple built by Raja Bhumi Chand Katoch of Kangra is just 20 km adrift of the station. The station itself is set on a curve which makes it a captivating one. Here we met with the third crossing of our journey. Huge passenger deboard from both trains ensured that the station was bubbling with life and with this the rush of passengers in our train had also vanished. As earlier promised by the LP for a cab ride, he invited us to join them. This set us at the pinnacle of excitement.

Crossing at Jwalamukhi Road

Photo by author





*Through the pine forest..
Photo by author*



*The girder bridge over Banganga River...
Photo by author*



Heading for the snow...

Photo by author

As the semaphore nudged down, we started off and suddenly the snow-clad Dhauladhars gave a sneak peek indicating what was in store for us. My joy knew no bounds as I was looking for the Dhauladhars through every nooks and corners of the sky, like a child craving for toys. A vista of happiness and solace enamoured us as we reached Kangra – a station laced with greenery with the milky Dhauladhars for company !!!! My friend and myself were just awestruck with the sight of a wall of snow floating amidst the blue sky. Perhaps the Almighty had left no stones unturned to adorn Kangra.... seemed like we had been transported into a surreal world with sights and sounds to savour for lifetime.... Rolling along the mountain streams with the alluring Himalayas, we reached Kangra Mandir, another station set with the white mountains in the backdrop. The famous Kangra temple and Fort lie in the vicinity of the station.

Kangra station

Photo by author



The illusion of an unswerving alignment entwined with the floras heading straight into the white wall was deceiving us. The Himalayas continued to amaze us as the jungle trail



Ravishing view from Kangra

Photo by author

along the hilly terrain was never short of enthralling us. Soon, the penultimate and the 4th crossing of the day was done as our train chugged into an idyllic Nagrota. Then came Chamunda Marg from where the iconic Chamunda Devi Temple is not far away. Drifting through a couple of stations, we pulled into the spectacular Palampur Himachal. One could only watch and admire the beauty of the Tea Capital of North India. Palampur also boasts of Tashi Jong – a Tibetan village about 14 km away which also happens to be the first smoke-free village. The Khampnagar monastery is also located in this village. Meanwhile, we got off the cab and headed back to compartment for the final leg of the journey. No round of thanks towards the LP and ALP was adequate for the unconditional favour extended towards us for living our dream!

As time passed the glistening icy white Dhauladhars slowly begun to elude us. By the time we reached Baijnath Paprola, clouds had taken crescendo by engulfing the higher ranges. Still Baijnath looked like a dream destination with the endearing foothills around.

Palampur Himachal station

Photo by author





Bajinath Paprola

Photo by author

De-boarding, we checked into the Retiring Room. Seldom any Retiring Room and Station building, looked so beautiful and serene, with gleaming green tops matching every bit of the ambience. Our sojourn had ended for the day. After freshening up, we walked along the tracks to reach Bridge no. 821 on Binuwa Khud, only a kilometre away, to get soaked in the aura and milieu of the place. After nearly an hour, it was again music to our ears....a ZDM4A powered Jogindernagar bound train approaching the bridge. And that was the exact spectacle we were longing to frame. As dusk fell, we strolled our way back to Bajinath station. We decided taking a small detour through the miniscule DLS which was found hosting about half a dozen of ZDMs.

Interaction with some locals revealed that the 13th century Bajinath temple was in the proximity. As legends would have it, this Nagara style temple finds mention in the Indian mythology as well. Meanwhile the aroma of varying street foods whetted our appetite. Some roadside yet delectable, hot steamed momos fulfilled our gastronomic desires as we ended the day with the dying roar of the little monsters.

Bridge no. 821

Photo by author



The break of a new day was marked with the cranking up of a ZDM4A for the maiden 4 am service to Pathankot – a perfect alarm for a ferroequinologist. While stepping out of the room after an hour, a solitude invoked by the layers of sleepy mountains shrouded in fog along with dew-wet grass made its prominent presence felt. Off we went to board a bus for Jogindernagar. The half an hour ride was equally ecstatic in the lap of the high mountains with fresh, cool breeze adding to the vibes. Paucity of early morning train service from Bajinath to Jogindernagar had compelled us to take to the road for availing the 7.05 am train from Jogindernagar to Bajinath for covering the left-out part of KVR.

Stepping into the Jogindernagar station was like setting your foot in a different world. Sunbeams penetrating through the thick foliage with unknown flowers blooming here and there summed up the mood and set the tone for the rest of the day with the misty Dhauladhars whispering “good morning” to us. A quaint Jogindernagar station is every traveller’s dream. Soon it came to the fore that the line did not terminate at Jogindernagar itself. In fact, the Station Master informed us that it went further up to Shanan powerhouse or the Uhl hydroelectric project for another 2.5 kms. I decided to trek a few 600 metres uphill along the line only to discover that luxurious undergrowth had nearly sent the line into oblivion implying its non-usage for years.

Jogindernagar station

Photo by author



The 7.05 am train left Jogindernagar bang on time with the iconic Chhatrapati (ZDM4A #198) as the power. After a 6.6 km run, came Chauntra Bhatrh – a station with nearly no platform among the towering trees. Trundling past orange groves, emerald-green tea gardens and fertile valley flanked by the Dhauladhars, we reached Ahju. It is the station located at an elevation of 1290 MSL (4,230 ft) – highest in the entire route. Some school students had flocked to board the train to get to their schools. A sky filled with pastel shades welcomed our train at a lush green Bajinath Mandir station. Two kilometres hence, we moved to our next halt – Bajinath Paprola. A 40-minute scheduled halt has been prescribed



*The Daulatpur Tunnel
Photo by Subhdyouti Bose*



*The Dhandi Tunnel
Photo by Subhdyouti Bose*

here as our puny 4-coach load train from Jogindernagar was about to get augmented with another 4 coaches. Steep gradient in the form of 1:25 in the Baijnath-Jogindernagar stretch has a definite role to play behind this arrangement.

As our downhill journey for Pathankot began with a red liveried ZDM4A # 223 in the lead, the nostalgia of travelling through tunnels evoked a sense of déjà vu. The two tunnels enroute— the 1070 ft. long Daulatpur tunnel between Kangra and Kopar Lahar and the 250 ft. long Dhundni tunnel between Kopar Lahar and Jawalamukhi Road were enough for the young and old to scream and whistle their way, every time the train plunged into the darkness of the tunnels.

The four scheduled crossings surprisingly did not bother our scheduled arrival at destination. Once again, the train enjoyed full patronage as vendors also made merry with tea, coffee and other snacks which kept us going. The transition of the landscape from sub-tropical to alpine was astonishing to say the least.

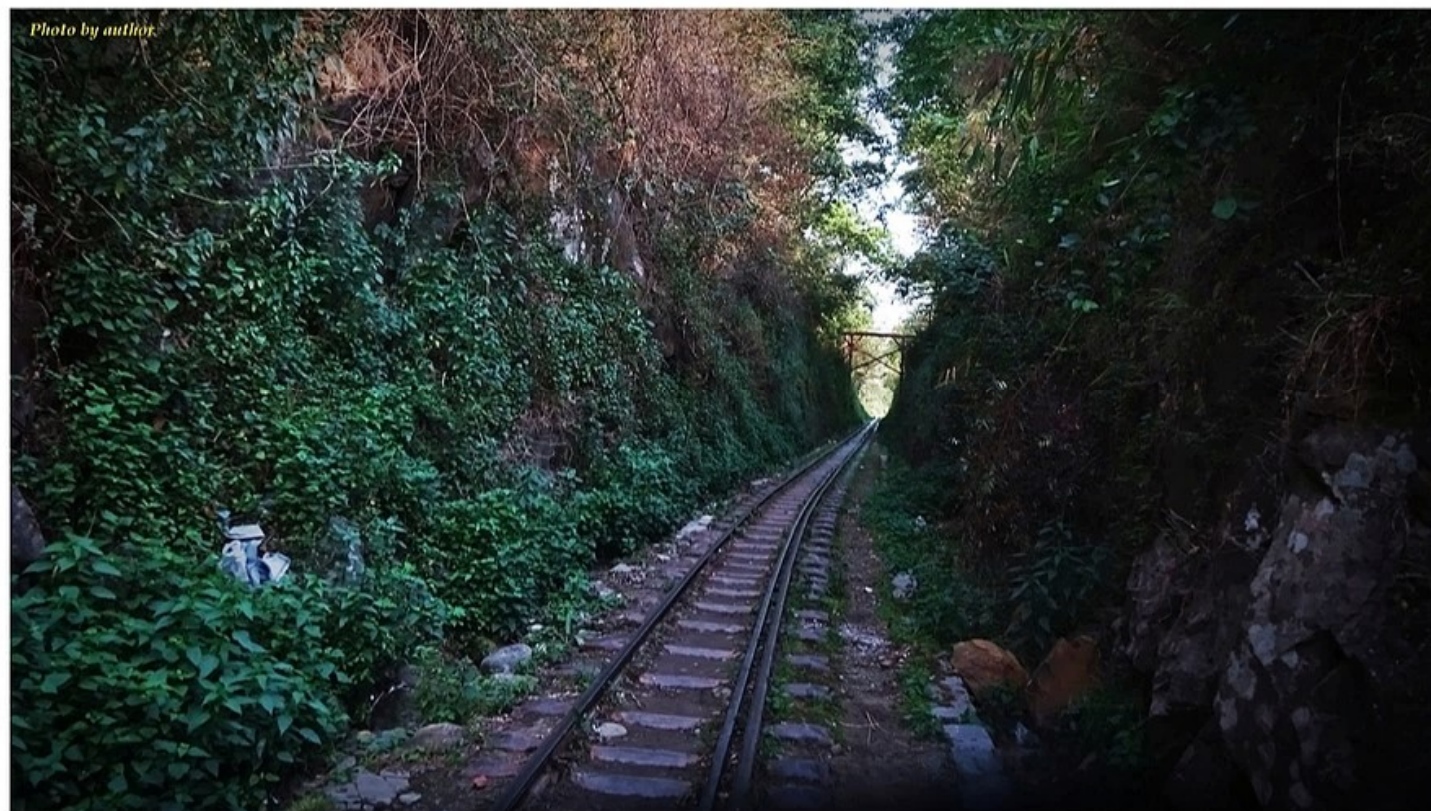
After reaching Pathankot, while reminiscing those ravishing spectacles of the sensuous mountains, we realised that how those glorious moments were a real fillip to our minds. We helped ourselves to Pathankot Cantt. for boarding the Jammu Tawi-Kolkata Express for home with some wonderful memories that will always remain etched in our soul.

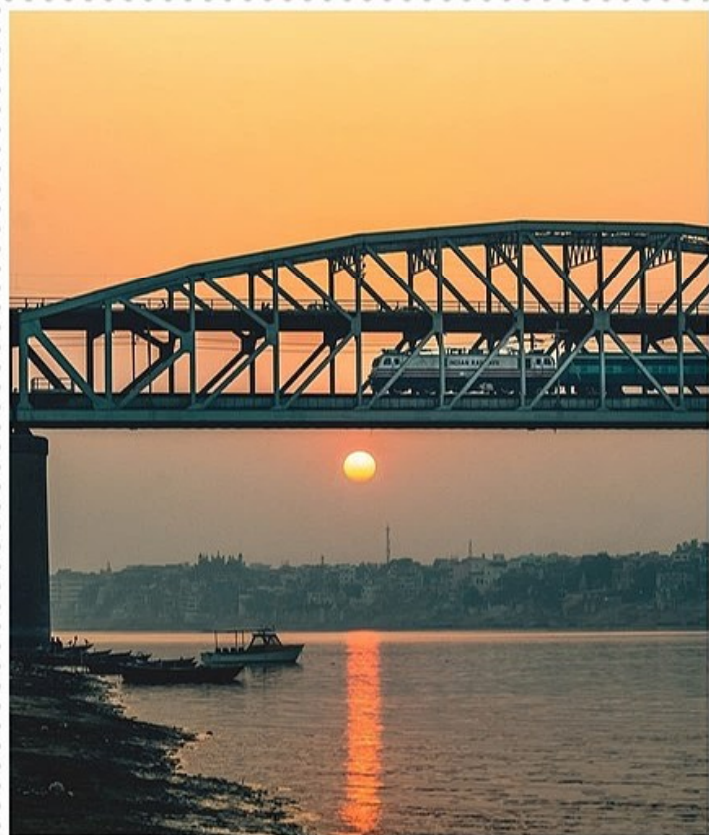
This 9-decade old 2'6" railway has not only stood the test of time but also has had its fair share of history and antiquity. The principal factor behind fabrication of the Kangra Valley Railway was meant for its utilization for conduit of heavy

equipment for construction of the Uhl hydroelectric project. This route was initially planned in 1926 only to be fully commissioned in 1929. The Pathankot-Nagrota section was opened for traffic on 01.12.1928 while the Nagrota-Jogindernagar section became operational from 01.04.1929. The KVR has an assignation with the Second World War as well. Services in the Nagrota-Jogindernagar section remained closed during the war from 1942, only to be resumed on 15.04.1954. The KVR also has a tryst with the Indus Waters Treaty of 1960 signed between India and Pakistan which led to the construction of the Pong Dam on the Beas river near Talara station. The Maharana Pratap Sagar or the Pong Reservoir which came into being during contriving of the Pong Dam forced realignment of the tracks between Jawanwala Shahr and Guler due to submergence. Stations like Mangwal, Jagatpur and Anur which once featured in the original route had to be ultimately abandoned in 1973 with opening of the newly laid (existing) route in 1976 with the present set of stations.

The KVR journey bears no reminiscence with any other hill railways of the nation – it was a journey across history, time, pilgrimage, spiritualism and passion intermingled and blended with the exiled world of Tibet, eternalized by the locals whose have kept their culture and quintessence intact, deep in their heart. Every part of the journey unravelled a different charm, unfolded a new story. Enraptured by the pristine beauty of the Himalayas and smitten by the innocence of the natives, we left with the vow to come back here to get enchanted and mesmerized again.

Cover photograph taken by author





A new white stallion from Howrah shed 35009 Howrah (HWH) WAP5 appeared with 00468 Amritsar-Howrah Parcel Express towards its next stop Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyay Junction. - Saurabh Kumar



The Legacy of Quilon Mail! The train which earned its alias "Ruler of the Western Ghats" still moves forward continuing to uphold its legacy from the Metre Gauge days. In picture, Quilon mail over the famous 13 arch viaduct near Thenmala. - Mohammed Ali



A mother and a child, wait and watch, as the Kanchenjunga Express to Guwahati blasts past Prantik. - Abhijnan Ray



ERS WDM3A with 12283/ERS - NZM Duronto Express crossing Sharavati River near Honnavara. - Sumanth Bhat



Beauties from Kangra Valley in the backdrop of the magnificent Dhauladhar range.

- Midhun Shankar



Still surviving from the mad rush of electrification

- Mahel Jacob



An absolute stunner ! Ernakulam (ERS) WDP 4D # 40103 (ex-GOC, repainted in custom home shed livery during overhaul) enroute its upcoming halt of Vasai Road with 02284 Hazrat Nizamuddin - Ernakulam Duronto Special running 15 minutes ahead of schedule.

- Sourav Dutta



Tughlakabad WAG9HC 32191 approaches Rairakhol, at the foothills of Eastern Ghats hauling 22839 ROU-BBS Intercity express!

- Anwesh Anshuman



The afternoon train from the Indo Nepal border to the town of Bahraich cruises through the resplendent mustard fields.

- Protkarsh Kumar



Connecting the City of Nizams to the City of Kakatiyas. Hyderabad-Warangal Pushpull passenger.

- Rabiratan Samanta



On a beautiful forenoon, Erode WAP-4 powered Alappuzha-Dhanbad express crosses Ettimadai with the mighty Western Ghats in the background....

- K Gautham Karthik



Air Conditioned Local! Kurla Carshed Empty Rake 7051-54 ICF BHEL AC EMU passing through Parsik Hill, Belapur.

- Bittu Maity

Photo Junction



Basking in the Sun!!! Twin WDP-3A class locomotives sprinting the lengths of Sharavathi bridge as they head towards Mumbai.

- Mohammed Ali



Chugging hard over the river Narmada.

- Midhun Shankar



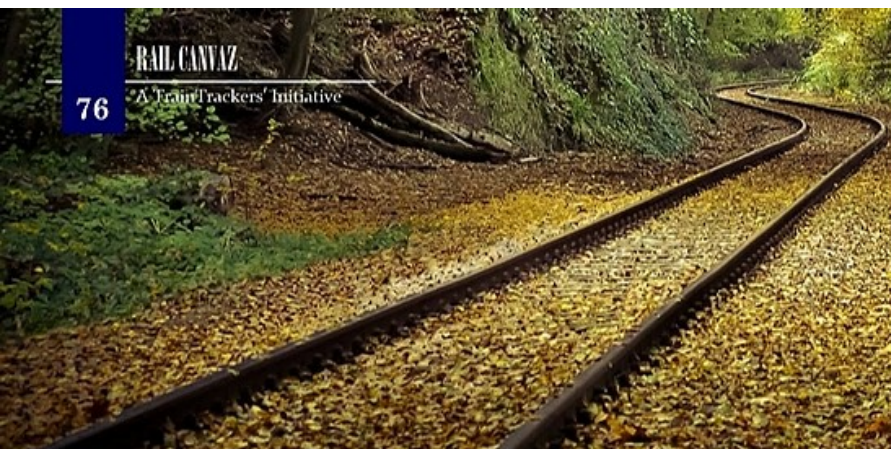
Offlink Bhilai HOG WAP7 37107 curves out of Mahanadi bridge with 12820 ANVT-BBS Odisha Sampark Kranti Express !

- Anwesh Anshuman



SGUJ EMD WDP4D hauling newly LHBfied Capital Express from Kamakhya Junction to Rajendra Nagar Terminus, approaching Siliguri Junction in the backdrop the great Himalayas.

- Ayan Dutta



Kolkata's iconic Tram ties an 'eco-friendly' knot with Jute



After the infamous torching incident of a tramcar (numbered 568) near Charu Market during the 1960s by Left activists opposing fare hike left it damaged, officials from the Nonapukur Central Workshop revived the same after a period of almost four decades. Tramcar number 568 was earlier named as 'Bonolota', and now called as 'Paat Rani'. The name translates to 'Jute Queen' in English, and is dedicated to promote the use of eco-friendly jute. The tramcar is also decorated with a plethora of jute products.

Kolkata Gets World's First Library Tram & Kids Library Tram



A first-of-its-kind 'Library Tram' was inaugurated in the City of Joy on 24th of September, this year. The air-conditioned single-coach tram plies on the Shyambazar-Esplanade, which passes through the famous Boi-para (College Street) and many other renowned educational institutions like the Presidency and Calcutta Universities. Another tramcar, featuring a library but this time solely for the Junior Citizens of the city, was rolled out on the National Children's Day, 14th November 2020. This one also operates on the same route mentioned earlier.

Gallery on Wheels !!! Kolkata Gets World's First Art Gallery Tram



The West Bengal Transport Corporation (WBTC) introduced an art gallery on trams for the first time in India. It has been modified by the Nonapukur Central Workshop on a Burn Standard (numbered 258) tramcar. The exterior has been aesthetically adorned with various artworks and graphics. The interior has been designed for convenient display of paintings and easels. An artist can book the tram for exhibition and public display, where everyone can enter. On non-exhibition days, it will display old archive photos of tram heritage of the city.

Kolkata's North-South Metro Extended Upto Dakshineswar



The North-South Metro of Kolkata got its final extension upto the Northern tip of Kolkata, i.e., Dakshineswar from Noapara, adding another 4.14 kilometers to the already existing stretch. On 24th December morning, the MR-412 Medha rake undertook trials upto Dakshineswar. The route has 2 new stations: Baranagar Road and Dakshineswar. It is equipped with Train Protection and Warning System (TPWS) signaling system of Siemens, same as the existing technology. The import process from Germany delayed the project by a few months. After extensive trials, the Commissioner of Railway Safety (CRS) will inspect the section and upon clearance by CRS, it will be opened for public use.

Indo-Bangla Chilahati-Haldibari Rail Link Revived After 55 Years



PC: Somoy News

The Haldibari-Chilahati railway link was jointly inaugurated by the Honourable PMs of India and Bangladesh, increasing the cross-border links to five. The British-era link was operational until 1965, which got cut off due to the Indo-Pak war. The Indian Railways constructed the 3.5 kilometer link upto the international border, whereas Bangladesh Railways constructed the remaining link on their side to link with the Chilahati-Parbatipur-Santahar BG line. Both authorities expect significant increase in freight traffic, and also passenger trains in future.

End of Days for Smaller Gauges As Western Railway Decides to Shut Them Down

Including Century Old Bilimora-Waghai Heritage Route



The Western Railway decided to shut down services permanently on eleven smaller gauge sections, including the 107-year old Bilimora-Waghai section. Started by the rulers of the princely state of Baroda, it served a 63 kilometer long stretch and was used extensively by the local tribals and labourers, who would presumably be the worst affected. The decision is in contrast to the Railway Board's decision of preserving some of these lines as heritage sites.

Kolkata gets 'Tram World'

Sanjoy Mookerjee



22nd December, 2020 was indeed a red-letter day for the tram-lovers of Kolkata. On this day, the city, which ran the first electric tramcars in Asia in the year 1902, got the gift of an exclusive arena aptly named *TRAM WORLD KOLKATA* - a repository of priceless equipments and heritage tramcars which once upon a time were considered the kings of Kolkata's roads, at the Gariahat Tram depot, to commemorate 140 years of the registration of CTC in London on the same day in 1880. The oldest vehicle displayed at *TRAM WORLD* is of 95 years' vintage, the Tram-Truck FW 2, built in 1925, which was utilised to carry and lay tram-lines. A number of heritage passenger tramcars manufactured from 1938 to 1980 find place in the arena, side by side. The interior décor of the carriages has been kept unchanged. The older generation of trams have wooden seats and wooden skid-proof ribs on the floors. The newer versions, manufactured during the 1970s and 80s are however fitted with fibre seats and steel flooring. Most interesting are the original ceiling fans which were provided

in the First-Class carriages in the good old days along with the frosted glass lamps, a unique tram legacy. Photographs of Trams from across the world embellish the inner walls.

In the words of the MD, "This is going to be a place where you can have a long affair with the Trams, unrestricted by journey time."

Every event has its share of frolic. Seeing the colourful Tramcars parked proudly side by side, someone jovially named them the "Tutty-Frutty Tramcars". Another promptly remarked, "Of course! After all, they do have a colourful history." This shows that the concept called *TRAM WORLD* is already catching the imagination of the Tram-Lovers of the City of Joy.

Yet some heritage enthusiasts do crave for placing the original CTC logo and painting the outside of the preserved tramcars with the celebrated livery for which they were well-known across the world. But there's time yet to make these restorations and make *TRAM WORLD* more appealing in every sense.

RAIL CANVAZ

A TrainTrackers' Initiative

30th May 2021



Darjeeling Himalayan Railway

Across the world, hill railways have always evoked a sense of romance as well as an aura of thrill and some mystery. Come and journey along with us as we take you from the hot plains of Siliguri to the cool climes of Darjeeling on the World Heritage railway route called the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway.

Make sure to read this in our next issue.....