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Today's Paper » FEATURES » EDUCATION PLUS

It ain't a joy ride for us

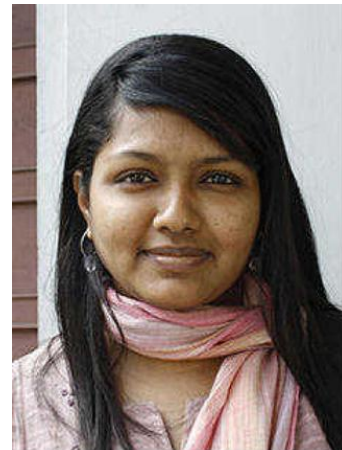


Rush Hours: Commuters have no option but to board an overcrowded bus. Photo: V. Ganesan



The conductor must stop
people from boarding
overcrowded buses

Anugraha Madhavan



Every one boards the first
bus leaving the depot

Candice Rozario



Men must be asked to stay
at the rear of the bus

Karen Savarirayan



Women are abused daily

Melisha Robinson

Students of the English department of Stella Maris College, Chennai, speak about their daily travel woes and suggest ways to change the situation.

The accident involving four students travelling on the footboard of a bus has once again turned the spotlight on the transport woes of commuters in Chennai. While in most cases buses are overcrowded, there are a handful of people who get cheap thrills by travelling on the footboard, often dangling their bodies halfway outside the bus. Candice Rozario, III BA English, says, “This seems to work in a systematic way. Passengers travelling on the footboard of the bus often make it a point to tap the side of the bus when they see another vehicle approaching so that the driver can steer the bus in another direction. In the recent accident, however, the driver probably failed to take account of this.”

In fact, buses having doors are often not shut as people stand on the footboard. Even though new buses have been arranged to make up for the inadequate transport facilities in the city, many do not have doors.

The shortage of buses is aggravated during the peak travel time. Candice Rozario, III BA English, says, “Buses are packed and it takes much time to get a seat. At a given time, only one bus departs from the depot, which is boarded by everyone.” She suggests that it would be better if two buses, going the same route, are made to leave the depot at the same time to ease congestion.

Infrastructure

The poor infrastructure exacerbates the woes of passengers. During the monsoon, the poor drainage system leads to flooding. Candice, who bought a scooty to avoid the hassle of travelling in buses, says that she finds it easy to ride a bike through congested roads but the rains make it difficult for her. The city gets flooded and I have to wade through knee-deep water.

Melisha Robinson, II BA English, adds, “Water seeps in through the small cleft on the roof of the bus when it rains; and often the shutter is not closed.”

The condition of the roads in Chennai is appalling. Candice says, “Bad and uneven roads make it difficult for auto drivers to ride smoothly as they are unable to prevent the rear wheel of the auto from falling into potholes.”

Not only are some of the roads narrow, they are also infested with too many vehicles. Moreover, the traffic in many parts of the city is not managed properly making it difficult for pedestrians to cross the road. Also, autos are usually parked at bus stands making it difficult for people to board the bus. They often make their way past the bus when commuters are rushing to get into the bus making it extremely inconvenient for them. Anugraha Madhavan, III BA English, says, “The auto drivers worsen the plight of commuters waiting to cross the road by slowing down thinking the person is awaiting an auto.”

Unruly behaviour

The unpleasant conduct of some of the commuters makes it difficult for people using public transport. It is annoying when people who are about to get off the bus are confronted with people who scramble to get in before they have disembarked. Anugraha says, “Some people shove and push others in crowded buses. The conductor must stop people from boarding the bus when it is overcrowded.”

Women find it difficult in overcrowded buses as they often end up brushing shoulders with men. Melisha adds, “Women are abused daily. In fact, men deliberately stand in close proximity to women and attribute it to the congestion in buses.”

Karen Savarirayan, Final-year MA English, suggests, “The seating arrangement in buses must be changed. Women should stand in the front, while men must be asked to stay at the rear of the bus.”

Travel fare

Passengers also have to cope with the price variations of different types of buses. While there are some who wait for the regular white-board bus, commuters, especially the lower strata of society have no option but to take a deluxe bus during rush hours. Karen says, “Although, there are people who specifically wait for the standard white-board buses, which are again overcrowded.”

Bus passes, which are meant to make the travel fare economical for students, are of little help. “The cost of the bus pass has been increased and it is nearly equivalent to what we pay for a deluxe bus,” says Karen.

The disagreement with the auto drivers over travel fare is age-old. The meter system is not followed here making it easy for drivers to charge enormous fares especially from non-natives.

So, shared autos are a preferred mode of transport compared to congested buses and high auto fares. Anugraha says, “Neither is it overcrowded, nor is the fare too high. The only problem is that the drivers are reckless and they run on limited routes.”