Chapter V

Problems Faced by Passengers during their Travel
5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter the passenger satisfaction with Anna Transport Corporation (ATC) services in rural areas and the factors influencing the same have been discussed. An attempt is made in this chapter, to discuss the different aspects of the passengers' problems during their journey in ATC buses.

Transport problems are not common for all the places, but they exist everywhere. These problems are aggravated by differences in geographical, environmental, psychological, cultural, economic, and social factors, and quality of service provided. Thus the size and kind of problems may vary from time to time and from place to place. Furthermore, travel problems are relatively greater in rural areas mainly due to non-availability of alternative modes and inadequate transport services. Providing adequate services to each and every part of sparsely populated rural areas is quite difficult for the agency, whether it may be in the public sector or in the private sector. There is always the complaint against the public sector that its services are not upto the expectation. In this regard P.G. Patankar states that

Even though the public sector passenger transport undertakings have been providing fairly satisfactory services, there is a feeling that these services are irregular, unreliable and unsafe, inadequate, and frequent breakdowns and have been frequent complaints that buses are not clean,
travel is uncomfortable and behaviour of staff discourteous.\(^1\)

Though there are some difficulties in convincing and satisfying commuters in rural areas, it is the responsibility of the transport agency, especially when it is a public sector undertaking, to identify and understand the commuters' travel problems and try to solve them through efficient planning, so that its image can be improved.

Basically the commuters' travel problems can be classified under four categories viz., problems with regard to corporation, with respect to crew, pertaining to co-passengers, and other problems. When the commuters, the corporation, the bus crew, and the government come together and try to understand the transport difficulties from one another's point of view, these problems can be overcome successfully and fruitful solutions can be found out.

In order to have a deep insight into the various aspects of these problems they are explained below:

**5.2 Passengers' Problems with Regard to Corporation**

The major problems experienced by the passengers with regard to the corporation are as follows: inadequate services, poor conditions of buses in rural routes, and undue waiting time at bus stops. Of course these

\(^1\)P.G. Patankar, *Road Passenger Transport in India*, (Pune: Central Institute of Road Transport, Training and Research, 1985) 85.
problems are not intentional, and they happen when the possible remedies could not be found by the Corporation. These problems are to be solved fully by the Corporation for ensuring maximum passenger satisfaction. But in practice, it does not materialise. The success of the solution depends on the operational efficiency of the Corporation.

Even though it is not easy to find quick solution to all these problems, their intensity can be minimised through efficient and effective planning, and better services can be rendered to the general public, which is, and should be, the ultimate aim of any public utility concern.

5.2.1 Inadequate Services

Inadequate transport services can retard the improvement of rural areas and reduce the cultural and social contacts as well as limiting business and employment opportunities. In Salem district the ATC has been providing on an average nine single trips per day in the selected sample routes. But the study finds that it is inadequate for the growing travel needs of the commuters at peak hours, early morning, and late night hours. In most of the rural areas, the bus facilities are available only between 6 a.m. and 8 p.m. In between, 14 hours on an average, there is one single trip for every one hour and thirty three minutes (i.e. 93 minutes). That means even in the day time a passenger has to wait for more than one and a half hour to get into a bus. To a certain extent, this may be due to the fact that if the time gap is reduced, there may not be enough passengers, to fill a 50-52 seater bus. In short, inadequate services cause more waiting time at bus stops and it results in
overcrowding problem. J. Diandas has suggested that smaller buses with more frequent services are suitable in rural areas. So it is suggested to ply a 20 passenger bus every hour rather than 40 passenger bus every two hours.²

Regarding the observed opinion of passengers about inadequate services, this study reveals that 337 of 400 sample respondents feel that the frequency of service is inadequate, whereas the remaining 63 commuters are satisfied with the existing level of frequency. Perhaps the reason may be due to less number of trips made by them per week or they made their journey at lean hours. There are 377 and 393 sample commuters who are engaged in different occupation and in need of some more buses in the mornings (from 5 a.m. to 10 a.m) to go to town and at evenings (from 4 p.m. to 9 p.m) for returning home.

Generally, agricultural and dairy products -- vegetables, fruits, flowers and milk -- have to be transported to the town market in the early morning (usually before 6 a.m) hours. But in most of the rural areas, the non-availability of early morning transport services forces the agriculturists to carry their luggage on head or by cycle upto five to 10 Kms to the nearby trunk roads and board in the already overloaded buses. This is a major problem for them. Similarly, labourers expect adequate and timely services because they are to reach their work place before 8 a.m. Due to

the unsuitable bus timing the labourers in most of the rural areas are forced to march few kilometres and get on bus services. In most of the rural areas, the commuters are late shift labourers and those who have spent some extra-time for social and recreation purposes are dissatisfied with the services of ATC due to the non-availability of bus services after 8 p.m.

Furthermore, rural people expect some more frequency of services in all week days both in the mornings and evenings, that too during fairs, festivals, and market days. A sample of 204 out of 400 commuters demand more frequency in their routes on Mondays (week beginning), and 197 commuters demand more frequency on Fridays (week end). In many rural routes under study, passengers have to be content with the existing limited services resulting in the problem of overcrowding.

5.2.2 Poor Condition of Buses

Generally, the quality of services reflects the image of transport corporation. There is no set of standards that could be universally applied in assessing the quality of bus services in particular places. The concept of quality is a relative one and may vary according to the context. Alan Armstrong-Wright and Sebastien Thiriez have stated that "Acceptable quality of services will differ considerably from one country to another and it will be highly influenced by the value placed on time, geographic and
climatic conditions, availability, public attitude, and ethic characteristics."\(^3\)

Condition of buses is also one of the indicators of quality of services. Of course, old appearance of the bus, damaged seats and window shutters, smoothness of services, irritating noise, frequent breakdowns, and slow speed are signs of the poor condition of buses.

Operation of age old vehicles particularly in rural areas is not because of any discrimination to the areas nor because of poor maintenance by the Corporation. Unsurfaced and substandard rural roads prompt the corporation to operate old buses in those areas to minimise operational and financial losses. These defective roads damage tyres and tubes and the bus body and also cause more fuel consumption, frequent repairs and breakdowns, and other technical problems.

The extent of satisfaction of the respondents on the various dimensions of the quality of buses plied by ATC in rural areas has been ascertained. The percentages of commuters dissatisfied on various aspects are as follows: With cleanliness 26, comfortable seating arrangement 53, ventilation 31, space inside the bus 16, mobility of window shutters 85, ease in boarding and alighting 30, breakdown 12, noise level in vehicle 68, and with smoothness of service 58. Among these problems, the problem of windows affects the commuters much. Intolerable suffocation during overcrowded trips, as the glass windows provide limited scope for

sufficient air movement and difficulties during rainy season due to damaged window shutters, are the reasons for their dissatisfaction.

So the poor conditions of buses in rural areas can only be improved when the conditions of roads are improved in the village areas.

5.2.3 Undue Waiting Time at Bus Stops

Another important problem for the commuters with regard to the transport Corporation is the undue waiting at bus stops for buses in rural areas. This indicates low frequency of buses and untimely services. The unnecessary waiting for buses is a waste of time and causes considerable dissatisfaction to the commuters. Moreover, it is clear that more waiting time causes overcrowding. The World Bank Technical paper number 68 quoted London Transport criterion for acceptable waiting time to be in terms of frequency, that is, "if passengers are unable to board the first bus to arrive, they should be able to board the following bus without fail." The Overseas Unit of Transport and Road Research Laboratory (TRRL) has contended that 15 to 20 minutes might be the reasonable waiting time for bus passengers.

In Salem district, people in some part of rural areas (21 out of 40 sample routes) enjoy adequate frequency while those in some other areas (remaining 19 routes) get less frequency of four to six single trips per day. The inefficient route and time schedules result in unequal interval between

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4 Alan Amstrong - Wright and Sebastien Thiriez 57.
services in rural areas. This situation forces the people in rural areas to wait for even three to four hours at bus stops.

5.3 **Passengers' Problems with Respect to Crew**

The problems with regard to crew include inadequate time for boarding and alighting, non-refund of balance, impolite behaviour of the crew, quarrel with other bus crew, not stopping buses at scheduled places, negligence to provide seats to handicapped passengers, and failure to consider concessional travellers at peak hours. The study reveals that 71 per cent of passengers in rural areas are, in one way or the other, facing the above said problems from the crew. Each of the problem is discussed briefly.

5.3.1 **Inadequate Time for Boarding and Alighting**

In rural areas, the agriculturists, petty shop and business people, vendors, and housewives buy and sell various products according to their needs in the market. All these things can be carried through buses which are the only easily available means of transport in rural areas. However, in most cases, the time given to passengers, both free and with luggage, for boarding in and alighting from buses is highly inadequate. On any occasion it results in accidents to passengers. Particularly, the old and women passengers feel it too difficult to manage the situation when buses move before they board in or alight from them.
The study indicates a substantial number of respondents (139/400) pointing out this problem as an important one which causes dissatisfaction to the passengers and out of this, 91 respondents have ranked this problem as the first.

5.3.2 Non-Refund of Balance

Some conductors may not refund the balance of five or ten paise to the passengers when they do not have adequate change and sometimes wilfully. In any case it is a kind of pilferage by the conductors and is not acceptable. Moreover, most of the passengers do not co-operate with the conductor by tendering the exact amount of fare. For instance, giving ten rupees currency note for buying seventy or ninety paise ticket may irritate the conductor, especially when the bus is overcrowded. Hence, the government should fix the fare structure to the convenience of both the passengers as well as the operators in round amounts such as fifty paise and one rupee bereft of small changes.

According to the study, 77 respondents respond to this problem, and among them 38 gave first rank.

5.3.3 Impolite Behaviour of the Crew

Now-a-days impolite crew behaviour is common everywhere, especially at peak hours. In rural areas, the passengers with luggage, students availing concession, and ladies carrying children with luggage are treated as second grade citizens and well dressed commuters are looked
upon polishly by few conductors. Of course this may be due to the tension
and inconvenience of the conductors, but the ultimate sufferers are the
commuters.

At the survey, 90 commuters opined about bad courtesy of crew
and among them 35 have ranked this problem as the first one among the
crew related problems.

5.3.4 Quarrel with Other Bus Crew

Generally, this problem is found in the routes where the private
buses also ply. Usually, quarrel with other bus crew happens because of
not maintaining the scheduled departure time among the operators, severe
and unhealthy competition while driving the bus, and the like. Due to
these problems, there is delay in the journey, and the passengers may not
be able to reach their destination in time, and also the passengers may get
irritation and tension during the journey. Sometimes accidents also may
occur because of the crew driving the buses rashly either for compensating
the time lost due to the quarrels or to catch the passenger at bus stops
before the competitor reaches there.

Even though 62 per cent of sample commuters are availing private
services, an insignificant sample commuters of 28 out of 400, are seized
of this problem. Among the 28 respondents, only 13 treat the problem of
quarrel with other bus crew as a prime one.
5.3.5 Not Stopping Buses at Scheduled Places

Generally, in rural areas the distance between one stop and another is comparatively more than that of the urban areas due to less density of population. Due to the scattering population, at each stop there will be only one or two or a few passengers to get in. But in many cases, the crew may try to ignore them, especially when the number of passengers is too small or when the bus is full. Needless to say, due to inadequate services and less frequency, the commuters in rural areas have to wait for more time to get the next bus, whereas, the crew hurt the commuters through their arrogance of not stopping the buses at scheduled stops and pick them up at peak hours. Seventy one commuters out of 400 responded to this problem of which 28 respondents gave first rank.

5.3.6 Negligence to Provide Seats to Handicapped Passengers

This problem is not particular only in rural areas. In every bus, two or three seats in the front portion of the bus are specially meant for physically handicapped persons. Usually, these seats are occupied by the other passengers and most of them are not ready to vacate the seat even if any handicapped commuter comes. During such times, it is the duty of the conductor to request the person occupying the concerned seat to offer it to the handicapped. If the conductor does not discharge this responsibility, the physically handicapped commuters suffer, especially when the bus is overcrowded.
With regard to this problem, 104 out of 400 sample respondents were dissatisfied with conductors' behaviour. Among them 32 commuters have given first rank to this problem.

5.3.7 Failure to Consider Concessional Travellers at Peak Hours

Another important transport problem in the rural areas, with regard to crew behaviour is the reluctance of the crew to consider the concession available to passengers, especially during peak hours. As per the Tamilnadu government orders, all the bus transport corporations are providing full fare concession to the students upto VIII standard and some other specific section of the people such as freedom fighters and 50 per cent fare concession to other school and college going students. Of course, among these specific groups, students form the majority of concessional bus users. During peak hours some drivers do not stop the bus at boarding points where their number is large, some stop the buses at 50 to 100 metres away from the stipulated points and some deliberately avoid to pick up the students. Such a crew behaviour not only wounds the students but also affects their studies, some times, many students from villages return home with fear of not reaching their schools on time. Alternatively, they have to reach the school either by cycle or by foot. Furthermore, the other commuters who are waiting for the bus along with the students at the bus stops also suffer due to this crew behaviour. According to the study, out of 400, 87 sample respondents responded positively and among them 51 commuters considered this crew problem as the first among their problems.
Table 5.1
Problems with Respect to Crew

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problems</th>
<th>Number of respondents (n = 400)</th>
<th>Number of respondents who marked first</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate time for boarding and alighting</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-refund of balance</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impolite behaviour of the crew</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarrel with other bus crew</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stopping buses at scheduled places</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negligence to provide seats to handicapped passengers</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure to consider concessional travellers at peak hours</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Primary Data
The above problems relating to crew and passengers response to them are summarised in Table 5.1

The table reveals that among the problems with regard to crew, the problem of inadequate time for boarding and alighting stands first with 139 responses, followed by the problem of negligence to provide handicapped passengers seats reserved for them brings second with 104 responses, failure to consider concessional travellers at peak hours comes the third with 92 commuters, impolite behaviour of the crew ranks the fourth with 90 responses, non-refund of balance amount holds the fifth with 73 responses, not stopping at scheduled places stands the sixth with 71 responses, and quarrel with other bus crew is the last one with 28 responses.

Even though the majority of the commuters in rural areas encounter some problems from crew, the opinion of most of the respondents about crew behaviour in ATC buses is favourable. Six respondents felt that the crew performance in ATC was excellent. Two hundred and eighty eight respondents were of the opinion that the crew performance is good, 93 respondents felt the same to be average, and only 13 felt it to be bad.

5.4 Passengers' Problems Relating to Co-passengers

There are some common problems like smoking inside the bus, spitting and vomiting in the buses, quarrel among the passengers and
ladies with crying children which are faced by the passengers during their every day life in rural bus travel. Regarding these problems, just only 44 sample respondents out of 400 considered serious and remaining 356 (89%) have not attached much importance to these problems. The problems with regard to co-passengers and the responses to these problems by the sample commuters are presented in Table 5.2.

It can be inferred from the table, that 217 respondents face the problems of other passengers smoking inside the bus. But among them, a majority of the commuters i.e.110 respondents are of the opinion that it happened occasionally. There are 100 respondents, occasionally, 54 commuters frequently face the problem of spitting and vomiting in the buses from the total response of 198. Even though two hundred and twenty commuters dislike quarrels among the passengers, the majority of 104 passengers experience this problem occasionally and 63 respondents face less frequently. Hundred and thirty passengers consider the ladies carrying children as a problem. However, on the whole, 86 commuters face it occasionally and only 23 passengers meet this problem frequently.

It is clear from the table that in all the cases the number of respondents who face these problems occasionally are more, and the number of commuters who meet these problems more frequently are less. It brings out the fact that a majority of the passengers encounter these co-passengers' problems occasionally. However, without these problems certainly their travel will be a pleasant one. So cent per cent co-operation among the commuters is indispensable to solve these problems, which
Table 5.2
Problems Relating to Co-passengers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problems</th>
<th>More frequently</th>
<th>Frequently</th>
<th>Less Frequently</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Smoking inside the bus</td>
<td>20 (9.22)</td>
<td>43 (19.81)</td>
<td>44 (20.28)</td>
<td>110 (50.69)</td>
<td>217 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spitting and vomiting in the buses</td>
<td>8 (4.04)</td>
<td>54 (27.27)</td>
<td>36 (18.18)</td>
<td>100 (50.51)</td>
<td>198 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarrels among the passengers</td>
<td>9 (4.09)</td>
<td>44 (20.00)</td>
<td>63 (28.63)</td>
<td>104 (47.27)</td>
<td>220 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ladies with crying children</td>
<td>7 (5.38)</td>
<td>23 (17.69)</td>
<td>14 (10.77)</td>
<td>86 (66.15)</td>
<td>130 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Total</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>400</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Primary Data

Note: Figures in bracket represents percentages to the total of each group.
cannot be controlled either by strict rules and regulations of the corporation or by the request of the bus crew.

5.5 Passengers' Other Problems

In addition to the problems with regard to the Corporation, the crew, and the fellow passengers, the commuters experience some other problems also during their journey such as overcrowding, unreasonable fare, and poor road condition in rural areas. Each problem is briefly discussed below.

5.5.1 Problem of Overcrowding

Rapid growth of travel demand without a corresponding increase in the quantum of services causes the problem of overcrowding in the buses. It is common feature in rural areas that people are waiting in bus stops for buses and passengers hanging on foot boards if they catch the bus. K. Muniramappa states that "due to lack of sufficient transport facility, many passengers travel sitting on the deck of a passenger bus and sometimes exposing themselves to grave danger to life."\(^5\) Overcrowd travel creates many problems to the commuters such as accidents, pick pocketing, standing in the buses, uncomfortable and tedious journey due to intolerable heat, and dresses getting dirty and damaged.

Panduranga Rao and Rama Rao have expressed that "Physical effort should be tendered extensively by users, on journeys in bad weather, in overcrowded traffic condition and when heavy hand-luggage is being carried." This overcrowd also results in delay in operation, short life of vehicle, and inconvenience in issuing tickets.

Due to the overcrowd, commuters with luggage and concessional students are forced to be ignored by the crew especially in peak hours. The women passengers feel uncomfortable because of the misbehavior of a few male passengers in many instances. Applying of sudden break in substandard roads causes unmanageable standing journey for the passengers, particularly housewives carrying children and luggage and for the old people. The various problems under the category of other problems along with the percentage of respondents are reported in Table 5.3.

It is understood from the table that only 74 respondents are reporting pick pocketing as a problem. But among them, majority of the respondents numbering 56 are of opinion that it occurs occasionally. Two hundred and ninety nine passengers feel that their dresses becoming dirty and sometimes damaged. This problem is felt very much by the passengers. That is why it is felt very often by 126 passengers and frequently by 125 passengers. Two hundred and sixty six people consider the tedious journey as their problems and 81 respondents face it.

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### Table 5.3

Problems with Regard to Overcrowd

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problems</th>
<th>More frequently</th>
<th>Frequently</th>
<th>Less Frequently</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pickpocketing</td>
<td>4 (5.41)</td>
<td>6 (8.11)</td>
<td>8 (10.81)</td>
<td>56 (75.67)</td>
<td>74 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dresses getting dirty/damaged</td>
<td>126 (42.14)</td>
<td>125 (41.81)</td>
<td>37 (12.37)</td>
<td>11 (3.68)</td>
<td>299 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tedious journey</td>
<td>39 (14.66)</td>
<td>81 (30.45)</td>
<td>79 (29.70)</td>
<td>67 (25.19)</td>
<td>266 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standing in the buses</td>
<td>120 (37.97)</td>
<td>105 (33.23)</td>
<td>24 (7.59)</td>
<td>67 (21.20)</td>
<td>316 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncomfortable journey</td>
<td>170 (55.56)</td>
<td>99 (32.35)</td>
<td>30 (9.80)</td>
<td>7 (2.29)</td>
<td>306 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>459</strong></td>
<td><strong>416</strong></td>
<td><strong>178</strong></td>
<td><strong>208</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Primary Data

**Note:** Figures in parenthesis represents percentages to the total of each group.
frequently, 316 passengers dislike the standing travel in the buses. It is quite natural that the majority of people want the sitting travel. Hundred and twenty people feel this problem very frequently and 105 frequently. Three hundred and six passengers consider the journey in overcrowded buses as uncomfortable. If we take an overall view of these problems 459 passengers feel them very frequently. It is observed from the study that 84 per cent of the sample commuters feel discomfort due to the problem of overcrowd. Moreover all these problems are related to operators. So they should take steps to avoid these problems by offering more number of bus services in rural areas.

5.5.2. Unreasonable Fare Structure

Generally, town bus services are used extensively by the middle and low income groups due to the inability of getting alternative modes. Fixing fare structure for the public utility service should be favourable to the poor commuters. Here, it is appropriate to state that the World Bank Technical Paper contended that "in developing countries a reasonable level of household expenditure on bus travel should not exceed 10 per cent of household income." 7

In Tamilnadu the bus fare structure is fixed by the government without taking into consideration the difficulties of passengers as well as the operators. Whenever the fare structure is revised by the government, it is also its responsibility to improve the existing quality of service to the

7 Alan Armstrong - Wright and Sebastien Thiriez 56.
public through the corporation. If it fails to do so, it results in dissatisfaction of the commuters. Most of the time, the revised fare structure by the government is unfavourable to the corporation because fixation of fare is not on the basis of its operational cost but on the basis of other considerations. So the government should avoid this adverse situation to both commuters and operators by having discussion with transport corporation and people's representatives before fixing fare structure. The fare fixation should be on the basis of operating cost, and it should be implemented by taking into account the views of the passengers and the operators.

5.5.3 Bad Condition of Roads

Poor condition of road is the common sight in rural areas. It is not a problem to the commuters only but to the operators as well. Unsurfaced and substandard rural roads cause uncomfortable journey for passengers. Bad roads cause damage to vehicle, tyres and tubes, frequent breakdowns, repairs, more fuel consumption, and other technical defects. This problem can be solved only by the government by allocating more funds to its highways department to maintain rural roads properly.

This study reveals the road conditions in the rural areas in Salem district. Accordingly out of 400, 20 sample respondents consider the roads in their places as very good, 39 as good, 197 as average, 68 as poor, and 76 as very poor.
Thus the problems of passengers are many and varied. But these problems could be solved if the corporation, crew members, and the government discharge their duties properly. Of course, the passengers also should co-operate and adjust themselves to the circumstances in order to have the benefit of pleasant travel.