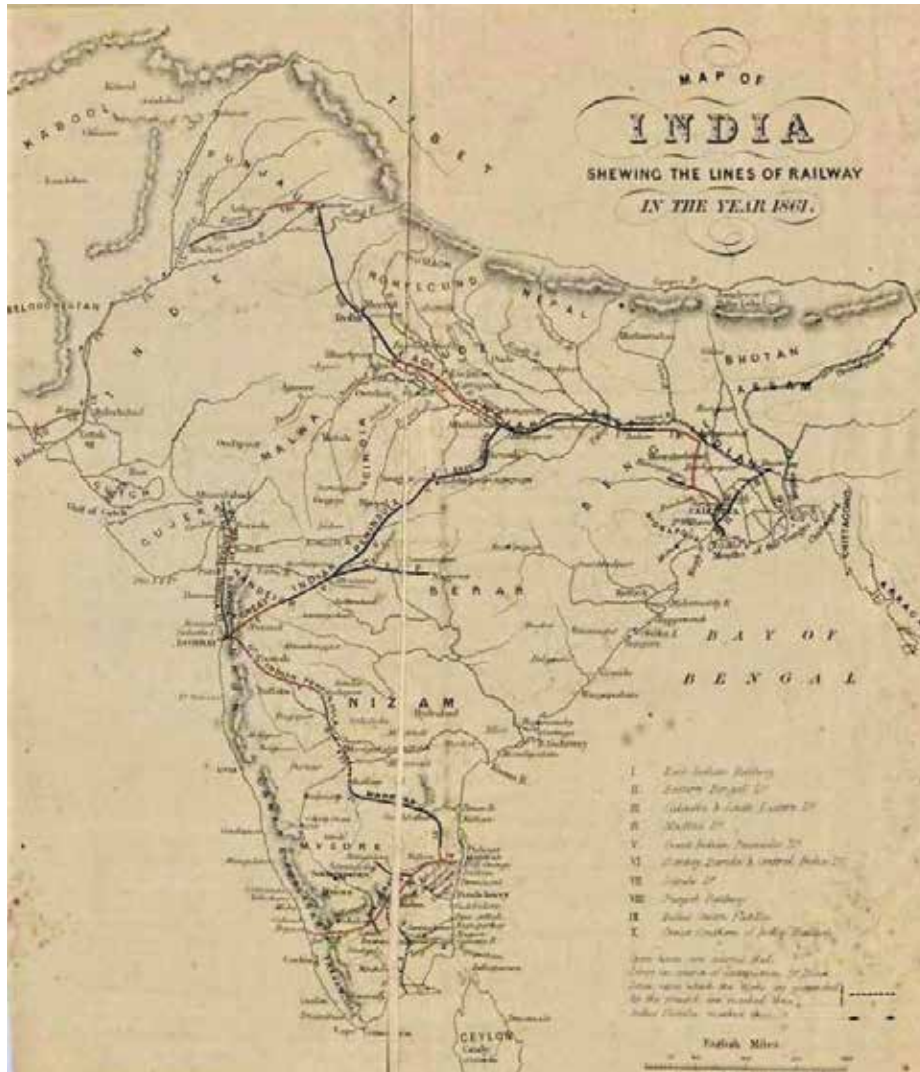


INDIAN
RAILWAY BUILDINGS



Map of the Railways as conceptualised and constructed (shown in red) in 1861. Many of the routes initially planned were built on different alignments

Map: Administration Report on the Railways in India for 1860-61

INDIAN
RAILWAY BUILDINGS
HERITAGE, HISTORY AND BEYOND

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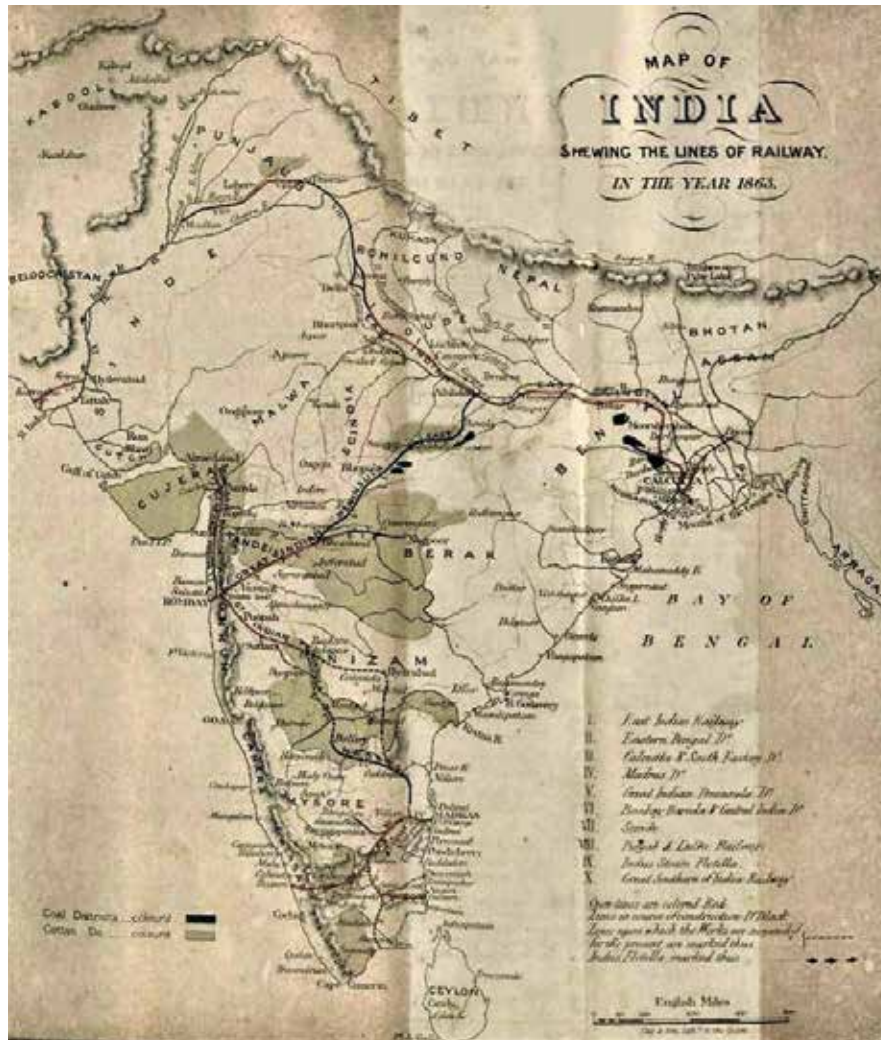
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Railway Map of 1863 showing planned (black) and constructed (red) lines. The Railways were constructed for commercial and strategic reasons. An important objective was to facilitate the export of cotton to Britain. The main cotton growing areas are shown in grey

Map: Administration Report on the Railways in India for 1862-63

Introduction

I have had the rare privilege of being associated with the Indian Railways for half-a-century and have directly served it for 37 years. During this long association, apart from professional responsibilities, I have found interest in various facets of the Railway. One such is the rich heritage of the Indian Railways, spanning over almost 170 years. Since childhood, I have had a casual interest in arts and architecture. Later, as a student of history, I got interested in the evolution of India's monumental architecture and never missed an opportunity to visit old forts, temples, churches and monuments.

In 2004, while serving as Secretary, Railway Board, one of my responsibilities was conserving 'heritage' on the Railways. To my surprise, one morning I was requested to lead a delegation to a meeting of the UNESCO World Heritage Centre in China, where they would decide on

which proposals received from all over the world should be included in the World Heritage List. There were three proposals from India, including one for the Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus station and administrative building complex, Mumbai (formerly known as Bombay Victoria Terminus). Fortunately, two of the three proposals were accepted and inscribed in the World Heritage List, including the magnificent station and office complex in Mumbai. The week-long visit was an eye-opener. First, the finer nuances of getting a site included in the list, which requires a considerable amount of effort in terms of drafting the proposal, getting expert appraisal and convincing member states who vote, of the merit of the application. Second, was the experience of learning and appreciating the finer aspects of Mumbai's Victorian gothic revival architecture and our own proposal.

Indian Railway Buildings

As a routine, most of us walk in and out or occupy offices in some of these fine heritage buildings without really appreciating their beauty or outstanding architectural features.

The Railways in India now has the rare distinction of being the custodian of two Cultural UNESCO World Heritage Sites out of a total of about 33 Cultural World Heritage Sites in the country. The other site is the 'Mountain Railways of India', which includes the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway, the Nilgiri Mountain Railway and the Kalka Shimla Railway. Western Railway offices in Mumbai are now part of a third site. It was after the China visit that I started taking a closer look at the rich built-heritage of the Railways. No other railway building is in the same class as Victoria Terminus, however, there are a large number of very fine buildings, big and small. They are the General Offices of the former state and private-run railway companies, station buildings in metropolitan cities and provincial towns, offices and stations of princely state railways, railway training establishments, townships, bungalows, clubs, churches and institutes. After the events of 1857, the rule of the East India Company came to an end and the country was placed under the direct rule of the crown. The event coincided with early rail development in India. At the time, a conscious effort was made by the British to build monumental buildings with

a view to impress the local population and replace the country's rich architectural inheritance left by the earlier rulers of the country in terms of fortresses, temples, mosques and palaces, with new symbols of authority. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, a number of monumental Raj buildings were constructed, in the form of High Courts, Secretariats, university buildings, hospitals and palatial residences. This was also a time when a number of trained British architects came to India. Whereas in earlier years, military or Public Works Department engineers played a key role in designing and constructing railway buildings, they were progressively replaced by professional architects in larger projects. Young architects engaged by the Railways, in later years, became architects of national repute carrying out many commissions outside the Railway.

The Railway's built-heritage includes buildings and structures such as bridges, viaducts, tunnels, locomotive sheds, workshops and manufacturing units. The bridging of India's mighty rivers was a major challenge and the achievement of the Railway pioneers, as were the Railway workshops and manufacturing units, which were the country's first industrial units. The focus of this book is, however, only on Railway buildings built during the period from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries. The motivation for the book is threefold. First, to try and

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Railway Map of India published in the *Imperial Gazetteer of India Atlas* Volume XXVI, 1909, on which some locations covered in the book are circled in red

Indian Railway Buildings

capture an aspect of the Railways of the Raj, which is least talked or written about, though it merits attention and narrating its story, for the benefit of future generations. Second, at the time they were built, and even today, many Railway buildings were and still are landmark structures in several of our cities. To highlight the point, it is worth mentioning that, between about 1890 and the beginning of the First World War, picture postcards were a popular means of communication. Several million of them were printed in Britain and Germany. A large number of these postcards depicted the Railways of India and many illustrated Railway buildings. The railway station was, obviously, a prominent and picturesque structure in the country, which caught the imagination of the people.

Finally, and more significantly, is the relationship between the average citizen, rich and poor, with the railway station. You only have to visualise the millions of footfalls that our bigger stations receive. Add to this, the fact that many of our present stations, such as Chennai Central, Delhi Junction, Howrah, Mumbai CSTM and so many more, have served five or six generations already. Stations have been meeting places; eating places as well as places to welcome or bid farewell to family and friends; where national leaders delivered speeches; from where soldiers went to war; where refuge was given to displaced populations, which witnessed horrific violence

and barbarism during Partition; from where young men launched themselves into new careers and where older men came home at retirement. The station has been a happening place in our lives and needs to be celebrated. Though our average station may not be comparable, architecturally, to the many fine stations in Britain, Europe or the United States, each one has a unique character and has created a lasting set of memories associated with it for the rail traveller.

Initially, I had proposed to publish a coffee table book with vintage photographs of what the buildings looked like in the period they were built. Later, I decided to include text and write briefly about each building, placing it in the historical context of rail development at the time and also highlight its architectural features. The structuring of the book has been a challenge. The second half of the nineteenth century saw the revival of a number of ancient and medieval architectural traditions. These included the 'Classical Revival', 'Romanesque Revival' and 'Gothic Revival' styles of architecture. These were first introduced in Britain and Europe and, subsequently, in the colonies. In India, a little later, a new architectural style evolved, known as the 'Indo-Saracenic', which borrowed elements from Indian and Islamic traditions. The twentieth century, witnessed change and a modern, more minimalist, style emerged. The first few chapters are devoted to buildings

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that broadly fall in these categories or were influenced by these styles. The princely states devoted attention to the station buildings in their territory and some fine station buildings were built by or for them, on which a chapter is also included. A very appealing feature in many buildings is their pitched roofs and gables. Although a common element, a few distinctive buildings have been identified and discussed in an exclusive chapter. An attempt has also been made to identify the characteristics of the building styles adopted by individual railway companies. After this categorisation, there still remains a large number of important station buildings which are difficult to categorise into a specific architectural style or tradition, though they are fine buildings by themselves; they have been clubbed together in a chapter that brings out a range of building styles. The remaining chapters of the book are devoted to Mountain Railways and buildings designed for specific functions, such as Company General Offices, Training Institutions, Railway Institutes and Bungalows. Although, every effort has been made to cover all parts of the country, a constraint has been the lack of old photographs of certain parts of the system, which I would like to have covered to a greater extent, mainly East Bengal, the east coast and the North East Frontier Railway systems.

A railway station can be looked at from various perspectives, these include its role in politics, its impact

on society, during wartime, during a crisis such as famine, natural disasters or its impact on art, literature and films. While these are very interesting perspectives, I have only included historical and architectural aspects for the large number of buildings covered in the book. The information included is based primarily on secondary sources that include the limited literature on colonial architecture in India, which cover some railway buildings, Annual Administration Reports on the Railways in India, publications of the Company Railways, Imperial, Provincial and District Gazetteers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, newspapers, old Travel Guides, and records available in the archives of various zonal railways.

As the title suggests, my endeavour in *Indian Railway Buildings* is to take the reader into the fascinating world of colonial railway architecture in our country. I have enjoyed writing the book and I do hope it will be of interest and give equal pleasure to the general reader, the railway buff, and those interested in art and architecture.

Vinoo N. Mathur

Gurgaon



Mole Station at Ballard Pier was built by the Bombay Port Trust in the neoclassical style with Doric columns and classical ornamentation on the entablature

Postcard: Author's collection