

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research is to analyse the important impact railways had on the literary milieu. The railways, since its introduction, have been depicted in the literature of Bengal. These portrayals were based on various factors which mostly came from people's experiences as either passengers, employees or even simple bystanders. A deeper look into the literature on railways in Bengal revealed that trains as some kind of an architect of long-distance travel had a tremendous role to play in people's lives and situations. This research has attempted to look at Bengal as a nucleus and identify the pivot role as well as the utility of the railways. This study also aimed to explore non-traditional historical sources such as folklore, print media and poetry revolving around railways. It is concluded that the railways became an eclectic space in Bengal, where the passengers became the prototype of historically modern Bengal and hence representative of influences of changes taking place after the introduction of British rule. The focus of the thesis has been on literary traditions which have been seen through Bengali poems, prose (both fiction as well as non-fiction) and folklore. Conventional historical sources such as travelogues, newspapers, and reports have also been used predominantly to understand and reflect the socio-cultural responses to railways.

The discourse surrounding railways in historical research has primarily focused on economic factors. However, there is a dearth of investigation on people's experiences with railways, particularly in the Bengal region. This gap is significant as it presents alternative perspectives that can complement the dominant discourse. These perspectives can provide a more comprehensive understanding of railways' impact on society when juxtaposed with the rulers' viewpoint. The establishment of railways constituted a new technological innovation that significantly affected society. Indications of this influence can be found in multiple literary genres, including poetry, which demonstrates how Indians viewed and responded to change.

In the thesis, poetic representations indicate the cornerstone of Bengal's cultural acceptance of this new mode of mechanised transportation. This acceptance can be observed on different levels: firstly, many poems celebrated the introduction of railways in Bengal, highlighting how the people of Bengal began to rely on railways to carry out their daily activities and cultural practices. Secondly, there was an intellectual acceptance of train culture, reflecting the significant adaptations that society experienced. The Bengali poems reflect that many pre-colonial socio-cultural structures exhibited signs of disintegration due to the undeniable competence of the revolutionary means of transportation- railways. Thirdly, the poems also indicate that the railways were not always viewed positively, as they brought with them newer problems such as the spread of new diseases and water logging concurrent with their expansion. Fourthly, many poems drew attention to the haughtiness of the British, which subjected the working class to various kinds of oppression. Despite this, it proved beneficial in instilling class consciousness and a sense of their rights. This also facilitated the initial development of the railway working class.

Whether a commoner, a railway worker or a woman, railways influenced almost every Bengali life. This elicited a folk response from the masses and features related to railways were integrated into folklore. Bengali folk genres such as *loko chodas*, *dhandhan*, and *loko sangeet* have been studied in this thesis. The response of the Bengalis towards railways was varied, ranging from enthusiasm, reverence, faith, and even fear or dread of its potential to alter the trajectory of a nation. The transformative effect of railways on society and culture is reflected in all these genres. Through musical renditions, the train has been portrayed as a means of transportation that has facilitated India's modernization and has also been likened to a spiritual journey to attain moksha. The lore also covered how railways brought about new employment opportunities, connected regions, and facilitated the transportation of people, materials, and ideas, which led to other social improvements. However, the folklore of Bengal has also voiced the adverse effects of railways, such as economic exploitation, environment and disruption of ordinary lives of people. Overall, railways have had a profound impact on the people of Bengal, both positive and negative. It is through the lens of local folk culture that we can understand the complexities of this impact.

Railways have had a significant influence on Bengal, as evidenced by Bengali prose both fiction as well as non-fiction. The prose used in the thesis explores various facets of people's responses. It clearly illustrates that despite some initial resentment, Bengalis embraced the railway system as an impressive technological feat and a useful mode of transportation. The establishment of railways not only facilitated the movement of goods and people but also played a pivotal role in the sociocultural transformation of Bengal. The prose used in the thesis gives due credit to the new industry as it provided job opportunities and even points towards it being responsible for the evolution of new social classes, such as the *Babu* class. Moreover, the prose also reflects that railways affected and altered the urban landscape and transformed rural regions, leading to increased urbanisation.

Both Bengali fiction, as well as non-fiction, exhibit a change in the daily routines of common people. A special mention is made of train timetables and regulations that changed the lifestyle of Bengali people, redefining the notion of punctuality and discipline. A very important transformation that is noted in the prose and other Bengali narratives is the change railways brought in the lives of women. It allowed Bengali women to move beyond the confines of their homes, providing exposure to the outside world and public life. Many prose used in the thesis also point towards the fact that the railways played an essential role in breaking rigid caste and communal barriers. They make it clear that it did not completely remove the barriers but posed strong challenges to them. The Bengali adage "*Jat marlo teen Sen e/Keshab Sene, station e ar Wilson e*" provides some evidence that cast rigidity was reduced to a greater extent when railways arrived in Bengal than it was before their arrival.

The prose used in the thesis also points towards the negative impact of railways. For instance, the induction of foreign goods into remote areas of Bengal sparked growing aspirations among the younger generation, leading to a shift towards urban life and away from agriculture, disrupting the agrarian production system. Furthermore, British colonial attitudes fostered a sense of subversion among Indians while reinforcing their superiority, leading to class divisions within the railway workforce. These prejudices, however, served to unite the Indian population, as the railways facilitated the spread of nationalism among Bengalis. By providing an efficient network of communication the railways became instrumental in promotion of the Pan-Indian consciousness. On the other hand railways epitomised colonialism which exploited Indians and their resources. Therefore they also became primarily targets of attacks by the agitating masses during the last phase of freedom struggle. Additionally, the prose draws attention towards how railways were seen as hurting the ecology of Bengal, including its forests, water, and overall public health. The emergence of both railways and newsprint in colonial Bengal during the same century intertwined the two. The railways provided a platform for disseminating notices and updates, while newsprint found new fodder for publication. Initially, publications such as *Bengal Harkaru* and *The Statesman* lauded the railways for their necessity and amusement. However, over time, the narrative shifted. Print media began to highlight mismanagement, accidents, and passenger hardships, advocating for change. From 1862 onwards, newspapers such as *Sangbad Prabhakar*, *Prabashi*, and *Amrita Bazar Patrika* echoed the demands of railway workers and criticized economic exploitation. Environmental concerns, one would feel, are the concerns of contemporary times. However, the print media of Bengal reflects its concern even in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They shed light on environmental impacts, such as deforestation and waterway disruptions, highlighting the toll on public health. Amidst these revelations, railways faced blame for waterlogging and disease outbreaks, shaping a complex narrative of progress and peril in colonial Bengal.

The portrayal of railways in the context of colonial Bengali travel literature offers a comprehensive and intriguing account of the profound impact of this technological advancement. The travelogues present a diverse range of opinions regarding the railways, which vary from admiration for the engineering marvel to critical assessments of the social and cultural modifications that resulted from the railways. As per the travelogues, the railways had a significant influence on the Bengali way of life. The commencement of railways provided the Bengali populace with new opportunities to explore a diverse range of landscapes and socio-cultural practices. Before the advent of railways, travel outside of the country was primarily for trade and religious purposes, and the Bengali people had limited exposure to it. However, the travelogues suggest that the arrival of railways transformed Bengalis, both men and women, into travel enthusiasts, who were eager to explore new destinations and experiences.

The historical discourse on the role and impact of railways in colonial Bengal presents a complex and multidimensional picture from myriad perspectives, as conveyed in both Bengali and English narratives. The construction of railways in Bengal was primarily motivated by commercial, military and administrative interests. The merchant class of Bengalis and Britons shared a common passion for commerce, which propelled the building of railways. However, attempts to depict the public facilities from a utilitarian standpoint were few and far between, as the company and the British government were primarily focused on colonial benefits, with public amenities being a byproduct. The construction of railways facilitated British and European trade in and out of India to a significant extent, with Indian merchant classes acting as brokers. Hence, nationalist historians viewed the railways as an instrument for the extortion of the Indian economy and the destruction of indigenous trade and production relations. The two narratives provide valuable insights into how railways have transformed Bengali society. The common space offered by trains contributed to the gradual elimination of social rigidity, hierarchy, community distinctions, and cultural prejudice. The emergence of new job opportunities led to the rise of new classes and social groups, as well as new establishments. By sharing this common space, women, who were the most marginalised group in society, were allowed to be bold and open-minded. In conclusion, the historical discourse on the significance of railways in colonial Bengal presents a wide range of viewpoints that reflect the various interests and perspectives of different groups. While the socio-cultural effects of railways showed a complicated interaction

between development and opposition, the administration of railways and its economic effects received both praise and criticism.