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HISTORICISING PAMBAN RAILWAY BRIDGE

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Colonialism is understood as a social formation, which had control over a number of modes of production and forms of exploitation. Colonialism was first in the form of mercantilism then it transformed itself into capitalism. Britain acquired colonies in the non-European world including india for missionary work, glory, adventure and trade in exotic luxury goods .Eventually they became the rulers of India .For the perpetuation of their rule they had to make the people inferior to them. Thus the process of modernization was introduced in all spheres of life by them.It got strengthened in India by the aggressive policy of Lord Dalhousie[1848-1856],the Governor General of India. He started modernization in education, transport and communication. The Railway era began in India on 6 April 1853when the first train covered a distance of 21 miles from Bombay to Thane.

Pamban island is in the district of Ramanathapuram in Tamilnadu.In1792 British appointed Benjamin Torin as the collector of Tirunelveli and Ramanathapuram provinces .The Famine of 1876-78 necessitated the re organization of the Madras Presidency. Subsequently Sir William Mayor of Indian civil service was appointed to give suggestions for the same. He found that the Madurai District was spread over 8708square miles and had a population of 3 million. On the basis of the recommendations of Sir William Mayor ,a new district was created as Ramanathapuram in 1910.It was created by carving out certain portions from the Madurai and Tirunelveli districts.The Madurai -Tuticorin Railway line was opened in 1876.Further South Indian Railway was permitted to extend a railway line towards Ramanathapuram.In 1899,a proposal was made to extend the railway line upto Pamban.A fund of Rs10 lakhs was allotted in 1899 and the work began in the same year. Pamban bridge was opened on 1 August 1902 covering a distance of 891/2 miles. Then the second phase from Pamban to Rameswaram a distance of 17 miles was opened for public on 11 september 1906.The distance between Mandapam to Pamban was covered by sea.Henceforth from Mandapam to Pamban water boats were maintained for the passage of a distance of 3 miles. another line was laid between Rameswaram and Dhanushkodi covering a distance of about 111/2 miles.This line was opened for traffic on 10 December 1908 . Although a line from Madurai to Dhanushkodi was laid it could not be completed because of a sea gap between Mandapam and Pamban for a distance

In the history of Railways the year 1914 was a landmark. Here after pilgrims who travelled by boat to and from Mandapam and Rameshwaram enjoyed the train service of South Indian railway.In that year South Indian Railway extended the railway line upto dhanushkodi by

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constructing a viaduct over the reef between Mandapam and a cantilever bridge was constructed over the Pamban channel. Passenger traffic started in january 1914 and the goods traffic on 14 september 1914. Srilankan connection was opened on 24 february 1914.

REASONS FOR THE CONSTRUCTION

The most important reason for the construction of Pamban railway bridge was to enlarge trade activities and thus acquire more profit from it. The British wanted to bring provinces, towns, districts, and villages under a single political administrative system and it lead to the speedy construction of Pamban Railway bridge. The British wanted to reduce the travelling distance of its both colonies India and Srilanka. The British also wanted to avoid the risk and delay in cotton trade. The export of agricultural products and the expansion of tourism in Ramanathapuram district also induced the British to construct the bridge.

SCHERZER ROLLING LIFT BRIDGE

The Pamban Railway bridge is also called as scherzer rolling lift bridge. It was named after the German engineer Scherzer who built the Pamban viaduct. The viaduct is 6778 feet long and consists of 145 openings. Out of 145 openings 143 of 40 feet span , one 43 feet span and another one was 44 feet span.The bridge was designed by Scherzer rolling lift bridge company of Chicago. The Pamban railway bridge is considered an engineering marvel and it was built within two years . 600 workers were involved in the construction of bridge.

The lifting of Pamban railway bridge was done by means of winches on each side of lifting span. The winch is normally locked by means of mechanical lever in the operation cabin.The lever is controlled electrically by another lever called the King Lever. The position of the King Lever releases the mechanical lever which in turn releases winch lock thus enabling the bridges leaves to be lifted up. Normally 6 persons are needed on either side to manually operate and lift them for ships to pass.The navigation span needs to be lifted 4 times a month.

CYCLONE AND SCHERZER RAILWAY BRIDGE

The year 1964 is memorable in the history of South India and also in the pages of Southern Railway. On 22 December 1964 a storm formed in the Bay of Bengal in the eastern direction of Dhanushkodi town. A wave of 20 feet lashed the town and the speed of the cyclone was calculated as 120 kilometres per hour. The cyclone wiped off Dhanushkodi from the map. Many people lost their lives while they were sleeping. The cyclone formed around 12.30 pm and lasted for 24 hours and devastated Dhanushkodi. After the cyclone, a portion of the railway track at Dhanushkodi was also swept away. The Southern part of Dhanushkodi surrounded by the buildings including temples was submerged in the sea.

On that day, the six coaches Pamban Dhanushkodi passenger train No: 653 left Pambanat 11:55 pm with 110 passengers including a party of school students and five members of the railway staff. The signal at Dhanushkodi failed and the train stopped for a while, in pitch darknessaround

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and there was no indication of the signal being restored. The driver then gave a long whistle and decided to take the risk. The train started rolling along the sea and suddenly a giant wave rose from the turbulent sea and smashed the train. The initial reports put the casualty figure at 115 based on the number of tickets issued but it was suspected that the figure would be around 200 as more passengers were said to have travelled ticketless on that night.

In the year 1965, the Government of Madras declared the town as unfit for living. At present a small group of fisher folk only reside in Dhanushkodi. Immediately on receipt of the information about the disaster, arrangements were made for the rescue operations. Feeding centres were opened and cash grants disbursed to the suffering people.

The government of India took effective measures to reconstruct the Pamban viaduct, under the leadership of E. Sreedharan, the chief engineer of Southern Railway. Almost all the girders were salvaged from the sea and the emergency girders were brought from Assam. The Pamban bridge was reopened in a record time of 46 days. Engineers installed an anemometer which is a safety parameter against high wind speed.

The introduction of Pamban Railway Bridge reduced the distance between India and Srilanka. It is through the Pamban viaduct people visit the Rameswaram which is 12 miles from Mandapam, Dhanushkodi is another holy place situated at a distance of 8 kilometres from Rameswaram. The famous Kothanda Ramaswamy temple is the speciality of this place. It has been playing a significant role in bringing people together and promoting nationalintegration and creating a chord of harmony, transcending territorial barriers.

Oriyur in Ramanathapuram also attracts pilgrims and tourists. It is one of the most important pilgrim centres for Christians. St. John De Britto, a Portuguese Jesuit missionary better known as 'Arul Anandar' attained martyrdom here. . Number of pilgrims including foreigners visit this holy place where the holy man shed his life blood. Above all, the economic condition of the people of Ramanathapuram and Pamban also has improved. It accelerated the growth of export and import of agricultural and industrial products between mainland India and Rameswaram Island as well as a few foreign countries like Bangladesh and Srilanka. Above all the Pamban Railway Bridge is a plaudit of Southern Railway's scientific and technical achievement.

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