

**REPRESENTATIONS OF RAILWAYS IN LITERARY TRADITIONS OF BENGAL: 1854-1947**

**SYNOPSIS**

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### SYNOPSIS

#### INTRODUCTION:

The railways have drawn considerable scholastic attention over the years. But most of them are based on economical and technological aspects whereas the socio-cultural and more specifically the literary perspectives have received scant consideration particularly in respect to Bengal. The present study has attempted to present impacts of railways through literary traditions in Bengal. Throughout the colonial period the Indians had to cope-up with social, cultural, political, religious and administrative changes that were brought about and introduced by the European powers. All these changes had left its mental, moral and physical effects on Bengalis as well as Indians. This scholastic work has presented how the people in Bengal responded to colonial discourses and how they cope up with a new transport system gradually. This attempt has also explored how railway systems changed the cultural aspects of the society and had been represented in literary traditions of Bengal in various dimensions.

The advent of such a mass transport-system resulted in changing not only socio-economic conditions in Bengal but also socio-cultural spheres. The Railway as a transport-system affected every day's life in many ways. The customs of life, the rhythm of work and movement, the perception of space and time were changing. Rural landscape, economic set up, the mode of production, human relations, and individual and social lives also underwent rapid transformation.

At the same time a new component-Railways began to be ingrained in the language and literary traditions in Bengal. Railways and its related issues were occupying rooms in the contemporary newspapers, magazines, reports, gazetteers; and simultaneously entering the sphere of poetry, prose, stories, and songs etc. The world of trains and railroads had not only endowed themes and metaphorical perceptions upon the literary imaginary; it has also resulted in new procedures of narration. The great extraordinary abundance of novels, short stories and

travelogues written in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with the setting and plot based on travel by train, the rail road accident, the casual encounter in a compartment or night spent on a sleeping bath, shows their personal interests in it and at the same time it helps to draw the socio-cultural picture from it.

### **OBJECTIVES:**

The purpose of this study was to contribute to an understanding of impacts on socio-cultural life and representations in literary traditions in Bengal during colonial period as a result of introduction of railway-transport and the main objectives are:

1. To study the attitude, views and reactions of the Bengalese towards the railway-transport through poetic response.
2. To know the general and diverse reaction of the society in Bengal and the process of their adaptation with a new transport system, its mobility and pace through novels and prose and other contemporary narrative.
3. To explore the reflection of railway-issues in contemporary newspapers, magazines, journals etc in many respect
4. To look into the contemporary literary forms, especially travelogues to know the views of the populace in Bengal.
5. To go through the Bengali songs, rhymes, folklore etc to know the root level societal impacts as a result of the introduction of railways and so on.
6. To know the different views and attitudes as represented in both bengali and English narrative.

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE:**

The Indian Railway has mainly been studied from the perspective of economic growth and technical development, sometimes from a historical and cultural point of view. A very few works are found to be done in respect of impacts of railway system on literary traditions in Bengal. Socio-economic impacts of railway in Bengal have been reflected by Brajendranath

Bandopadhyay in his *'Sangbadpotre Sekaler kotha'* (Contemporary Topics in Newspapers) 1949, Vol I and II to a little extent. He analyses education, society, economy, religion etc, along with news of rail as represented in the colonial bilingual newspapers. Sukumar Sen, the famous Bengali linguist highlighted the chronological growth of railways in Bengal in the book *'Reler Paa Chali'* (The Doggerel of Rail) by describing how train became a running market of various commodities and crime at the same time. In the *"Early Railwaymen in India: Decoity and Train-wrecking"(c. 1860-1900)*, 1976 edited by Banerjee, Dipendra, Chattopadhyay Boudhayan, Chaudhury Binoy, Barun de, Ray Aniruddha, a comprehensive description regarding the adverse impact referring robbing in rail wagons is found. The article *'The Colonial Context Of The Bengal Renaissance: A Note On Early Railway-Thinking In Bengal'* written by Dipesh Chakrabarty in the book *'Our Indian Railway, Themes in Indian Railway History'* edited by Roopa Srinivasan, Manish Tiwari and Sandeep Sailas shows how railways may be attributed to bring renaissance in Bengal with the help of Prince Dwarkanath Tagore, Muty Lal Shil, Ram Komul Sen and Ram Gopal Ghosh. Sri Bibhuti Bhushan Mukhopadhyay's *'Rail Rango' (Rail as an arena)*. Kalidas Maitra wrote *'Bashpiyakol ebong Bharatbarshiya Railway'* (The steam Engine and the Railway of India) describing its technological evolution and growth of railways. Arup K. Chatterjee's *'The Purveyors of Destiny: A Cultural Biography of the Indian Railways'*, 2017, traces the 156 years history of the Indian Railways from an unusual angle- how the railways influenced the cultural milieu of India through not only the literature, films and songs but also catalyzed revolutionary changes in the country's political and social canvas. Dr. Aruna Awasthi's article *'Railways And Cultural History: A Study of Poetic Representations'*, IHC, 2011; is an important attempt to study the interaction of society with the phenomenon called railways in India through its representations in Indian literature-primarily poems. Ritika Prasad's *'Tracks of Change, Railways and Everyday Life in Colonial India'* explores how colonial society negotiated the wide range of transformations wrought by railway technology. Ian J Kerr's works on Indian Railways: i). *'Building the Railways of the Raj 1850-1900'*, ii) *'27 Down: New Departures in Indian Railways Studies'*, iii) *'Railways in modern India'* brilliantly discusses the social, political and historical aspects of railways, but discussions on Bengal are very brief. *'Railways in India, A Legend'* by

Sitanshu Sekhar Ghosh(2002) is a huge work on Indian Railways once again briefly points out its impact on Bengal.

#### **METHODOLOGY:**

As the main objective of this attempt is to study the cultural impacts of railway on Bengal through literary representations the data and information have been collected from various sources as given below:

**Primary Sources:** Contemporary Govt. reports, census, manuals, yearbooks, All kind of gazetteers etc published by railways, Government year book and gazetteers to know the reaction and purpose of the British government as well as the opinion in regard to the railway systems of renowned native elite persons like Dwarkanath Tagore, Ramcomul Sheel and so on.

#### **Literary sources:**

The Literary sources have been divided into two:

1. Contemporary (vernacular) Bengali and English newspapers, journals, letters, magazines, reports and gazetteers like *Amrita Bazaar*, *Archchana Patrika*, *Bengal Hurkaru*, *Education Gazette*, *Friend of India*, *Gramobarta Prokashika* etc have been studied to explore the purpose and socio-cultural impacts of this new transport system, bilateral discussions over it, response of natives towards railways, difficulties faced by the railways etc.

2. Other literary sources like poetry, songs, short stories, novels, and articles have been studied to acquaint with socio-cultural transformations occurred by the introduction of railway. Folklore traditions have been dealt with to explore root level impact of railways in the society of colonial Bengal. Travelogues, contemporary Bengali literatures and other rail related historical writings have been consulted to corroborate and draw a picture of socio-cultural impacts both in positive and negative perspectives.

## CHAPTER 1: Poetic Responses to Railways

The poetic depiction of Railways shows the way Indians viewed and responded to changes brought about by this new means of transportation. Their response gradually transformed from an initial overawe to acceptance and eventual assimilation or naturalisation or normalisation of Railways in popular culture.<sup>1</sup> The Railways gave a romantic approach to Bengali society also which could be found in their poetry. Through the poetry the attitude, views and response towards the Railway by the Bengali literati has been explored. All the poems related to Railways showed the state wide social and cultural transformation. Trains, train windows, train tracks, platforms, bridges, yards, workers, ticket counters, rail working class behavior became the themes of the poetry.

Three consequent attitudes and views towards railway through poetic response have been discussed here. In the very beginning railways became a phenomenon of wonder, amazement and amusement. After saturation in day to day life it provided the space of romanticism. But gradually it became the centre of various agitations even. For example, three famous poets of a slightly different age could be discussed here.

1. **Ishwar Chandra Gupta** (1812-1859) a poet, writer and editor of Bengali newspaper, *Sambad Prabhakar*. Probably he wrote the first poem 'KOLER GADI' on this new fast communication.
2. **RabindraNath Tagore** (1861-1941) wrote many poems on this new transport system. Amongst these stations, Hothat Dekha and Rater Gadi are very famous in which romantic poetic responses could be found regarding railways.
3. Another very romantic and revolutionary poet is **Kaji Nazrul Islam** (1899-1976), now the national poet of Bangladesh. His famous poem 'Kuli Majur' shows the revolutionary protest against the British railway officers and other elite class passengers who extort the 'porters' in a very inhuman way.

Romantic acceptance of the changes brought out by Railways, proves the adaptation of Railways

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<sup>1</sup> Vaidya Maitree, Socio -Cultural History: Railways in Gujarati Literature and Traditions in *The Railways in Colonial South Asian Economy, Ecology and Culture*, ed. by Ganeswar, Nayak, 2021 Delhi, Manohar Publications., p.

in everyday life. “ Understanding of such aspects enables one to become cognizant of the way in which the Railways had affected the entire structure of the society.” Three types of responses have been found here from wonder to vandal with romance between.<sup>2</sup>

## CHAPTER 2: Portrayal of Railways in Prose and other Bengali Narratives

Literature **is the mirror of a society**, and prose is a most important genre in modern literature which highlights social issues. Each period of phase of literature is a microcosm of the then contemporary society. In this regard it could be said that the introduction of the railway in Bengal was a very revolutionary phenomenon which left its impact on the society as a whole which have been reflected in the contemporary literary genre especially in Bengali novels and prose. In the beginning of nineteenth century Bengali prose literature began and in the second half of the 19th century this new faster communication system was introduced so the literary tradition took this new technological system within its canopy. Railway took the room in this literary tradition and the tradition also got the theme to narrate.<sup>3</sup>

Immediately after the introduction of railways in Bengal, two important books were published directly related to railways are- 1. *Bashpiyo Kol O Bharat Barshiya Railway* (1855) by Kalidas Maitra and 2. *Devaganer Martye Agoman* (1869) by Dwarka Nath Vidya Bhushan . Both of these book are may not be history books but are relevant as historical sources.<sup>4</sup>

*Bashpiya Kol O Bharatbarshiya Railway* (The Steam Engine And The East Indian Railway ),1869, published by Mr. J. H. Peters and written by Kalidas Maitra. It defuses and disseminates accurate knowledge regarding the introduction of railways in Bengal. He compared the old transport system with the new momentum transport system in Bengal.

Devagoner Mortye Agoman is another insightful book, serially published in 'Kalpadroom' newspaper in 1880 , edited by Dwarkanath Vidyabhushan, later published in 1855 as a book. It is a narrative novel of Hindu Gods who were traveling by train as it was a new fast

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<sup>2</sup> Vaidya, 2021 p. 334

<sup>3</sup> Das, S. (1955), *Bangla Gadya Sahityer Itihash*, Kolkata, Mitralay, p.5

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.,

communication system in the mortal world. It draws our attention by giving information and descriptions on it with humour. All the Gods start their journey from Kailash to West Bengal by train pulled by 'Kaler Gari'. The railway locomotive- prodigious car was being identified by few similar known names like Ratha, Pushpak Rath, Anal Nishari Ratha, Aaggadi (in Gujarati), Totarvanti ( in Tamil), Mala, Avali, Louhamarg (railway) etc.

All these books defuse and disseminate accurate knowledge regarding the introduction of railways in Bengal, social changes and local reactions and attitude towards the railways which will be corroborated in chapter four and seven.

### **CHAPTER 3: Adumbration of Railways in Print Media**

Nineteenth century was the age of vivification of vernacular newspapers in Bengal which had been commenced with Christian missionaries. All these newspapers vivified and stimulated the Bengali mindset towards enlightenment. Railways and related issues occupied a considerable room in the contemporary print media like Bengali and English newspapers, periodicals, journals etc. Planning, proposal, trilateral discussion, future impacts etc were being published with due gravity from the very beginning. Responses and reactions of common people towards railways, incidents and accidents, problems faced by railways, molestation, various types of crimes were being published by the contemporary newspapers, periodicals etc. Print media, especially contemporary newspapers and periodicals and magazines showed their active role to make the people aware about its utility and negative impacts like economic extortion, destruction of agrarian economy and small scale of industry, degradation of environment, working class agitations etc,. Hence, all the issues related to railways published in print media have been explored.

### **CHAPTER 4: Depiction of Railways in Travelogues**

Travelogues are crucial to the process of reconstructing history. Humans have long been fascinated by traveling and distant locations. The Travelogues give us a thorough account of information about the political developments, the social climate, and the economic features of

the inhabitants or empires. They also encountered a genuine report of a traveler's experiences while traveling by train, through which a holistic contemporary or previous socio-cultural, religious and economic scenario could be drawn.

All the plausible contemporary travelogues which are mostly from personal experience, have been explored which have given us the vivid experience with the new transport system, its pace, its amazing power of mobility, its constructional endeavors, historical development, authoritarian mismanagements and other hazardous or inconveniences caused by the railway department.

For example **Banglay Bhraman**" (Travel in Bengal) in two volumes give vivid descriptions of every station from Kolkata onwards East west, north and south region of whole Bengal. How all the pilgrimages have been connected with railway stations to facilitate the pilgrims could be derived elaborately.

Another travelogue " **Punyabhume Punya Snan**"(Pious Bath at Pious Land) written by famous Bengali writer Kalkut (real name is Samaresh Basu) on train travel from Allahabad to Calcutta via Patna. The author vividly describes how different lingual people were exchanging their views as well as culture while traveling, which proves the prelude to breaking of social taboos .

"**Bhraman Katha**"(Tale of Travel) is a very important travelogue written by Swarna Kumari Devi, sister of Rabindra Nath Tagore. The book is important as it is written by first woman writer of Bengal who describes her own traveling experience.

## **CHAPTER 5: Acceptance of Railways in Folklore Traditions**

Folk culture typically refers to the culture of a society's early years. The value of studying folk culture is highlighted in this situation because the new communication system impacted upon this materially and culturally. The new communication system was so influential in its appearance and activities it affected the root level people and their culture also. Both upper class folk tradition and root level culture has been explored to know the impact of railways and its acceptance by popular culture also. The folk songs, and folk verses of tribal people have also been dealt with to know the impact of railways.

There are so many folk verses, rhymes and songs in which Rail has been exposed in many ways. For example, the rhyme *Rel Gadir Gaan* composed by UpendraKishor Rooy (1863-1915), shows the curiosity regarding trains. Baul songs are the most popular folk tradition in Bengal. There are many songs which consist of the rail as a theme with similes. *Chode ingrejer gadite tor proyojon/ shonre abodh mon, shree gurur padopadma gadir age tuccha koler gadi/ kothay lage. Shigra chado nurage jabe nitya Vrindavan* is a song which compares the train with the Guru to achieve the ultimate goal. Another Most popular rhyme is "*Aikom baikom taratari/ Jadu jabe swasur bari/ Rel gadi jhomajhom paa fickle aloor dom*" which makes the people alert about the manner of boarding the train. *Gadi elo dumdumaye de go tushur bedaiye/ Ailo gadi baile gelo joda bengal bajaye*, is another folk song practiced by the people of Midnapur district which means the train has gone but I had a great desire to board it.

#### **CHAPTER 6: Comparative study of Representations in Bengali and English Narratives.**

As the narratives were written both in English and vernacular languages, the views and attitudes were also explained in divergent ways. A comparative study regarding the introduction of railways, its purposes, its management, its impacts on socio-cultural and economic consequences have been exposed to present a balanced view to the scholars. Both the Bengali and English literary traditions have been analyzed to unearth the views, attitudes and responses towards the railways.

For example Many English narratives explain the purpose of the construction of railways in India as social and economic progress. The railway system will be the forerunner of modern industry'. But at the same time many Bengali narratives like Newspapers, Periodicals and other literary traditions explained its purposes as fully political and economical extortion, etc.,

#### **CONCLUSION :**

It took a considerable period of time for the Bengali society to negotiate with the new system of transport and adjust to a wide range of transformations. This was reflected in the literary traditions of the region. The literary traditions were also experiencing a parallel influence in

many dimensions which is the main theme of the instant research work. The attitude, reaction, views, adaptation and presentation etc. of railways have been uncovered in the study of literary tradition. The social and cultural impact have come out as a result thereof. This would help enrich scholastic concepts and knowledge towards the cultural impact of railways in Bengal.

Presence of impact of railway transport remains strong in many popular poetry to literary genres, and from vernacular newspapers to folk traditions. Station, yard, train compartment become the theme of imaginary writing which at the same time portray a socio-cultural picture of that time. Both positive and adverse reactions are reflected in all literary traditions. This smoky phenomenon, which is sometimes described as a monster, becomes somewhere threatening elements for cutting natural landscape and violating nature and somewhere became the cause of economic extortions and working class agitations. At the same time some literary tradition represents it as a symbol of progress and cultural and textual heritage from numerous examples of literary traditions it could be concluded that the new technology of travel and transportation has had an important role in the general transformation of modern societies, their ways of feeling, thinking and living.

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