

Conclusion

In this dissertation I have undertaken a study to ascertain the relationship between the railway and fiction by analyzing the sociological, psychological, historical, political, economic and cultural significance of the railways in literature. My effort has been to chart the evolution of Railway Fiction by mapping out how the railways are constructed in fiction, drawing on the differences between the technological construct (in mechanical and scientific terms) and the human in terms of ideation, narrative, and other devices of fiction. It begins with a brief theoretical study of time and space to juxtapose the findings that the railway has transformed spatial and temporal notions of humankind. The nineteenth century impression generated due to the speed of the train, 'annihilation of space and time' initiated a detailed enquiry of space and time to understand the prevailing notions and the transformation of perceptions. The steam locomotion that began in the Indian subcontinent in the nineteenth century seems to have not only established a revolution in transportation, but also was instrumental in instituting a cultural revolution, which is reflected in the railway novels that are discussed in this dissertation.

An altered temporal and spatial awareness resulted in a cultural transformation as people began to live by clock time with considerable changes in their language and life style. This change is found in different terms in different places and different times. The first and second chapters dealt with the theories of time and space, and have prepared a base for understanding the changes and transformations the modern technology of mobility has brought along. I have drawn largely from philosophical theories of space and time by Isaac Newton, Gottfried Leibniz, Immanuel Kant, David Harvey, Michel de Certeau and Henry Lefebvre in my effort to theorize, time and space to some extent.

The concept of time before industrialization, railways, and the new concept and practice of time, post railways, is explored in detail in relation to selected fiction to understand time in railway fiction. An investigation through fiction has revealed how mechanical or scientific inventions transform time and how this happens particularly with the railways in fiction such as *Saraswativijayam*, *Train to Pakistan*, *Pather Panchali*, etc. Space as transformed by the railways in terms of subjectivity of the human condition and the objectivity of transformation of space as seen in relation to the mechanical and infrastructural development of trains such as railway lines, railway platforms, railway colonies, coaches, etc. are traced and investigated as they are presented in the railway novels *Bhowani Junction*, *Ladies Coupé*, *The Strike*, etc.

The study presents the railway in various roles as social equalizer, engines of change and progress, liberator and many more as represented in select fiction in the third and fourth chapters. The genre¹ of the 'Railway Novel' is traced and established in the introductory section, and novels are selected for the study according to this categorization. History often demonstrates how humans adapt themselves to changes and new situations that they come across. For example, the railways had brought about enormous changes in the field of transportation and human beings soared from walking and animal pace to the machine speed within no time. This speed seemed to be necessary to get acquainted with at least a part of the spatial vastness as technology is said to be a 'distinct human cultural activity in which, human beings exercise freedom and responsibility in response to God by forming and transforming the natural creation, with the aid of tools and procedures, for practical ends or purposes' (Monsma19).

¹Usually literary works are categorized by length, mood, style, theme, time, special incidents that are involved, by the size of the work etc. Elizabeth Boyle. *Literary Terms: The Basics*, 17/08/2015
<http://www.ode.state.or.us/teachlearn/subjects/elarts/reading/resources/readingglossary.pdf>

The enormous spatial distances cannot be experienced by walking and a faster means of travel technology seemed necessary to appreciate the vastness of the universe to some degree. Transportation and communication technologies seem to have the capacity to broaden awareness of the self and the surroundings, and sensitivity towards others as how humans related to each other in an artificially created environment of the trains' travelling space. They could alter the notion of the self, nature of relationship among individuals and thereby have an impact on society as Jonathan Matusitz argues:

Indeed, the introduction of the railroad seventeen decades ago can be credited with breaking new ground in the way people viewed other people and profoundly changing the way they communicated with one another. It has put human beings on the course to universal accessibility: the creed and ultimate goal of human communication. (456)

The study was based upon the given assumption that transportation technology of the railway altered the perceptions of temporal and spatial distances and increased geographical awareness. Till the second half of the nineteenth century, before the train technology was introduced, humans seem to have travelled by the same means and same speed for thousands of years. Though it may appear controversial, this view is expressed by Dionysius Lardner as early as in the year 1850 when he says:

Within an hundred years more has been accomplished in facilitating and expediting intercommunication than was effected from the creation of the world to the middle of the last century.² (25)

With trains people got an experience of a new technology of mobility and speed, entirely different from the past experiences which in turn created a new consciousness and social relations as different people, complete strangers could come together in a closed space. Changes that the railway brought overnight was thus much more than what had ever before been seen. It had the power to change everything—economy, politics, culture and civilization.

²It is reproduced exactly as found in the original text.

Fiction of any particular time perhaps may represent contemporary society if realistic authors, 'penetrate deeply into the great universal problems of their time and inexorably depict the true essence of reality as they see it' (Lukács 214). Through the realistically presented novels, the shift from travel by foot and palanquin bearers, to animals and animal drawn coaches and wagons, to steam driven locomotives and electric trains, to the latest advancement of transportation may be traced in sequential order. The thread of progress may be found as being used by the characters for travel or serving some other metaphorical purposes.

The initial novels studied in chapter three of this dissertation thus presents the railways of the nineteenth century when most of the characters are not yet introduced to modern technology, and walked their way to destinations. Progress is evident in the subsequent novels, where trains are as much a part of the daily life for most, but not for all, as there are still places not connected to the railways and people who have not seen a train in India and other parts of the world. The awe and response induced by the train, in the time and space of the nineteenth century differ enormously in the ensuing ages and hence the train motifs in modern fiction differ in its reason and spirit. This dissertation confirms the relationship between the railways and novels by analyzing the sociological, psychological, historical, political, economic, and cultural significance of the railways in 'railway novels'. It also considers the railway itself as a fiction in the narrative of technological progress.

The role that the railways, a colonial legacy played, in the spatial and temporal transformation of the Indian subcontinent, as captured by the narrative rhetoric of fiction is identified through railway novels in my study. The insights derived from a fairly detailed study of the select railway novels; along with theory of time and space include the individual subject and subjectivity that underwent changes in the backdrop of the technological innovations that affected everyday life. These changes as represented in fiction through

different characters are discussed to analyse social transformations as found in the novels from the nineteenth century itself like *Indulekha* (1889) and *Saraswativijayam* (1892) in the third chapter.

An important point in the history of the subcontinent, its partition, is also important for the history of the railway and the novel in India. Partition of the subcontinent alone has churned out large number of 'partition railway novels' as it was one of the most eventful periods of rail history with the railways playing a crucial role in its aftermath. It is not possible for any work based on the railways in India to ignore the time of partition. A fair share of partition fiction is included in chapter three while revealing the counter narrative of the colonial rhetoric of engines of progress and modernity in India. The trains had an active participation in the mayhem and many novels have it as a theme. A section in the third chapter deals with this particular period of time in the railway space along the borders of the divided land as represented in *Train to Pakistan* (1956), *Ice-Candy-Man* (1989) and *Train to India: Memories of An other Bengal* (2009).

The railways had always been the pivot of the economic machinery balancing the global economy during the colonial days (Kerr, *Engines* 130) and a deciding factor of the national economy of Independent India, even without bringing in industrialization as it has done in other countries like Britain. It provided directly and indirectly employment and livelihood for numerous people like Hari's father and grandfather in *The Strike*, or as a conveyance to the work place as for Akhila and her friends. Even the hijra, Radha, made her living by collecting money from superstitious rail passengers. Direct and indirect beneficiaries of the railways like the vendors in the stations and trains and those multitudes who made the railways their homes alone, might make a study perhaps vast enough for a thesis. The railway as owned and operated by the government of India earned economic benefits for the nation, as it has

benefited the railway companies and patrons during the colonial days before its unification and nationalization. Details of such information can be derived from the yearly railway budgets. As John Hurd rightly claims:

By reducing transport costs, railways brought significant economic benefits to India. Resources that would have been used to transport goods were saved and thus freed to be used for other economic activities. (Kerr, *Railways* 150)

Economic benefit is just one factor of the multifarious achievements of the railways which continues to be the life line of India³ in every possible way, at least wherever the life line has its reach.

The railways and politics share a close affinity as the two are always interlinked. Major decisions concerning Indian railways are political and politically motivated since it is directly under the Ministry of the Railways. The railway has the capacity to make or break political careers and decide the future of a government when it is a coalition government. A minor fare hike is also a politically motivated decision and may have far reaching implications. Also it is a platform for the budding politicians like Surabhai and Ranjit in *Bhowani Junction* to hold strikes and political demonstrations to politically groom themselves for higher callings. A strike by the railway staff becomes a major political issue, even if it is staged for reasonable demands. A strike crushed by the British in *Bhowani Junction* reminds one of a strike in Sembène Ousmane's *God's Bits of Wood* (1986) which had far reaching revolutionary effects.

Railway stations and carriages are considered as the microcosm of Indian society with all its diversity gathered together in one place as people and parcels, for circulation around the vast country. This representation of the nation as found in *Ladies Coupé*, *The Strike*, *Bhowani Junction*, etc. are discussed in detail in the fourth chapter. Chaos, crowd, noise, pushing and

³Found in the railway web site in 2006. <<http://www.Indianrailways.gov.in>>

pulling, etc. associated with train travel during the nineteenth century can still be found in modern railway fiction in details of the station scenes of arrivals and departures as Akhila observes the chaotic movements before and during the arrival of her train in *Ladies Coupé*. The isolated traveller in the public space of 'rational utopia', the body bound in the carriage space, feeling of isolation, and relation with other bodies as detailed by Michel de Certeau (117) in the upper class compartments, and entirely different experiences of the second class and general compartments are found in most of the narratives as exemplified and contrasted in *The Strike*.

The role that the railways played in empowering women by providing an exclusive female space (*Ladies Coupé*), or a general genderless space like the train of Mahatma Gandhi (*Water*) to ensure freedom in mobility and transformation is discussed in the fourth chapter. The railway as a redeemer and a liberator for Akhila and Chuyia and as a lingering unfulfilled desire for Durga in *Pather Panchali* are also dealt with in detail in the fourth chapter. As much as the presence of the railway is felt as beneficial or transforming, its absence becomes the theme of *Pather Panchali* as the politically neglected village Nischindipur too represents India even many decades after its first railways and independence. Symbolic and metaphorical representations of the railways in fiction are major features of the railway novels. Such representations of the railways are also discussed in the fourth chapter with inputs from *The Red Tin Roof*, *Train to Pakistan*, etc.

The railway seems to be an agency that can unify fragmented territories, castes and religions into a homogeneous nation called India. The story of the railway is still evolving in spite of its familiarity and long history through its ever changing technology and modern innovations

and also due to its increased heritage⁴ value. Along with preserving the heritage, innovations and improvements often allow the railways to remain in the present, in the news with something novel each time like opening of a new line, introduction of some new-fangled technology like the bullet train, monorails, etc. or an exhibition to show case the national heritage. The true life-line that continuously shape and reshape the history of India with its innovations, probably will further transform the spatial and temporal perceptions of people, which may also encourage more literary fiction dealing with novel experiences.

With more than one hundred and fifty years of history, a colonial enterprise, with proper names attached to most of the trains such as ‘Flying Rani’, ‘Gujarat Queen’, ‘Rajdhani’, ‘the Deccan Queen’ and the early steam engines, the railways in India has one of the most fascinating stories. India and Indian railways hold much to be explored and exposed that could be intriguing and interesting as materials for constructing many more novels as ‘no railroads, no India? Perhaps—or at least a very different India (Kerr 179) it would have been.

There were certain limitations that the researcher encountered during the study, first of all the task of identifying and collecting the railway fiction distributed in such a vast geography and impossibly varied languages in the subcontinent was tough. It is a matter of regret that, many works are left out in the process due to lack of available translations and also to tackle the issue of delimitation. I have put in some effort in the present study to make it an inclusive study of railway fiction from as many different languages as possible, though enormity was one reason among restraining factors. Identifying, classifying translating and listing existing railway fiction may prove to be a full-fledged research project, even if it includes only the states of India.

⁴Heritage railways are usually railway lines which were once run as commercial railways, but were later no longer needed or were closed down. Taken over and re-opened by volunteers or for-profit organisations, many run on partial routes unconnected to the commercial railway network or run only seasonally.

It could be an interesting project and collection from the view point of the railway as well as literature and it may be worthwhile to understand the varied reactions from different cultures existing in the same country and how the people belonging to different geographical localities and culture welcomed, rejected or assimilated the new technology in their midst. Short stories with railway materials are in abundance in every Indian language and in English and a study exclusively on construction of the railways in short stories also may be another project. One may look out for fiction built upon the high speed trains that are going to define the travel scenario in the future and the huge transformation in perception that is likely to accompany it.

After Independence and consolidation of Indian Railways under the government of India, reviving the system involved, laying new lines, upgrading of gauge, production of locomotives and coaches and management of skilled employees was a preoccupation. Such issues are not any more the major concerns of the Indian railways as the railway is acquiring a kind of heritage value apart from the political implications. After more than a century and half of its existence the railways have undergone many technological changes and now there is a nostalgic interest in the technology of the past and hence an effort to preserve the heritage of certain old lines, old engines, etc. The railways of independent India have always been changing in order to recover from wars and partition to cater to the needs of a modern nation. Ian Kerr argues that the engines of change moved along lines that were already established during the colonial period as it continued to make and remake India since 1947 (150). The Indian railway is always in news as a true life line of India; innovating, expanding, improving and digitalizing its services and operations. The railway during the postcolonial period has come to produce the nation through the economies and practices of movement (Aguiar 103). The railways always played a key role in the economy and after the independence, the railway had to consolidate and unify the new nation by connecting it through rail. The railway has continued to be the primary means of transportation for people and commodities

whether it was a pilgrimage or a long distance travel. Post independence the railways have turned out to be the life line of the nation literally as well as metaphorically.

Even after years of familiarity and many other additional technologies, trains still seem to retain fear factors, some magical traits and feelings of wonderment and the post-modern English novel, *The Girl on the Train*, briefly mentioned in the fourth chapter stands as an example. Unreliable and paradoxical narrative style of post modernism is used by Hawkins with all the three female characters turning narrators, taking their turns; with Rachel being the most unreliable as she is an alcoholic and inconsistent. Trains are needed for liberating, levelling and equalizing Indian society and as they still hold the key to progress and transformation with mobility, should extend to the unexplored regions. I would conclude repeating the words of Nalinaksha Sanyal, at the close of a detailed study, of development of the railways in India extending over many years that ‘one can only feel happy, that in spite of many faults of omission and commission by the authorities in the past, the people of India have secured not only a valuable property yielding a substantial revenue annually but also a machine that has united them into a nation’ (370).