

An unplanned and memorable trip to Pune and Khandala.

There are many options for tourists / rail enthusiasts to travel between Mumbai and Pune. That too one will definitely plan in such a way that at least in single direction that they will take this legendary Deccan Queen Superfast not only due to its unique feature, having old and unique livery of Central Railways, having a dining car in the rake and offering delicious cuisine, but for its monstrous run and for its limited stops too.

But, my choice at that juncture was quite different, since I always loved to travel in a diesel hauled train and heard about the monstrous run that the Indrayani Superfast used to offer with diesel traction, and also its timings being comfortable for me, having some coaches of old and unique livery in Central Railways, felt that I must try this train. Have seen in many train videos this train being hauled by ALCOs and EMDs, but have never seen and travelled in the same in person. So I was very much eager to give it a try.

All set, booked tickets, got window seat, came Mumbai, roamed for a day, came back to my dormitory in CSMT and kept alarm for next day morning at 04:25 hrs and slept. Woke up immediately after alarm rung, got ready within an hour and came to platform 12 when 15 more minutes were there for departure of the train. Now was seeing the rake of Indrayani Superfast with a joy as last SLR coach of that train was Janshatabdi liveried, having big red coloured train board with beautiful white fonts, was searching for my coach, boarded it and searched for my seat, felt extremely happy because my coach was having that unique old livery of Central Railways and my seat was a track sided window seat in the direction in which the train moves.

So kept my big shoulder bag in the luggage rake, came out of the coach, performed some rituals which every rail enthusiast used to perform mostly. Clicked pictures of the rear and front board of the train, small train boards outside my coach, and loco, yes loco was parked in such a way that loco was outside the platform. Since the sun did not come out by then, did not get a proper picture of my loco but yet managed to snap one by standing near the 1st coach. The loco which is going to take this train till Pune at that day was WDP – 4D, GT46ACe, 4500 Hp dual cab EMD locomotive numbered 40156 from PUNE shed.

And took selfies outside of my coach in the train, my train was sparsely crowded, next to my platform, Tapovan express was there and rake of Mumbai CSMT – Karmali Tejas Superfast was being shunted. Recorded some train announcements while the final departure announcement for my train was made and dot on time slowly, we started from CSMT while sun also started showing its face to us.

Train slowly looped into main line, and picked up speed effortlessly, was cruising through Mumbai suburbs, witnessed some highspeed crossings of the incoming trains to Mumbai like late running Gadag CSMT express and Nandigram express. Since that was my first day time direct journey from CSMT to Pune, curiously gazed the Mumbai suburbs, coaching yards, local trains, etc... Meanwhile, we reached Dadar within 15 minutes if time and a huge crowd started boarding the train in such a way that all seats got full and even few were standing.

Train halted few minutes in Dadar and we accelerated out of dadar towards thane in no time. As we were accelerating out, I spotted a train with KYN based WCAM – 2 locomotive hauled train entering dadar which is Chennai egmore – dadar superfast express. We crossed matunga and kurla in no time, was curiously watching the point where the railway line from lokmanya tilak terminus would arise and start running parallel to our railway line.

And we even crossed train like amaravati superfast express, our train maintained at constant MPS till it arrived thane, there itself the train got jampacked. Even standing crowd was full. Even it halted very briefly there. As we departed from thane I started clicking random pics of the nature and the trains crossing us. Took some random pics of thane creek, where we gradually was accelerating. And even parsik tunnel came, I was out of control and started clicking videos from entering parsik tunnel and exiting through the same, the picturesque entry of this tunnel and the EMD loco honking and humming through the tunnel and accelerating, literally I got goosebumps. Even today I used to wonder by seeing the pics and videos I clicked there. As the line bifurcated for panvel as we exited the parsik tunnel, huballi – lokmanya tilak terminus was entering into Mumbai from panvel . Then we slowly entered diva, where Diva – Sawantwadi road Sindhudurg passenger hauled by 11183 numbered WDM – 3D loco of erode loco shed was waiting for its departure. We skipped diva bit slowly, then pick up speed. Then diesel loco showed all its wrath, went in maximum permissible speed till kalyan within which mr. sun started showing its full face. Some more people again boarded at kalyan, now my coach flooded with passengers, slowly we moved out of kalyan, random chikki and local food vendors started showing up.

After we moved out of thane itself that appearance of the city slowly started disappearing. After kalyan, need not explain. Gradually started experiencing that mightiness of the western ghats. Though it was a sunny day, the chill winds were pleasing me. And train beautifully negotiated many curves and I was tirelessly clicking every possible time the train went in a curve. And the humming and acceleration sounds of EMD cant be heard much because of the crowd in my coach. We skipped neral jn in a very good speed. My eyes were searching for neral – matheran narrow guage loco and train but I was happy that I atleast saw the narrow guage platforms. Then as we maintained at MPS till karjat, we did not get slowed down anywhere till we arrived karjat.

We were looped In Platform 1 in karjat for its scheduled halt and for attaching the bankers for the train to climb uphill. As soon as the train arrived karjat, the bankers, I mean the locos which are attached at the back of the train to give pushing effect and also helps for additional braking power. Those were ready and as soon as the train stopped, I went to backside of the train to see the bankers and by the time I went, they have already entered the line and were closely approaching my train. It was gradually attached to the train.

The bankers for this train was twin WAG – 7 class electric locomotives of kalyan shed with nos 27118 attached with the train and 27117 at the rearmost. As soon as the bankers were attached, I rushed to my coach to board the train and honks from both bankers and the leading loco was given. Even in this small gap, I managed to get a pair of vada pav, a common delicacy in Mumbai, and somehow boarded my coach within train started moving. In that crowd some one occupied my seat and then I showed my ticket to take back my seat.

And at the very moment of departure, I heard some vague honking. I kept my cameraphone ready. Already some WDG – 4D class locomotive with concor consist was already standing

at karjat jn. That honk came closer. From far it seemed like WAP – 7 locomotive, and I tried to take a video of that train. I realised that very locomotive was WAP – 5 class locomotive when train came comparatively near to me. Yes that was the first time I saw WAP – 5 class locomotive with my naked eyes. I was extremely happy that I captured a video of a train that is hauled by such a locomotive. That too 30039 numbered WAP – 5 of Ghaziabad shed. It was hauling darshan ac superfast express.

Meanwhile, my train departed karjat and cleared the loop slowly, after exiting karjat I could able to see goods yard with lots of goods rake and each coupled with a locomotive, as we slowly started to gain speed, we had already entered palasdhari which is haven for most of the rail enthusiasts. Yes it is very much obvious since the station starts with a curve and goes straight, start climb hills and take a right side curve. A scenic locations to capture trains with bankers (for uphill trains as down hill train goes without bankers, not sure of downhill travelling goods trains though.)

After leaving palasdhari, even myself I could feel that we are climbing uphill and EMD locomotive gave its best efforts to climb uphill and the bankers supported it effectively. I lost my control and started clicking “n” number of pictures. Meanwhile, slowly munched the vada pav which quenched my hunger too. Then back to my photography business, yes train was moving in reasonable speed, climbing hills, entering and exiting tunnels, negotiating curves, crossed jambrug and thakurvadi cabin, taking photos of serene mountains, clouds, richness of the nature in western ghats, also was aware visually about the height in which the train was moving, when I saw below. Then and there could see banker locomotives moving downhill towards karjat jn.

Once I crossed one such tunnel, I saw a catch siding which was very steeply ascending from a cabin, which is monkey hill cabin, yet another scenic location to capture trains for the rail enthusiasts. Realised that I am nearing the mighty khandala, which is a heaven for rail enthusiasts, travel fanners and nature lovers. And regarding that station if I say, after coming out of the tunnel, a curve comes following by a steep upgradient, then the station comes in the curve, after the curve ends, it straight away enters into a tunnel, literally got goose bumps when my train went through that upgradient and was skipping the station in a hot sunny morning with maximum efforts put up by the EMD locomotive. Then after series of small upgradients, then an upgradient, I was able to see a town, end of the upgradient showed me a station board showing lonavala, yes we arrived lonavala.

As we arrived lonavala, people started deboarding, crowd in my coach reduced, bankers were detached and after a brief halt, we departed lonavala. Literally we accelerated out of lonavala, we picked up speed, at kamshet, where we negotiated a beautiful curve, yet another location for rail enthusiasts to capture the train where one can spot the high speed action of the trains. My train beautifully negotiated the kamshet curve in excellent speed, after which it got slowed down and crawled through kanhe, went in 15 kmh^{-1} for say some 5 kms due to some track work, while negotiating above temporary speed restriction due to the track work, meanwhile WDM – 3D locomotive in long hood front facing from kalyan loco shed hauling Kakinada – lokmanya tilak train also crossed us in the same speed. After skipping Talegaon my train slowly started accelerating.

Though ghat section ended in lonavala, but still that we virtually could enjoy the beauty of the western ghats surrounding and the Mumbai – pune expressway passing parallel to us. But

unfortunately could not able to see indrayani from indrayani i.e., could not see indrayani river from my train indrayani superfast since my seat was at right side of the train and that river passes at the left side of the train. After Talegaon my train started picking up speed and went in maximum permissible speed, nearly before akurdi signs of city started appearing, which potentiated when we were moving further, chinchwad station came and enjoyed the curve, signs of entering pune suburb was evident. We were already 25 minutes before schedule. We were with minimal delay till lonavala. Then we looped into Shivaji nagar railway station, as we looped into, 51318 Pune – panvel passenger with chocolate boy locomotive 21878 numbered WCAM – 2 of kalyan shed was hauling the train. After disembarking at pune I planned to take this train back to khandala to enjoy the nature and spot some trains there. Could have deborded at lonavala and caught this train. But still wanted to perform end to end journey in this train. So, I resisted this thought within myself.

Still was helpless as we were 25 minutes behind the schedule and that train started leaving Shivajinagar by the time our train had arrived Shivaji nagar, helpless but calm, we marched slowly into platform four of pune jn, arrived at 09:20 hrs, 20 minutes behind the schedule. All the passengers started disembarking the train and I wondered about it. But still the run I had in this train, each and every second I still remember and I will never forget this wonderful trip in my life.

After then, Indrayani superfast express is one of my most liked train of all time. Macho man WDP – 4D 40156 of pune loco shed performed really well, then again took picture of that very loco attached with that train in different angles, that too in proper lighting, hence was satisfied. Then the rake was taken back to yard, wondering about that since after 5 minutes the same rake should leave as pune – Solapur superfast express. But then it was announced that the same was cancelled because of track works near daund jn. After that confusion solved. Then moved to platform one with tons of memories of travelling in the great indrayani superfast express.

Now, after coming to platform one with my heavy luggage, went to PRS counter and asked about tatkal booking, assuming it to be free, but while I went and asked someone told that there was already 30 token per counter. So clueless, went to platform 1, it was 10 for 10 am, I sat near a railwire wifi modem near foot over bridge and tried to book tatkal for my return journey back home from Mumbai. Meanwhile empty rakes of 22845 pune – hatia superfast express was shunted at platform 1. Then it was 10 am. I had two options, either to book 3A tatkal in 19424 GIMB TEN humsafar from surat or to book SL in 22654 h.nizamuddin – Thiruvananthapuram superfast from panvel. I first tried to enter tatkal and book in tatkal for 19424 from surat.

Even I filled in the details and the fares were nominal. But since I wanted that wind in the face experience from sleeper class, dropped that option. Went till payment page and came back. Then in between came to food court in the same platform to have a nominal brunch to quench my hunger. So, bought a plate of poha, had it, also had vada pav for one another time for that day.

Then as it was 11 to 11, came again to the foot over bridge end, sat near the railwire wifi modem and tried to book tatkal in 22654 h.nizamuddin – thiruvananthapuram superfast express. Though I successfully opened it initially, within filling the booking details, the availability status of 110 reduced to only 10, was afraid since it was the only last option

remaining for me to go back home. Already I had a ticket in the same train from panvel with RLWL/22, though I booked it 15 days back, the waiting list did not even move. One another thing is that no premium tatkal was there at that train. Felt afraid. But, thank god during the time of cash payment as railwire wifi was fast, it saved me and somehow got confirmed ticket for my return journey back home.

So, as I booked my tickets back to home successfully, Then I went to take ticket unreserved train ticket between pune and khandala, but as none of the trains at that time was having commercial halt at khandala, the clerk issued me ticket till thane. then was searching in online for the next train between pune and lonavala. saw that the next train towards lonavala was 11026 pune – bhusaval express at 11:40 hrs were the next train towards lonavala. So, as it was announced that it was standing at platform 5, went to the same, after getting down from the foot over bridge, saw many bhel puri vendors, got one, actually one and a half.

Yes, as he told one bhel puri is rs. 20, I asked to add extra bhel and give it for rs.30. then went to the first unreserved coach (actually last coach that day) and boarded that train. Only five minutes was remaining for that train, and I was wondering that still no loco was attached to the end. But still I went to my seat and sat. finally, the train started to move in the opposite direction. Suddenly I realised and as It was moving slowly in the platform, I put my bag down in the platform and I deboarded quickly. So, the next possible option to go lonavala side by train was this weekly contender hubli – lokmanya tilak express via bijapur, while tracking him, he was on time and he had already left daund.

Then, I sat there in platform 5 to take some rest, kept tracking the status of 17321 and it was ontime till uruli, as I checked the status around 12 pm at which it is supposed to be at pune, thought that this train could only be maximum some say 30 minutes at pune started slowly taking a nap at pune station in sitting position, holding my bag. As I checked after 30 minutes, still it was at uruli and no further updates were there about that train. I got literally panicked. Then thought this won't work out and came out of railway station.

So, came outside of the railway station to the bus stand nearby and asked for buses to lonavala and khandala. I was unaware of the pune city and its actual Shivajinagar bus stand. In that bus stand, for my good time, only shivshahi and shivneri buses were available and they told that they will drop at lonavala bypass and ticket fare will be rs. 300. They even told ordinary buses are also not available. So again disappointed, went back to pune railway station. Then I introspected once that should I atleast see sightseeing at pune or as per plan should head to khandala. But as I was unaware of the places that I could possibly cover in the available six hours, so planned to head to khandala and to spot trains and enjoy the nature.

By then it was already 1:15 pm then a slight relief as the train had left uruli as per both where is my train and national train enquiry system. Then again it took half an hour for the train to arrive pune and by around 1:40 pm, with 40522 numbered WDP-4D locomotive without shed marking, pulling hubli – lokmanya tilak express into pune junction platform 5, 40585 numbered WDP-4D locomotive from pune shed simultaneously pulled 07618 panvel – h.s.nanded weekly special express into platform 6, both came in such a way that cab – 2 was facing front. Now as both simultaneously arrived, I started taking pictures. Now as soon as the engine crossed me, I rushed to the front of the platform for boarding the train.

Then, I went suddenly to a bhel puri wala, got a bhel puri again, had it fast and rushed to front of the platform and boarded the front UR next to guard cum luggage van. The first coach was full upto brim. But still was okayish near the door. So settled near the door. Kept the bag in my lap and sat near the door at the right side of the coach, that is trackside door. Managed to sit safely. As shed markings was not there for 40522 WDP – 4D, I searched both in IRFCA and IRI database, it showed that that loco was belonging to hubli shed. I was shocked since I was unaware that UBL holds any dual cab EMD locomotives, i.e. WDP – 4D. this was my first time spotting WDP – 4D of hubli loco shed and first time travelling by a train hauled by the same.

Though 07618 panvel – h.s.nanded weekly special express slowly departed pune junction platform 6. Then was googling about the crossings that I am about to encounter till I reach khandala and the trains that I could probably spot at khandala, also checked about view points and tourist places nearby the railway station. As I sat near the door, I was sitting, sitting and sitting, but no signs of train leaving pune even after halting for 15 minutes. Then again got down, purchased some water bottles, boarded the train. Then again googling about the same, forgot myself for a while chatting in railfanning groups in whatsapp.

No signs of train leaving pune even after 2 pm, started panicking, but still again started planning systematically and searched the running status of the train which was about to cross me and did some calculations, was gazing at the trip shed visible far away and also was thinking about how much time that I could possibly spend there and how fruitfully that I am going to use that time, then hopelessly was gazing at the sun. Could hear the cranking of the EMD locomotive but still no signs of departing from pune.

After 20 odd minutes, I could hear the honk of the EMD locomotive, was finally happy that at least by now that the train departed, and we slowly started moving out of pune, at least a ray of hope gushed into me as we departed pune.

Meanwhile, empty utkrisht rakes of deccan express was parked in the platform – 4 as we left. we cleared the loop lines slowly. Meanwhile we were passing through the loco trip shed and pit lines in pune station outer, forgot myself for a minute when I saw the rake of indrayani express being parked in the pitline. For a second, I recalled the wonderful moments I had when I was onboard the same that day morning. Saw some locos like ajni and Vadodara based WAP – 7 class locomotives, Ghaziabad based WAP – 7 with big P – 7 fonts in loco. KYN based WCAM – 2 and 3 class locomotives, bhusaval based WAP – 4 class locomotive, some WAG – 9 locomotive, pune based WDM – 2 locos which were used for shunting and some WDP – 4D locomotives too. As usual, snapped the pictures of the same. We entered the mainline, crossed mutha river bridge and started accelerating steadily. We started moving out of the pune suburbs. Being a sunny day, the place where I sat near the door and the door handle, I was holding for balance was hot to touch, but yes adjusted meanwhile. We curved through Shivajinagar station in a good speed and as we were speeding, thought that we would anyway reach khandala around 15:30 hrs max and enjoy the available time there.

Also, checked the opposite pairs of trains that could possibly cross us. The first candidate that we are supposed to cross is 16339 mumbai csmt – Nagercoil express, i.e. mr. Nagercoil as called fondly by railfans in that region. Thought that somehow will capture this train at khandala itself. Mean while we crossed khadki and dapodi stations in good speed, as we neared kasarwadi, train started slowing down. From kasarwadi, train started moving slowly.

Thought that it is negotiating temporary speed restriction and some how will pick up speed after leaving the station. But even after leaving the station, the train moved with the same speed. Did not suspect the situation initially. It was moving say in 50 – 60 kmph speed, was maintaining that, skipped pimpri station. Few minutes after we left pimpri station, we slowed down further. Thought that it was one another temporary speed restriction and was hoping that the train would move further in a good speed after negotiating that.

As we passed few kilometers, we started looping into a station. Initially thought that we are skipping this station in loop since there possibly could be some work happening in the main line of that station or may be some goods train or departmental vehicle could have been parked there. Moving further, we entered a platform which was in good height. The name board read it as chinchwad. As we moved further, I peeped into the mainline to see if such things which I mentioned above was there. But in reality, nothing was there. Realised that the main line was free. Meanwhile my train further decelerated and came to a halt. Our coach was at the end of the platform and the luggage coach in front of our coach was already out of the platform. People standing near the door in my coach they got down and was standing. There was a bit of shade near my coach though it was a scorching sunny day. Rested my big bag near the door and went to the door exactly in the opposite side. Peeped the signal there and it was red. Again, came to my side, the same prevailed. All the signals were red.

Now that train halted, meanwhile, purchased some water bottles. Announcements were continuously made in three languages that some set of local trains between pune and lonavala are cancelled. Was hearing that, standing for some 10 minutes in the platform as I felt sleepy. Then went and occupied my place near the door and sat. was peeping into the screen of mobile phone of the fellow passenger who was literally lying down near the door, some random telugu film was running. After 20 odd minutes that we departed chinchwad, finally got relieved. While checking the running status of the 16339 train, it showed that it had already crossed karjat jn. Now started accelerating, thought that atleast within some 40 – 50 minutes that probably we could reach khandala. We slowly started moving out of the pune mahanagar and started seeing some dry terrains and some tall trees. These locations used to be so green during monsoon and winter seasons.

Skipped akurdi in decent speed, after which we were decelerating slowly and meanwhile, we were again looped into some station. The station board said it is dehu road. Slowly moving into the loop line, again halted here. Panicked as I realised that time available for me to explore khandala was decreasing badly. This time, our coach was outside the platform. I moved bit inside the coach since I was sitting very near the door. Some passengers who got down when this train stopped, took those places near the edge of the door. now was checking the position of trains that I am about to cross, 16339 nagercoil express was already nearing lonavala. So, anyways that I won't be spotting this train at khandala. Somehow consoled myself that this is the only train that I would be possibly missing. Meanwhile other trains were leaving their source on time. A loud honk was made by EMD locomotive after 25 minutes, and we slowly cleared the loop.

As we cleared the loop, we were slowly gaining the speed. And one railway line without overhead pole was coming and was amalgating with the main tracks. Was wondering where this line arises from and the nearby areas suggested that it could probably come from one of the military sidings. Then as we picked up decent speed, was maintaining at 40 – 50 kmph.

Again, some railway lines were amalgating and bifurcating, the terrain and some mountains were visible, enjoying the nature, skipped begdewadi. Now only slowly started to realise that morning between kanhe and kamshet, for some kilometers that my train and the train which crossed me in opposite direction was moving nearly at 10 – 15 kmph and possibly that some works may happen there.

Simultaneously, expected 16339 nagercoil express to cross us at any time. After crossing ghorewadi, slowed down again to some 30 kmph, was moving slowly. Looped again and we slowly entered Talegaon. Was expecting to stop here for 20 more minutes as it happened in chinchwad and dehu road. But, for my surprise, even after seeing the other end of the platform, the train was kept moving and yes, it even cleared the loop. But even after clearing the loop, we did accelerate but the train was moving in the speed of 40 – 50 kmph till vadgaon outer where again it decelerated. As we departed vadgaon, we moved very slowly for a bit and we stopped for some 5 minutes. Again, the train left with a loud honk slowly, moved at around 10 – 15 kmph for roughly few hundred meters and again we halted for 10 another minutes. Could see a group of people working near the tracks. The passengers onboard enquired about the work going on there to the workers and they replied back.

Actually, near kanhe, a manned level crossing was being replaced by the rail underpass. And that work, since was in its final stage, everyone was working hard there. Our train and the train which is about to cross us in the opposite direction was badly delayed already. We started moving few hundred meters further after which again our train halted. Now a greater number of workers could be seen near the tracks as we were near to that levelled crossing. Was hearing a low tone honk from distance, but ignored it for that moment. That honk intensified after some moment, also came near me. Then mr. Nagercoil i.e, 16339 with kalyan based WCAM – 3 locomotive crossed us in a very slow speed.

After this train had passed us, even I felt as if I was moving slowly, yes, our train started moving very slowly, maintained in the same speed and crossed that manned level crossing where the work was going on. Saw an inspection trolley lying near the track. And as our train cleared that spot slowly, we maintained that speed till kanhe station. A ray of hope burst into me as we left that spot. As our train left kanhe, we slowly accelerated to 60 kmph speed, maintained that till kamshet. Our train negotiated kamshet curve beautifully. Now, a ray of hope bursted out in me and I felt extremely happy as somehow we started moving in a good speed and was nearing my dream destination i.e. khandala. Now my train accelerated madly and hit the top speed. Simultaneously could hear the loud honk of EMD locomotive and a kalyan based WDP – 4D with 17222 lokmanya tilak – Kakinada biweekly crossed us in a very good speed. Crossed malavli in no time and we arrived lonavala.

As per the passenger time table for this train 17321 hubli – lokmanya tilak express, there is no scheduled halt at lonavala but still it halted for break testing. This train did not have khandala halt too as per the time table, but strongly believed that it will halt again there for break testing. I checked the running status of 17031 mumbai csmt – Hyderabad express, it had already departed khandala. Meanwhile, I got some water bottles, packed my bag. We descended slowly towards khandala, as we slowly started descending the lonavala, could hear the majestic chugging of the kalyan based WDM – 3D class locomotive ascending to lonavala platform – 1 hauling the Mumbai csmt – Hyderabad express.

I was still four kilometers away from the khandala, but still that I have missed three trains already which I could have spotted in khandala owing to the delay, was thinking about it and also was planning to spend the remaining time effectively in khandala. Still I had not completed this mind calculation, khandala has arrived already and I deboarded as soon as possible from my train since it is a technical halt, my train could depart at anytime. Walked slowly to the foot over bridge, came to platform 2 and 3 and settled myself in end of the platform towards lonavala. that particular location was scenic. Meanwhile took pictures of train board of 17321 hubli – lokmanya tilak express, and the same train left khandala slowly.

With mixed feelings, I opened a water bottle to quench my thirst.

Then, my eyes took a 360-degree gaze around the station. Already I was sitting under the tree which was near the lonavala end of the platform. Till then, i have seen Khandala railway station only in pictures and youtube videos. Yes, it is one of the popular locations for spotting trains. Generally, the train which skips this station towards pune, it climbs the gradient with efforts, negotiates the curve beautifully as it skips the station and climbs further up towards lonavala. seeing this entire event virtually itself is a very big visual treat. Meanwhile, I heard a honk of the train and as few minutes went, I could sense the honk coming closer to me. At some distance that I could see a chocolate coloured locomotive climbing the gradient and entering khandala station.

Still I could picturise that moment in my mind. The scenes of the which I used to see in youtube videos, now perceiving with my both eyes. was excited and automatically I took my mobile to capture the train approaching. Started the video in the right time and that chocolate coloured loco was pulling the train slowly into the platform. as the chocolate coloured 21878 WCAM – 2 locomotive of kalyan shed crossed me, the train came to the halt. Train board said it was pavel – pune passenger. Return train of which I missed in the morning. Now rushed to the front of the locomotive, snapped some pictures of the locomotive and train board. Since light of the sun was very bright, was unable to fetch a proper picture of the locomotive.

This is one of the very few trains that have commercial halt at khandala though most descending trains towards karjat stops there for break testing. Now stood in a place near the end of the platform, immediately after i kept my mobile camera ready, a loud honk was made and train started departing slowly. Loco pilot of the train flashed the headlamps. As the locomotive crossed me, the assistant loco pilot smiled at me, waved the flag and showed a kind gesture. That was a very first time for me to receive acknowledgement from a crew which is operating the train when I captured the same. It was pulled up the hill from backwards by WAG – 7 triplets of kalyan loco shed, two being tiger faced, one with conventional WAG – 7 livery.

Captured that train successfully and walked towards the platform, was very happy since I had a video of a train hauled by a WCAM – 2 class locomotive, that too in such a scenic location with acknowledgement of the crew. Now came to a tree in that platform and saw the upcoming trains that I could possibly spot there. The first in the list was deccan express and already it had crossed malavli as per where is my train app. Was also seeing next set of trains that I could possibly spot. Drank some water. After say some five minutes, checked the running status of deccan express and it had already arrived lonavala.

Fastened myself to the end of the platform in an excitation, waited in hot sun for ten odd minutes, after which heard a loud honk and fastened my mobile camera. Again, the chocolate boy from kalyan, Mr. WCAM – 2 numbered 21869, started showing up as he was negotiating the curve beautifully, entered platform – 1 of khandala railway station hauling the Mumbai bound utkrishtified deccan express with elegance. Decelerated steadily as it entered the platform for its scheduled halt. Some random passengers in general coaches and the overcrowded second class sitting with reservation coaches, started yelling at me and even shouted some words. Literally I got panic and my heart stopped for a second. But still I was not bothering that and continued to capture the train till it came to a halt. Somehow, captured it successfully and came back to the shade under the tree in the platform.

Now, some random vendor selling vada pav boarded that train in the opposite side of the platform, crossed the track and came to the platform in which I was sitting. Since I was very hungry that time, went to him and brought a pair of vada pav from him. The time I was paying him for vada pav, I heard a continuous honk of a train and chugging sound of the locomotive was following the honk. So, paid him fast and tried to go to the end of the platform, but I was already late. After realising that, I rested those vada pav on top of my bag and fastened my mobile camera.

I was anxious and my heart started beating so fast. Since the chugging sound indicated that it must be an ALCo locomotive, my most favourite class of locomotive that is hauling a train. Immediately after I started the video, the locomotive had already started to climb the gradient. That chugging sound and honk was so divine. Now in long hood forward, 11355 numbered WDM – 3D class locomotive of kalyan loco shed hauled Mumbai – Chennai express was chugging hard and climbing up the hill, skipping khandala and WAG – 7 triplets of kalyan loco shed pushed it from backwards. Meanwhile, the deccan express also departed after its scheduled halt at khandala.

After capturing it successfully, saw the top of the bag. Thank god that vada pav stayed undisturbed in the top of my bag. Now checked and analysed the video that I captured. The video which I took from this new location was better than the video that I took at the platform end. Now, checked for the upcoming trains I am supposed to spot. For thirty minutes, there was no passenger trains as per schedule passing the station since sinhagad express which was supposed to arrive at khandala was nearly half an hour behind the schedule, and yes, I got a bit of gap to relax myself and patiently have that vada pav. That was the third time in that day I had vada pav. Though the vadas were stale, but still it retained its taste. Enjoyed that for few minutes, and heard some random honk so near to me, anxious for a moment, fastened my mobile to capture train, but that was light WAG – 7 triplets that were moving towards karjat and vice versa. This happened continuously for every ten minutes.

Time went on, now I tracked the next train that could possibly cross khandala. But that was not a passing train and was a stopping train. By the time I checked for running status of sinhagad express, it was only few kilometers away from khandala, so ran to the end of the platform, took the position to capture the same. Around evening 05:30 pm, again chocolate boy WCAM – 2, numbered 21874 of kalyan shed pulled the train into platform 3, halted for a moment, and gave a very brief honk before departure. Slowly as the sinhagad express moved out of the platform, noticed that the rake of the same had coaches of different liveries. Few were of normal blue ICF livery, few were of old livery unique to central railways, some one

or two coaches were of utkrisht livery and some one or two were of janshatabdi liveried coaches. Now, KYN based WCAM – 3 twins locomotive pushed the train uphill from the back.

Now while capturing this, I was sweating a lot, was a bit tired and thirsty. So, went back to the shade and took some water and sat there for few minutes, went to NTES app for tracking koyna express since I was expecting that koyna express could be the next train I could be probably spotting. Meanwhile, heard a brief honk from a distance and that honk came near in few moments, suddenly took my mobile camera, and started capturing, saw a red beast climbing up the gradient with some train, and passed khandala. It was 22352 numbered Valsad based WAP – 4E locomotive hauling that train which was of ICF rake and had marking of the north central railway. Surprisingly, that train did not have the luggage and guard van in front of the train. That was my very first capture of train from north central railway. WAG – 7 triplets of kalyan loco shed pushed it uphill. Now, after capturing this train, was wondering what train that I captured.

Then, I checked the list of trains arriving pune for next four hours to find that it was Gwalior – pune weekly express and it was few minutes ahead of the schedule. After capturing this, slowly moved to the end of the platform to capture koyna express bound for Mumbai. Heard the humming jet engine like sound which is characteristic for EMD locomotive, at a distance after negotiating the curve, face of the locomotive was visible and it was cab – 2 of WDP – 4D locomotive numbered 40424 of pune loco shed pulls the koyna express into platform – 1 and decelerated elegantly for its scheduled halt.

By that time, koyna express also slowly departed khandala, saying bye to us. I came to the shade under the tree and checked the running status of the daily Bhubaneswar, konark express, which could have been spotted by me now. It has already neared khandala and within I take my camera, heard a loud honk characteristic to EMD locomotive. Putting efforts, cab – 1 facing WDP – 4D class locomotive numbered 40416 from pune shed, pulled the 23 coacher konark express uphill. Captured that train but while the last coach of the train crossed me, accidentally pressed the stop button, spoilt the video. But again, I clicked the start button, some how captured the 2nd and 3rd loco of the WAG – 7 triplets of kalyan loco shed pushing it in upgradient. Now I can some how manipulate by merging both the clips but anyway, felt highly disappointed for spoiling the video.

Somehow, convinced myself and checked the next set of trains that I could be probably spotting. Meanwhile, checked the running status of 12128 pune – Mumbai intercity superfast express in which I booked from lonavala to Mumbai csmt and planned to board from khandala. It had already departed pune on time. The next train that I would be probably spotting was the daily kanniyakumari, mr. jayanthi janatha express who is also an age-old legend. It had left karjat on time and still 30 minutes was there for it to reach khandala. Meanwhile, few triplets of banker locomotive were moving downhill to karjat at say some 15 minutes gap.

Was admiring the beauty of the nature that time, walked around the station, answered the call of the nature and whiled away my time, chatting in whatsapp groups. Thirty minutes have already passed and heard a loud honk at some distant. Was cautious this time, took the mobile camera fast and started video before that train started climbing the gradient. It was 21891 numbered WCAM – 3 class locomotive from Kalyan loco shed hauling the daily

kanniyakumari i.e. jayanthi janatha express, climbed the gradient and skipped khandala in good speed, the same WCAM – 3 twins of kalyan loco shed pushed it back uphill.

After capturing it successfully, checked the list of trains that is supposed to arrive lonavala in next four hours. Six and a half hours delayed Coimbatore – lokmanya tilak express had already arrived lonavala and this time for a change, I went to the lonavala end of platform 3. within five minutes of time, I heard a loud honk characteristic to EMD locomotive and meanwhile, also noted that signal was green in end of the platform 3. So, made myself aware that some train is going to cross the Coimbatore – lokmanya tilak as it is supposed to arrive within few moments.

And, cab – 2 of WDP – 4D locomotive could be seen and numbered 40450 numbered locomotive of krishnarajapuram diesel loco shed pulled the 24 coacher Coimbatore – lokmanya tilak express into platform – 2 and steadily decelerated for its technical halt for break testing. When engine of the train crossed me, immediately turned my mobile camera in such a way that I could capture the train passing through platform 3. Thank god no train came in Platform – 3 in that gap. Though the signal was green for a long time, till Coimbatore – lokmanya tilak express came to a halt, no train arrived in platform – 3 of khandala. After it came to a halt, heard a loud honk from a distance.

I was about to stop the video but I refrained to do so as the honk appeared to come near me and I saw some EMD locomotive with original short hood front cab facing front was climbing the gradient. Yes, it was WDG – 4 twin locomotives of hubli loco shed numbered 12049 and 12106 respectively was pulling the freight rake of BOXNHL consist up the hill and WAG – 7 triplets of kalyan loco shed were pushing the train uphill, i.e. was banking. Felt that this could be a compensation for spoiling the video of konark express, since I unexpectedly spotted an extra train.

As the freight skipped khandala, Coimbatore – lokmanya tilak also completed its break testing meanwhile and slowly departed khandala. Now next train that was supposed to arrive khandala was 12128 pune – Mumbai intercity superfast express in which I am supposed to travel. I was standing at platform 2 that time. As per schedule, 12128 pune – Mumbai intercity superfast express does not have scheduled halt at khandala, but I strongly believed that it must stop at khandala for break testing as other trains passing downhill does. So checked the running status of the same to find that it had already departed lonavala.

Meanwhile, fastened my mobile camera to capture the same. Booked in this train for return since this had newly been converted into LHB rakes that time and also, never travelled in LHB version of second-class seating coach. Expected ajni based WAP – 7 locomotive to haul this train since that was the regular link. Also expected this train to arrive platform – 2 of khandala. But after series of honk, for my surprise, it was WCAM – 3 class locomotive numbered 21893 of kalyan loco shed pulled LHB rakes of 12128 pune – Mumbai intercity superfast express into platform – 1 of khandala.

I turned anxious as it came in such a speed into Platform – 1 and quickly decelerated. I did take the video from platform – 2. For my surprise the D7 coach which I am supposed to board was in the middle of the train. I did not stop taking the video. Since this was rare event, I wanted to capture the full video. But when the penultimate coach crossed me, I got down in the tracks adjacent to platform – 2 and continued taking the video. As soon as the train came

into halt, stopped the video and ran in the tracks with a back pack roughly weighing some 10 to 15 kilograms, towards my coach D7 which was some 8 coaches away from the last coach which halted near me when train came to halt. As I ran quickly in tracks, people from the train started staring at me weirdly.

I kept running towards my coach and finally reached there. People were sitting in the door and my coach was heavily overcrowded. I asked them to give some way so that I can board the train. they quickly gave the way for me and I went into the train as soon as possible. After boarding, I was searching my seat and when I went near my seat, I found a man already sitting in my seat. Firstly, I removed my bag weighing some 10 – 15 kgs, placed it in the luggage rake. I felt a jerk that is characteristic for LHB coaches which marked the departure of train from khandala after brake testing halt. Now, I took my ticket and showed to that man, who was already occupying my seat. He realised and moved from that seat. Now I took my mobile phone charger and fastened it into the port and took my seat.

Now, took my mobile camera, got up from the seat and took some photos of my seat. This was my first time in LHB reserved second class seating coach (2S). Till then I had travelled only few times in ICF reserved second class seating (2S) coach in trains like pallavan sf., in which the older coaches used to have a straight back rest and for longer distances, which will be uncomfortable for long distance journeys. Reserved second class seating in janshabdi express used to be okay since backrest will be bit inclined. The major advantage what I feel in LHB 2S coach is that we can recline the seat to our convenience, also tray was there in front to keep the food items and eat. Like ICF second sitting coaches, it was of 3*3 seating arrangement. Windows were wide and legroom was good. Seating capacity was also par to ICF coach without much increase or decrease. Some of the disadvantages which I noted was that the walkway between seat arrangement was narrower so it was difficult for passengers, vendors and staffs to move. Also, when train gets overcrowded, it will become so congested. Also, some seats were not par to the windows and came in between the gap of two windows. Apart from that, it was quite good.

I was extremely happy since this was my first time in LHB second sitting coach. Mine was window seat, not on the side of the track luckily was not between two windows. So as usual took some selfie and plugged my phone to the charger and started enjoying the journey. As the train was now descending the ghats in a steady pace, sun was also descending down, bidding bye to us. This time I turned nature enthusiast. Enjoyed the scenery and nature, the lights near the road, the colour of the sky during sunset in a typical summer. Also, at certain places, I was able to see pune – Mumbai express way which was glittering in lights. Enjoyed the trees in the hill, tunnels, track sounds made by LHB coaches.

I did not go to the track side door and peep through since I was very exhausted after many memorable events that day and did not have proper meal that day. Was not aware when utkrisht pragati bound for pune crossed us but was sure that before we arrived monkey hill cabin. Our train arrived monkey hill in some time, we halted here for a moment. Meanwhile heard a sharp honk and it was the legendary deccan ki rani who was climbing uphill. But only could see the lights from the loco and coach from my seat. As we departed monkey hill, slowly the sky also became dark and was unable to see much outside. Still the lights in the tunnel, lights from the settlements below the hill, etc., was still a visual treat. We crossed jambrug and thakurwadi cabin meanwhile, was able to appreciate the gradient as the train

descended and also was able to appreciate the curves which was beautifully negotiated by our train. as we crossed

As we descended down the gradient before the palasdhari station, heard a loud honk and humming sound. The sound intensified in few seconds. Yes, it was jaipur – yesvantpur suvidha express ascending the gradient at palasdhari. Well, I could not appreciate the full train as I was in the other side but had a glimpse of the EMD locomotive and some coaches of the train. still I can recall the way it accelerated to climb the upgradient, the honk, the track sounds it made and I get goosebumps even now when I recall this event. Even then I got goosebumps. Immediately after crossing that train, we also crossed palasdhari and after that, saw many goods train rake and some WAG – 7 and WAG – 9 class locomotives and we arrived karjat. As we entered karjat, I saw a local train rake at platform – 3.

We accelerated constantly and skipped karjat and we hit maximum permissible speed in next few moments. What I could see for next ten minutes was our train was moving somewhere after karjat and we skipped some stations in high speed. Meanwhile, checked my phone which was plugged to the charger, it was 100 percent charged. I removed the charger and the phone, put the charger into the bag. As this was my first time to mumbai and pune, and the previous day I enjoyed different type of chat items in Mumbai. Since I did not have my food properly this day, took my phone and checked about the local cuisine and type of local cuisine available. Then checked the hotels which are offering such cuisine and their proximity to the local train station. Since dadar had many such options, planned to deboard at dadar.

Meanwhile, I contacted my family and friends and enjoyed the comfortable seat of LHB 2S. our train slowed down. Yes, signs that we were arriving kalyan was evident. As per schedule our train does not stop at kalyan and this is the first time for me to witness the same, was eager to see it. but at the same time, was doubting that will it stop or not. I thought to take video of our train skipping kalyan but unfortunately, as I was not in the side of the track, I was not on the side of platform too. Hence, dropped this idea and enjoyed kalyan skip with both my eyes. It did not stop at kalyan and we slowly skipped the same. Meanwhile, some passengers standing near the door they deboarded from the running train which is not safe.

We gained speed after skipping kalyan and when I crossed the yard near kalyan jn. Spotted 15543 numbered tejas liveried WDP – 3A class locomotive of kalyan loco shed, that was the first time I am seeing such loco. But, as it was night, there was no proper lighting and our train was moving, I managed to capture only a blurred picture. But I still treasure it for my memories. touched maximum permissible speed in no time, and negotiated the ever beautiful parsik tunnel in the night. we arrived thane in some 20 minutes of time and nearly 40 percent of the train got empty and the nearby platform was very much crowded as some train is expected to arrive there. Our train departed thane after a brief halt and started picking up speed. I took my luggage and went near the door.

Near Bhandup, saw a long train passing in the line towards lokmanya tilak terminus line and we were overtaking it. But, could not capture the same as it was dark. Somehow, managed to see the engine in the light and it was WDP – 4D locomotive numbered 40450 of krishnarajapuram diesel loco shed. I spotted the same loco with around six and half hours late Coimbatore – lokmanya tilak express, just moments before boarding this train at khandala. Yes, as we overtook it, we passed suburban station in good speed and in next twenty minutes

after leaving Thane, our train arrived Dadar. I deboarded the train, managed to take pictures of the small train board in my coach. After a very brief halt in Dadar, it literally accelerated out of Dadar in good speed and was mesmerized on the way it accelerated out of Dadar.

Meanwhile, I was searching for a restaurant which offers good local cuisine, though many are there near Dadar station itself, I felt the one near the Byculla suburban station better, went to ticket counter to take ticket for the same but unfortunately, it was crowded like a hell and I was too hungry enough. Already it was 9 pm by that time. So, came back to the same platform and a fast local bound for Mumbai was already standing there. So, decided to board without the ticket and did the same. I am not promoting the same but my circumstances made me to do so. Even today, I regret for the mistake I made. Immediately after I boarded the train, the fast local accelerated out of Dadar and my coach was less crowded. But one positive thing to think that time was next stop was Byculla. So Byculla came in few moments and got down to the platform.

Thank God no ticket checker was there at that time and local train left in no time. In the opposite side platform, Devagiri express bound for Secunderabad was passing Byculla in a good speed with Gooty based WDP – 4D locomotive. Now, I came out of the station, checked for the location of that restaurant in Google Map and went as per the navigation. Had a hearty meal and after 45 minutes, again came back to Byculla station, this time took ticket till Mumbai CSMT and in display board, it showed that a fast local bound for Mumbai CSMT will arrive shortly, went to that platform, boarded the fast local and went to Mumbai CSMT in ten minutes. It was around 10:30 pm when I reached Mumbai CSMT. I was very tired and I walked to the dormitory thinking about the places that I should cover the next day, i.e. the final day of my stay in Mumbai.

Thanks for reading it patiently.

- A travel enthusiast from a remote location.