

Lecture on the History of Indian Rail

In today's lecture, we are going to be talking about the history of Indian railways, from when they began, up until 1945 when they had all been taken over by the government.

Indian Railways is an Indian state-owned enterprise, owned and operated by the Government of India through the Ministry of Railways. It is one of the world's largest railway networks comprising 115,000 km of track over a route of 65,000 km and there are 7,500 stations. It transports over 25 million passengers daily, which is over 9 billion on an annual basis. Indian Railways is the world's ninth largest commercial or utility employer, by number of employees, with over 1.4 million employees. Q31

The history of rail transport in India began in the mid-nineteenth century. The core of the pressure for building railways in India came from London. In 1848, there was not a single kilometre of railway line in India. A British engineer, Robert Maitland Brereton, was responsible for the expansion of the railways from 1857 onwards. Q33
The Allahabad-Jabalpur branch line of the East Indian Railway had been opened in June 1867. Brereton was responsible for linking this with the Great Indian Peninsula Railway, resulting in a combined network of 6,400 km. Hence it became possible to travel directly from Bombay to Calcutta. This route was officially opened on 7 March 1870 and it was part of the inspiration for French writer Jules Verne's book *Around the World in Eighty Days*. At the opening ceremony, the Viceroy Lord Mayo concluded that, if possible, at the earliest possible moment, the whole country should be covered with a network of lines in a uniform system. Q34

By 1875, about £95 million were invested by British companies in Indian railways. By 1880 the network had a route mileage of about 14,500 km, mostly radiating inward from the three major port cities of Bombay, Madras and Calcutta. By 1895, India had started building its own locomotives, and in 1896 sent engineers and locomotives to help build the Uganda Railways. Q35

In 1900, the Great Indian Peninsula Railway became a government owned company. The network spread to the modern day states of Assam, Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh and soon various autonomous kingdoms began to have their own rail systems. In 1905, an early Railway Board was constituted, but the powers were formally vested under Lord Curzon, the then Viceroy of India. It served under the Department of Commerce and Industry and had a government railway official serving as chairman, a railway manager from England and an agent of one of the company railways as the other two members. For the first time in its history, the Railways began to make a profit. Q36

In 1907 almost all the rail companies were taken over by the government. The following year, the first electric locomotive made its appearance. With the arrival of

World War I, the railways were used to meet the needs of the British outside India, but with the end of the war, the railways were in a state of **disrepair** and **collapse**. Q38

In 1920, with the network having expanded to 61,220 km, a need for central management was mooted by Sir William Acworth, a British railway economist. Based on the East India Railway Committee chaired by Acworth, the government took over the management of the Railways and detached the finances of the Railways from other governmental revenues.

The period between 1920 and 1929 was a period of economic boom; there were 66,000 km of railway lines serving the country; the railways represented a **capital value** of some 687 million sterling; and they carried over 620 million passengers and approximately 90 million tons of goods each year. Following the Great Depression, the railways suffered economically for the next eight years and the Second World

War severely crippled the railways. Starting 1939, about 40% of the rolling stock including locomotives and **coaches** was taken to the Middle East, the railways workshops were converted to ammunitions workshops and many railway tracks were dismantled to help the Allies in the war. By 1946 all rail systems had been taken over by the government. Q40