

# Itarsi Junction

By : **Juggernaut**

Itarsi Junction is one of the main rail terminals in the country. Juggernaut shares his experience of travelling through Itarsi Junction four decades ago.



Published on  
**Booksie**

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## *Itarsi Junction*

Subba Rao

A trip from Banaras to Hyderabad around 1000 miles took just over 30 hours on a train. Juggernaut took this trip four decades ago when he was a graduate student briefly at Banaras Hindu University. The slow moving train stopped at numerous stations including Allahabad, the birth place of Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, immediately after independence from Great Britain in 1947.

Itarsi Junction is halfway to Hyderabad, around 500 miles from Banaras, one of the largest railway stations in India located in central part of the country. As the train approached Itarsi, the rail tracks were multiplied on either side of the running train, some ran parallel and others curved away in different directions. On some tracks crowded trains were just leaving the platform while others slowly approaching the train stop. Several freight trains were parked at a distance on the rail-spur for loading and unloading. In between the tracks, maintenance crew was working in very close proximity to the running trains without fear. From large open windows, one can see signal men operating the levers arranged in series in the control room to change the direction of trains while others were waving green flags to the trains just leaving station. Looking from the train window Juggernaut was amazed at the complexity of the operations as the train slowly pulled into the Itarsi station.

Decades ago, many locomotive engines were still running on coal and few on diesel. The steam engines puffing black smoke and letting out excess steam with characteristic hissing sound was an experience to remember lifelong.

As the train slowed down on approaching the platform, the station appointed porters in crimson uniform ran on the platform along the halting train to jump into the railcars to seek passengers to carry their baggage to parking lots. Holding on to one or two pieces of baggage, the porters bargain with the passengers on carrying charges, some porters bold enough to take hold of the baggage and move quickly onto the platform only to demand exorbitant fee later. Few porters fight among themselves, holding a piece of passengers' baggage leaving the passenger in confusion. This drama occurs at every busy train station. A station like Itarsi junction with multiple platforms with several trains arriving and departing at the same time, the place was a chaos with porters, passengers and visitors bumping each other.

Juggernaut walked up and down the platform looking at several food stalls only to find that every stand was selling the same items; boiled potatoes arranged like boiled eggs on a rack and Puri, a deep fried flat bread, and chai or tea to drink. For a such a busy railway junction at the cross roads of the country, there was no choice at the of food carts.

With so many trains crisscrossing the Itarsi station carrying millions of passengers, the facilities for travelling passengers at the station were very limited then.

At the Itarsi station like any other railway station in India, the train tracks also serve as receptacle for passenger's trash. Passengers routinely threw empty food containers, fruit peelings and other waste on the tracks hoping the heavy train wheels would crush the trash like a trash disintegrator under a kitchen sink. All the waste food on the tracks feed the massive rat population making the tracks at the platform the most unsanitary place for people working on the tracks.

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During the last four decades, the Itarsi station certainly would have modernized. Now, gone with steam locomotives, only diesel and electrical trains carry passengers. One would expect a great deal of improvement in rest rooms and sanitary facilities for the benefit the passengers at the station. Hopefully the food vendors were providing more choice like idly, dosa and upma, and coffee in addition to tea. More importantly, the passengers were stopped using the railway tracks as dust bin and the health authorities got a grip on rat population on the tracks.

Itarsi Junction is a marvelous railway terminal to travel through to watch the massive rail yard with innumerable tracks with trains pulling in and out of the terminal particularly during night time under the glaring floodlights.

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