



# The Ladies Coaches in Mumbai Local Trains



Scenes in the Ladies Coaches. Mumbai. Photos by P. Weide

## The 'Ladies Coaches' in Mumbai Local Trains as an example of intertwined mobility and immobility relations- Comparing commuters' experiences with the current media discussion about increasing mobility and safety in Mumbai

The media often represents the Mumbai Local Trains as the city's lifeline (*Mumbai Mirror*, 2017). Central-, Western- and Harbour-line build one of the world's busiest railway systems that connects the suburban areas with the metropolitan region of the city, where most of its economic business takes place (*Times of India*, 2018). In spite of being represented as relatively safe compared to other Indian cities, the media is focussing on reports about increased safety measures for women using the Ladies Coaches, which every Local Train provides. Using ethnographic research methodology I intend to find out whether the experiences of female commuters are accurately represented in the media discourse about mobility and safety, which actors are speaking and how apparent mobilities have the potential to entail immobilities.

### THE ONGOING MEDIA DISCOURSE

"The Narendra Modi government is likely announce 2018 as the year of women's safety in railways in the upcoming budget ." *The Business Standard* (2018)

The Media is pushing the women's safety discourse with the intention of protecting women commuting to and from work. Actions from the government are often highlighted to demonstrate their efforts, which are often connected to the adherence of the patriarchal order.

### THE VOICES OF COMMUTERS

Ethnographic research and interviews have resulted that most commuters enjoy the comfort of travelling in the Ladies Coach. Being in a space away from home and work can have a liberating effect on their personalities, activities and their access to public spaces. About the newspaper articles most say that „the media is pushing the women's safety discourse immensely since 2012 and misses the real cause of trouble- lack of education and increasing urban density.”

### MOBILITY

„Empowering women starts with mobility and (non-traditional) gender roles.” „Enabling women and girls to utilize public services makes them empowered citizens.” *The World Bank* (2011) Efforts for the increasing mobility of women can be interconnected with the rising female workforce and economic growth. Mobility can here be seen as rather functional than for pleasure. Looking at women's travel patterns shows, that the majority is using public transport for a 'respectable purpose' (Patel, 2010; Phadke, Khan, Ranade, 2011)- commuting to work or college. Providing a separate space for women "underlines and reproduces gender differences" (Why Loiter?, 2011). "Family members and society use safety concerns as a way to regulate and control women's mobility." (Patel, 2010). John Urry and Mimi Sheller argue in the "New Mobilities Paradigm" (2006) that all mobilities entail specific immobile infrastructures. Urry and Sheller underline the relevance of integrating people's movements more into social sciences.

### DERIVED RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Who benefits from mobility regulations, that are linked to the increasing safety of women in the urban context of Mumbai?

Which potential do the Ladies Coaches have for their users?

How do women turn the segregated space of the L.C. into a liberated space? Which forms of expressions do they use?

Why do public (instead of private) spaces are mainly scrutinized when it comes to safety concerns about women?

What needs to be done for a peaceful gender-mixed handling in public as well as private spaces?

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