

Preservation of Railways Heritage in Pakistan

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Abstract

The history of Pakistan Railways is rooted in the North Western Railways established in 1884, following amalgamation of the Punjab, Scinde and the Delhi Railways dating back to 1850s. The railways landscape in the country, comprising a large variety of buildings and yards and related paraphernalia, more spectacular at the railway stations, can be traced back to the Raj times. The signaling system comprising poles, sign posts with semaphore signals lit by kerosene lamps; the guard posts; the telegraphic wires; the standard sign boards; and pedestrian bridges, still evoke the image of 19th century railways. The closure of hundreds of miles of railway lines, often rural branch lines, and the abolition of steam locomotives in favour of diesel power has been the only change in this landscape since 1880s. In a situation, where a century old railway system is fully functional, no one cares about its vintage and heritage aspects. However, need for preservation of vintage buildings, objects and documents was registered with gradual technological change on the network. In early 2000, attempts by Pakistan Railways to preserve and display aspects of country's railway history led to designating a functional, suburban railway station as country's first Railways Heritage Museum. While maintaining its functionality, the railway station is a full-fledged railway museum for its architectural character, related artifacts, and industrial machinery and equipment. The Heritage Museum has experienced increasing popularity and represents settings for understanding and experiencing of industrial heritage and its authenticity. The paper explores the significance of country's railway heritage and discusses the efforts for its conservation and its historical importance and architectural value. It documents the process of establishing Pakistan's first railway heritage museum. It details the ways in which objects which were deemed to represent Pakistan's railway heritage were identified, designated as important and subsequently displayed or stored by the Pakistan Railways.

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