

eBook

Here's Why Your Train Journey
Could Turn A Quirky Adventure



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Here's Why Your Train Journey Could Turn A Quirky Adventure

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The Experiential Travel Blog

Dedication

This book is dedicated to my mother, brother, wife, and daughter without whose constant encouragement and support this could not have been achieved. This book has been created for you the reader.

Acknowledgment

I acknowledge the contribution and continuous support of theblogchatter.com and their excellent team, especially my mentor Leha Divakar, and scores of fellow bloggers whose twitter posts on how to make an ebook helped in a huge way.

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My name is Kumar Parameswaran, and I am from Hyderabad, India. At 50, I called it time on my marketing & services business career, to step back and ruminate. A 3 year hiatus from work impelled me to follow my passion and motivation, to explore the country and its neighborhood.

My passion is travelling by public transport, as also through the countryside, discovering and exploring offbeat, heritage and classical destinations, always looking out for lifetime experiences.

My motivation is in touching the lives of people, in different regions, playing a constructive role, in channeling their development, in my own small way, with an eye on the environment.

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Introduction

Having travelled a large part of my journeys in over 3 decades, in sleeper class coaches, I could relate more to those experiences and less to AC class experiences.

Drawing on my personal train travel experiences, I made an attempt to bring out silent voice of the common man, and give you the reader an insight into what commonly happens during a train journey.

Thus was born the series on Quirky Experiences on Indian Train Travels. I dedicate the book to you the reader in the hope you have an interesting journey reading the book.

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Last Minute Announcements

On a sunny afternoon of peak summer in Hyderabad, sweat rolls down my eyes, as I tug along my heavy luggage trying to find my way to the train. However since the train has not arrived and announcement is yet to be made, the first thoughts on my mind are where will my train come. I wanted to take a breather once I get to the platform so that I can swipe the sweat off my face. I had begun to lose my cool in the heat.

My first instinct was to approach the nearest porter wearing a red shirt. Usually they are the reliable ones to guide you correctly. This guy seeing me surmised that I was going to ask him a typical question. He thought I was going to use his services, but my question put him off completely, enough to guide me on a random direction, which left me puzzled.

Arriving at Secunderabad station, the first thing that strikes me is the confusion all around. It is crowded and no one is willing to talk. I needed to take the train out of Secunderabad, and the indicator showed the train will arrive on platform 1 but the wait gets longer than usual.

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Left without a choice I then walked up to a couple of people who were cooling their heels waiting for their trains to come. One gave me a suggestion that I stand on the over bridge and wait for the announcement, while the other said that I better wait at the lounge. I decided to stay put for the announcement.

It had become accepted by almost everyone at that point in time, that the train was to arrive on platform 1 and people more or less settled to finding the spot from where they would board their respective coaches. Then the much awaited announcement came. The din made it inaudible.

I had to listen to it closely for a few more times in multiple languages before I could make out the change in platform. The crowd moved helter-skelter and confusion prevailed once again. I had a heavy luggage to be pulled along, and the escalator wasn't functioning. So I go from platform 1 to platform 4. This is typically called "Stimuli, Response, and No choice situation". Getting down from the staircase, I went briskly towards the rear end of the train, as my coach was aligned accordingly, in the online chart.

The time to board the train was limited and I had to walk past 12 or 13 sleeper class coaches, 2 or 3 third AC

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coaches, to get to mine. A long walk of this nature if done at brisk pace, would take easily 10 minutes or more. I was short of breath by the time I reached, my boarding spot. I was trying to cool down, gulping water. The train had still not arrived at the platform, and I thought I was lucky. But what happened next stunned me completely.

The railways indicator suddenly came alive and indicated that the alignment of the coaches had changed and I came to know that mine had shifted from the rear to the front. Now this was a near breakdown situation and resulted in utter confusion all across the platform, for not only was I affected, many more too. Still the train was yet to arrive and this gave hope to me just like many others. I trudged to the new alignment and waited for the train to come.

This wasn't the end of travails for me on that day. Just as the train arrived at the platform, the railways made announcement of coach position. Guess what, the coach position was according to the original alignment, while the indicators still showed the realigned coach positions. Now this was the last straw on the camel's back.

There was yelling all around with the TTE trying to pacify the passengers. Fortunately I had the time to get

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into my coach and the journey continued. So watch out for the last minute announcements the railways make. It could be voice or digital, but it could potentially throw you off your track.

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Berth Pangs In The Coach

Summer heat burns my skin but I am in no mood to take all that into account. My focus is on getting my ticket confirmation done at the station itself by speaking to TTE and hopefully without any major issue along the way. The rush at the station was enough to signal tough times ahead. Perhaps a lot many are travelling like me.

My travel worries started at the point of origin. Due to seasonal rush my ticket isn't confirmed. The journey had to be made, but the situation didn't give me the confidence of making it possible. I was among those who had the misfortune of being allotted RAC ticket, which atleast meant I could make the journey on that day with that ticket on that train. A seat indeed had been allotted to me for sure.

I had to push myself in to get inside the compartment. But when I did get to my seat, it was occupied by three people. I had to tell one to get off, by showing proof of my ticket copy. Thankfully I carried a print. Settling down to my allotted seat and with my RAC ticket issue yet to be resolved, I resign to fate when the TTE bluntly puts it across that berths are not available.

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Just then my co-passenger with the other RAC ticket slowly starts stretching his leg first and then his body, and finally prepared to take 40 winks, all at my cost. He had a smart way of telling me that he will rest for some time, and then I too can rest similarly later. Surely he was stretching his luck too far.

Something snapped within me. I told him I would have none of it, and he would have to sit. This said, the co-passenger's chase of the TTE started in full swing. He was willing to pay "the price". Such was his relentless chase that the TTE finally allotted him a berth close to midnight. By then I had mine and was fast asleep.

As if this was not enough, the person who comes into the compartment at the next station wakes me up and asks me to get off. Raising his voice and arguing with me, he threatened to call the TTE to sort things. Clearly I knew something was amiss. Ultimately when TTE did come, he discovers that he had boarded the wrong coach and worse the wrong train too. Giving me a sheepish smile, he walks away, while I give him my piece of my mind, for taking away my peace of mind.

Watching from a distance was another passenger who wanted to try his luck now. He wanted me to exchange berths by occupying his at the other end of the

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compartment, as his friends are closer to where my berth was. There was no way I would move. Somehow I fended him off for the rest of the journey.

There were times when RAC would give a comfort zone that confirmation of berth was a mere formality once the journey starts. These days RAC clearly means you stay on the wings eternally hoping for a berth. So book your tickets well in advance if you don't want disappointments of the berth kind.

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Civic Sense Is Common Sense

Suddenly the train starts and there is pandemonium all around. Our train had made an unscheduled stop at an intermediary station waiting for signal to move ahead. This surprised many who were enjoying themselves under the shade of the tree, oblivious to the fact that the train had made its move.

In a dash they attempt to get into their compartments, while the train had already picked up a little speed. What disturbed me much was seeing people stand at the door and do nothing to help those trying to get in.

In fact one passenger who was the last to board almost fell down as his legs slipped while hanging on to the door handle. That we were crossing the river bridge just outside of the station sent a chill down my spine. Well this was just the beginning and more was to come in this journey that would normally shock the senses.

The train was running late and passengers were already irate by then. What did keep the passengers cool however, was the continuous supply of snacks, cool drinks, water, tea and coffee in regular supply, leaving in its trail, water and food packets, spilt tea and coffee and a spray of bhelpuri.

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By then the half open toilets were raising a stink, while some were happily smoking at the door, oblivious to the fact that smoke was coming in to the compartment and choking hapless people. Add to this was cigarette butts all around. I had an issue with the civic sense of the travelling public. I messaged the railways at the next station to do the cleanup act.

It was a long distance journey and there was a large family travelling together in my compartment. They had brought along an assortment of food items for their journey, and were busy sharing food. They offered me too but I had mine already by then, so politely refused. Sure it must have been tasty, but my surmise was from the fact that they were munching loudly, licking up the front of the hand and the back of the hand, in full public view. Made me turn away and go. Isn't there something called table manners?

Lunch over, there was another passenger, an elderly woman who threw out her left over food and started washing her hands, right outside her window, while the train was in full speed. Imagine the consequences of the person sitting on the next window having a shower on his face along with leftover food. I could see him wiping his face with a helpless growl. Adding to co-passenger

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woes was her attitude of dusting off the food particles, not for a moment stopping to think that it could attract rodents.

At the next intermediate station, an elderly couple walked in possibly travelling from one village to another village enroute, and without reservations. I thought the best way forward is to offer them a part of my seat to sit, as theirs and mine travelling distances weren't long. In the meantime I realized that I needed short nap before my destination arrives next.

I was left with the thoughts that people who travel in trains need to have some common sense and better still they need to inculcate some civic sense too. There is no point in asking India to produce some of the best trains like the Rajdhani, Shatabdi, Gatiman, Tejas and most recently Train18, while the travelling class act irresponsibly in more ways than one.

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Drunken State Of Mind

I was panting as I came running in to catch the train just in time, and within seconds the train left the platform. I believed luck was on my side that day as I had got reservation too, at the last minute. Since it was a night journey I made arrangements to sleep while I waited for the TTE. Things appeared fine while I settled down. The passenger seated near me was having a few sips of what looked like a cola drink. His eyes were red and looked quite unusually “sober” too. I knew he wasn't in good “spirits” and so did not engage him in a conversation. But his attitude that night didn't leave a good taste.

Still nothing unusual was noticed till the TTE completed his rounds. It was well into the cold wintry night, and so I tugged into my blanket and went off to sleep. But soon there was some commotion. The noise around was disturbing me much. Unable to sleep peacefully I kept shifting from side to side on my berth. Something told me that all wasn't well in the compartment and instinctively I got up to take a look at what's happening around me.

My hunch about the guy having cola drink had come true. He was drunk. The smell from him was a giveaway and he was talking gibberish. By now the crowd had

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gathered trying to soften him up. But the more you engaged with him the more he flew off the handle. My luck of getting into the train in time was quickly unfolding into a hapless encounter.

Blabbering whatever he could mouth, he started singing loudly as if the compartment world was his stage. Taking off his shirt, he was quickly turning into a nuisance for women passengers, who were travelling together, but quite unfortunate to have been allotted seats near him that night.

When questioned about his drunken state, he started arguing with other passengers. In his inebriation, where he was barely able to stand, he was reaching out to pull the chain, when fellow passengers pinned him down. That's when he turned even nasty by puking on the floor. Some passengers decided to take things into their hands, before sane sense prevailed.

We had to move fast to bring things under control. A lot of phone calls were flying out with people trying to reach authorities, so that this person takes the exit door at the nearest station and the compartment is made clean and neat for further travel. There was a lot of commotion till then. Some wanted him to be handed over to police

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while many others wanted him to be offloaded and fend for himself at an intermediate station.

Ultimately the TTE stepped in to bring a closure and he brought in the police. Also at the next station the team of cleaners swung into action, thereby sparing us all of the misery of having to travel that night in unbearable conditions.

Truth is, this drunkard isn't the first nor will he be the last to board trains. The railways have no way to check out such passengers before boarding the train. Sad but true. So ya, the next time you board the train and see a guy or a group having cola, your senses would obviously tell you to watch out for some "show" that may unfold.

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Getting Pushy With Excess Baggage

The heat was killing and none could escape the severe perspiration. Looking for a place to sit at the station, the lack of proper seating arrangement came to the fore on everyone's mind. Some began walking restlessly through the length of the platform. Standing at the edge of the platform some people looked at either side of the tracks hoping to sight the engine. Adding to the tension, the indicators showed one train coming and a different train came in. The announcers however did make the amends. But this created a problem.

The train was already late and its scheduled stop was for only 2 minutes. There was a mad rush due to ensuing weekend. People were pushing each other to get in. It was a scene where either the elbow hit the rib cage or the suitcases hit the knees. Ouch! I gave way to a few elderly people to get in first. There was a lot of commotion with people shouting at each other for blocking their way with luggage.

Never before have I witnessed such a mad unruly rush to enter a reserved coach. Its summer holidays and the station overcrowded. My train came in late and tested patience. The restlessness of the waiting passengers,

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with each passing moment, became evident. As soon as the coach doors opened, all hell broke loose. Each one wanted to be the first to enter. They barged in pushing aside the other with force. There were far too many at the door, all at the same time. None wanted to yield an inch.

The tension was understandable because the train was to depart a few minutes later. In the melee, none stopped to think, even for a moment. The darkness due to lights not switched on inside the coach heightened the tension. One fell over the other, making their way inside. Furthermore, people with luggages blocked the passageway of those who wanted to come in and settle down. With the green signal flashing and hooter sound buzzing, a few who still could not enter the coach, raised hell.

My wait to get inside the train, seemed eternal, and my patience by now was being tested. The family ahead of me in the queue was loading their luggage of all hues and of sizes usually reserved for travelling abroad. This wasn't it; they were loading cartons too, of all sizes. I could figure out they were shifting to another city, as the sendoff crowd made it look obvious.

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This family was slow in moving their luggage right to the middle of the compartment, and this was blocking the path of all those who wanted to find their way to their seats. The moment this family began settling down, they started asking everyone to move their legs and keep it on the berths so that they could push their luggage inside.

I can understand if they had only a handful of luggage for themselves, which in most cases wouldn't inconvenience others. But here they started occupying others luggage space too. Having seen a tumult outside, a similar one inside was making me feel uneasy.

I did accommodate them by keeping my hand luggage on my berth like the laptop and the lunch bag. But their need for space or should I say greed for space was more. The way they went about it, looked as if the entire compartment was for them.

They had the temerity to make an atrocious request that I keep my entire luggage on my berth, to accommodate theirs beneath the berth. Since I was occupying the upper berth, they wanted me to not only put my luggage up, but also move up and stay there through the journey. Made me wonder about whether I was travelling on RAC or a confirmed berth for this journey.

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This was a long journey and I couldn't afford to travel the way it was turning out to be. The family was beginning to be pushy and once settled, they were trying to talk rough with the passengers by asking whether their names were cast on the berth and luggage spaces.

Their point was that since they are travelling a shorter distance than the rest of us, we should be more accommodative and adjust to the environment around us. Annoyed, I decided to take some action against them. Things were getting out of hand. I summoned courage to call the TTE to settle the issue.

No sooner the TTE arrived on the scene, the family knew their game was up. The TTE talked tough and was about to challan them, but upon relentless pleading by the family, he changed his mind and asked them to keep their luggage on their allotted berths, else would have to pay up a stiff penalty.

Yet again causing great difficulty to passengers, they shifted their luggage from other spaces to their own berths, while all the while cursing their luck on the trip.

But this time, while the others made themselves comfortable, this family shared their own berths, much

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like RAC with two sitting in place of one. This could have been the scene in any unreserved compartment.

It is time the railways come up with strict baggage rules at the station entry point itself. This would save passengers a huge embarrassment.

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Tatkal Bookings-Fact Or Fiction

Sitting in front of the computer, I wait with bated breath for the opening time for tatkal booking in the IRCTC website. I have an urgent trip coming up and an important one at that. Keeping my eyes peeled for the clock that turned 9.59am, the wait for login was a restless one. Just then someone **had** to ask me a question. My mind was very clear. Any conversation would **have** to be only after the tatkal booking is over. At 9.58am I login to test check to see if things are working fine. There was no sign of anything going wrong. All set, I felt. In a moment it should be a job done.

Time for login at 10am and IRCTC site doesn't open on my regular browser. Frantically opening windows in different browsers, I began hoping that one of them will open faster than the rest. The site in each browser shows up a blue image going in circles possibly for eternity. I keep the details, to key in, ready at hand. But all of this will work only if the site opens. Feverishly tapping the space bar on the keyboard, I am determined not to let my laptop hang. My chance of a successful tatkal booking hangs by a thin thread as time ticks by.

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Finally yes, the login happens. I am short of expressing joy the way a bowler does upon taking a wicket or batsman does after a century. So much suspense endured before the site opens. But soon reality bites. For starters I am left to search for stations. How would I know Hospet is now Hosapete? Well that's the place you get off on way to Hampi. To make matters worse, IRCTC site took me to the general booking page, leaving me to fend for myself and search for the tatkal drop down. I wasn't conversant with tatkal booking and felt I am done in by the system. Every second counted, and by the time I crossed a few more hurdles and got to the booking payments page, only a couple of berths remained.

But I haven't yet seen the end of troubles with my booking process. At the payment process stage, I am asked to fill in a captcha, and additionally by asking further questions about my identification. Since the bank's server was not reachable, payment's denied. Later it turns out that I am charged for payment denial. Moving from one payment gateway to another was a comedy of sorts. Finally after repeated attempts, the screen says debited by bank, as it took endless moments to move back to merchant's page. Have I got the berth or not? By now my patience was tested to its limits.

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My worst fears come true. By the time the merchant's page is back, the ticket is not booked and goes to waitlist. The payment made, but reservation not available. I am sure this resonates with many who have tried their hand at tatkal bookings. For this journey though, I am forced to opt to travel, by another connecting train, given the urgency.

Why is it that a person who pays much more than the normal ticket fare isn't given the fair treatment when it comes to emergency ticket booking. The railways have got their priorities wrong on the quota mix.

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Getting The Door To Open

Arriving at the station late night, I was glad that the rains had just stopped. The roads were all clogged with water, and there were puddles to cross. Carrying luggage on shoulders I carefully jump over several pools of water before I get to the station. Humid as it was, I try to wipe the sweat away, but my wet clothes were quite bothersome. This wasn't going to dry up any time soon, and the AC compartment wouldn't help too. It was cold and windy, and the trains being late due to rains didn't help my cause. After much delay my train reaches the platform, in the dead of the night.

The system of charts being pasted on the train doors long gone, I am left to the mercy of SMS from IRCTC to know my coach. My mobile was down without battery power and there was no way I could confirm my coach now without a printout, which I didn't have. Still I was braving it thinking my memory would serve me right.

But I did make a cardinal mistake since there were many AC coaches in that train and I had to figure it out. I began my hunt for the TTE who may possibly see his chart and let me have the details. But all he would say is get into the coach and I will help you figure it out. Saying this he disappeared leaving me out in the cold.

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I am now left with a minute at the station to board the train and I am confused. Still I walk up to an AC coach that I think I should. It is here my trouble multiplies. The doors are closed. There is no way I could open from outside, perhaps because someone from inside has put on the safety lock as well. I try opening the door frantically, running from one AC compartment door to another. I try to bang the door so that someone from inside will listen and open the door. None came forward and my pleas fell on deaf ears.

With the signal given and train hooting, I had almost given up hope. I was just moments away from missing the train. I was terribly sweating by now. No it's not the humidity to blame this time. All of a sudden it starts raining heavily and moving from door to door and coach to coach banging the door, was getting increasingly difficult. Did the heavy rains make people short of hearing the banging on the doors?

Still I wouldn't give up. My banging became louder and louder. I felt this was not a done thing. Perhaps an inner sense was telling me that people are not opening the doors out of safety concerns, and even though I did see one of them move the curtains to see what's happening, but didn't bother to come and open the door. However I

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was livid that AC attendant too felt it unwise to open the door.

At the very last moment a railway police official notices me, and starts speaking to someone on the wireless. The official signaled that I calm down and things would be fine. To my good fortune a TTE emerges from one of the coaches, and lets me in. I was thunderstruck for a few moments unable to understand why the railways are putting several passengers to great difficulty by not pasting the charts on the train doors. Making the travel paperless is one thing, putting the passengers to great difficulty is altogether another.

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Unscheduled Halts Irksome

Arriving at the station an hour early, only to escape the peak evening traffic rush, I check the digital indicator, if my train's in time. A simultaneous announcement too affirms this. Walking up to the food plaza on the station, I have a cup of hot elaichi tea, munch a few cashew butter biscuits, while packing a vegetable biryani for dinner. The train was on time. So far no issues and I am glad I got a berth of choice too. Well ensconced on my side lower berth, I get chatting with others, as is common practice especially in the Indian train travels. Time flies but I notice something odd.

The train hasn't moved from the station, and is already having an "unscheduled halt" if I may so call it. Comments made in common parlance often in lighter vein, imply that railways follow IST (Indian Stretchable Time). Humor apart, this delay is a signal that this isn't going to be a journey of "depart on time and arrive on time". My hunch comes true, as the moment the train starts, it halts a little further down the track, right immediately after crossing the platform. I walk up to the door to check why the halt, as I could hear some disturbance outside. Hoping all passengers have boarded, I get back to seat, once the train departs.

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Settling down, I have my dinner and prepare to sleep. All is well until midnight. Raining as it was the train wasn't proceeding at the right pace, and I could sense that some caution was being applied. But in one of the intermediate stations, the train halted, while the time-table mentions it as a passing by station. This halt continued and was totally unscheduled in an under construction station. The reason given by the TTE was that a goods train has to pass through, and since this was a single line track ahead, they have to wait till the goods train passes by. This kind of unscheduled halts leaves passengers plans awry.

There was no way the TTE could confirm when the train will move at the dead of the night. The painful wait began and it wasn't until an hour or so, that the train made its move again. Having a meeting scheduled in the morning hours, I am left twiddling my thumbs not knowing whether I should get off at the next station and find my way or wait for the destination to arrive. To add to the ordeal, was that, the next station was where bogies of this train get attached to another train, to commence the journey to destination. Will that train come in time? That was a million dollar question. But I chose to wait.

As expected the train is late. Now what do I call this? I hear voices speaking that this is nothing unusual on this

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route for this train I am travelling. Seems like any train whose slip coaches get attached to another main train almost always meets this fate. The rains only add to the distress. An “unscheduled halt” of the helpless kind. I was restlessly pacing up and down at the station. But not for long. Coaches from mine get attached and I am off to my destination.

There's one thing that the Indian Railways are famous for. Making up for lost time between midnight and daybreak. Yes I was there at the destination at right time and my day got made. Despite this, the unscheduled halts are the bane of Indian Railways, one of the most congested and largest railway networks in the world.

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Insufficient Air-Conditioning

I woke up with a start from sleep on the inside upper berth of 3rd AC. Profusely sweating, I felt the heat growing on me. Itching as it was, I felt that my back had got stuck to the berth. I had to pinch myself to check if I was indeed travelling in AC compartment. The train running full, I was destined to travel the entire day journey on the upper deck, since the lower and middle berths were occupied by elderly people, who in the fitness of things, felt it best to have an afternoon nap, for the longest possible time.

While not lying down, my head hit the ceiling hard, every time I shifted around on the berth. Drinking water or removing purse from back pocket, was possible only by a yogasan. I became wise to realize that sitting hunch-back was the only option. Uncomfortable to stay put there, to have my lunch, especially when sweating, I decide to climb down to stretch myself a bit. It takes some tactical balancing skills to get down. Wary of disturbing those sleeping, I climbed down carefully, but missed a ladder step and clumsily landed with a thud and staggered. Made a mess of my whole intent by almost falling on the lower berth passenger.

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Not wanting to take any chances in summer, my first choice was to take the AC class, as the travel time stretches to nearly 24 hours. The bulk of the journey was to be done during day time. Congested and overcrowded with RAC passengers, the situation brought home the atmosphere of sleeper class to 3rd AC. But where's the AC working? The preset temperature levels were not in tune to present and immediate needs. I walk up to the attendant to remind him that AC wasn't functioning, but the attendant was not to be seen. Lunch time it is and the attendant disappearance act, made things far worse to bear.

Things were getting to a point of suffocation and switching on the fan was a savior to some. I have no option but to be on the hunt for the attendant before the situation gets out of hand. I move from one AC compartment to another, trying to spot the attendant. Are we going to see him only around night time when people would need him for blankets and pillows? In the absence of a solution a question popped up in my mind. Would it be better to stay outside near the door than be inside?

It was commonly felt by that time that an open door would bring in fresh air. This was a temporary solution we all could make do with, till the attendant showed up. The attendant bore the brunt of passenger fury, but he

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got the message quickly and set the temperature at optimum levels, so that for the rest of the journey we could travel comfortably.

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A Scary Journey

The journey began with a question mark, but the TTE was quite helpful in ensuring I got my reservation confirmed. I got myself a travel magazine at the station and immersed myself into it upon boarding. This was unusual way of me beginning a journey, but I chose to be quiet that night as something else was running at the back of my mind. I was in the side lower berth and so was happy to sit and travel for a couple of hours into the night before I hit the sack. I was to get off the train the next morning at day break. This journey was shaping up to be uneventful, until I heard disquieting conversations of some co-passengers close to dawn the next morning.

Once the journey commenced I noticed that a suave young couple occupied their seats in the inside berths. They were quite lively in their conversations with other passengers who were travelling that night. Although I was into reading, their conversations were always within an earshot distance. I could figure out, that their friendly banter, with this family, was meandering into personal things, which were normally kept in the private domain. Even if such conversations were to happen, never have I encountered such conversations, at such a pace, in any of my overnight journeys. I continued to ignore them and kept to myself.

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Time for dinner but their chatting continued. Upon a kind reminder by one passenger that he needs to switch off the lights at 10pm, they settle down to have their food. From exchanging snacks, to exchanging food, everything was happening. Quite normal I thought. There is an element of trust built in before sharing of food takes place. But I did notice a departure. Despite this family refusing to share the young couple's food, citing varied reasons, I found the young couple were not taking a no for an answer. They were so relentlessly persistent in their request that the resistance of this family was tapering off.

They insisted that this family, taste at least one bite of their snacks of sweet and savories, as they were all homemade. This family began exchanging looks with each other and were smiling away. They nodded their heads to signal their consent. Now the word homemade was sufficient to change this family's mind. They gobbled all that was on offer to their heart's content. Sooner than later, they felt sleepy, and the young couple laid out the berths for them. They were kindness personified. In fact the young couple gave this family their lower berth as a mark of respect for their age.

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What unsettled my sleep early that morning were the disturbing questions that was there on everyone's lips in and around them. Who were the young couple and where did they get off? It emerged that the young couple got away with 100gms of gold jewels, the lady of this family had been wearing.

Everyone was left shell shocked and nobody had any answers. Loud screams of this lady was of no use, as it was a story of crying over spilt milk or a realization after the con job was done. Police was called in, but at the end of the journey, a careless conversation and engagement proved costly. The point is, there were enough warning signals right from the word go, that were ignored.

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Keeping Decorum

Travelling at night, I complete my dinner and prepare to sleep. On a cold wintry night in the sleeper class, the chill winds blowing on all sides, makes it difficult. Despite that, with some winter wear, I try to manage, hoping to cut off the chilling winds. This stays possible by shutting fans, closing windows and doors, in the compartment. Even so, what I would experience that night left me thinking. Do people travelling together, feel enough, to share and care? The least expected of the passengers, is maintaining decorum.

Its 10pm and time to switch off the lights. Yet one family wanted the lights on for the reason they haven't had their dinner. Fair enough since there is no point in discomforting them. But once others were off to sleep, this family continued keeping the lights on and their chatting causing disturbance. The need to stay awake, as the station arrives at midnight, became an excuse. Being elderly citizens, I offered to turn off the lights, and remind them at their destination to get off. They ignored my request, and went about their ways.

The railway police, doing their rounds, instructed all passengers to down the window shutters and keep doors closed. This due to previous attacks of stone pelting by

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unruly villagers along the way makes abundant caution necessary. This elderly family resented, but grudgingly did as told. With the police gone, they decided to open the window shutters, without care for safety and security of other passengers. I could sense their rebellious nature, right from the start, through their journey, till they got off.

For a while, the co-passengers respected the age of this family and kept quiet to a point. That they refused to switch off the lights became a debating point. Quiet murmurs grew louder, giving a sense of predicament. As the night passed, not only did the chill winds took toll on the rest of us, the fan kept switched on, too affected us. This caused the double effect of chill on me, as I sat next to them. Do I demand for my middle berth to sleep or do I “adjust to the circumstances” and wait, till they got off the train? Having the misfortune of occupying the middle berth, I bore the impact of their antics.

The duo of TTE and railway police appeared on the scene, as if God sent, and this time they didn't mince words. A stern warning from TTE, to bundle them off, at an intermediate station, had the desired effect. Getting wiser in no time, they assured cooperation with the rest. As a result, I got my way to shut down the windows and fans; I took their help to shut the doors as well. Taking

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my middle berth, I went off to a good sleep. It dawned on this family that they had crossed the red line of acceptable conventions.

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Entertaining Noises

Train journeys are often compelling situations when you have to grin and bear. I didn't have confirmed tickets in the first place to board the train, until about 4 hours before train departure. After a while, confirmation comes for sleeper class, the only option available and best under the circumstances. So, I pack my bags knowing that the journey will be a noisy one at the very least. Greeted by a jam packed station, I could barely stand comfortably. I could hear the cacophony, loud and clear. In this din, train announcements, required special hearing abilities.

In the midst of all this were groups of people on pilgrimage, crowding all the boarding points. As the train arrived, the usual scene of a mad rush to enter the coach, played out. At this point, applying mind on orderly entry would help all. But that didn't happen. Furthermore, the shriek while entering the coach, as if a musical chairs event went on, seemed unnecessary. It would be a surprise if they settled down fast. This set the tone for what to expect from people, from noise point of view, while the journey progresses.

Inside the coach, silence became a forgotten word. Once the train moved, many phones rang, and as many shrill voices spoke, it looked as though cross talk went on.

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Meanwhile as ladies chatted, we gained the impression, they only knew comma in a sentence and not a full stop. A few of us men, went from exchanging pleasantries to strong opinions, that would put news channels in the shade. At the slightest hint of some sarcastic comment, they burst out with laughter, reminding me of Ravan.

At dusk, our pilgrimage group began to claim their fair share of making themselves felt. Beginning from talking to each other loudly, in multiple languages, from one end of the coach to another. Thereafter they assembled together, to sing hymns, some mellifluous, and some in jarring voices, accompanied by percussion instruments, that were deafening the ears. Overall it did not evoke a sense of prayer, but they had mercy on us, by ending their impromptu program.

At night fall, once all of us were in bed, our university student friends, got busy on their mobiles. Their mobiles rang louder, their whispers audible enough to tell their intimate stories, and their videos glare disturbing. But those were things you could switch off with the flick of a button.

On the contrary, what can you do if the person who sleeping next to you snores in different patterns, or if a person coughs through the night, or if a person

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constantly sneezes? It is need to see such co-passengers with some empathy.

With a target of getting off my train at 6am, I try to get a semblance of sleep that night. I didn't need an alarm. The pilgrims began their hymns early morning, and sooner than later I got off the train. I quietly thanked them for waking me up, for if I had missed the station it would have taken me a minimum of 4 hours to get back.

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Overcrowding In Outdated Coaches

Train journeys in India often kindle mixed response from passengers. While some AC coaches are world class, you cannot speak of conditions in sleeper class in the same breath. At best it can pass muster as an affordable solution. Not only unconfirmed passengers enter but also the coaches are not designed to cater to common needs. In fact these two issues are the ones I have most faced in my decades of travel. Needless to say, if we take a survey, these two issues would rank among the top for improvement in services.

Issue of Over Crowding:

The coach running full, conveyed a picture of congestion. While the inner berths had people with advance bookings, the bottleneck was on the side berths, where seat adjustment stories were happening. With only a general ticket, I found a person occupying a lady's seat. But the lady had her way, by creating a scene, something he didn't factor in. Allowed into the train, he held hope that he would get a confirmed berth, based on cancellation, by the time the train reaches a few stations ahead. Being a regular on the train, he identifies the coach TTE and knows how to push things around, to get

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the job done. Once the train started the mix on the side berths were general tickets and RAC tickets.

Looks like side berths are specially designed for last minute bookings. Come night time, I found the scene for all those hopeful travellers, change to one of hopelessness. One person came and sat at the edge of my seat, while I laid down, wanting to travel only a short distance, till one of the intermediate stations. Those travelling longer distance, decided to sleep in the corridors and near the doors. I can't think of a better proof for an overcrowded train. I am not even talking of those scenes of extreme overcrowding where you find people travelling on train tops. That's for some other day.

Issue of Outdated Coaches:

The most common issue I have had with outdated coaches is that they do not have enough electrical points to plug in the devices. How on earth do they expect a couple of 8 passengers to travel with only 2 plug points. That too, only inside berths have access to plug points, a facility not available to side berths, at most times. Even those plug points many a time do not function, for the point won't hold the charger inserted, thus not charging.

On countless occasions I have stood near the door on one end of the coach, as the plug point is sometimes

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available there only. There are other major issues too, like fans not working, especially in summers. It is an all too familiar scene of using a hair comb or a tooth brush, to get the fan to rotate. Even then it makes noise. Not to mention the other repulsive issues like odour, cleanliness and maintenance of basic human necessities, while on travel in trains. Well, the list is long.

The fundamental question is this. Why would I pay a steep additional price, for a tatkal ticket, only to find myself denied access, to the basic fundamental requirements for modern day travel? And I am not talking about AC class here, where too, some issues mentioned above, may find resonance. It is time for the railways to think and apply their minds on this issue.

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Observing People

You come across all types of passengers while travelling in the train. One of the best things that can happen is that sometimes you end up having a genuine friend with whom you tend to keep in touch. Many a time you also come across passengers who you keep meeting in many of your journeys on the same route. It could be either an onward journey or a return journey together in the same train, that such meetings serve as an introduction to become even friendlier with the other person. Such meetings gives an added incentive to share personal information and perhaps even a business tie up would be on the cards.

Entering the train, almost instinctively we tend to strike a conversation, with the passenger sitting next. Small engagements make a difference to the journey. During the course of the journey, we come across interesting personalities, and the interactions with some of them stay in etched in our memory. For that matter, in a couple of journeys, I have met the same set of people in my return journey as well. This adds to the enriching experiences we have meeting passengers. I love to observe people, as it engages me much more. Here are some interesting observations, on groups of people, that came off in my journeys.

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The Villagers:

I have always admired the thrill that the rural populace get while travelling in a train. It is a big celebration for them. In the sweltering heat, the ladies wear their best silk saree full of handwork, covering their heads also fully, letting not an iota of air to enter. The children are forced to wear their full trouser and coat and there they are stuffed, sweaty and screaming, not to forget the streaming nose getting deposited in the coat cuff.

The menfolk are also in their festive best with a big turban as well. I have to share that these people have the largest hearts; they offer everybody whatever they have to eat, they are happy to accommodate as many people as can be adjusted.

The families:

If you find a band of people hanging around to send off, surely there must be a family in the coach. They will tend to play with children, and typically travel as grandparents with their sons or daughters family. On the move, once they get comfortable with you, they tend to ask your personal details but won't hesitate to share theirs if there is a consonance. They are quite friendly

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and will go back in time to share their experiences with you. Sometimes as a family they are full on entertainment, as you get to share a lot of laughs. A tedious journey of 24 hours may seem to pass just like that. But you have to be on the watch. They are the ones who could ask for your lower berth, just when you drop your guard.

The Children:

Nothing can stop the children from climbing up and down on the berths, or pestering their parents for more water. The restless bunch, they prefer getting down at each station the train halts. To be friendly with them takes time, but once the ice is broken, a barrage of questions follow. Give them something they grab it, but ask them something and they pull back almost instinctively. But what I like the best in them is when they reply with the sharpest wits. Parents of such children are quite watchful as they tend to tell everything that happens at home. Surely they don't care for reputations even one bit.

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The Professionals:

Very common these days you come across people who immediately upon boarding the train, plug their mobiles for charging and start working on their laptops. For atleast an hour or two, they will stay a world apart and will not interact with others. The gadget gurus, sunk in their own world, are first busy on laptop, then later are busy on mobile. If everything is over they take out their tablets and start seeing some videos. Their digital life overtakes personal life. I must say, they are wired differently.

The Reticent:

You come across people who doubt the other person that during the journey they will not talk to you at all. They try to talk very little and generally keep to themselves. Any questions from our side, will be met with stony silence, or at best they will answer in single syllables. Such kind of people will not accept what you share and will generally crib if you put the lights on for searching your luggage. But if the length of the journey is long, then there is a chance that these doubting Thomases may turn around, with some kind heartedness, and feel satisfied to extend their hand of friendship.

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The Brash:

Then there are others who always enter into the conflict zone with co-passengers. The moment something irks them they start yelling. It doesn't matter to them if they are right or wrong, they always tend to see the other person as wrong. They will not share the berth during the seating hours and will tend to sleep giving you little room. They will occupy every bit of space for their luggage, without care that the other person too has to keep his. In fact such people will have the temerity to tell you to keep your luggage on your berth. They talk loud, keep lights on, switch off fans at the wrong time, open the windows when it has to be shut down, and the list goes on.

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Reservation Queue

Booking at the reservation counters have always been an experience, that fits the description of a suspense thriller. You must prepare for an ordeal of atleast 2 hours if not 4 hours for the issue of ticket. If you have any plans of completing this work in a hurry and then get on to do something else, then it's better to forget such options. If you are right ahead in the queue by sheer luck, then you may get your job done in a jiffy. Whereas if you are one among the hundreds, then you will have to bide your time on that given day.

The moment I enter the reservation center, the first thought that enters my mind is this: where does the queue start from? At this point I see a sea of people lined up along several counters. From a top level glance it looks like the chances are slim that I will get anywhere near the counter. So the next question that pops up in my mind is: which queue do I join? I begin my hunt for the shortest line. Likewise I took chance to see if a longer queue is moving faster. Finally I decide to stand in one that looked to suit my purpose best.

Yet I stand in every line, that holds the potential of getting me to the counter faster, and in the process I discover excuses to tell the person behind me in that line,

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that I will be back soon. That way it gave me a better perspective of the happenings around and whether I can get my ticket within reasonable time. Moving between waiting lines, my legs start aching, and the sweat adds to my tired state of mind. The jostle around me that I bear, gets on my nerves, while I stay determined to book.

Pushing myself to stay in the hunt, I could visualize an insurmountable situation, unfolding before me. Not only did some people start to form a double queue, but also tried to push through their bulk bookings ahead. But this met stiff resistance from those behind, and loud noise and arguments followed. Furthermore, a few counters started closing, for reasons best known to them. This sets off panic amongst the rest. In the meantime, the queue that I stood for the longest time began moving at snail's pace.

The staff were often consulting themselves for reservation and cash related issues. Many began questioning the head incharge for closing down other counters. My heart skipped several beats, when as I came within striking distance from the counter, the computer system hanged. Will the counter close before I get there? Nobody knew, as the staff got away to attend to some personal work of urgent nature. A feeling of dejection started sinking in. The tripping of power

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supply made things look worse, when within sometime, the computer systems worked. Shutting down on time, I became the last person to get the ticket, at the counter. This caused much dismay to those behind me.

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Inadequacies Of Railway Facilities

It isn't very frequently that we go in search of facilities in a railway station beyond the normal needs of shops. More often than not, we search for a food plaza, for the usual dose of Idli, Vada, Dosa, and Upma or for a hot cup of Tea / Coffee. Still others who want to kill time go after bookshop, to check out on the latest newspapers and magazines. Yet others go after search of air pillow or lock and keys. Yet there are a few travel needs that matter, but are conspicuous by its absence, causing much discontent. Here I share a few such experiences of mine, which may find consonance with a few others too.

Reaching station I realized I failed to bring my purse. Making frantic calls to people back home I had my purse issue sorted in time. Still the need to pay for my cab remained as I had no cash on my person.

It took me sometime to gather myself as to what to do next. That I didn't have the usual digital payment option only added to my predicament. A friend arriving in time saved me an embarrassment.

By providence I had the debit card with me and thought it saved my day. Nevertheless, inside the station I couldn't find an ATM, however much I searched for

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one. I asked a few coolies around, but they threw up their hands.

To quicken the pace I asked the station manager who said there is no such facility inside station. I walked nearly 200 mtrs away to the nearest ATM only to find it dysfunctional. That very moment I felt like air sucked out of me and felt terribly let down. Can't the railways extend a basic facility, to make life of the paying public easier? The heat of the day told on me, as I seethed with anger.

Purse in hand, I did the rounds to search for a medical store, since a person traveling with me, fell sick. The person needed paracetamol tablets to keep fever in check and sadly not one medical store within the railway station.

I began to think aloud on the fate of passengers with illness, pain and other difficulties. If crucial medicine is not available on platforms, it reflects a sad state of affairs, on what the railways think on passenger amenities.

I guess the issues faced holds good for nearly every station across the country. Are we paying for just the

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seat and berth or are we paying for a travel experience with the railways?

After all the fares of the first AC and sometimes second AC, is just a shade under air fares. It is time railways seriously pay attention to these critical issues.

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Traveling On Unreserved Ticket

The TTE did the rounds and by observing him deal with some, it became clear that he didn't brook any requests for confirmation of berth. His responses varied from politely refusing senior citizens to a terse response to the youngsters. Those with unreserved general tickets had an earful. It takes a lot of guts to enter a coach with an unreserved ticket and stay in the game.

The first indication that the person sitting next to me had a general ticket emerged from his shifting from one seat to another. His restlessness gave away his predicament and sooner than later he became the cynosure of all eyes. People started to openly question him making it clear to him that his being in reserved coach was untenable. The moment someone would cross question him, he would smartly take a topic and divert attention so much so, that his engaging with people saved his day.

Came night time when everybody slept, he waited inside the toilet to escape the TTE and the police rounds. He knew, that once the coach fell silent, there would be none to challenge him sleeping inside the coach. Stealthily he crept in and laid out his bedsheet and air pillow and slept on one of the berths. At the next station, when a passenger demanded his berth he gave way, only

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to lie down in the corridor, as if none would question him in the act. This was without doubt, getting on the nerves of the passengers.

Despite telling him to move out of the coach he would somehow make his way into the coach. He kept insisting to every new person that his berth is on the other side of the coach. Whenever somebody would be harsh with him he would move till the doorway. In no time he would be back to hopping seats or go off to sleep in an empty berth.

Finally the railway police did the clean up act. Called in to handle this person they spoke rough with him. They forcibly made him get off the train at the next intermediate station and took him away. But my guess is, he would have convinced the police. By some smart work he may have got into the unreserved coach at the far end of the train.

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Unpredictability Of Arrivals And Departures

It was the last day of our holiday and we arrived at the station by dusk, with a tired look on our faces. The journey to the station was tiresome given the fact that we had to take a long winding road journey, to arrive at the station. We quickly settled the bills with our tour operator, and bid our final goodbyes to our group of friends who had accompanied us during the journey. As we enter the station we notice that it was crowded and it was an indication that not everything was going right. Yet we chose to ignore it, as it was but natural to have a crowded station in an over populated country.

While we were there at the platform, the initial feedback was the train was late by just one hour. That didn't worry us much as we thought it was all too usual about trains in India and it not something we should be worried about too much. We went about our usual things chatting to our heart's content. In the meantime we had our snacks that we had purchased at the place. Then came the announcement that the train would be further delayed by a couple of hours. Now this was a cause for concern, and we began making our initial enquiries on what has happened.

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Having completed a good holiday trip, it was our time to get back home. A connecting train was the best possibility given the time constraints. However after waiting for a considerable time at the station we were told that the train would be 16 hours late, and there is no guarantee when it would actually come. The issue was that since it was a single line, the station master too didn't have any clue to departures and arrivals of trains. As a result our train had been held in one of the siding platforms, for other trains to pass through. This wasn't the best endings of a trip.

The coolies were nonchalant about the train coming in late. The TTE cared less. He would give us an almost patented evasive answers. We were boarding a train from a destination where we had language problem communicating with the local people. We had a flight to catch at our next destination, we were clearly in a soup. The station master too would only give information of what he already had with him, and that it will be long before the train arrives at the platform. Now this was a predicament, we didn't want to face. We had to resolve this before long.

After a while, after making several visits to the station master's room, I guess he started getting a feel that he must help us out, and stop being indifferent. It was then

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he came up with a suggestion that there is a connecting train coming from another direction that would take us to our destination, but that we would have to pay for our difference fare and also for the difference in the travel class. We gladly did as told and boarded the train to arrive at our destination just in time, to be able to catch the connecting flight out, back to home.

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Vendors Overcharging Nonchalantly

One look at the station you know there are a whole lot of things to purchase. Except for a few essentials like medicines, you can practically purchase many things of common needs that will be useful for the journey. But I don't think the passengers care much on what price they pay, as getting them before stock is over, is of primary importance. The vendors at the stations to are aware that the passengers would willingly throw money, and are happy to play along charging at will. The Railways have fixed a price at which it has to be sold at the platform. Except that, it rarely happens.

Arriving at the station in a tearing hurry, you realize the need to buy some essentials for the trip at the station. Food, snacks and water are absolute essentials, without an iota of doubt. However while on the platform, the hunt for the nearest vendor begins. It is not unusual that vendors will not have what you want and you will be forced to compromise and buy another. But what disturbs your mind, at the first interaction, is the price quoted by the vendor nonchalantly. The price on the packet is never a matter of consideration, in the price negotiation.

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You walk up to the right vendor who has his stock but is inflexible on the price. Soon it is apparent that you have little negotiation power, as people around you are willing to pay the price and take anything that comes their way. However what is even more problematic are those vendors who walk into the coaches while the journey is on. There are no maximum retail price fixed on what they sell, and so they decide the price, because demand outscore supply. It becomes a take it or leave it situation, and with no choice you take it, as food, snacks and water are important.

Decades have passed by but no strict action has been taken to enforce pricing discipline. It is easy to observe that some TTE in the coaches, not everyone though, tend to look the other way. It is absolutely wrong to say that they are hand in gloves with such vendors. After all they have to be on the journeys and the best way to stay safe for the TTE is to stick to their job and not be too bothered about what happens with the vendors. But it amply clear that the railway authorities are aware that such malpractices taking place. It is a sad reflection on the railways that they don't take proactive measures.

The one good thing about the products sold by the vendors at the station and in the coaches is that they are genuine and of good quality. Finally bowing down to the

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demands of the vendors, we buy our needs at the demanded price. The journey continues and there is hardly any time for us to notify authorities. Many such journeys come and go, but the vendors go on forever. Unless the railways take stern action to regulate prices, down to MRP levels, it will continue to be one where it is typically a case of “it happens in India only”.

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Water Supply Not Regular

Drinking water is without doubt one of the most essential elements in our travel packing. The sleeper class people cannot afford to buy drinking water, as they usually tend to make the journey with the smallest of budgets. They try to save every drop of water in such a way, that it lasts a full journey. But if a large family travels together, it is then that the issue of frequently of fetching water arises. It is not unusual to see people rushing out to fetch water, when the train stops at small and large stations along the way, to fill their bottles and cans.

As for the single use water in the coaches, it is usually filled at major stations along the way. Usually at the starting station itself, all the coaches are filled with water, so that supply lasts till the next major station. But railways always have a history of running late. That causes all issues with keeping water stocked well enough going awry just at the right time. It is only when we need to use the water that taps run dry. The coach has a leaky tank or pipe that drains out water just when everyone needs it badly. It takes a long time before someone from the railways fix it.

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There is always shortage of single use water in the coach. This is especially true because more often than not in a long journey, water is unavailable for basic human needs. How many times have people been inconvenienced when they have to brush their teeth early in the mornings, or have an urgent use for the washroom anytime during the day? If the train is crowded, then the chances of the taps running dry quickly is more likely and is often a common phenomenon. Nobody would have solutions to stocking up enough water and so it is a futile exercise chasing the attendant.

Drinking water is never available in the coach, and the vendors have a free hand in selling bottles of water. People are left to fend for themselves and this is one area the railways need to address. There is a lot of concern for the environment that the railways can show, if they stock RO water in the coaches, and ask people to fill up their drinking needs from that. So much of plastic is generated selling water bottles, which can be cut down if railways impose a ban on single use plastic water bottles, and the cost of water too can be brought down drastically, if refilling measures are available.

No matter what price, water is always purchased by the passengers, and so the vendors have a field day, in selling it at a profit and in the process also generating

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trash. When vendors come selling water, they sell fast and their stock although replenished comes at a steep increase over the MRP. At the same time, the railways can make sure that they have a quicker periodic check in place to fill up single use water in the coaches, more so when they know that the trains are running packed to capacity or perhaps overcrowded. They can have a system in place to ensure that the problem of water supply is eliminated.

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X-Ray Machine Services

You spot x-ray machines these days at some important stations across the country. This is part of the new security system that the railways deem to have put in place, especially with the country going through an upheaval in terms of terrorist attacks in many parts of the country in the past. It is a nice system to have the device check the luggages as one can feel safe while travelling, and with the thoughts that the perception of threat has been reduced by some screening. Ofcourse we cannot rule out mishaps, but this is a sure shot way to ring in a confidence building measure amongst the passengers.

At the station where x-ray machines are in place, you are asked to pass the luggage through them. The first thought that goes through your mind is an appreciation for the systems in place that the railways have brought in with care and concern for the passengers. However you are quick to notice that the x-ray services are not as strict as they are often seen in airports. You can quickly notice that the security apparatus, which includes the machine and staff, are not serious at their work, and they don't really seem to be checking anything on their screens. The luggage goes in and comes out with equal speed which means it may not be halted for screening.

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Sometimes one can notice the security staff playing on their mobiles while you put your bags through for scanning and screening. It is not common sight, but perhaps it's the strangest thing one would come across. You notice it more glaringly when you seriously mean to scan your luggage and take them in for the safety of all passengers. Perhaps it could be a sign of machine not working rather than security not working, for only if the machine worked without breakdown will the staff do a conscientious work and do it in a manner that their duty demands in terms of due.

While one set of luggages are passing through the security machine, there are always another set of people who do not pass the luggage for scanning. You notice that there is so much chaos at the station, that there isn't much checking happening. People just walk through even without going through the door scanner kept for incoming passengers. It is a sad thing to notice that people slip in through without even screening their luggages even for the sake of having them scanned. They just walk through. This just cannot happen at airports for sure, as rigorous scanning takes place and they ensure every luggage is tagged before loading.

Everytime there is a disturbing news across the country screening norms kick in. The security people are

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swarming all over the place with their guns to give a frightening scare. But all of that stays just that and nothing beyond to really scan the luggages using the x-ray machines on a regular basis ever happens in most of the stations, where the luggage x-ray scanners are installed. Less said the better for all the other stations, where in the normal course of things, even the station entry points are left unchecked and unmanned at times. Hopefully before long, the railways will make x-ray screening compulsory for all passengers across the country.

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Yearning For Better Services

Any passenger without exception yearns to have a decent service provided while on a journey in the trains. However not all services offered by the railways are matching up to expectations of the passengers, thus leaving a wide gap between genuine needs and services offered. It is not uncommon in trains that you find the passenger complaining right from the very beginning of the journey about some service or the other nonfunctional. This leads to discomfort and discontentment, and the passenger continuously wears a forlorn look on his face as help is nowhere in sight for most of the journey.

There are too many trains on single line tracks, that the delays are very frequent. It is most often observed that we go to the station and find trains late either in departure or arrival or both. We have seen situations where the train may be waiting on a side track to allow other trains to pass through, when in fact it is just outside the station. Railways must need to give the passenger a service level of on time departure and on time arrival. Perhaps this is among the most basic facility, and it helps passengers with some degree of predictability.

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The maintenance of the toilets and supply of water to the toilets and wash basin are much left to be desired for. Waste baskets are not found in all the trains. In some trains they are found under the wash basin and in some others in the vestibule. Yet there are some where the waste basket itself is missing. Food quality needs to be improved as sometimes you get half boiled rice and vegetables. The choices available on trains are also next to nothing. Tea vendors need to serve in cleaner ways. One look at them serving up the food and tea, and sure enough you will only think of alternative ways.

There is too much overcrowding in reserved coaches by people travelling short distances, that in most cases you have passengers sitting on your seat without care. There exists a huge gap in the kind of services offered between sleeper class and AC class. The berths are not in the best of conditions and sometimes are not fit for travel.

Station cleanliness is one of the most important things a passenger would yearn for, as in most cases it isn't clean. Passenger safety is another aspect, as passengers alighting from trains in late nights are mostly left to fend for themselves putting themselves at risk.

Ticket booking online isn't something for the weak hearted. By the time the window opens, all available

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tatkal tickets are exhausted. Perhaps the quota for tickets are skewed in favor of those paying normal fares. Ticket booking can be staggered, and priced accordingly.

Why should a person paying higher fare be offered upper berth while a person paying normal fare be offered lower berth. Also additional facilities must be provided to the passengers based on the fare they pay and facilities must be extended accordingly. The facilities offered today are not in line with international trends of passenger comforts and calls for a major change in such services.
