CONCLUSION

To think of life without railways is a very primitive state of existence. Railways, as we know them did not exist in any part of the world before the year 1825. It was only in 1825 that the first train ran between Stockton and Darlington in England. The first rail engine was driven by George Stephenson, the famous inventor of the steam locomotive. Later, France, USA, Germany, Holland, Russia, Italy, Spain, Austria and other important nations also came into the path of railways.

The first railway line in India between Boribunder (Bombay) and Thane was opened to traffic on 16 April 1853, 28 years after the world’s first train made its initial successful run. The plans for the introduction and extension of railways were formulated by Lord Dalhousie. The construction of railways in India was undertaken to achieve a number of objectives both, commercial and political. The basic purpose was to collect raw materials from different parts for export to Britain. It was also used to sell British manufactures in every part of the country. Another compulsion for railway extension was the need to move troops safely and speedily from one part of the country to another during times of emergencies. The British suffered heavily during the revolt of 1857. The subsidiary objectives of railway development included famine prevention and opening up of coal fields.
The first railways in India were constructed and worked by Private Railway companies. They were guaranteed a fixed rate of exchange and gained a specific return on the capital invested by them. East India Railway Company, Madras Railway Company, Bombay- Baroda and Central India Railway Company, Bengal - Nagpur Railway Company and Great Indian Peninsula Railway Company played important role for the construction of railway lines across the length and breadth of our country. But public opinion both in India and England was highly critical of the terms and conditions which were characterized as unduly generous for the British investors at the expense of the people of India. It was felt that private companies with a State guarantee of profits were not likely to observe economy in the outlay. The share holders got their guaranteed profits properly, even if the companies were extravagant and wasteful in construction. Accordingly the contracts with the working companies were terminated after 1925 and the management of the companies was taken over directly by the Government.

With the achievement of independence and the partition of the country on 15 August 1947, the existing railway system had also to be divided. Soon after independence the entire railway system in India was brought under the direct management of the Government of India. These railways were later on merged with the contiguous railway systems, when the Zonal railways were formed. At first the different railways were regrouped and formed into six Railway Zones. Changes occurred in these Zonal systems and at present there are sixteen Railway Zones in India.

The first proposal for railway lines in India emerged from the presidency of Madras in 1832, much before the similar proposals in Bombay and Bengal presidencies. In 1836, an experimental line was laid near Chintatripet. This was followed by 3½ mile long rail line South West of Madras.
connecting Red Hills and the stone quarries near the Little Mount in 1832. This was used for private purpose. The formation of the Madras Railway company in 1845 gave a stimulus to the introduction of Railways in South India. But the apathy of the British Government forced the promoters of the Madras Railway company to dissolve it in 1847. Through the continued efforts of promoters, share holders and the people of Madras brought back the approval of the Court of Directors of the East India Company on 25 May 1852. Subsequently a new company with the same title Madras Railway Company was registered in London on 26 July 1852. The first line was opened on 1 July 1856 between Vyasarpadi near Madras and Walajanagar (Arcot), over a distance of 63 miles. Besides Madras railway Company, Great Southern of India Railway Company, Carnatic Railway Company, Pondicherry Railway Company, South Indian Railway Company, Southern Mahratta Railway Company, Madras and Southern Mahratta Railway Company, East Coast Railway Company and Nilgiri Railways undertook the construction works in the Southern parts of India before the formation of Southern Railway as a Zone. Through the amalgamation of these railway companies Southern Railway as a Zone was formed on 14 April 1951.

The capital of Tamil Nadu, Chennai, serves as the headquarters of Southern Railway. Southern Railway encompasses the States of Tamil Nadu, Pondicherry, Kerala as well as little segments of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. Over 500 million passengers commute on the Southern Railway network annually. In 1956 Southern Railway was divided into 8 divisions. These were Royapuram, Olavakkot (Palghat), Mysore, Thiruchirappalli, Madurai, Guntakal, Vijayawada and Hubli. On 2 October 1966 South Central Railway, a new Zone, was formed by carving out of Central railway and Southern Railway. Accordingly Southern Railway lost three of its prominent divisions such as Vijayawada, Guntakal and Hubli and left with 5 divisions viz, Madurai,
Thiruchirappalli, Mysore, Olavakkot and Madras (Royapuram). Later, with the formation of South Western Railway, Southern Railway also lost another division, Mysore. On second October 1974, Thiruvananthapuram division was formed by carving out certain portions from Olavakkot and Madurai divisions. Thus in 2001 Southern Railway had only 5 divisions. (Salem division was formed only in 2005)

To carry out the day to day functions effectively Southern Railway has various departments - Mechanical Department, Commercial Department, Store Department, Electrical Department, Engineering Department, Signal and Telecommunication Department, Medical Department and Railway Protection Force etc. which work hard to provide safe and speedy journey to its passengers.

The most important project of Southern Railway was Pamban Railway Bridge. The honour of the building of the Pamban Railway Bridge goes to the South Indian Railway, the predecessor of the present Southern Railway. This bridge was constructed in 1914. The Pamban Railway Bridge is considered as an engineering marvel. Though the bridge was constructed at a time when technology was not advanced, it stands out as a fine example of construction. This bridge is also called as Cantilever Scherzer Rolling Lift Bridge. It was named after the German engineer Scherzer, who built the Pamban Viaduct. It was 2.06 kilo metre long and had 146 spans. One of the spans had lifting mechanism to give way to passing ships. The existing Pamban Railway Bridge was built in a short span of 29 months. Following a cyclone in 1964 Southern Railway undertook major repair work of the bridge. The Government of India took effective measures to reconstruct the Pamban viaduct, under the leadership of E. Sreedharan, the then chief engineer of Southern Railway. The Pamban Railway Bridge was reopened in a record time of 46 days.
The construction of Pamban Railway Bridge gave a new lease of life to the people of Ramanathapuram district in Tamil Nadu. Further it reduced the distance between India and Sri Lanka. It played an important role in the socio, economic life of the people of South India. Communication has become more rapid than in earlier centuries with the construction of the bridge. 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 Sri Lanka.

From its humble beginning Southern Railway, steadily and slowly came into the path of modernization. Modern railway coaches offers safe and relaxed travel providing better room, more comfortably inclined seats, sufficient external and internal lighting, door catches, fans, sleeping bunks, glass and ventilator windows, lavatories, wash basins, mirrors etc.

Perfect braking system of Southern Railway provides very sensitive control and the brakes can be graduated on or off at will. Prompt and reliable means of communication improves the effectiveness of train operations. Southern Railway gives much vigilance in level crossing also. It is very essential for the protection of the users of level crossing.

Another area in which Southern Railway made its significant step is in the field of signalling. At first, hand and arm signals were used to direct the Loco Pilots. But with the passage of time, many changes took place in this field and in modern times signalling system gives information about the dangerous conditions and automatically apply the brakes and bring the train to a stop if the driver ignores the dangerous situation.

Modern locomotives and new Broad Gauge lines give pleasant, comfortable and safety transportation to passengers. Southern Railway provides excellent services to passengers in the field
of reservation system. Punctuality, proper amenities at the stations and also in the trains attract the passengers to travel by trains. Computerization has brought about transparency in the reservation system. The information on fares, availability of the position of seats and berths became accessible to the passengers with the introduction of computerization in Southern Railway. Southern Railway gives much importance to sanitation. A container with a slogan ‘use me’ is available on all platforms of the stations. Pay and use toilet facilities in the railway stations have helped the railway administration to a greater extent to keep the station premises neat and clean.

In fact in the early years, railway travel itself was the greatest amenity. But now social, political and economic conditions have changed, and better passenger amenities are demanded as a matter of right by the public. Retiring rooms, waiting halls and STD booths provided by Southern Railway are very useful for passengers. Free wheel chairs for physically challenged persons, self-help trolleys, foot over bridge, cloak rooms, cool water facility, drinking water facility, platform shelter, raised platform and shady trees are another helpful activities of Southern Railway. Through Catering Department, Southern Railway serves hot, hygienic and tasty food to the travellers at a reasonable price.

Southern Railways have initiated measures for the safety and security of the passengers inside the train also. Ticketing system, berth facility, punctuality, concession to passengers in fare and freight charges, refund of fare, user friendly time table, and public grievance redressal measures are also taken by the Southern Railway for the benefit of the passengers.
In addition to the passenger amenities, Southern Railway provides amenities to the Railway personnel also. Many welfare measures are undertaken by the Southern Railway for the benefit of its employees. Medical facility, good salary and staff quarters are provided by Southern Railway for its employees. Railway schools, holiday homes, recreation facilities, running rooms, rest houses, co-operative societies and awards for efficiency are also given by Southern Railway for its employees.

The impact of railways in South India has been altering the travel habits of people, breaking down the barriers of isolation and enlarging the educational facilities. Railway not only affected the life style of the people of South India but also transformed the economy of the country. By providing, cheap, speedy and safe transport facilities Southern Railway had enabled a large number of agriculturalists, industrialists, businessmen, professionals and all other workers to travel from one place to another for their needs. Equalisation of prices for the commodities was one important impact of railways. The village folks who depend upon the agricultural products for their livelihood could compete in city markets which were made feasible by the railways that linked the villages to the major cities and sea ports. But during the Colonial period the indigenous trade suffered heavily due to the influx of foreign goods.

The intermingling of different sections of people with different colours of skin was made possible and easy by the development of railway system. Railway journey was opened to all and not reserved to any particular castes or communities. People of different religions and professions broaden their views and knowledge through the discussions with fellow passengers and this help to remove many of the social barriers.
The rapid spread of education has been possible by the extension of railways in South India. Students from distant areas could come to colleges and universities to get higher education because of the facilities offered by the railways. Railways quickened the activities of social reformers who disseminated new ideas of brotherhood, non violence, truth and equality among the people. Some superstitious beliefs like untouchability, unapproachability and unseeability have been considerably removed from the society with the introduction of railways.

National leaders preferred to use railways as a medium to spread their messages and they induced the feeling of nationalism and patriotism among the people. In the field of military and postal system the role of Southern Railway is pivotal.

The railways brought about tremendous changes in the cultural fabric of South India. Railways carry cultural heritage such as fine arts, dance, music, painting, etc and make them universal. Though the colonial power introduced railways to satisfy their needs, the benefits occurred to the Indians through it was great and transformatory.

Though Southern Railway is in the path of modernization it has to go a long way to secure its target. As regards catering service, there are some constraints prevailing in Southern Railway. In the fields of cleanliness, provision of water, accommodation in carriages and lavatory facilities still there is long way to go. The common man judges the operating efficiency of railways from the point of view of punctuality with which the passenger trains and goods trains leave a station and reach their destination including intermediary stoppages. On this aspect our railways are most vulnerable to criticism. Railway should take vigorous efforts to maintain high punctuality ratio.
Southern Railway gives importance to the promotion of tourism. Even though Indian Railways have been considered as the second largest in world in its extent, it is not so in terms of facilities offered to the tourists and amenities provided in the carriages. Lack of watering stations along all routes leads to water scarcity for the passengers and the water closets in the compartments may become stinky and unusable. No attendant is provided to the tourist coaches and hence the train is dirty and this detracts tourists. Leaking roofs of the carriages, uncomfortable seats, and lack of privacy, compel the foreigners to set aloof from railway booking.

Even the complaint with the Railway Police is not effective. In spite of precautions taken by the railways, considerable losses and damages continuously occurring in Southern Railway. The alarm chain is used for stopping the train in emergencies. But this safety device is often misused by the people for their own convenience. This led to unnecessary delay and wastage of man power and labour.

Southern Railway aims to give safe and secure journey to its passengers. But it couldn’t achieve this aim properly. The recent occurrence of Soumya’s death was an eye opener, in which she was a victim of the cruelties of a man in the train. Like wise robbery and pick pocketing are frequently occurring inside the train and also in the premises of the railway stations. Railway should give more safety and security to its passengers especially the womenfolk.

Efficient fencing arrangement on all the railway stations is essential, so that the ticketless travellers may not go out of the stations except through the railway gates. Intensive checking in the trains and at all important stations should be organized so that no train or no passenger should go unchecked. Surprise checking and checking through flying squads should be very effective. Better
tickets selling arrangements reduce the travelling without ticket. Sometimes the passenger gets bored by standing in long queues and ultimately they leave the queues and travel without ticket.

Booking offices should be opened at all important markets or other places in the city so that the passengers may purchase tickets without any difficulty. However much more remains to be done for bringing it in harmony with the demands of the time.