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Fitting three for two

Sanjay K Bose

When I got into the chair car compartment, it was already full. And I was justifiably upset at finding my seat occupied by a well-endowed lady with her husband sitting in the seat next to her. Unfortunately, for me, when I laid my claim to the seat that I had reserved and paid for, the couple refused to budge. Instead, the husband smiled indulgently at my foolish attachment to my own reserved seat and assured me that "we will all adjust," appropriately once the train started moving.

Since the coach was already full, I was curious to know what this adjustment would be like. Unfortunately, my innocent question on whether he would like me to sit on his wife's lap or his, made him rather furious. To this day, I cannot quite figure out the kind of adjustment he had planned for fitting three people into what the railways clearly intended to be seating only for two.

Like good wine, I do not travel well. But when I have to travel, it seems, the railways, the airlines, the buses and even my very own fellow passengers, all conspire against me, bent on making the trip as memorable as it could get. Take the time when I was flying from New York to Dallas for a connecting flight. The passenger in the seat next to mine seemed like a nice old man who appeared to be quietly dozing - always a good sign that you are not likely to be bored listening to his life story and his insisting on knowing everything about yours.

As we were taxing towards the runway, the pilot started telling us about the weather in Dallas. For some strange reason, this got my neighbour very agitated. "Why is he telling us about the weather in Dallas when we are going to Miami," he complained. It turned out that the dumb fellow had actually boarded the wrong flight and was very averse to travelling the friendly skies to sunny Texas instead.

The captain was a kind soul who took us all back to the terminal to drop him off, even though most of us thought it would be easier to get rid off him with a parachute after we were in air. And so, as a result of his kindness, the flight was delayed and I missed all my connections after that.

Nevertheless, trains are my own personal nightmare, when I have no choice but to travel by them. Catching the train and finding your own seat is hard enough. What makes it worse is that you aren't really ever sure, where you'll land. There have been at least two occasions, when in spite of my having a ticket to Kanpur and being on the right train, somehow the Railways dumped me in Lucknow and asked me to find my own way to Kanpur.

Not that buses are any better! I remember boarding a bus from IIT to Delhi railway station, some years ago. I was amazed to find that the driver, who was new at his job, had lost his way and was taking us on a free, unintended ramble around Delhi. Much as I like the



nation's capital and this chance to do some free sightseeing, my heart was not in it, as I not want to miss my train. That eventful bus-ride ended with the conductor doing the driving while everybody else in the bus spent a merry half-hour cursing the driver. I did make it to my train, courtesy the railways, firm about living up to their reputation of stretching Indian Standard Time, as much as possible.

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