

Enhancing Women's Commuting Experience: A Study of Ladies' Special Trains in the Mumbai Suburban Railway System

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Abstract

The suburban railway network in Mumbai plays a crucial role in the daily lives of millions of people. To improve safety and comfort for female commuters, Ladies' Special Trains have been introduced. This research paper undertakes a comparative analysis of Ladies' Special Trains and conventional local trains, examining their historical backgrounds, developmental trajectory, and influence on the commuting experiences of women. Through the evaluation of safety, comfort, and convenience, we analyse the advantages and disadvantages of both transportation methods to inform future enhancements. The results of this study make a valuable contribution to the scholarly conversation and provide valuable insights for policymakers, transportation authorities, and civil society organizations involved in promoting inclusive and secure mobility solutions in Mumbai.

Keywords: Ladies' Special Trains; Gender Inclusion; Mumbai Suburban Railway; Female Commuters

1. INTRODUCTION

Mumbai, a bustling metropolis on India's western coast, boasts a dynamic suburban railway network crucial to the daily lives of millions. Among its features are the Ladies' Special Trains, introduced to enhance safety and comfort for female commuters. These trains, exclusively for women during peak hours, offer a reprieve from the usual mixed-gender compartments. Since their inception, they've garnered praise for empowering women to navigate the city. This paper conducts a comprehensive study of Mumbai's Ladies' Special Trains, exploring their origins, evolution, and impact on women's commuting experiences. We aim to assess their safety, comfort, and convenience relative to regular local trains on the same routes. By comparing them to normal local trains, we seek to identify strengths and weaknesses in both modes of transportation, guiding future improvements in the suburban railway system. Findings aim to contribute to academic discourse and inform policymakers, transportation authorities, and civil society organizations working towards inclusive and safe mobility solutions in Mumbai.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1. Ladies' Special Trains

The first Ladies' Special Train in Mumbai was introduced in 1992 as a pilot project on the Western Railway line, running between Churchgate and Borivali. This initiative aimed to provide a dedicated space for women during peak hours, offering them a safer and more comfortable commuting experience free

from the overcrowding and potential harassment often encountered in mixed-gender compartments. The success of the initial pilot project led to the expansion of Ladies' Special Trains to other routes and railway lines across Mumbai. Over the years, the service has evolved to cater to the diverse commuting needs of women in the city, with additional trains being introduced and schedules adjusted to accommodate changing demand patterns. The introduction of Ladies' Special Trains marked a significant milestone in Mumbai's transportation history, symbolizing a commitment to gender inclusivity and addressing the unique challenges faced by women travelers. These specialized trains continue to play a vital role in empowering women to navigate the city with greater ease and confidence, setting a precedent for gender-sensitive urban mobility initiatives across India.



(Source: twitter.com/WesternRly)

2.2. Distinctiveness

Ladies' Special Trains: These trains are specifically allocated for female passengers during specific peak hours, usually in the morning and evening rush periods. The trains' exclusivity provides a more comfortable and secure environment for women, as they are not subjected to the crowded conditions and potential harassment that can occur in compartments with both genders. Female passengers frequently value the assurance of traveling in an environment where they are less prone to encountering unwelcome attention or uncomfortable circumstances. Moreover, the inclusion of female railway staff and police personnel amplifies the perception of safety and support accessible to female passengers. *Regular Local Trains:* In contrast, regular local trains have compartments that are not segregated by gender and are accessible to all passengers, irrespective of their gender. Although measures are taken to guarantee the safety and security of all passengers, women may experience a diminished sense of security in these compartments, especially during peak hours when overcrowding is prevalent. Male passengers, particularly in crowded situations, can heighten the likelihood of harassment or unease for female commuters. Although emergency intercoms and CCTV surveillance are in place, the presence of both men and women in the environment can still create difficulties in ensuring the safety and comfort of female passengers.

2.3. Safety and Security

Ladies' Special Trains: These trains are equipped with heightened security measures and are frequently staffed by female railway personnel and police officers. The inherent exclusivity of Ladies' Special Trains mitigates the potential for harassment or unwarranted attention from male passengers, thereby establishing a more secure environment for female commuters. Additionally, the inclusion of specialized security

personnel both on board and at stations further guarantees the safety of female passengers. Female passengers who travel on Ladies' Special Trains frequently express a heightened sense of security and self-assurance during their journey, as they are aware that effective measures are in place to promptly address any safety concerns that may arise.

Regular Local Trains: Despite efforts to ensure passenger safety and security on normal local trains, challenges such as overcrowding and the presence of male passengers can potentially jeopardize the safety of women, especially during peak hours or late at night. Occurrences of harassment or unwelcome advances may still happen, even with the implementation of safety measures like emergency intercoms and CCTV surveillance. Female passengers may experience a sense of insecurity in compartments that are shared by both genders, particularly when moving through congested trains or waiting at stations during less busy times.

2.4. Crowd management

Ladies' Special Trains: They typically have lower passenger numbers in comparison to regular local trains, as they are specifically designated for female commuters during busy periods. The reduced passenger density leads to a more pleasant and less congested commuting experience for women. Due to a decrease in the number of passengers, women have a greater amount of available space to navigate and locate seating, resulting in a decrease in sensations of overcrowding and unease. In addition, the decreased congestion improves safety by minimizing the likelihood of accidents or incidents while traveling.

Regular Local Trains: Conversely, regular local trains are renowned for their excessive congestion, particularly during peak hours when commuters hastily commute to and from their workplaces. The elevated passenger density on regular local trains can result in discomfort, inconvenience, and potential safety risks for passengers, including women. Traversing congested compartments can be arduous, and passengers may be required to remain upright for the entire duration of the journey due to the scarcity of available seats. The cramped conditions may also intensify feelings of stress or anxiety, especially for female commuters.

2.5. Frequency and Accessibility

Ladies' Special Trains: The frequency of Ladies' Special Trains may fluctuate based on demand and specific routes. These trains are usually scheduled during the busiest times of the day, specifically to cater to the commuting requirements of female passengers. Ladies' Special Trains provide specialized services during peak hours when women commuters need them the most, such as in the mornings and evenings, although they may not run as frequently as regular local trains. Nevertheless, restricted accessibility beyond peak hours may present difficulties for women with adaptable schedules or those requiring travel during non-peak hours.

Regular Local Trains: They run throughout the day at consistent intervals, catering to both male and female commuters. These trains provide increased flexibility in terms of scheduling and options for destinations, with frequent services offered on multiple routes. Passengers can utilize regular local trains at any point throughout the day, which offers a convenient means of transportation for individuals with various commuting requirements. Nevertheless, the presence of regular local trains during busy periods can result in overcrowding and discomfort for passengers, including women.

2.6. Convenience and Amenities

Ladies' Special Trains: These trains typically offer superior amenities and cleanliness in comparison to regular local trains. Reduced passenger density can facilitate women commuters in obtaining seating and navigating more comfortably during their journey. Moreover, the specialized design of these trains enables

a more targeted provision of facilities specifically designed to meet the needs of women, including well-maintained restrooms, designated luggage areas, and enhanced ventilation. These factors enhance the overall comfort and enjoyment of female passengers during their commute.

Regular Local Trains: These trains may not have certain amenities and can be overcrowded, particularly during peak hours, resulting in a less comfortable commuting experience for passengers, including women. Due to the restricted number of seats and overcrowded conditions, passengers may be required to stand throughout the entire journey, resulting in fatigue and discomfort. Moreover, the level of cleanliness on regular local trains can differ, as certain trains face difficulties in upholding cleanliness standards due to the frequent influx of passengers and limited cleaning resources.

3. CONCLUSION

Ladies' Special Trains signify a notable progression in offering enhanced safety and comfort in commuting alternatives for women residing in Mumbai. The exclusive characteristics of these compartments provide a respite from the difficulties faced in mixed-gender compartments on regular local trains. Although there are restrictions on frequency and availability, Ladies' Special Trains have played a crucial role in empowering female commuters and establishing benchmarks for transportation initiatives that are sensitive to gender. To promote inclusivity and safety for all commuters, it is crucial to address gender-specific needs in public transportation, as emphasized by the comparative analysis. In the future, ongoing endeavours to enhance the suburban railway system will have a positive impact on the commuting experience for women and contribute to a fairer urban environment in Mumbai.

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