

# Essay on A Railway Journey in India

In the old days of colonial rule in India, railway journey was perhaps comfortable, for the rich people. The upper-class compartments were well lighted and provided with electric fans, closets were kept reasonably clean. Sleeping accommodation could be reserved in advance and the high railway fare prevented over-crowding. But in the lower class compartments traveling by railway was a nightmare. There was heavy crowding to the point of suffocation: the compartments were ill-lighted and without fans, while the closets were unbelievably unclean. Supply of water and food at the railway stations was practically nobody's business, and the unfortunate passengers had to adopt makeshifts as their slender means permitted.

Since then conditions have changed appreciably. Railway journey has lost much of its forbidding character. Once a ticket is obtained and reservation is booked, travel is more or less comfortable. One is assured of sleeping or sitting accommodation for the whole length of the journey, however long it may be. The berths and the seats are more or less comfortable. The lower class passengers are now served with electric fans while the compartments are cleaned at important wayside stations. The compartments in long-distance trains are now inter-connected with corridors and much of the turmoil and inconvenience of a railway journey are now things of the past.

India is a vast country with a varied topography. As the train rushes through the wide space, one can feast one's eyes on the shifting panorama-wide stretching fields of corn, dark-green clusters of trees and woodlands, hazy blue hillocks on the far horizons, and every now and then one comes across peaceful villages, neat and tin cottages sheltered under trees, women carrying water from near-by tank or river, and men ploughing the fields or grazing their heads of cattle.

There is never a monotonous movement for those who have eyes to see and enjoy the varied beauty or the landscape. At night the dim rumble of the train make monotonous music as the eyes close restfully in sleep and one is wafted to some magic dream-land.

Among the charms of travel by the railways, one must not forget to mention the brief halts at wayside stations. In European countries, one station is just like another, and there is nothing to hold the attention. But India, the character of a station changes with the character of the people. Speech and dress, manners and food are different as we pass from one state to another. We are made to realize the unity of the vast country to which we have the good fortune to belong. It is unlikely, that this unending variety would ever be reduced to a dull level of uniformity. If variety is the spice of life, a railway journey brings home to us the charm of this variety with a deep relish.

A railway journey is an aid to education. It enriches the mind and liberalizes the outlook. If we take it in the proper spirit, we will soon shed our local prejudices and learn to appreciate and admire the ways of life different from ours. We become less insular and more broad-minded. Our human sympathies are enlarged. In olden days we used to be too self-centered and pre-occupied with our personal discomforts to think or feel for others. Nowadays we are reasonably free from these petty considerations and we are able to look around and absorb something of the varied life around us.