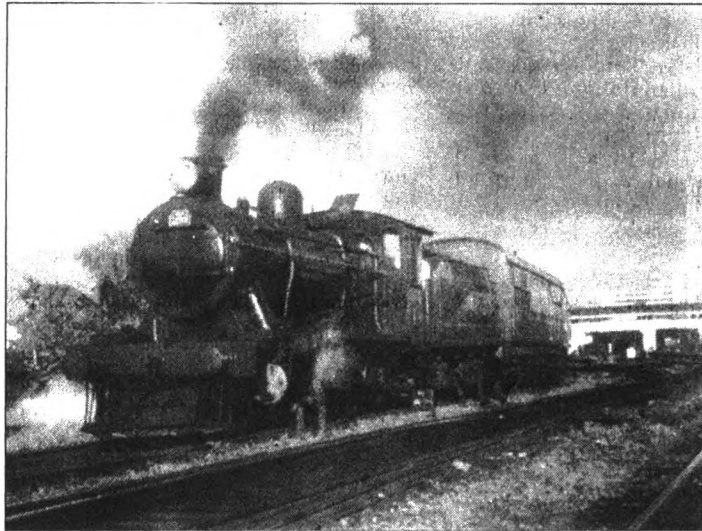


K.V. Train Service: Its benefits and woes



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TRAINS: It is very recently that the Railway Department celebrated its 50th anniversary of introducing 'Ruhunu Kumari', 'Yal Devi' and 'Udarata Menike' train services to three provinces in the country. As far as its service is concerned, we, as citizens, can be proud of it because the bus service specially the private sector, leaves much to be desired qualitatively and quantitatively.

When train service is narrowed down to Kelani Valley (K.V.) line of which I am well aware, it can be appreciated that there are about seven trains that run on this line in the morning hours from 6.00 a.m. to 8.00 a.m. for the travelling of passengers from Avissawella to Colombo. The number of passengers travel in these trains are equal to those travel in 35 to 40 buses. The people are more benefitted by the train service due to many reasons. One reason is that they can avoid the delays because traffic congestion and other delays on the roads like collecting passengers are not the barriers for the trains. The safety and the trouble-free environment created in the trains are relatively higher. For example, the passengers concerned can travel upto their destinations even standing without jostling against one another unlike the buses.

They are at liberty to occupy a convenient place because there are no conductors to direct the passengers to and fro, even when the trains are packed to full capacity. They are also not subjected to pay exorbitant fares for travelling here like the buses which are categorised as ordinary, semi-luxury, luxury, air-conditioned and inter-city. Most of all, the fact that has to be appreciated is that the people are immune from noise pollution when they travel on the trains. The blaring cassette players and FM radios deafen the passengers in the buses and they are not in a position to avoid this discordant cacophony that dominates the entire bus, because these songs and the radio programmes are the favourites of drivers and conductors.

When taken into consideration

the inconvenience caused during bus-travel, it need hardly be said that trains have been rendering an invaluable service. Since its establishment by the European rulers in spite of the fact that they cannot serve all the people alike all over the country depending on their limitations.

It is true that there are various plans and strategies afoot to expand the train services and upgrade it in order to provide a better service to the people.

The incentives and awards are also being given to the employees to encourage them. This is a good trend.

I saw one notice displayed prominently in front of Railway station which is adjudged the best station on the K.V. line. But, it is a matter for regret that this station does not have the toilet facilities like a few others in the suburbs for the use of the passengers and their employees. Adding insult to the injury of this situation, the station master of a certain station uses the backyard of the station for urinating in the late hours of the day let alone using this place by the male passengers who wait for the trains. The most deplorable situation is that, it is the female passengers who have to suffer untold difficulties without a toilet in case of an emergency. I spoke to one of the Railway employees regarding this and he replied that the Department is good but the negligence of some officers has led to such a tragedy in the railways.

He further said that it was long ago that the toilet-pit got filled and abandoned.

The other evident lapses are that there are leaking roofs in some trains and electric bulbs in some trains which were switched on at night remain burning even in the broad day light.

But, the common complaint that is heard from the Department circles is that it runs at a loss and sufficient funds are not allocated for the development of infrastructure facilities.

If the authorities concerned take suitable steps to rectify the defects of this nature, then it can be developed to provide a better service for the people slowly but surely.

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