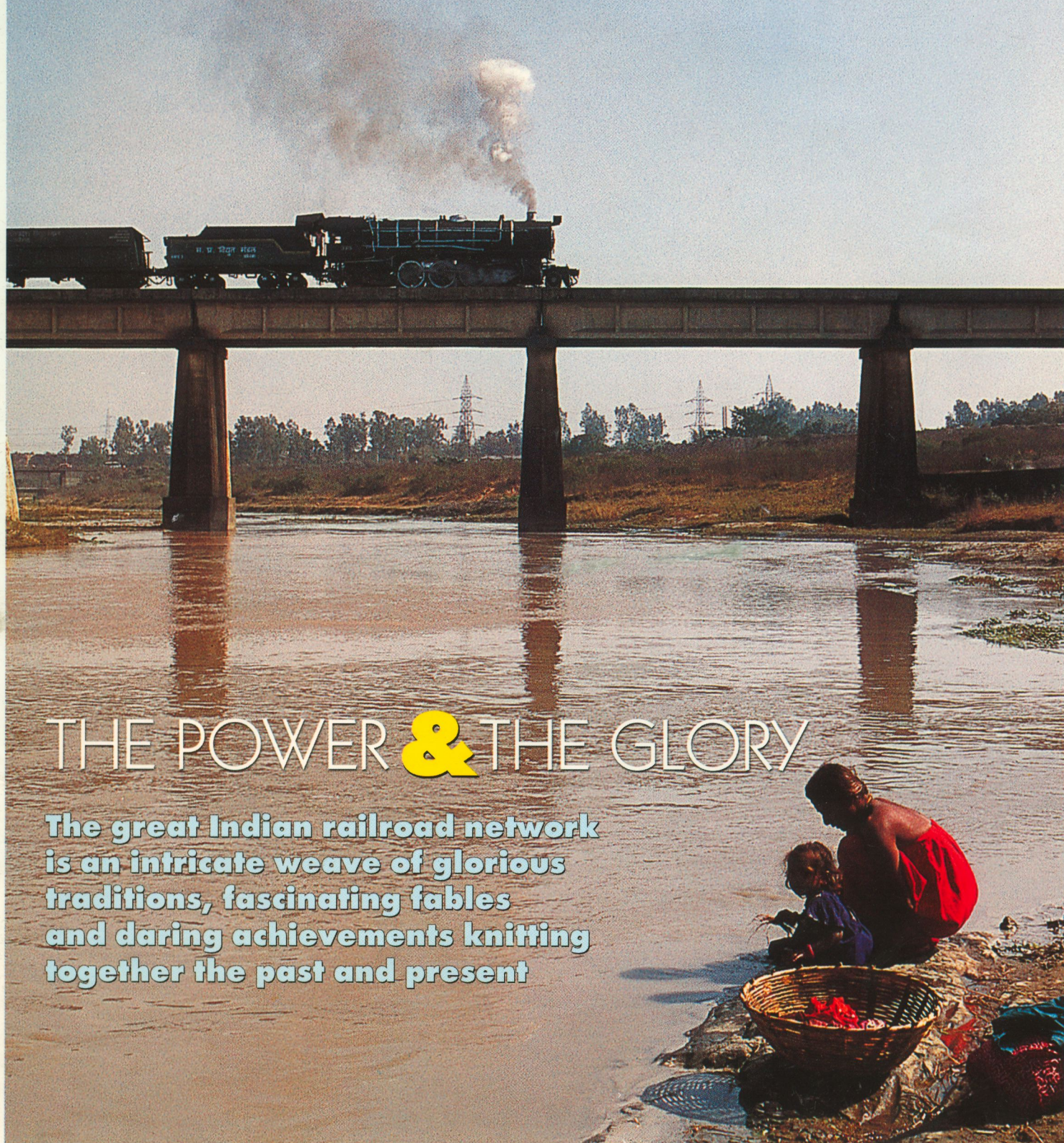


Discover India

April 2001

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THE POWER & THE GLORY

The great Indian railroad network is an intricate weave of glorious traditions, fascinating fables and daring achievements knitting together the past and present

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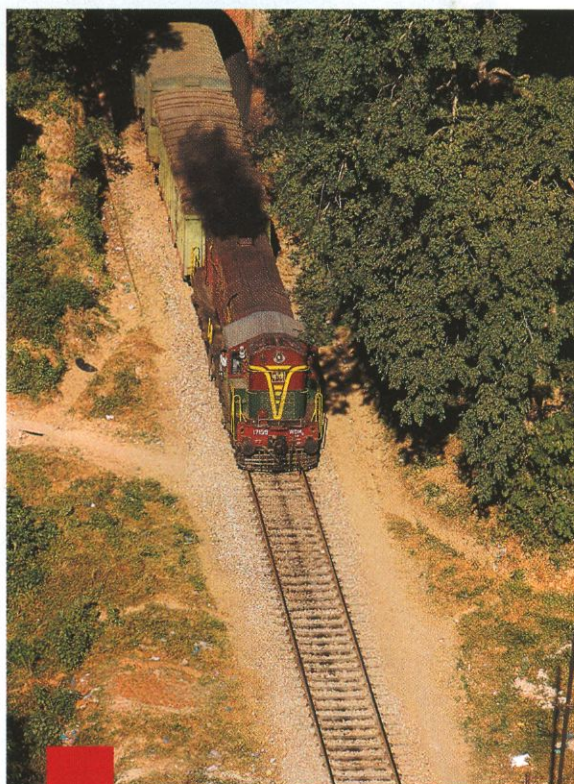
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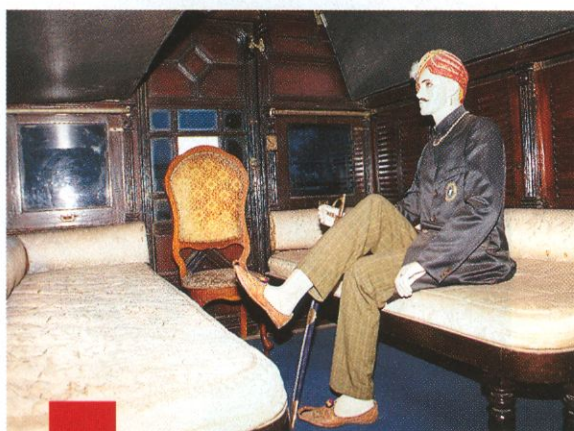
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Posting a Grand Tale



Photo: Nihal Mathur

Nihal Mathur

Governments the world over, have recognized the contribution of the Railways in nation-building by issuing postage stamps in their honour. India too has paid a rich tribute to its Railways by bringing out a series of commemorative stamps that celebrate the history and development of the Railways in India

The first stamp released after Independence, marked the centenary of the Railways in India. It was the British who brought the Railways to India in the middle of the 19th century. This was the beginning of a new era of steam locomotion that began on December 22, 1851 when a small steam locomotive named "Thompson" started to haul some wagons containing earth during the

construction of Solani Aqueduct near Roorkee in Uttar Pradesh. Two years later, the first passenger train hauled by a steam locomotive was introduced on April 16, 1853 between Bombay and Thane covering a distance of 32 kilometres. To mark the centenary of that historic event, a stamp depicting steam engines of 1853 and the one currently being used was released on April 16, 1953.

Realizing the importance of the Railways in the exploitation of the resources and the governance of a vast empire, the British were quick to expand the network all over the subcontinent. The demand for locomotives far outstripped supply — mostly from England and some other European countries. It was natural that indigenous manufacture of locomotives started on a small scale in the railway workshop at Jamalpur and Ajmer as early as 1889 and 1895 respectively. Soon changes in the design began to be made to suit local conditions. Although standardisation of locomotive design had begun as early as 1903, it was not until 1924 that a Locomotive Standards Committee was formed to suggest new types of powerful locomotives. This helped considerably in developing indigenous technical know-how on locomotive production. Soon after India became

independent, a full-fledged steam locomotive manufacturing unit was set up in 1950 at Chittaranjan in West Bengal. This was one of the Nehru's modern 'temples of technology' and the nation was justly proud of it. In 1955, the Department of Posts produced a series of definitive stamps that depicted the aspirations of the young nation, and one of the stamps depicted the Chittaranjan Loco Works.

In keeping with the times, manufacture of electric locomotives was also started at Chittaranjan in 1961 while a new facility in

celebrated railway engines by depicting various locomotives with the Indian Railways that then had a fleet of 8682 steam, 1702 diesel and 729 electric locomotives operating in the country.

The first stamp depicted the GIP No. 1 engine which was representative of the earliest type of engines employed in India, and had the distinction of pulling the first passenger train from Bombay to Thane. The second locomotive featured was the F/1 Meter Gauge type — the most widely used engine on the Indian Railways before Independence. The engine depicted in the stamp was manufactured in Ajmer in 1895. The third in the series was a standard post-war broad gauge express loco referred as the WP/1 'Pacific Type' which India began to produce at the Chittaranjan Locomotive Works from 1963 onwards. Finally, the fourth one was a WDM2 diesel locomotive which is the most widely used diesel loco in India. This is a powerful engine that can haul a freight train of 2250 tonnes or mail trains with 18 passenger coaches and remains the main workhorse of the Indian Railways today.

Another set of four stamps, released in 1993, paid glowing tributes to the loco-

The stamps have not glorified the past alone. When the Indian Railways created history with the commissioning of the Konkan Railway, the Department of Posts felt privileged to release a special commemorative stamp

Varanasi started the production of diesel locomotives in 1964. A far more powerful and efficient engine, the diesel locomotive came to symbolise modern technology. Consequently, another definitive series of stamps, first produced in 1963 and reproduced with slight variation in 1974, celebrated the onset of diesel locomotive which had now increasingly come to replace steam engines. Then again, in 1976, a set of four stamps



Photo: Nihal Mathur

motives of the Mountain Railways which were built by the British who could not bear the summer heat of the plains and escaped to cooler heights. These were their "hill stations" — Shimla in the north, Darjeeling in the east, Ooty in the south and Matheran near Mumbai in the west. The Kalka-Shimla section was opened for traffic in 1903, the Matheran Railway in 1907, the Nilgiri Hill Railways in 1908 and the Darjeeling Himalayan Railways in 1887.

Of the four, the Darjeeling Himalayan Railways is not only the oldest mountain railway in India but has the distinction of using steam locomotives till date. What is unique about this line is that the need for tunnels was completely dispensed with by means of using "loops" and "reverses". There are four loops of which the most famous one is the Batasia Loop and the maximum height attained is 2258 metres at Ghum. In 1982, the Department of Posts issued a special stamp to mark the centenary of this Railway.

The Department of the Posts also celebrated the hundred years of the Railways in the Doon Valley by taking out a special commemorative stamp in 2000. The steep Shivalik ranges had stopped the Railways at Hardwar. Thereafter, it was a journey on horseback or by foot. The railway line between Hardwar and Dehradun was commissioned in 1897 and was completed by 1900, thus opening up the Doon Valley for development. A high value stamp in large format depicts a puffing steam locomotive pulling the train into the railway station at Dehradun.

One of the oldest, and without doubt, the most impressive railway station in the country is the Victoria Terminus Station, simply known as the VT. It was constructed in 1888 by the then Great Peninsular Railway. The VT is an extraordinary building that has received worldwide appreciation for its sheer size, ornamental arches, spires and dome rendered in Italian Gothic style. Many writers have compared the grandeur of the building to that of a cathedral and say that VT "makes St. Pancras (on which it was modelled) look like a country halt

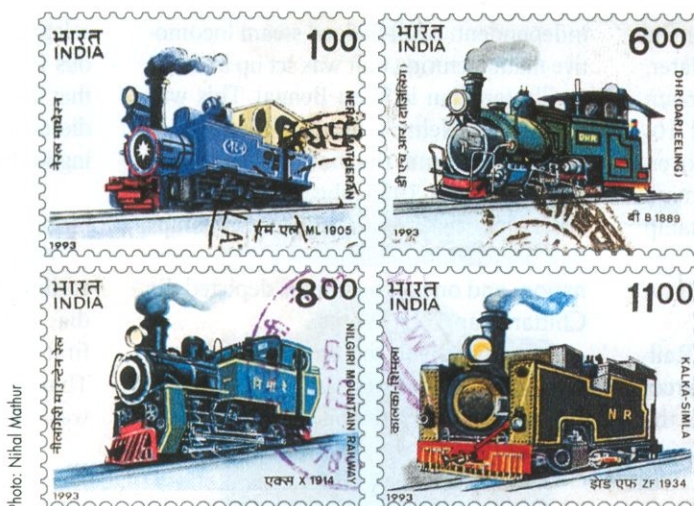


Photo: Nihal Mathur

A set of four stamps released in 1993 paid glowing tributes to the locomotives of the Mountain Railways

and the Victoria and Albert Museum like a simple cottage!

In 1972, the Department of Posts brought out a special commemorative issue on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of the International Union of Railways, also known as UIC, which was founded in 1922. Established to standardize and improve on the railways worldwide with special regard to international traffic, the UIC is also responsible for ensuring coordination and unity of action amongst the International Railway Organisations. The India Railways have been associated with the UIC since 1957, and of all the members of the UIC, it is the Indian Railways that have the distinction of having the second largest network in the world under a single management.

For better management of such a complex organisation, the country is divided into nine railway zones — Northern, Southern, Eastern, Western, Central, South-Eastern, North-Eastern, and North Frontier Railways. The oldest is the South-Eastern (SE) Railway that had humble beginnings in 1887 when the then British Government took over a meter gauge line from the privately-owned Bengal-Nagpur Railway Company. Headquartered in Calcutta, the SE Railway links the states of West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. As this is a region rich in natural resources, it is not surprising that the SE Railway has

grown into a gigantic railway system, leading other zones in carrying freight, earning the epithet of "The Breadwinner of the Indian Railways". In 1987, the Department of Posts celebrated the centenary of the SE Railway by issuing a set of four stamps.

The role of the Railways in carrying mail was also recognised by the Department of Posts, when in 1982 during the Fourth India National Philatelic Exhibition held in New Delhi, a 50 paise stamp was released. The stamp depicted a vintage coach with the Railway Mail Service set against a silhouette of an early steam engine. Then again, on the occasion of World Philatelic Exhibition in 1989, the Department of Posts issued a series of stamps.

One of them depicted the earliest cancellation of the travelling post office in the "Allahabad-Cawnpore" Railway sector between 1864 and 1869.

It isn't as if the stamps have glorified the past alone. When the Indian Railways created history with the commissioning of the Konkan Railway, the Department of Posts felt privileged to release a special commemorative stamp. The Konkan Railway tamed the formidable Sahyadri mountains by linking the picturesque western coast of India with a railway line. After four years of extensive surveys, work began on one of the most difficult terrains in the history of railway construction that took 10 years to complete, in 1998. It was an incredible feat of modern engineering that involved building 92 tunnels, 179 major bridges, 2819 minor bridges and 59 stations. It claims the longest tunnel of 6.5 kilometres in India and the tallest bridge in Asia. The success of the Konkan Railway owes a lot to technological innovation that were carried out in its laying.

In 1996, the Department of Posts issued a special commemorative stamp marking the celebrations of silver jubilee of the National Rail Museum in Delhi. Besides displaying old locomotives, saloons and carriages of a bygone era in the open spaces of its outdoor display area, it also presents a whole range of artefacts in its indoor gallery that tell the continuing story of the history and development of the Railways in India. □