

A Journey in a Crowded Train
Or
An Experience in a Crowded Railway Compartment
Or
Travelling in a Second-Class Compartment
Or
A Memorable Train Journey

Travelling it is said, is a source of education and delight. I hold a different opinion. It is source of education all right but it is no more a delight in the present-day India. The population of the country is increasing at a tremendous rate. The impact of this increasing population is most felt when one ventures to travel by a bus or a train. You can often find people sitting on the roof tops of buses as well as of trains. An open violation of the rules, over crowding in buses and trains has become a part of normal life in this country. Travelling is therefore, a nightmare to me. I always try to avoid it.

But, at times, in spite of one's best efforts, one just can't put it off. This is what happened with me last month. My mother is a highly religious minded lady. The Kumbha Fair was to be held at Haridwar. She insisted on attending it. She made it a point of prestige. Since my father was away to Assam, I had to agree to accompany her. To make things worse, some more ladies joined us. I was compelled to accept the leadership of the whole troupe.

At long last, I decided to put up a heroic fight. But the very first sight at the railway station gave me a jerk. The sight at the ticket window made me tremble. There was a great rush. People were pushing, jostling and elbowing one another. I saw little hope for my puny self. I feared that if I advanced, my bones would be shattered. I, therefore, remembered the saying 'End justifies the means.' I contacted a policeman who bought me ticket from inside.

When I reached the platform, the colour of my cheeks faded. The whole platform was crowded with men, women and children all going to Haridwar and all waiting for the same train! I began to perspire at the prospect. How shall I

enter and how shall I drag these ladies inside? I began to feel giddy. My mother noticed my worry. There was sympathy in her looks but other women were looking on indifferently.

At last the train arrived. It was packed to capacity. Some passengers were standing on foot-boards. Some were sitting on the roofs to coaches. Fortunately, there was some room in the ladies' compartment. I pushed the ladies into it. Then I made a frantic effort to squeeze myself into some male compartment. I went to the other side of the railways line and got into a compartment through a window.

The compartment was virtually a battlefield. The passengers were quarrelling and pushing. They were abusing one another. There was a great noise. All the doors and the windows were blocked. It was suffocating to sit there. I began to pine for a breath of air. I was badly perspiring. Children were crying. Some old men coughed and spat inside the compartment. They could not even blow their noses outside as there was no room. The smokers made the situation worse.

At last the train started. We got some fresh air. I heaved a sigh of relief. A beggar began to sing loudly. Then he begged for a pice. A hawker sold his goods to the highest bidder. A person had entered the lavatory and was taking long time. Another person standing outside was abusing him and asking him to come out soon. The other person only made an affirmative sound with his nose.

To make the best of the worst, I started enjoying the situation. All the passengers had by now, settled in their seats. Some of them started playing cards. One of the passengers, dressed in white, kept boring us with his moral sermons. Just then, God knows from where, the ticket examiner appeared on the scene. To our great surprise, the person who had been lecturing on morality and honesty, had no ticket. He was badly exposed and put to shame.

After a few hours, we reached our destination. There was no question of our getting down on the wayside statins. I thanked God when I found that the ladies as well as their boxes were safe.