

Introduction

In this dissertation I attempt to answer the question, ‘What role did the railways, a colonial legacy, play in the spatial and temporal transformation of the Indian subcontinent as captured by the narrative rhetoric in fiction?’ as the contemporary fictional rhetoric of the epoch reverberate the temporal and spatial transformation of the Indian subcontinent, caused by a colonial legacy, the Indian Railways. Today perhaps the railways are taken as a given, but historically they are a construction of the imagination and technology. In order to trace this historical development, I identify three different types of construction, firstly, technological construction of the railways, and secondly, construction of a literary genre called the railway novel in the Indian subcontinent right from the nineteenth century to the post-modern fiction and thirdly, a cultural entity called India which is constructed every day by the railway and the immense changes that it makes through the notion of a oneness that comes about on the train. The field of study though vast is worth the enterprise for these three aspects if not more. The railway is approached mainly in its conceptual form of existence with some instances from actual sites of construction of its space and time. Boundaries and limits of the Indian subcontinent being vague, a few regions are identified for the purpose, from varying geographical locations. Efforts are made to trace, identify and locate the genre of novels presuming that the fictional, realistic and postcolonial novels that are selected can be grouped as ‘railway novels’ assuming that technology of the railway and the content of the novels selected are complimentary and overlapping concepts.

It was into the sub-continent that the railway was introduced as the present day India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, all existed in an undivided stretch until independence and partition. It might seem strange to any Indian that the railways of India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan had

one common ancestor, or rather was run by the same administration and carries with it the prejudices and imaginations and systems that its ancestors carried. Along with the growth of nationalism and identity of the three nations, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, the railways of the subcontinent got divided and went their different ways. A railway system designed to serve the British Empire, when divided had its limitations of an amputated system to suit the interests of the free independent nations separately, and another saga of the national railways began making and remaking the nation.

The terms 'railroad', 'railway' and 'railways' are often used interchangeably, though 'railroad' is used commonly in the United States and there are exceptions and variations of usage. In the dissertation, 'railways' is used to denote the network of railways like Indian Railways, and 'railway' to indicate smaller units, a technology or an entity. Likewise, fiction may be found in many forms like short stories, poems, epics and novels, advertisements, news paper reports etc. The present research has selected novels for the study of fiction and the terms novel and fiction denote similar significance though fiction is not easily distinguishable from reality and fiction in history posits another problematic issue.

The Railway in the Indian subcontinent was a project planned, implemented, owned and operated by the British companies as private enterprises under the control of East India Company. Different companies operated in different parts of the subcontinent: Great Indian Peninsular Company (GIPC), East India Railway Company (EIRC), Bombay Baroda and Central India Railway Company (BB&CI), Madras Railway Company (MRC) etc. Many Indians supported the system and some kings patronized it as the Gaikwads of Baroda had set up their own Gaikwad Baroda State Railway (GBSR) as early as 1862.¹ The trains created a revolution in the travel scenario of the subcontinent. As we know until the advent of the

¹ Information collected from the Railway Heritage Museum, Pratapnagar

railway that in this subcontinent people moved only by means of animal powered carts, palanquins or by foot. The idea of travel underwent a change after the arrival of the railways, as the number of passengers and distances were of no consequence as a train could traverse relentlessly cutting across terrains with any number of passengers and goods for miles, constantly at great speed. The rail project that began in 1850 in the subcontinent was developed, implemented, and operated by the British till independence in 1947.

The story of the railways that was scripted in a subcontinent like India with the huge diversity of linguistic, religious and caste divisions appears to be no less fictional than its representations in the novels. No other technology perhaps must have found itself in such enormous volumes of textual representations.² Texts about railways and on railways abound in the departmental libraries and archives of all the railways. Global representations that shaped the symbolic railway history reveal how the railway was imagined by different people in different places at different times. I am attempting to show in this dissertation, how trains were represented as symbols and images that turned to be a trend in the field of fiction. Images of trains are used quite abundantly in fiction, which I have dealt with at some length.

I attempt to show how the train functioned as an imaginative object, a fiction by itself and as a concept which altered the definition of the human subject and the colonial subject too. With its beginning, and its growth—a saga of fiction unfolds for example, images of colonial power, cultures of the colonizer and the colonized. Its role in the building process of a nation is frequently represented and captured in fiction by different authors. A study of these two parallel narratives, the railway and railway fiction with its spatio-temporal implications is what I wish to explore in this dissertation.

² Ian Kerr. (ed.) *27 Down: New Departments in Indian Railway Studies*. (Hyderabad: Orient Longman) 2007. Ian Kerr has given a long list of railway writings under various categories in this book.

A Brief History of the Railways

The discovery of fire, it is well known, was a major turning point in the history of human civilization and so was the invention of the wheel. These two historic milestones joining together in the form of iron wheels and steam power seems to have scripted the narrative of another watershed moment in history—the advent of railway technology. I think that railways in general and the Indian Railways in particular call for a brief moment of reflection to focus on railway novels and the technology itself, not from the point of view of specific technical details but as a civilizational and a cultural tool.

The railway has a well-documented history contained in volumes of railway documents, and in many texts authored by many writers during different times in different countries. The railway has a well-known history as in Europe; to begin with, a fully-fledged industrial revolution and increased production of coal lead the way for a novel way of moving coal in wagons on tracks pulled by horses.

The invention of steam engine brought in dramatic changes and horsepower was soon replaced by steam power and machines overtook the animal power which was proving too costly to maintain. The steam powered engines soon began to carry other goods and human beings. The beginning of the modern railway age is usually marked by the opening of the Stockton & Darlington line in 1825. The line built between Manchester and Liverpool in 1830 was mainly aimed at transporting cotton from Liverpool port to Manchester which was the centre of the textile industry.³ It was during the early years of Queen Victoria's reign that the first long distance lines opened from London and Birmingham in 1838, and the London

³R.S.Chandrika Prasada Tiwari. *The Indian Railways: Their Historical, Economical and Administrative Aspects*. Appendix 1. 'Origin of Railway in England'. Ajmer:Yedic Yantralaya, 1921, i-xi.

and Southampton line in 1840.⁴ Railway construction continued for over twenty years and by 1854 every town in England was connected by the rail (Tiwari 1).

The history of the railway on the Indian subcontinent is more than one hundred and fifty years old, as the first train operated in 1853 from Bombay to Thane, (Kerr Engines ix) initiating one of the world's most fascinating scripts in the stories of the railway system. The idea of building railways in India was being formulated for many years, as early as from 1831-32 and demands arose almost simultaneously from all the presidencies⁵ (Madras, Bengal and Bombay). Though the idea was first conceived by the Madras presidency in 1831, various proposals were put forward by all the three concerned, and it was Mumbai that first ran its train in 1853, and then Bengal in 1854, and Madras was the last in 1856, the last to run its first train (Sanyal 3-6).

We are told that railway construction once it began progressed rapidly, section by section of tracks being laid and trials and test runs taking place (Kerr Engines 6). Eventually, on April 16, 1853, at 3.30 P.M. the first ever official (there were test and trial runs) train, of fourteen carriages and three engines, in India, transported about four hundred public figures along twenty one miles of track that connected Bombay with Thane⁶. The day was declared a holiday, marked with banquets and congratulatory speeches by many dignitaries, highlighting the changes that were to follow, and the progress and advancement that the British were willing to share with the Indians (Kerr 6).

The Railways grew soon into the rest of the subcontinent mainly following a commercial track⁷. 'The first passenger train steamed out of Howrah station destined for Hooghly, a

⁴ http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/victorians/victorian_technology.

⁵ Nalinaksha Sanyal. *Development of Indian Railways*. Calcutta: The University Of Calcutta. 1930, 3.

⁶ < <http://www.indianrailways.gov.in/railwayboard> >

⁷ Also known as goods line, a line used mainly for freight trains. Alan A Jackson. *The Wordsworth Railway Dictionary*. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1997.

distance of 24 miles, on 15th August, 1854 inaugurating the beginning of railway transport on the Eastern side of the subcontinent. In the south the first line was opened on 1st July, 1856 by the Madras Railway Company⁸ between Vyasarpadi Jeeva Nilayam (Veyasarpandy) and Walajah Road (Arcot), a distance of 63 miles. In the North a length of 119 miles of line was laid from Allahabad to Kanpur on 3rd March 1859⁹. The first section from Hathras Road to Mathura Cantonment was opened to traffic on 19th October 1875'.¹⁰ These were the small beginnings which in due course developed into a network of railway lines all over the country. By 1880 the Indian Railway system had a route mileage of about 9000 miles which is at present approximately 63,028 route kilometers and 108,706 kilometers of tracks. The administration of the Indian Railways claims that the railway is the life line of India perhaps because it runs around 11,000 trains everyday, of which 7,000 are passenger trains.¹¹ I would like to think that it is still growing, though not at the rate it had in the initial phase, and it is always in the limelight as: a new train is introduced, a new line inaugurated, a fare is hiked, introduction of new technology is incorporated, and a sabotage or an accident is reported.

I find it important to think of the Indian railways with its colonial past and a fascinating present to have been connected with the growing idea of India with multidimensional features, a vast deal of which are still not explored adequately. This dissertation attempts to concentrate by and large on the railway that is realistically represented in fiction as a technological and civilizational tool dealing with the politics of being of a nation. It tries to show that in India, the railway system was, for Indians, a coming to terms with the colonizers and their technology of speed. This was often from a distance or from a closer contact in a public space of the railway which were the platforms or a third class compartment for most of

⁸ Information found in the web-site of Indian Railway Board in January 2016.

URL < <http://www.indianrailways.gov.in/railwayboard>>

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

the native people. For the native rail workers building the lines, it was a closer confrontation as knowledge and skills were exchanged. Even the technologically sound British at times had to depend on the natural skill and local knowledge of people like Bhalku who helped building the Barog tunnel in Shimla Kalki line.¹² The railway in the subcontinent became a colonial legacy, planned, invested, executed and run by the British. It was built by the combination of Indian labour and planning and supervision by the British. While the engines, coaches, etc. were brought readymade from England¹³ initially, the track was entirely the fruit of grinding the Indian labour. Skills of administration, organization and planning were taught as a cultural exchange, which enabled the Indian railways to Indianize its workforce which was heavily staffed by British people (Kerr Engines 148).

The Novel

Just as the railway was considered as modernity's engine of change that was brought to India by the British with the rhetoric of colonial modernity, the novel too is sometimes considered as a recent literary creation regarded as England's original contribution to the world of letters as the 'idea of the modern novel seems to have been worked out largely on English soil'.¹⁴ Both the above claims on the novel—the recent status as well as being the English contribution—are refuted as Margaret Doody argues that 'the concept of 'Romance' as distinct from 'Novel' has outworn its usefulness, and that at its most useful it created limitations and encouraged blind spots'(xvii).¹⁵ Thus a definition as well as identifying general traits of the novel appears to be problematic. Previous genres 'long since completed

¹² The tunnel is given the name of the man in charge of the tunnel who committed suicide as his plan failed and was humiliated with punishment. It was Bhalku who helped to complete the tunnel with his natural engineering skill. Jagmeet Singh. 'Man Behind Barog Tunnel Lies Forgotten'. *The Tribune*. Windows. Saturday, June 15, 2002.

¹³ Integral coach factory was established in 1955 in Chennai. <http://www.icf.indianrailways.gov.in/>

¹⁴ William J. Long. *English Literature: Its History and Its Significance for the Life of the English Speaking World*. The Project Gutenberg EBook of English Literature. Release Date: January 6, 2004 [EBook #10609]

¹⁵ Margaret Anne Doody. *The True Story of the Novel*. London: Fontana, 1998.

and in part already dead'¹⁶ like epic and romance, seem to differ from the novels according to M.M. Bakhtin in its subject which is absolute past, source (national tradition not personal) experience, and the time (that separates the epic world from contemporary reality).¹⁷ The epic told a conventional story of the past with lofty characters perhaps gods, goddesses or extraordinary men and women, and hence a novel may perhaps be distinguished from epic through the common men and women characters and realistic treatment of life and events.

Encyclopedia Britannica defines the novel as 'an invented prose narrative of considerable length and a certain complexity that deals imaginatively with human experience, usually through a connected sequence of events involving a group of persons in a specific setting.'¹⁸ Considering different definitions of the term, it becomes more and more inconclusive as it is entered into *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, a novel is 'nearly always an extended fictional prose narrative, although some novels are very short, some are non-fictional, some have been written in verse, and some do not even tell a story.'¹⁹

Just as the definitions suggest, the novel seems not to have a set of canonical regulations on its length and form and no models to follow strictly, as for Doody if anybody has called a work a novel at any time, that is sufficient for it to be a novel and a novel can be forty or more pages of prose fiction (10). Dilip Menon calls the novel 'a do-it-yourself form that came from the west without any instructions'.²⁰ Thus within its broad structure, the genre of the novel has included a wide range of types, forms and styles like picaresque, epistolary, romantic, realistic, and historical—to name only some of the more important ones.

¹⁶ M. M. Bakhtin. 'Epic and Novel'. *Essentials of the Theories of Fiction*. Edit. Michael Hoffman and Patrick Murphy. London: Duke Murphy Press. 1988, 50.

¹⁷ Ibid, . 58.

¹⁸ "novel". *Encyclopaedia Britannica. Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*. Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc., 2016. Web. 09 Feb. 2016. <<http://www.britannica.com/art/novel>>.

¹⁹ Chris Baldick. 'Novel'. *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 3rd E. Oxford: Oxford University, 2008.

²⁰ Foreword by Dilip Menon in. Potheri Kunjambu. *Saraswathi Vijayam*. Tran. Dilip Menon. New Delhi: Book Review Literary Trust, 2002.

Considering the available definitions of the novel and its seemingly never diminishing popularity one may wonder why anyone would want to read a lengthy report of something that never happened, or why should an author write it, unless it is a historical novel that deals with something that has happened. When O. Chandu Menon, the Malayalam writer, faced the challenge, why should one trouble to write a story which never really happened, he gives his opinion:

That most of the books, which the world has seen are story books, and that, while some of these books contain stories which, being styled histories, must be believed, the notion that the events chronicled in the rest ever actually happened, must be rejected altogether or accepted with considerable reserve. Generally speaking, however, the truth seems to be that popular appreciation of a story depends on the skill displayed in its treatment, and is irrespective of the question whether the subject is one of fact or of fiction. Were it otherwise, there would be no reason why the vast majority of books should be so exclusively composed of romance. Men of intelligence, in reading books of this type, do not stop to inquire critically whether the tale is true or imaginary, but the qualities which they demand to rivet their attention are ingenious semblance of reality and elegance in the elaboration of the narration.²¹

Most certainly one reason for reading a novel seems to be that it is ‘interesting.’²² Henry James argues that, ‘the only obligation to which in advance we may hold a novel, without incurring the accusation of being arbitrary, is that it be interesting’ (15). So the reader may expect to be entertained through an interesting narration of life as James adds further that ‘A novel is in its broadest definition a personal, a direct impression of life’ (15). Hence, I think, it may be rightly said that novels represent life in all its complexity through individual experiences.

I would like to draw a comparison between the novel and the railway and say that the novel as a literary genre still holds the scope of development and change just as travel technology of the railway which is evolving, improving and changing the travel picture while also

²¹O. Chandu Menon. *Indulekha*. Trans. W. Dumergue. Kottayam: Sahitya Pravarthaka Co-operative Society. 1889, xii.

²²Henry James. ‘The Art Of Fiction’. *Essentials of the Theories of Fiction*. Edit. Michael Hoffman and Patrick Murphy. London: Duke Murphy Press, 1988.

scripting new narratives. Hence Bakhtin aptly says that, 'Of all the major genres only the novel is younger than writing and the book; it alone is organically receptive to new forms of mute perceptions, that is to reading' (50). The novel is said to be evolving through narrative experimentation and breaking the laws formulated by the previous generation (Kermode 221). This notion of the novel perhaps is a metaphor for the railways too which seem to be breaking away from its technological and sociological and political formulations of different times.

The Railway Novel

The novel is said to be a reflection of a society as the changes that have taken place in a particular society at various points in time are seen reflected in it. Lucien Goldmann points out that:

The novel for the first part of its history was a biography and a social chronicle and so it has always been possible to show that the social chronicle reflected to a greater or lesser degree the society of the period. (6)

During the nineteenth century the world witnessed unprecedented transformations such as imaginative and successful exploitation of new technologies, fast forwarded industrialization, which in turn got accelerated by the ever growing railways that transported goods and passengers in such speed unimaginable till that time. George P. Landow looks at these transformations and how they influenced fiction as he reflects, 'references to railways and the phenomena surrounding them become an important part of Victorian fiction'.²³ Neil Postman argues that technological change is not 'additive' but it is 'ecological',²⁴ because a new medium does not add something, but it changes everything. It seems to be true with the

²³George P. Landow. Railways and Victorian Culture—An Introduction.

<<http://www.victorianweb.org/technology/railways/rrlit1.html>> retrieved in July 2013.

²⁴ Neil Postman. 'Five Things We Need to Know About Technological Change'. A talk delivered in Denver, Colorado by Neil Postman on March 28, 1998.

<<http://web.cs.ucdavis.edu/~rogaway/classes/188/materials/postman.pdf>>

arrival of trains as it was not England plus the railways, but a different England or a different Indian subcontinent like in Postman's example, a drop of red dye changing a beaker of clear water.

Industrialization during the nineteenth century also brought in liberation from natural resources like wood, leather, wind, water and animal power to machines and iron. Wolfgang Schivelbusch traces that wood had been the prime material for construction and combustion during the pre-industrial period, followed by wind and water (2). This emancipation from nature is thoroughly exhibited in the railways as the travel scenario got changed from the wood and leather built coaches that were powered by the animal muscle power on roads into iron coaches pulled by locomotives that ran on iron rails (Schivelbusch10-12). Slow movement of walking and animal driven speed changed into unimaginable artificial speed, also changing the landscape and people's awareness of space and time and people reacted differently to this novel experience. Travel by train that runs on rails perhaps deprived the passenger of what would be considered 'a closer experience of the surroundings' as Alf Seegert says that it had a destabilizing effect on the traveller.²⁵ Some writers like Charles Dickens represented these destabilizing feelings as well as reactions to the train in their writings. Dickens has represented this feeling of destabilization and disorientation in his short story, 'The Flight'.²⁶

In India as elsewhere the travel scenario had seen the speed of the horse perhaps to be the fastest for a very long time. The speed of the new means of travel was something beyond imagination, a fiction as Harriet Bury describes the Indian rail in Hindi travel narratives, 'For those who did use them, railways facilitated travel in a previously unimaginable way and thus they transformed the imagination of space and time by drastically reducing the time (and

²⁵ Alf Seegert. 'Stream of Consciousness: Technology and Sensation in Dickens' 'Railway Sketches' *Philament Sense & Sensation* –2009 < http://sydney.edu.au/arts/publications/philament/issue14_pdfs/ />

²⁶ Deborah A. Edit. Thomas. *Selected Short Fiction*. London: Penguin, 1983.

therefore the perception of distance) it took to travel between places' (3). Though trains have become common place and taken for granted now, the Victorians had experienced the coming of the railway age as a turning point in the history of Great Britain as well as in other places where trains arrived early like Russia, India etc. because the revolution it brought in travel speed was immense. It was perhaps the unprecedented speed, ease of mobility, related social and economic changes etc. that changed the life of people for ever.

The railways which began as a travel technology slowly became an integral part of the culture of the land, as it even reached the villages soon, and intruded into the village life. The changes that the technology brought in were immense that references to the railways began to be found in fiction.²⁷ George P. Landow gives examples of the railway rug,²⁸ Bradshaw's time-table,²⁹ the railway carriage space, and the stations, etc. thus beginning to serve as plot devices. The social and cultural impacts of the new mode of travel found its way into various works of literary art like short stories, poems, novels, etc. In each instance, the figure of the train emerged as a complex narrative form engaged in by the artists, creating a new genre called railroad literature, railway novel, railway stories³⁰ etc.

The railways not only encouraged the creation of literature, but also facilitated the availability of books and provided indirectly an atmosphere for reading. Routledge the pioneer of the 'railway library' and selling of the 'railway novels' is a British multinational publishing firm that was started in 1836 by George Rutledge and W. H. Warne. In 1848 the pair entered the booming market for selling inexpensive imprints of works of fiction to rail travellers, which became known as the "Railway Library". Routledge is claimed to be the largest global

²⁷ George P. Landow. 'Railways and Victorian Culture—An Introduction'.

<<http://www.victorianweb.org/technology/railways/rrlit1.html>> retrieved in July 2013.

²⁸ Elizabeth Gaskell. *North and South*. London: Chapman & Hall, 1855.

²⁹ Wilkie Collins. *No Name*. London: Sampson Law, Son & Co, 1862.

³⁰ Ruskin Bond. Edit. *Penguin Book of Indian Railway Stories*. New Delhi: Penguin, 1994.

academic publisher within humanities and social sciences today.³¹ The technology that changed the world, 'print' combined with the new technology of the railway seem to have changed the world further by enhancing the scope of capitalism and preparing the stage for the information and communication revolution.

As cheap reprints of novels began to be sold at the railway stations during the 1850s, the term 'railway novel'³² originated, though it had an altogether different connotation as Simon Eliot in, 'The Business of Victorian Publishing,' has elaborated upon specially when he mentions the emergence of reprints which were called 'railway novels'.

Sometime between December 15-29, 1948, the publishing firm of George Routledge issued James Fenimore Cooper's *The Red Rover*. This was bound in boards covered with glazed paper on which was printed a picture. The book was small, easily slipped into a greatcoat pocket or handbag and cheap. The Fenimore Cooper cost just a shilling. Routledge's Library series survived until 1899 during which 1277 titles were issued in it. Many other publishers followed suit in the 1850s and 1860s, and this cheap issue adopted what became a very common format: a book roughly 17.5 by 12.2 centimetres, covered often in yellow glazed boards, carrying an illustration (frequently of a rather racy sort) on the front cover and commonly a picture-based advertisement on the back. Most cost between a shilling and two shillings and sixpence. Generically they became known as "railway novels" or "yellowbacks."³³

Simon explains the reason for these developments as the new technology that transformed everything during the 1840s and 1850s which was the railway with its well-lit and smooth running comforts of the compartments that provided a suitable environment for reading. The print technology and the publishing firms responded instantly by printing and issuing small and cheap books bound in boards that could be slipped in coat pockets and handbags thus compressing and altering the space of the printed world. These books came to be known as 'railway novels.'

³¹ <https://www.routledge.com/>

³² These books were called railway novels just because they were sold at the railway stations for the travellers to read in the train.

³³ Eliot Simon. 'The Business of Victorian Publishing'. *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel*. Edit. Deirdre David. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

For the 'railway novel' as it is referred to in this study, no well-defined bench marks seem to exist to consider a literary work or label it as a 'railway novel' or a 'railway story' other than by assessing the content directly or indirectly related to the railway. Alf Seegert in his article 'Steam of Consciousness: Technology and Sensation in Dickens' Railway Sketches'³⁴ observes that '*Dombey and Son*' is widely considered to be the great 'railway novel' of the nineteenth century. But Ian Carter argues that the role of the railway in *Dombey and Son* is overstated, for it contains only eight great pages on the railway (out of more than 800 pages in the novel).³⁵

Though the epic style narrative of about eight hundred pages contains hardly eight pages on the railway, I think that those eight pages contain a complete narrative of the railway that displays the popular thoughts and reactions to the railway, the chaotic scenes that followed the arrival of the railway, its impact on society and social life as well as Dickens's own views and reactions to this new technology in a condensed form. The Staggs's Gardens (78-80) represents the devastated landscape of the chaotic construction sites of the railway and the transformed space later in full details providing with visual effect. Mr. Toodle the railway (29, 30, 308) steam engine driver represents the progress of the lower class benefiting from the railway. Mr. Dombey's train journey (310-314) gives out the details of the early traveller's experience of the speed and disorientation as Dickens himself has experienced it. Mr. Carker's encounter with the engine in the end, and his death, highlight the metaphor of the train as agent of death as was often considered.

Ian Carter in his article, 'The Lost Idea of a Train: Looking for Britain's Railway Novel,' discusses the neo-Victorian railway novels, and comments upon the absence of contemporary

³⁴ Alf Seegert. "Steam of Consciousness": Technology and Sensation in Dickens' Railway Sketches." *Philament: The University of Sydney's Online Journal of the Arts and Culture: Sense and Sensation* (August 2009). Published, 08/01/2009. [http://sydney.edu.au/arts/publications/philament/issue 14-pdfs](http://sydney.edu.au/arts/publications/philament/issue%2014-pdfs).

³⁵ Ian Carter. *Railways and Culture in Britain*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. 2001, 71.

British railway novels as he thinks that British fiction has kept an ambivalent relation with the railways. Christopher Daley is of the opinion that the British railway writing has struggled to go beyond the energies of the steam age.³⁶ I think an effort to examine some of the lesser known authors and novels may produce many railway novels existing perhaps unknown to the genre.

Nicholas Daly, in the section titled 'railway novel' in his book *Literature, Technology and Modernity 1860-2000*,³⁷ explains that sometimes the Railways is evoked directly in the text as in M.E. Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*³⁸ and in Wilkie Collins' *Woman in White*.³⁹ Further distinguishing the railway novels Daley adds, 'Railways must be understood as more than a simple mode of transport; for the Victorians it stood as both agent and icon of the acceleration of the pace of everyday life, annihilating an older experience of time and space, and making new demands on the sensorium of the traveller (46). In his article 'Railway Novels: Sensation Fiction and the Modernization of the Senses',⁴⁰ he equates railway novels to sensation fiction (novels with a secret, a combination of romance and realism), as he considers railways to be a source of anxieties of industrialization.

La Bête Humaine (1901) and *Anna Karenina* (1878) are frequently referred to as Railway Novels due to the prominent role that trains play in them. Jeffrey Richards and John Mackenzie call Emile Zola's *La Bête Humaine*, 'arguably the greatest of all railway novels' as it contains several strongly impressionable station descriptions. Nina Lee Bond, in her

³⁶Christopher Daley. 'Railways and Fiction'. *Alluvium*, Vol. 2, No. 1(2013). 12 January 2013. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7799/alluvium.v2.1.04>.

³⁷ Nicholas Daly, *Literature, Technology and Modernity, 1860-2000*. Cambridge: University Press, 2004.

³⁸ Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*. London: Tinsley Brothers, 1862. Project Gutenberg. Web. 10 Jan 2012.

³⁹ Wilkie Collins, *Woman in White*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1860. Project Gutenberg. Web. 12 Jan 2012.

⁴⁰Nicholas Daly. 'Railway Novels: Sensation Fiction and the Modernization of the Senses'. *ELH* 66 (2). Summer 1999. 461-487. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/elh.1999.0013>.

doctoral dissertation,⁴¹ considers Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* and Emile Zola's *La Bête Humaine* as "Railway novels". These novels are called railway novels probably because in these novels, aside from passing comments on the railroad, the setting for a number of key scenes are located at railway sites, be they cabins, stations, tunnels, etc. or some figurative references directly or indirectly involving the railways have an important space in them. For example in *Anna Karenina*, a chance meeting of Anna with Vronsky takes place in a railway station which leads to a catastrophic relationship, a rail worker is crushed under the train perhaps in an accident, and Anna commits suicide on a track coming under the wheels of a train in a railway station.

Through the medium of narrative, those who had doubts and concerns expressed them as authors like Tolstoy and Dickens have done in their works. Tolstoy makes Levin to discuss and disapprove railroad, industrialization and all the modern technology and support only the traditional ways of farming. Levin in the train talks with his fellow passengers about politics and the new railways and feels oppressed, by discontent with himself and a vague sense of shame. It is only when he got out of the train at his station and by the dim light from the station windows saw his coach man, his confusion was beginning to clear away (83). Dickens seems to be not against the railways completely but expresses his concerns of the ravished landscape (79), disorientation caused by the machine speed (310-312) etc. in his railway novel, *Dombey and Son*.

The trains are thus the ideal space for railway novels to be set in, either for the characters to travel or for some incidents to take place. Paul Theroux in *Great Indian Bazaar*, a train travel narrative while describing the Orient Express as the most famous train in the world that links Europe with Asia, establishes how it has been 'hallowed by fiction: 'restless Lady Chatterley

⁴¹ Tolstoy and Zola: Trains and Missed Connections' (Thesis submitted in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Columbia University, 2011).

took it; so did Hercule Poirot and James Bond; Graham Greene sent some of his prowling unbelievers on it' (7) as authors either place their characters on a train or find some characters from a train (Wolf 24). Railways thus provided a platform not only for travellers but also for imaginative thinkers and writers as 'anything is possible on a train: a great meal, a binge, a visit from card players, an intrigue, a good night's sleep, and strangers' monologues framed like Russian short stories,' (Theroux 3) any or all of which can serve as a theme for a novel. The railway novels thus are the novels in which the railway has a role to play in, as with plot devices, background scenes, and symbolic or direct representations. Many railway novels seem to have biographical and autobiographical elements in them like Bapsi Sidhwa's *Water* and Malloy Krishna Dhar's *Train to India*. Dickens and Tolstoy are also supposed to have put in their experiences and opinions largely into their railway novels respectively.

Biography and Autobiography

Biography is defined in the Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms as 'a narrative history of the life of some person; or the practice of writing such works. Most biographies provide an account of the life of a notable individual from birth to death, or in the case of living persons from birth to the time of writing'.⁴² Biography and history seem to share the past and have more in common with the historical depiction of events in chronological order which is found in both. Life stories of most of the political leaders, public figures and celebrities have been recorded as biographies.

Autobiography is defined as 'a non-fictional account of a person's life usually a celebrity, an important historical figure, or a writer'.⁴³ Jacques Derrida analyses the concept of autobiography and questions 'if it is only because a certain 'I' speaks of itself, recounts itself,

⁴²*Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. Oxford University Press. ISBN-13:9780199208272. Published Online, 2008.

⁴³J. A Cuddon. *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. London: Penguin Books, 1991.

or confesses itself on another'. For him the question of autobiography is to the extent that it presents itself as a 'testimony' and a testimony implies truth. In contrast to the pure autobiography, 'an autobiographical novel is a semi-fictional narrative based in part on the author's life experience, but these experiences are often transposed onto a fictional character or intermixed with fictional events.'⁴⁴ Paul de Man refuses autobiography the elevated status of a literary genre and considers it as a figure of reading as the autobiographical moments occur to some degree in all texts.⁴⁵ Biography and autobiography are hinging on the fictional and the fact along with history as elements of fiction seems to have been used in them.

Autobiographical writings throw light on the surroundings and settings in which the author is set, as the work place, or the organization to which one holds an affiliation. A lot of insider information and perceptions may be revealed as the author's life experiences go by. *Time and Tide and My Railway Days* (Warrier 1988) autobiography of a former railway board chairman and *My Life and Times* (Giri 1976) by a railway trade union leader are examples of two such accounts. Seen as autobiography today, they may perhaps be considered as fiction in an altered situation tomorrow. To distinguish biography and autobiography from fiction is thus a difficult task as the distinction between them sometimes is a very slender thread, or there is nothing to demarcate them. Autobiographical novel in contrast to autobiography is 'a semi-fictional narrative based in part on the author's life experience, but these experiences are often transposed onto a fictional character or intermixed with fictional events'.⁴⁶ Most of the railway novels selected in the present study seems to have a lot of autobiographical elements in them, and they seem to include a lot of true incidents that took place. Yet these are treated as fiction that belongs to the genre of novels. Thus history, biography and

⁴⁴<https://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/lit_terms_T.html>

⁴⁵Paul de Man. Autobiography as De-facement. *MLN*, Vol. 94, No. 5, Comparative Literature. (Dec., 1979), pp. 919-930'. <http://links.jstor.org/>

⁴⁶J. A Cuddon. (1991).

autobiography share with the novel some of the narrative techniques that make their differences difficult to distinguish.

Travel Writing

The human race is said to have been travelling from place to place before becoming settlers and people still travel for various purposes to different places. People travel to satisfy their curiosity about the world beyond, for pilgrimage, trade, economic activities, political or diplomatic dealings, education or missionary activities etc. There are people who travel just for the experience of seeing new places, customs and people. Some of them record their travel experiences with great details of their travels, the places they visited, the people they met, their food, dress habits and customs. These writings may include also the adventures of the traveller. Travel writing thus like the autobiography has the element of being a witness as the writer deals mainly with the places travelled, people met, and their customs they encountered, etc.

Travel literature includes writings that describe either the author's journey to a distant and alien place, or writings which discuss the customs, habits, and wildlife of a distant place.⁴⁷ Travel narratives may be narratives either by an outsider or by a native and a native may be better equipped with a closer understanding of the land than the foreigners. Travel narratives often seem to be an encounter with another culture and the author's engagement with that culture. The question of language too perhaps plays a role in the narration. A journey is a metaphor widely used in all kinds of literature and travel narratives can also be fictional while fictional characters are seen travelling to fictional locations. Homer's *Odyssey* (8 B.C) and Dante's *Divine Comedy* (1472) are accounts of travels. Travel is used as a literary device

⁴⁷ https://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/lit_terms_T.html

in literary writing. Jonathan Swift's satiric novel *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) and R.L. Stevenson's *Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes*⁴⁸ and *Treasure Island*⁴⁹ are examples of fictional travel writing. Travel writing is a possibility enabled by two different technologies—writing technology and travel technology.

Human beings seem to have travelled forever as humans in the beginning were nomadic tribes. In the Indian subcontinent too people travelled, as they walked or used animals, animal drawn vehicles or boats to carry them (Khosla 1). Though travel culture existed in ancient India for pilgrimages, and business purposes, it was slow and difficult during the 'pre-railway period when rivers had not been bridged and roads had not been metalled' (Khosla 1). The advent of the railways appears to have enabled faster and cheaper travel possibilities and people sometimes even traveled just to experience the train journey and they recorded their experiences as travel writings. Paul Theroux's *The Great Railway Bazaar by Train Through Asia* (1975) and Bishwanath Ghosh's *Chai, Chai: Travels in Places Where You Stop but Never Get Off* (2009), are examples of such travel writing.

All the anxieties, excitements, concerns and admirations get conveyed to the public through travel writing in English as well as in all the Indian languages. *Outlook Traveller*, *Lonely Planet India*, *Air India Magazine* (English), *51 Sakthi Peedangal* (Tamil), *Yatra* (Malayalam) etc. are some of the Indian travel magazines and Bharatendu Harichandra, Har Devi, Pandit Ramshankar Vyas, Radhacharan Goswami etc. are some of the early train travellers who contributed to travel writings in India. According to Paul Theroux 'the difference between travel writing and fiction is the difference between recording what the eye sees and discovering what the imagination knows (191). The travellers' experience in India too evoked responses to the new technology and speed, and the fast forging colonial modernity with

⁴⁸ R.L. Stevenson. *Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes* (1879). London: Frontlist Books, 2001.

⁴⁹ R.L. Stevenson. *Treasure Island*. London: Cassel and company, 1883.

drastic changes in economic, social and psychological realms in the new form of writing called the ‘novel’.

Towards Novels that Define the Genre of ‘The Railway Novel’

I found the task of identifying and selecting railway novels for the study a complicated one. First of all it included limitations and implications of the railway novel as the genre is still not canonized and its definition seems loose if not undefined. Secondly Indian literature is distributed generously over a vast number of languages and to consider all of them is beyond the scope of the present study. To make a selection with a proper share of each language and region was also an arduous job as every language and every region has its own collection of representations of the railway in fiction and many of them are not translated into English. The selection of novels is done however, attempting to include representations from major zones of the subcontinent considering different phases in the development of the railways which parallel the rough historical periods which make a mark on literature in India. Some of the broad categories are the colonial period, independence and partition and post-colonial years. Though there are many novels that can be called ‘The Indian Railway Novel’, I have tried to consider a novel on the basis of its unique identity to include it in this study.

A list of the selected titles are: O. Chandu Menon’s *Indulekha* (Sahitya Pravarthaka Co-operative Society:1978) (First published in1889), P. Kunhambu’s *Saraswathi Vijayam* (Book Review Literary Trust: 2002) (First published in1892), Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay's *Pather Panchali* (HarperCollins:1999) (first published in 1929), Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan* (Chatto & Windus: 1956) (set in 1947), Maloy Krishna Dhar’s *Train to India: Memories of Another Bengal* (2009) (set in 1946-47), Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Water* (Penguin: 2006) (set in 1938), *Ice-Candy-Man* (Penguin: 1989) (set in 1947), John Master’s *Bhowani Junction*

(Penguin: 2007) (set in 1946), Anand Mahadevan's *The Strike* (Penguin:2009) (set in 1980), Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe* (2001) and Nirmal Verma's *Red Tin Roof* (1997) (first published in 1974). In order to compare the reactions of different people in different countries whose lives are transformed forever due to this technology, I consider Charles Dickens's *Dombey and Son* (1848), Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* (1869), Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (1878), Emile Zola's *La Bête Humaine* (1901), and Paula Hawkins's *The Girl on the Train* (2015).

O. Chandu Menon's *Indulekha* (1889) and P. Kunhambu's *Saraswathijayam* (1892) are two early Indian novels in Malayalam which throw light on the social conditions of the country with some fine details of life of ordinary people, their concerns and some of the promises of modernity. Both these novels set in what is now the Southern state of Kerala, are thought of as the pioneers in the field of the novel. Here, two opposing spatio-temporal settings exist in a period of transition—the reluctant feudal lords who cling to the old and a restless young generation forging towards modernity.

I would like to address Kushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956) as an Indian partition railway novel.⁵⁰ *Train to Pakistan* is a famous railway novel by Kushwant Singh telling the tragic and horrible pains of partition of India. Many may like to consider it a historical novel but it is not precisely because it is recording what happened not even ten years before it was written. Histories are written after at least one hundred years and historical novels are based on those histories. In this novel reality and fiction merge into a spectacular shock of trauma and tragedy. Stories of violence, riots, loots and murders that the border between the two newborn neighbours—India and Pakistan witnessed is what has been retold in this modern Indian novel, which perhaps will be considered a classic of Indian Writing in English, some

⁵⁰*Train to Pakistan* is known as a partition novel and there is a genre called partition literature with an immense body of written culture (Aguiar 80). But I would rechristen it as a partition railway novel.

day. In Mano Majra, Sikhs and Muslims lived a peaceful life regulated by the trains that rattled across the river bridge. The dramatic arrival of a train and its unscheduled stop slowly revealing the passengers of the train to be dead Sikhs turns Mano Majra into a battlefield. The magnificent culmination of the novel is Jugga, the village gangster, transforming himself into a hero by saving the lives of many Muslims. Kushwant Singh turns the train, once a symbol of colonial power, into a symbol of communalism, partition violence, and trauma in this novel.

Maloy Krishna Dhar's *Train to India: Memories of Another Bengal* (2009) too falls under the same category as the *Train to Pakistan* as it tells the stories of the great exodus that took survivors across imaginary lines drawn on cartographer's maps, which promised them no home, land or manna from heaven. The relatively less chronicled stories of trains travelling between India and East Pakistan carrying human bodies—dead and live—and the miseries of millions, is narrated through autobiographical observations by the author as a child who underwent the trauma of partition. The novel chronicles the forced journey from the only known home in East Bengal to the hope of a supposedly new home in a new India. Though the novel is fuelled by hate and fear, Dhar emerges as a victor with love and peace, as in the introduction he says: "The journey of hatred had finally become a journey of love and faith in humanity. That is the real story of my journey aboard the *Train to India*" (xi).

Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man* (1989) seems to be the counterpart of *Train to Pakistan* from the other side of partition. It is a little problematic to call the novel an Indian Railway novel, as it is rather a Pakistani Railway novel for though it was set in the subcontinent, the location is in Pakistan now. Sidhwa's narrative style differs as the story is captured through the eyes of an eight year old Parsee girl Lenny, while Singh has employed a third person omniscient narrator with the task. Most of the narrative is involved with the affairs of Lenny's Parsee

family, her growing up, and many associations of her young and beautiful *Ayah*. Pir Pindo is the equivalent of Mano Majra though without a railway station. Considerably less space is allotted for the railways in *Ice-Candy-Man*, though in effect, it serves the purpose of a partition railway novel.

John Master's *Bhowani Junction* (1954) is a novel about the empire and its aftermath intermingled in the railways, the military and the government packed within the pressure and conflict of freedom struggle which the author treats as mere law and order problems and criminal activities. Autobiographical traces are seen as they stretch into the army barracks working of the railway, railway people and their lives.

Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe* (2001) is a feminist railway novel, of six women who are complete strangers, till a railway journey arranges them all in a single compartment that can be locked away from the rest of the world. Each woman has a story and a different perspective to life which they share. Akhila reaches Kanyakumari with an altered vision, determined to follow her instincts and richer by the experiences shared by her co-passengers.

Pather Panchali (1929) by Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay is a railway novel from the eastern parts of the subcontinent in a small village somewhere north of Calcutta. This is the story of two innocent village kids, Durga and Opu. Durga the major character of the story is a village girl just like a wild flower that blooms in the wilderness. Her life's desire was to see a train for which she even makes adventurous escapades, but her tragic life ends without the fulfilment of that one desire. The story ends with Opu leaving the village in a train with his parents leaving Durga and her memories behind towards the promise of a future.

The Strike (2009), by Anand Mahadevan is a typical post-colonial Indian railway novel. Belonging to a Tamil family in Nagpur, the young protagonist travels to Benares and to Madras by train. The young boy's love for the railway engines, a strike by the M.G.R. fans on

the rail track, an accident, and cover-ups by the influential railway people etc. contribute to a novel of coming of age of Hari, the child protagonist as well as an idea of a nation in the backdrop of the railway technology.

Bapsi Sidhwa's *Water* (2006) exposes to bare threads, a social evil of condemning the widows into abandonment and unfathomable miseries. Inhuman treatments that Chuhia the child widow undergoes culminate into a ray of hope, an extended hand from a train, a promise of a future.

Nirmal Verma's *Red Tin Roof* (1974) is a railway novel from the northern part of the subcontinent in which the famous Shimla-Kalki route passes through live as well as in images. It is a translation of his *Nayi Kahani* (new story) that unravels the mysterious mountains and the valleys just as the complex and mysterious human minds through the imaginative as well as innocent view point and transformation of a little girl through her attainment of puberty and adolescence. Images of landscape, human beings, speeding train and the mysterious spirits of the mountains, all merge and weave a magical atmosphere. It is the process of mental and physical growth of a young girl in a magical landscape in which everything is somehow related to the railway line that passes through the hilly terrain and the trains that pass through the tunnel. Kaya reminds one perhaps of Heidi of Johanna Spyri's children's novel (1881) by the same name and the novel *Red Tin Roof* may also be called a mountain novel. The trains and the railway lines are as integrated a part in their life like the hills, the forest, the trees, the cottages and the people in their lives.

An effort to theorize time and space is undertaken in the first two chapters of the dissertation as the above mentioned novels are considered through a spatio-temporal frame in which they are situated in proximity and influenced by railway technology.

The first chapter of this dissertation—‘Temporality before and after the advent of the Railways’ deals with time as a construct: how time is perceived, various theories of time, factors that affect time perception, history of time tracking, standardization of time and the concept of railway time. All encompassing and authoritative volumes *Revolution in Time: Clocks and the Making of the Modern World* by David S. Landes (1983) and *History of the Hour: Clocks and Modern Temporal Orders* by Gerhard Dohrn-Van Rossum (1996) are referred to extensively with theories of time and temporality by Isaac Newton, Gottfried Leibniz, Immanuel Kant, and David Harvey.

The second chapter—‘History of Space and Spatiality as Railway Technology,’ theorizes space by analyzing various theories about space: perception of space, types of spaces, annihilation, production, and transformation of space. Insights from Michel de Certeau and Henry Lefebvre’s works on space reflect themselves in this chapter to understand and substantiate the concepts in detail.

The third chapter—‘The Railway that was Imagined: Pre-Independence and Partition Railway Novels,’ deals with time and space in railway fiction as how mechanical or scientific inventions transform time and space and how this happens particularly with the railways in fiction. The concept of time and space before industrialization, especially railways, and the new concept and practice of time—post railways—are explored in detail in relation to selected fiction.

In the fourth chapter—‘The Railways and Transformation: Before and After Independence,’ the railway as a means of locomotion is compared with the other means of transportation while considering its impact on the political, economic, psychological and sociological arenas as illustrated in fiction.

The Conclusion reiterates the theoretical and metaphorical implications of what 'Railway Fiction' involves and the significant positions that the research provides, drawing from the insights of the chapters in the dissertation.