

ROLE OF RAILWAYS IN THE ECONOMIC EXPLOITATION OF INDIA DURING BRITISH RULE

M. Thamarai Manalan

Department of History, Rani Anna Government College for Women, Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu

ABSTRACT

This article uses scholarly evidence to examine the significance of Indian railways to the pre-independence Indian economy and to show how the British exploited this sector of the Indian economy. When India was under British rule, the railways were instrumental in exploiting the country's resources for profit. The railways were constructed by the British colonial government primarily to facilitate the transportation of troops and goods across the country. The expansion of British trade and commerce, however, was greatly aided by the construction of railways across India. Transport of raw materials, ease of movement of goods across the country, encouragement of industrialization, substantial revenue for the British government, and disruption of established economic and social structures were all made possible by the advent of the railways. The purpose of this paper is to draw attention to how the railways helped the British exploit India's economy and how that legacy has persisted even after India gained its independence. One of the most notable contributions the British made to India was the development of its railway system. Since 1850, it has been India's single largest source of funding for new infrastructure projects, helping to propel the country's economic development. Since India's independence, it has been the country's primary mode of transport and is now the country's primary source of employment. Nonetheless, Railways' origins and historical significance cannot be overlooked despite its many achievements. Why did we feel the need to implement railroads? Before independence, how were railroads put to use? How did railroads influence the economy right away? This article makes an effort to respond to such inquiries.

Keywords: India, British, Railways, Train, Economy & Exploitation

Introduction

Impacts on India's economy and culture from the British Raj are still being felt today. The British colonial government implemented the railway system as one of its most groundbreaking innovations to aid in the transportation of troops and goods across the vast country. Yet the railways were much more than just a means of transportation; they had a significant effect on the Indian economy. When India was under British rule, the railways were instrumental in exploiting the country's resources for profit. They aided in the movement of primary commodities, fostered the development of manufacturing, and brought in substantial tax revenue for the British government. Simultaneously, the railways upended established economic and social structures, adding to India's widespread poverty. The purpose of this paper is to investigate how railways were used by the British to exploit India's economy, and how that legacy affects the country's current economic situation.¹

British and Indian relations have been tense for decades. Every Indian has their own unique experience of life under British rule. But the most pressing issue is, "When and why did the

British invade India?" A question: "What did they do in India?"

In mediaeval times, India was referred to as the Golden Bird because of its glistening culture. The Indians possessed gold, exotic spices, and fabrics that had never before been seen outside of India. They found it difficult to establish immediate dominance over us because Indians are united, honest, and have integrity. The Mughals ruled India before Akbar's dynasty, during which the British invaded and begged to establish a company. They were given permission, but only with certain constraints.²

Beginning in 1858, the British colonised India until its independence in 1947. They initially visited India in the capacity of traders for the East India Company. Over time, more and more hubs for commerce were established. The marriage of Charles II to Catherine of Braganza in 1668 also saw the gifting of Bombay to the English. As a first step in establishing a company, they approached local authorities for approval.

The Mughals ruled India during this time period. During this time, the British were under Company rule; they were eager for Crown rule to begin. Disputes with indigenous rulers led to the Battle of Plassey in 1757, which ultimately resulted in the establishment of Crown rule.

During their rule, they coined the term "British India" to refer to the Indian subcontinent.

The British government has only ever done what was best for its citizens. The British did us a great service by introducing the railway, but they did so for their own gain by imposing their own conditions on us.³

The British were having trouble getting around, so they came up with the brilliant idea of building railways. They predicted that the country's economy would flourish once rail transport of raw materials became commonplace. They were receiving 5% of their initial investment back from the railway, which indicates that it has become a source of surplus capital for them. But it was beneficial to them in various ways.

India before the Railways

Before 1850, India did not have so much as a single railroad. Transport via roadways was predominate. But the roads were spotty at best, poorly constructed, and impassable during the monsoon. Commercial shipping was restricted to the shorter distances of the waterways. Only the areas along the coasts and the rivers in northern India were affected. The British could not afford to move them to the coasts for export because the transportation costs were so high. Freight costs would have been 80-90% higher without railways, according to estimates by (Hurd, 1983). In addition, Hurd calculated that the nation could save about Rs. 1.2 billion (or 9 percent of GDP) by switching to railways as its primary mode of transportation.⁴

There is sufficient evidence to conclude that the expansion of trade in India was spurred by the railways, which facilitated the linking of markets and facilitated transportation between them. India's rural areas were self-sufficient economically until the advent of the railroads. As both production and consumption took place in the community, "it was self-sufficient. 'The village communities are little republics having nearly everything they want within themselves and almost independent of foreign relations,' said Sir Charles Metcalfe. India's society was slow to adapt to the new economic model of trade, open market, and commercialization of goods until the advent of railways. The country's GDP grew, that much is certain, but did the average citizen's standard

of living rise as a result? Were the Indians who were transporting raw materials for trade and export treated fairly by the policies and charges?"⁵

Reasons for Introduction of Railways in India

To get their hands on cheap cotton and other raw materials for their factories, the English company intends to endow India with railways, as Karl Marx foresaw in 1853. No members of the Indian public played a role in sparking the demand for British railways, which were instead driven entirely by private English entrepreneurs and sanctioned by the government. That was the case (Seymour, 1970). The development of railways heralded the beginning of the industrial age and galvanised the Indian populace to participate in commercial activity. Indian railways were crucial in transporting grain and raw materials to England, where they were used in the manufacturing of goods during the Industrial Revolution. The British government's apparent lack of compassion for the plight of the common people is illustrated by the fact that wheat exports increased 22-fold between 1867 and 1877 (Ghosh, 1944), and that this trend persisted even during the great famine of 1876-1878. Expecting bribery and corruption during the construction of rail networks was another impetus for their introduction. According to Sweeney's book, corruption in the railways has been rampant from the very beginning, with colonial administrators receiving kickbacks from the funding of tracks and trains. According to (Sweeney, 2005) After the British government took over the guaranteed Railway companies, corruption in the industry grew steadily.⁶

Railway efficiency must be broken down into two time periods, before and after 1920, when the railways were run by guarantee railways companies and the British government, respectively. During the years leading up to 1920, freight rates dropped steadily while rail networks expanded rapidly. Some examples of government policy include raising freight rates and slowing the expansion of railways.⁷

Objectives of British Railways

The British first introduced railways for the sole purpose of facilitating commerce. The following examples demonstrate this:

- Passenger fares in India were notably higher than average. The average Indian could not afford the Indian fares, which were one-third to two-thirds as much as the English fares. For example: (Robertson, 1903)
- National priorities were not taken into account while deciding where to build new rail lines. More extensive rail networks were built in the regions where industry was most prevalent, while the vast majority of the population was left out of the process.
- Freight rates were lowered between 1853 and 1919, but after the British government assumed control of railway companies, they were dramatically raised. Between 1920 and 1947, India's rail network expanded by a mere 1%, which, combined with the country's notoriously high freight costs, effectively paralysed the country's economy.

History of British Rail

The "father of trains," George Stephenson, contributed to the success of British Rail. The first rail in Britain was laid from Stockton to Darlington in 1825. Only mineral cargo would be transported via steam locomotive. As early as 1830, the Manchester and Liverpool Railway opened Britain's first public passenger railway. The railroad had grown to a length of 13500 km by 1870.⁸

Myth of Britain's gifts to India



Even though the British had used up all of India's resources (including, presumably, its health, wealth, and peace), the common argument was that at least they had left us railways, cricket, education, and tea. It was not a gift, but this is just one of the myths surrounding it, much like the idea that the English language was a divinely bestowed gift.⁹

They benefited from the newly opened railway. British authorities were only perpetrating a colonial con. They risked their money with the sole intention of recouping every penny they had put in plus a little bit more. Indians even paid their fair share of taxes. The best jobs were reserved for British citizens, and Indians were not even considered for them. Indians were only allowed to work as mechanics, and even then that was their only option. All they gave us was the railroad, and we plan to use it to its full potential. What they gave you was not a thoughtful gesture.¹⁰

Exploitation of India by British using Railways

There was a zenith in the railway's economic exploitation of India after 1920. Few attempts were made before 1920 to use railways for public good, such as expanding the rail network or using trains to transport necessities during famines. It has been noted by Robin Burgess and Dave Donaldson that the development of railways has mitigated the effects of famines in India (Burgess & Donaldson, 2010). There is, however, a counterargument that suggests the famines were brought on in part by the extensive export of food grains and the pressure on both land and human resources, in which the railways played a significant role. (Meena, 2016) Nonetheless, the decades following 1920 saw an intensification of exploitative railroad policies that were used to syphon off even more of India's wealth and ship it to Britain.¹¹ The following points support this point of view:

- After 1919, transportation costs skyrocketed. The freight rate doubled from 0.5 paisa per tonne mile in 1919 to 1.5 paisa per tonne mile in 1934. (Hurd, 1983)

- In addition, the fare rates increased from 0.35 paisa per tonne mile in 1919 to 0.83 paisa per tonne mile in 1934. (Hurd, 1983)
- Trains were used to move crops from farmers to shipping terminals. After 1920, rail networks stalled due to a lack of funding and a lack of interest in public service.
- During the Great Depression of 1931, gold was shipped by train from the interior to the port of Bombay. In an effort to revive the British economy, this gold was shipped there. according to (Manikumar, 2003)
- The railroads suffered during World War I due to increased use in transporting food and troops to the ports of Bombay and Karachi (Headrick, 1988), but they were completely destroyed during World War II. Railroad maintenance facilities were converted into ammunition factories to keep up with the rising demand for ammunition, and rolling stock was redirected to the Middle East. . (Wainwright, 1994)
- Despite frequent famines, such as in 1876–1879 and 1896–1902, exports of grains like wheat and rice increased.
- For the British, India's continued role as an exporter of raw materials and importer of finished goods depended on the country's railway system. One of the British goals was to stop the shift from an agricultural to an industrial economy in India, and this goal was achieved. Reference: (Chaudhuri, 1971)

The railways played a crucial role in the economic exploitation of India during the British rule. The British colonial government built the railways primarily to facilitate the movement of troops and goods across the country. However, the railways had a far-reaching impact on the Indian economy, contributing significantly to the growth of British trade and commerce.

Here are some of the ways in which the railways contributed to the economic exploitation of India during British rule:

- 1. Transportation of raw materials:** The railways enabled the transport of raw materials such as cotton, jute, coal, and iron ore from the hinterland to the ports, where

they could be exported to Britain. This helped the British to exploit India's natural resources and benefit from the country's cheap labour.

- 2. Facilitating trade:** The railways facilitated the movement of goods across the country, making trade easier and cheaper. This allowed British merchants to access new markets and sell their products at higher prices.
- 3. Supporting industrialisation:** The railways supported the growth of industries in India by providing a cheap and efficient mode of transportation for raw materials and finished goods. This led to the development of new industries such as textiles, which were then dominated by the British.
- 4. Generating revenue:** The railways generated significant revenue for the British government through the collection of tariffs and other charges. This revenue was often used to fund the British colonial administration and the maintenance of the railways.
- 5. Disrupting traditional economies:** The railways disrupted traditional economies and social structures by facilitating the movement of people and goods across the country. This led to the displacement of traditional artisans and small-scale industries, which were unable to compete with the cheap mass-produced goods brought in by the railways.

In summary, the railways played a critical role in the economic exploitation of India during British rule. They were instrumental in facilitating the movement of raw materials, goods, and people across the country, supporting the growth of industries and trade, and generating significant revenue for the British government.

Conclusions

The British built and ran the railroads with the goal of making it simpler to transport raw materials to the ports. High freight and fare prices were maintained, and the railways were accused of corruption by British authorities. Even when there were famines in the country, the railways were used to transport raw

materials, gold, and silver to the ports so they could be exported. One also cannot discount the possibility of droughts being manufactured using railroads. Despite the British's shady use

of the railways for their own ends, they helped thousands of Indians find work and bolstered the Indian economy by linking markets and opening up economic activity.

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