

NEEMUCH GOT RAIL CONNECTIVITY RATHER EARLY, WITH
IN 30 YEARS OF START OF RAIL CONSTRUCTION IN
INDIA. CREDIT FOR THIS GOES TO THE HOLKARS OF
INDORE. IN SPITE OF A MAJOR RIVER, NARMADA IN
BETWEEN THE MAHARAJA PROPOSED BRINGING RAIL LINE
TO INDORE FROM KHANDWA AND OFFERED FINANCIAL
HELP FOR IT. ONCE IT WAS THERE OTHERS GOT
INTERESTED AND TOOK THE LINE FURTHER TO NEEMUCH
AND AJMER. READ THE INTERESTING STORY.

HISTORY OF NEEMUCH GETTING RAIL CONNECTIVITY

This sleepy hamlet Neemuch, that was once the land of Rajputs of Mewar but given over to Scindias for settlement of a debt incurred by the Rana of Udaipur, was assured of an important role when the British decided to establish a Military post on an 8 square mile piece of land not far from the habitation and not too close either. It was a momentous decision for the city destined to bring its rewards and turmoil with passage of time. The year was 1822 but the construction of the Fort and other buildings began much earlier. One of benefits the city got was early rail connectivity. Within 30 years of the commencement of first passenger rail service it was on the Rail network. Many cities due to their remote location or due to indifference of the Maharajas had to wait a long time sometimes over a century like the town of Bundi that came on the network in 1980 or so.

Commencement of Railways in India

With steam engine thoroughly established as the prime mover to haul carriages, passenger and goods, as a replacement of Horses, the engineers started building rail roads all over in mid 19th century. The then British India Govt. too reacted favorably and encouraged formation and registration of companies in London for laying rail lines. The first passenger train in India traveled from Bombay to Thane on April 16, 1853. Progressing steadily the Rail line reached Khandwa in 1865. The British were desirous of taking it to Jabbalpore via Itarsi with ultimate goal to join it there with the existing East India Rail network. This was achieved on March 7th, 1870 thus linking the two major cities Bombay and Calcutta.

Holkar State Railway

The wise and fore sighted **Maharaja Holker*** noticed the arrival of Rail line across the river Narmada at Khandwa and desired to link his capital city Indore to it. It was a stupendous task because the river Narmada had to be crossed and a gradient of one in forty had to be faced to climb the Malwa plateau of about 500 meters high. However this did not dampen the spirits of either the investors nor of the executers. They both accepted the challenge and in 1870 the rail line was sanctioned to link Khandwa to Indore. The river was bridged with a 14 span bridge 197 feet each that was commissioned on October 5, 1876. It was a loan of Rs. 100/- Lakhs provided by the Maharaja Sawai Shri Tukoji Rao Holker* II in 1870 that accelerated the construction of the line. He should always be remembered for his wise decision.

***Holkers have blessings from Guru Nanak Dev Ji.**

It is said Nanak Dev in his wanderings in Central India came across some shepherds looking after their Goats and Sheep. Being thirsty he asked them about availability of water nearby. The simple folks thought they had a saint in him and instead of telling him nearby availability of water they themselves fetched water not only for his thirst but also to enable him to wash his face etc. and get refreshed. And while leaving them the Saint said their descendants will rule this very land in times to come. They are the HOLKERS.

Travelling a couple of miles on the Indore-Ratlam road there is a well associated with Guru Nanakdev. It is believed the water has medicinal properties and taking bath on a new moon day Amavasya cures a person.

Scindia-Neemuch Railway

With prospects of rail line reaching Indore **Maharaja Jayaji Rao** of Gwalior got interested being next door to Holkers* at Ujjain and beyond. The British too must have prompted him since they had established a Military post at Neemuch and would have been keen for a rail connection. Result, the Maharaja of Gwalior offered a loan of Rs. 7.5 million @ 4% interest per annum. The survey was commenced in year 1871-72 and final estimates were submitted to Govt. of India in 72-73. With the offer of loan the whole matter got accelerated and the new line was named Scindia-Neemuch Railway. The Maharaja while granting loan had desired for simultaneous construction of a branch line to Ujjain and this too was implemented. The Indore - Ujjain line was opened in part to passenger traffic in 1876 and the line was completed in 1880.

The Scindia-Neemuch rail line made steady progress reaching Neemuch in 1880 as is evident from the inscription on the Neemuch Railway Station building marking the year. This should have been comparatively an easy exercise because there were no large rivers to be bridged like river Narmada and no hills or climb either on the contrary the Malwa Plateau gently slopes down from Indore to Neemuch where it meets the plains of Rajasthan.

Further construction towards Ajmer started in 1879 and the rail line was completed in March 1881. It carried the Title Neemuch-Nasirabad Railway. In the year 1881-82 the three Railways viz. Holker State Railway, Scindia Neemuch Railway and the Neemuch-Nasirabad Railway were amalgamated under one single management called Rajputana Malwa Railway.

Bombay Baroda & Central India Railway

While all this was going on at this end there were other developments in the country. Col. J. P. Kennedy who was working with the Govt. of India as consulting engineer for Railways in the early 1850s resigned his post due to differences and returned to England in 1851. There he formed a company titled Bombay Baroda & Central India Railway and became its first Managing Director and Engineer-in-Chief. In 1853 the company was authorized by the East India Company to take up survey of the lines they had suggested. The survey party submitted its proposals for the lines and in Nov. 1854 the authorities approved in principle the connecting of Bombay Surat Baroda and Meter Gauge rail network linking Neemuch-Ajmer with Agra.

With B B C I firmly established in rail construction in the country it started work on the Baroda Surat line towards Bombay and on the other side Baroda Ahmedabad line and in the Malwa region it took over the management of Rajputana Malwa Railway w.e.f. 1 1 1885.

The original Bombay, Baroda & Central India Railway Company was purchased by the Government of India in 1905, but continued to be worked by a company with a board of directors in London until 1 January 1942, on which date the working was taken over by the government and it became part of the Indian State Railway system, directly under the Railway Board.^[3]

THE DECISION ABOUT SELECTING GAUGE FOR INDIAN RAIL SYSTEM

When the railway system was thought of for India the British Govt. desired that it should adopt 4ft 8.5 inch the gauge prevalent in UK. But the Governor General in India recommended 6ft Gauge considering the wild wind storms in plains and cyclones and strong winds in coastal areas, the like of which the British had neither experience nor had knowledge. The consulting engineers for railways, depending on their own expertise and calculations recommended a 5ft 6 in wide gauge for railways in India. In course of time after some discussions, suggestions and debates the 5ft 6in gauge was accepted and the first line laid Bombay-Thana used this standard. It was then understood that all future lines will be of this gauge but in 1870 Lord Mayo introduced the concept of Meter gauge the principle reason being the low volume and density of traffic. Later M G became quite popular with various Rajas and they started building rail lines in their states of this gauge for economic reasons.

The first M G line built was Delhi-Rewari in 1873 which got extended progressively to Bandikui- Agra, and Bandikui-Jaipur-Ajmer where it joined the Neemuch line coming on from Khandwa. This MG line became the life line of the entire Malwa region as also of Rajputana states through which it passed. Incidentally it provided an alternate route to people of Malwa to reach Delhi. They could either take this MG line or the BG Great Indian Peninsular Railway line from Khandwa. It was not until 1909 that the B B C I extended its Bombay-Baroda-Nagda B G line up to Mutthra providing one more route to Bombay citizens for Delhi besides the G I P.

Little did the people of Neemuch then know at the turn of the 20th century that they will have to wait a hundred years for a B G line . In 1978 the State owned company wanted to build a new cement plant near Neemuch with Limestone deposits proved in 1940s but with two cement plants already existing on that line the Railways were reluctant for additional business. The then Industry Minister George Fernandez discussed the matter with Railway Minister and it was decided that Railways will augment existing capacity as a short term measure but ultimately will provide Broad Gauge link to the cement cluster including the new unit. Nearest B G line available being at Kota it was decided to link this cement cluster to Kota. The Railways had a splendid opportunity then to build a new rail line Kota-Neemuch-Godhra . That would have served the purpose and incidentally would have not only reduced burden on the Kota-Godhra limb of the famous and often talked off Quadrilateral by providing a bypass of main line but would have reduced Delhi-Bombay distance by 100 KM if not more. The then local M P Shri B R Nahata too did canvassing for this proposal but the Railways thought otherwise. They linked Kota to Chittorgarh via Bundi. Sadly the design engineer is never an operations man to seek excellence of operating even if it means discomforts in making, in this case execution. Convincing the authorities was not difficult by advancing arguments *that bulk of the produce of the cement cluster will go to Bombay and considering the benefits of reduced distance forever, giving rail connectivity to the tribal and backward areas of Godhra, reducing traffic on main line and avoiding congestion on a trunk route it is well worth going in for this proposal.* But it did not excite the minds of people there in Delhi taking decisions unlike that designer of Pamban Bridge who opted for that unique bridge covering the needs of all. He too could have put a straight bridge but he took the challenge?

In course of time the entire Delhi-Ajmer-Neemuch-Indore line got converted to B G and the last leg Indore-Khandwa section is currently (2017-18) under conversion.

When the MG line was commissioned there used to be three UP and three DOWN trains touching Neemuch. In the second WW service was curtailed to just one UP and one DOWN train in 24 hours. With BG conversion the town has come more or less on main line and there are about 30 trains passing through Neemuch now.

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CHRONOLOGY OF RAILWAY DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA

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IR History: Early Days – II,III, IV, V VI VII

Contents

[Chronology of railways in India, Part 2 \(1870 - 1899\)](#) PART 3 1900-1947, PART IV 1947-1970, PART V 1970-1995, PART VI 1995-PRESENT



Bombay, Baroda and Central India Railway train at the [National Rail Museum, New Delhi](#)



NEEMUCH RAILWAY STATION 1880



NEEMUCH RAILWAY STATION 1880





In India first railway was built between Mumbai and Thane in 1852 and the first passenger train ran between the two stations, covering a distance of 34 km, on April 16, 1853.

NEEMUCH RAILWAY STATION NEW CONSTRUCTION