

A Study of Emergence of Railways During the British Rule

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Abstract

This article throws light on the need for the construction of Railways during the colonial period. The construction of Railways is considered as an important development by the Britishers in India. It connected even the interior area. It also focuses on the impact on the economy. The British commercial and economic benefits can be reflected.

Keywords : 1. East India Company 2. Peninsular Railway 3. Famines 4. Agriculture.

Introduction:

India was rich in terms of economy and culture. It was also regarded as a golden eagle. Its main occupation was agriculture. Being an agrarian economy, India also under took manufacturing activities before the colonial period. Farmers produced only those agriculture products which were required by them. If excess crops were produced than those surplus crops were stored. Apart from being an agrarian economy, India was also well known for its handicraft industries. Industries from the field of cotton, silk textile, precious stone and metals had a great demand in other countries. India was also rich in spices which had a high demand overseas. Spice trade was very important during ancient times and middle ages. It was due to the spices trade which made many other countries to invade India. This holded the attention of the Britishers towards India.

The level of infrastructure before the colonial rule in India was very poor. Many villages were not connected with each other due to poor development. The road tracks were dusty which were the original roads during that time. Such roads during the monsoon period were used to be in anunfavourable condition where it was not able to function properly. Even the natural calamities were another reason for the improper function of the roads. In such situation animals were only used as a mode of transport. But the transportation with the help of animals took a lot of days to travel the goods from one place to another. The water sources werealso used for the transportation purpose but it was also not much popular.

Literature Review:

- **Railways in Colonial India : An Economic Achievement ?** by **Dan Bogart** and **Latika Chaudhary** states the performance of the Indian railway in terms of its development and organization of the network , its impact on the Indian economy , ownership and regulatory policies etc.
- **Railroads of the Raj : Estimating the impact of Transportation Infrastructure** by **Dave Donaldson** this article states that the prior to the era of the railroad the transportation of the goods used to take place through various means such like the road , river ships etc. It gives the positive result about the railways like the increased level of income, increase of international trade etc.
- **Indian Railways and Indian Wheat** by **Arthur KnatchbullConnell** gives the difference between the conditions for America and India for adoption of railways. It was shown by the Mr. Goschen's Silver Committee of 1876 the direct cause of the loss by exchange .

Objective of the study:the objective of the study is to knowthe facts and importance about the development of the railways by the colonial ruler. It also reflects the motive ,economic and social impact of the railways on the economy.

Data used: itfocuses on secondary sources for data collection. The information about the establishment of the Indian railways were collected through various journals , articles, research papers , books etc.

Origin:The oldest railway evidence was found in Greece during 6th century. During 16th century the railway was commenced in Germany by the way of wagons. Around 600 BC a track provided the evidence which covered around 6 to 8.5 long trackway which transported boats across the Greece.

Reasons for rail development:With the liquidation of the East India company, the British Raj established their rule in India.The British aimed to develop a railway system in India to overcome the problem of transportation which took long days to reach the destination. This development changed the social, political and economic scenario of India. This construction of railways contributed in connecting the manufacturing center to the distribution areas where the goods could be easily made available to the ultimate consumer. The development of Railways benefited in two ways one is that the people could move from one place to another without any barrier and second it helped in commercialization of agriculture products.

Railways in India: The railways were constructed in India by the Britishers but its establishment was very difficult. It required a lot of hard work, time along with heavy investment of money. To bring the materials and engineers to India from England was a very difficult task. Also, a high cost was incurred in bringing the other materials from another part. So, its construction required a proper flow of money. The Colonials found it difficult for construction of railways from their capitals as it involved a heavy outflow of money from their treasury. So, for this the “Guaranteed system” was introduced.

During 1850 to 1947 the railways were considered as a most important infrastructural development in India. Due to which each aspect of the Indian society was connected with each other.

The first line was opened in 1853 connecting port of Bombay to Thana. It covered a distance of 21 miles.It consisted of 14 cars being hauled by three steam locomotives, and carried 400 passengers. The network started growing from 838 miles to 15,842W miles. Within two decades the network expanded and it covered 6541 miles where India was regarded as the fourth largest railway system in the world. ^{iv}The other ports of Calcutta and Madras were also connected by 1854 and 1856. It was Lord Dalhousie under whose rule the establishment of railways and its progress was been made possible. He was of the view to expand the British empire over the Indian economy by accumulating much wealth of India for which this project of railways was suited. Prior to the introduction of the plan, Dalhousie had submitted a minute to the court of directors stating the grounds on which the railways would be established in India. He was well aware of the issues related to the railways. After a lot of discussion on the management and the finance of the railways a final decision was made up in 1849 for the construction of railways in India, but in the favor of the private enterprises. This railway project was to be in the supervision of the state and the private entrepreneur would help in the investment and its construction. It was also noted that the private enterprises would get a return of 5% on their investments. After many years of financial investment along with construction the railways in 1901 had started to gain profits.

Rail networks: The private British Companies, Private Indian Companies, The Government of India and some native states were the participants in the construction and management of the Indian rail network. It was divided into four phases i.e.; under the first phase the private British companies undertook the construction and management of the lines under public guarantee system up to 1869. In second phase i.e., 1870, the Government of India had made an entry for managing and construction of state railways. The third phase was an involvement by both the public and private participation where the Government of India was the owner and the private companies were in charge of the operation as well for the construction. During the fourth phase Government of India overtook the railway operations. The Great Indian Peninsular Railway (GIPR) was incorporated on 1st August with an aim of connecting up of interior to the port and also to the city of Bombay. In 1900 GIPR became the first state- owned company. By 1907, all the major lines which were established by the government were given on lease back to the private operators.

Impact: The development of the railways had a great impact on the all sectors of the Indian economy. This construction helped both for the movements of goods and passengers easily. Its contribution had revolutionized the trade both internally and externally. Prior to the development of the railways, the agriculture goods were not much sent outside but after its construction the agriculture produce had been sent on bulk which resulted in

commercialization of agriculture products. The agriculture produces of India became quite demanding internationally for products like wheat, rice, jowar, oilseed and cotton. Railways helped to mold the Indian economy in terms of their foreign trade where the exports for the produce was on the increase.

- It changed both the status of the domestic and foreign trade in India by quick transportation of raw materials and agriculture produce.
- It increased the agricultural output in terms of export and import of grains, which took agriculture to commercialization level.
- It provided jobs at different levels and sectors which in turn increased the opportunity for employment.
- Railways were also valued most for performing their work in times of famines as it was considered as convenient way of supplying food to the areas affected by famines.
- It took back its control from the external contractors (1869 – 1881) for the purpose of expansion. So, the areas could be benefitted who were affected by famine due to intense droughts in the country.
- Railway development also gave rise to the coal industry as there was demand for the coal even from the distant part of the country.
- Apart from this, it also had some negative impact as due to the development of railways the Indian handicraft industry was at its decline. The commodities did not have more demand as compared to the British ones, so were getting ruined.
- The freight charged on Indian products were also too higher which was another reason for making the products uncompetitive in the market.

The new amenities were introduced in the passenger train during 1890's which included toilets, gas lamps and electric lighting. At this point the railways had gained much popularity which led to overcrowding. This overcrowding led to the creation of a fourth class. India had started building its own locomotives by 1895 and by 1896 it was able to assist the construction of the Uganda Railway by supplying its own experts and equipments.

Conclusion: The development of railways is considered as the biggest development in the world. It facilitated the entire economy of India. As the development was done by the Britishers there was drain of wealth from India. This construction had benefited the people to travel to and fro. It also made the cottage industries to decline.

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