

POLICY STUDY: 'RAILMADAD' GRIEVANCE REDRESSAL MECHANISM FOR BETTER SERVICES TO RAIL PASSENGERS

Prashantkumar Dubey

Research Scholar,

Faculty of Law,

The Maharaja Sayajirao University

of Baroda

hidpmsa@gmail.com

9374464420

Dr. Ghanshyam Solanki

Associate Professor,

Faculty of Law,

The Maharaja Sayajirao University

of Baroda

ABSTRACT

Indian Railways have been the life-line of the nation and over the period of time the Railways have been emerging as a better service provider. Indian Railways have implemented many reforms for providing not only better commuting or transportation service but as a holistic service sector in travel & tours, lodging & boarding as well. Development of such services have raised the bar and to be in better competition the Railways have been working on improvement of the safety & security as well as better amenities and services by resolving or addressing the problems faced by customers or passengers. The paper reflects upon the existing grievance redressal mechanism systems presently available with the Indian Railways for better services to its railway passengers. It is a study on the various platforms available for different types of issues affecting comfortable journey of passengers over Indian Railways. It also reflects towards whether public at large is aware of these grievance redressal mechanisms and how the Indian Railways act upon for providing better services, the standard operating procedures and the responsibilities carried out by the Railways especially through 'RAILMADAD' and social media like Twitter, Facebook etc. The study enables Indian Railway authorities to draw their attention and focus for better services based upon popular demand and it also enlightens the public at large to

understand the system, how does it work and what are the legal provisions, if the services are impounded or rights are defeated the remedies thereof.

Keywords:-Indian Railway, Passengers, Services, Grievance Redressal Mechanism,

INTRODUCTION

Indian Railways has been serving the nation ever since its establishments from the year 1853 and over the years the Railways has been developed with time and demands of the services from time to time. Initially starting its journey from Bombay to Thane in 1853, then from goods train to passenger trains and in the said passenger trains adding different types of passenger services for smooth running of railways and comfort of the passengers. These services were added gradually as and when needed or on popular demands. The recent provisions of some services are added with the aspect of globalization and international standards. The very funny and notable incident¹, which created a significant instance for bringing the passenger comfort in the scope of Railway services in Indian Railways and thus the toilets were introduced on passenger trains. In the recent days the railway passengers arbitrarily expect clearly visible, better qualitative and effective improvements on each and every item of the public utility provided at the Railway stations/platforms. In accordance of the increased expectations of the passengers/daily commuters, Indian Railways are making all the best efforts to provide various facilities at the Railway stations.

The Railways have provided many facilities to the Railway passengers² and some extended facilities for those passengers who are senior citizens³, females⁴ and the Divyangjans⁵. In the year 2017, in the purview of major reforms⁶ the review

¹Changeadmin, "Indian Railways History – Interesting Story about Okhil Chandra Sen letter" *Change Started*, 2019 available at: <https://changestarted.com/indian-railways-toilet-story/>.

²"Facilities to Railway Passengers," *Press Information Bureau (PIB)*.

³Indian Railways, "BRIEF FACILITIES EXTENDED TO SENIOR CITIZENS."

⁴Indian Railways, "DETAILS OF FACILITIES PROVIDED TO FEMALE PASSENGERS."

⁵Indian Railways, "FACILITIES EXTENDED TO PERSONS WITH DISABILITY."

⁶Indian Railways, "Reforms in passenger amenities in indian railways."

for categorization of station for providing better passenger amenities based on the annual passenger earnings and passenger footfall was carried out upon which for provision of the passenger amenities⁷ in an objective manner, the stations on Indian Railways have been clubbed into 3 groups i.e. Non-Suburban(NSG), Suburban(SG) and Halt(HG), which shall be reviewed every five years. The Railways also indicated some general amenities and facilities to its Citizen's charter⁸ which were emphasized in the vision for better services⁹ enlisted.

To provide the better and strengthening¹⁰ the facilities¹¹ to the railway passengers, the Indian Railways has been working on war-foot level. The Railways have systematic approach for facilitating the passengers without any hindrance or hurdle, for the same there are many gateways for the passengers to approach the Railways like complaint redressal mechanism¹² and social media platforms such as twitter¹³ and web-portals¹⁴. The very recently launched RailMadad¹⁵ has been much appreciated and passenger friendly grievance redressal scheme, which is achieving the goals enlisted under the Citizens Charter¹⁶ of Indian Railways. The on-board in-charge TTE, who is called as the Train Superintendent¹⁷ has been directed to look into the matters pertaining and the Station

⁷Ibid.

⁸Indian Railways, "Citizen's Charter on Passenger Services of Indian Railways" 350–3 (Trains at a Glance, 2019).

⁹Indian Railways, "Citizen Charter 2019.pdf" available at: https://indianrailways.gov.in/railwayboard/uploads/directorate/traffic_comm/downloads/Citizen_Charter_2019.pdf.

¹⁰"Facilities to Railway Passengers," *Press Information Bureau (PIB)*.

¹¹*Supra*

¹²"National Government Service Portal," *National Informatics Center (NIC)* available at: <https://services.india.gov.in/service/detail/file-complaints-or-send-suggestions-to-ministry-of-railways>; Press Information Bureau, "Suresh Prabhu Launches Passenger Friendly 'Customer Complaint Web Portal and Mobile App'" *Press Information Bureau (PIB)* (New Delhi, 2 March 2015); Press Information Bureau, "Complaint Redressal Mechanism of Indian Railways" *Press Information Bureau (PIB)* (New Delhi, 3 August 2016).

¹³"Twitter Handles of RailMinIndia," "RailwaySeva," available at: <https://twitter.com/railwayseva>.

¹⁴Press Information Bureau, "Suresh Prabhu Launches Passenger Friendly 'Customer Complaint Web Portal and Mobile App'" *Press Information Bureau (PIB)* (New Delhi, 2 March 2015).

¹⁵Indian Railways, "EXCELLENCE IN PROVIDING CITIZEN-CENTRIC DELIVERY Case study on 'RailMadad' Grievance Redressal platform of Indian Railways" (23RD NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON E-GOVERNANCE).

¹⁶*Supra*

¹⁷Indian Railways, "Updated duty list of train superintendents."

Superintendents' as well as the Railway Protection Force and the Government Railway Police have been directed to provide all the necessary assistance.

However, there are many such instances and the cases when the passengers are not entertained as per the expectations or are not provided the facilities as per the Citizen's Charter¹⁸, during such issues the various grievance redressal mechanisms are utilized and even though the passenger is not satisfied with the result / outcome provided the Railways, what to do then is always a question? Even approaching to the 'Consumer Forum'¹⁹ is not an easy task for every passenger in certain cases.

COMPLAINT REDRESSAL MECHANISMS OVER INDIAN RAILWAYS

Indian Railways has set up different channels of registering passengers complaints/grievances such as :-

1. Complaint Books
2. May I help you booth/Counters at the Stations
3. All India Helpline No.-139,
4. Centralized Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System - 2 - (CPGRAMS)
5. Complaint Management System (COMS)
6. Twitter
7. Facebook
8. RailMadad²⁰ App / Portal

There are large numbers of grievances including many of such complaints on poor service/hygiene, negligence of duties etc. are received through these channels which are

¹⁸Supra

¹⁹Consumer Forum as per the provisions of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019

²⁰Supra

sent to the concerned authorities for prompt and speedy redressal. For better services the regular, periodical and surprise checks are being conducted at officers/supervisors' level and corrective action is taken on deficiency so pointed out. A system of daily feedback from passengers on quality of services being provided at stations and in trains has been put in place. Feedback so received on quality of services from passengers are analyzed and unsatisfactory ones are sent to Division/Zones for appropriate action.

1. Complaint Books

Complaint Books, as the name suggests, it is a physical form of a book, available with public authority such as on board TTEs, Station Masters, Train Managers²¹ and other Railway staffs who are in public dealing work. The complaint book contains a proforma in triplicate and in case of complaint made by the passenger, a copy of the same is provided to the complainant and from remaining two copies one copy is sent to the higher authority intimating about the complaint, who assigns an inquiry or orders to resolve the issue, as the case may be, within stipulated time frame the disposal of the complaint is ensured and the intimation is made to the complainant by convenient means of the communications.

2. May I help you booth/Counters at the Stations

There is provision for the 'May I help you booth / counters at stations, whereas such booth is established to provide general assistance with regard to queries of passengers to be addressed. Such booths are located at conspicuous place on the platforms that maximum public can reach out easily. However, recently from many railway stations the 'may I help you booth' have been removed or are under locked condition or stays unmanned stating various issues pertaining to shortage of manpower.

²¹Indian Railways, "Revision of Designation of Guards."

3. All India Helpline No.-139²²

Previously the helpline no.139 was limited to general queries only, such as train booking, ticket availability, train timings, train running details etc. and simultaneously there were many other helpline numbers such as All India Security Helpline '182'²³, All India Passenger Helpline '138'²⁴, and almost every state had their own security helpline numbers for Government Railway Police (GRP), however after revamping the public grievance mechanism and implementation of Centralized 'All India Helpline No.139' all the other helplines were scraped. Presently the All India Helpline No.139 is shared with every department of Indian Railways and the prompt response to the complaints raised are ensured and monitored by the Divisional Railway Managers and General Managers. To ensure the customer satisfaction and betterment of the passengers of the Indian Railways the departments are encouraged by presenting them shield²⁵(reward) for the performance, which has been achieving positive results in favour of smooth running of the railways and passengers of the Indian Railways. Sometimes the passengers have to suffer a lot calling the toll free 'All India Helpline No.139' as it goes on holding for about 10-30 minutes and in case of urgency it can't be useful.

4. Centralized Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System - 2 - (CPGRAMS)

In order to address the Public Grievances, the Central Government of India established a Public Grievance Redressal body in the year 2007, the flagship initiative

²²“Now, single 139 railway helpline for all queries,” *The Hindu*, 8 March 2021.

²³ All India Security Helpline '182' was provided over Indian Railway to facilitate the travelling passenger. The service was very important public service and had played an important role in any emergency like crime against woman, onboard unlawful activity, train accidents, medical attention required fire etc. However, after short-term implementation of the same, it was abrogated after introduction of Centralized All India Helpline No.139.

²⁴ All India Passenger Helpline '138' was provided over Indian Railway to facilitate the travelling passenger as a public interface for quarries/complaints related to Medical Emergency, Cleanliness, Food & Catering, Coach Maintenance, Linen etc. (Except Security)

²⁵ Indian Railways, "Criteria Shield" available at: https://indianrailways.gov.in/railwayboard/view_section.jsp?lang=0&id=0,1,304,366,523,1247.

is named as Centralised Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS), which is an online platform available to the Indian citizens round the clock (i.e.24x7) to lodge public grievances to the concerned public authorities on any subject related to service delivery, or as the case may be. It is Nationwide Centralised and single portal connected to all the Ministries/Departments of Government of India and the States. Public can lodge the grievance and the same is assigned to the concern Ministry or Department and monitored by higher authorities, every Ministry and States have role-based access to the CPGRAMS. The status of public grievance filed through CPGRAMS can be tracked with the unique registration ID which is provided at the time of registration of grievance. If the complainant is not satisfied with the resolution by the concerned Grievance Officer, an appeal may also be filed through the CPGRAMS. Even after closure of grievance if the complainant is not satisfied with the resolution, he/she can provide feedback with this regard. Moreover, if the rating is fed as 'Poor', the option to file an appeal gets enabled. Petitioner can also track the appeal with help of the grievance registration number. The CPGRAMS through Public Grievance Portal (PG Portal) has been achieving good results for the public and the Government mechanism is getting efficient over the period of time.

5. Complaint Management System (COMS)

The Minister of Railways²⁶ launched Complaint Management System (COMS) portal on 02.03.2015 which consists (1) A mobile app based complaints and suggestion application, (2) A web based complaints and suggestions application on URL www.coms.indianrailways.gov.in& (3) An SMS based complaints and suggestion application on the number 9717630982 - for the help and assistance to *bonafide* Railway passenger²⁷ for giving their feedback for the experience and to register their complaints, presently the portal is non-functional.

²⁶Press Information Bureau, "Suresh Prabhu Launches Passenger Friendly 'Customer Complaint Web Portal and Mobile App'" *Press Information Bureau (PIB)* (New Delhi, 2 March 2015).

²⁷*Passenger* under Section 2(29) of the Railways Act, 1989

6. Twitter²⁸

Since expansion of mobile phone usage and development of online social media, the Twitter has its own space and out-reach, during his tenure as the Minister of Railways, Shri Suresh Prabhu interestingly thrived for accountability and service to the passengers of the Indian Railways. For the direct interaction of the passengers to resolve their grievances the Social Media handles of authorities were made public and it has been monitored by the Railway Board for not only prompt but positive and humanitarian response. There are n-number of cases and grievances being reported through Twitter²⁹ and are promptly redressed through channelized mechanism of the Indian Railways. The resolution in always tend to be published for the public at large and the grievance redressal through the Twitter has acclaimed lot of attention from the passengers travelling and the Twitter platform has become one of the easiest and fast mode for raising grievances, or reporting such issues which affect the public at large. Every positive thing has its dark-side also, in such manner many times the Twitter platform has created menace as many hoax calls and faulty reports / grievances are raised, however to cope up with such an issue the Railways have started to ask for the journey and contact details of the person / Twitter handle raising the grievance and after duly confirming the grievance is redressed accordingly.

7. RailMadad³⁰

RailMadad is a grievance redressal system by Indian Railways to enable railway passengers to lodge a complaint or give suggestion through online, App., or SMS and facility to track live status of complaints and provide feedback based on their satisfaction with the resolution. The portal is to enhance experience of Railways passengers with swift and satisfactory resolution of complaints. It has unprecedented reach, speed and efficiency. RailMadad can be accessed by any railway customer

²⁸Indian Railways, "Railways Twitter Handle Accounts of GM & DRM," 2015 available at: <https://twitter.com/RailMinIndia/status/669813173470400512>.

²⁹"RailwaySeva," available at: <https://twitter.com/railwayseva>.

³⁰Supra

(passenger, parcel or freight customer) who has a grievance with service delivery of Indian Railways (inside or outside India). There are multiple means of using the services of RailMadad such as, the option of logging in on a web-portal through a search engine, Integrated Railway Helpline number 139 (duly supported by a call centre 24*7), MobileApp (Android and iOS), Email, Social Media, access through SMS and Manual Dak. Integrated Railway Helpline number 139³¹ extends full conversational capability in ten (10) major Indian languages, besides Hindi and English.

RailMadad provides real-time assistance and grievance redressal for about 8000+ stations and 12000+ trains. As the system is integrated with National Train Enquiry System (NTES), it sends alerts to the concerned field unit directly responsible for providing relief. Efforts are made to redress real-time complaints, both on the train and the station itself.

CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS OF THE GRIEVANCE REDRESSAL MECHANISM OVER INDIAN RAILWAYS

The biggest issue of any difficulties arising out in India is due to its diversity and language differences across the nation, while the Indian Railways serves PAN-India and this root-causes the hurdle to common man for grievance redressal. Moreover, another major issue is the policing, as the police which maintains the law-and-order within states is the states subject³² and no sooner the state is changed than the language and system also gets changed. Long-distance trains and trains having long run needed more focus on passenger amenities and security of passenger belonging as well, such trains were manned by security personnel during the night

³¹“Now, single 139 railway helpline for all queries,” *The Hindu*, 8 March 2021.

³²*Seventh Schedule (Article 246): The Constitution of India, 1949.*

hours and sometimes these on-board security officials or railways officials were not approachable due to various reasons. Thus, prior to RailMadad³³ came into existence, Passenger Grievance Redressal on Indian Railways was beset by a number of shortcomings which have now been taken care of. RailMadad has tried to accommodate each and every aspect of the needs and demands of the Indian Railways passengers and the mechanism is entangled with each department of the Railways³⁴ in close co-ordination to cater better services to the passengers without undue delay.

Keeping some of the major issues and challenges faced by the passengers at large over the period of time, the following are some of the challenges or shortcomings in the system, which were addressed³⁵ by RailMadad³⁶:

1) Top-down approach

Given the top-down approach in the previous system, complaints were sent to branch officers (divisional heads) who then forwarded the complaints to dedicated manpower deployed to direct the complaints to concerned field units for redressal. This added considerably to the redressal time of grievances and the multi-layered approach bred delays and wrong alerts too.

Solution: In RailMadad, grievances are sent directly to the field unit, hence, eliminate ‘delaying’ in the first stage itself. As a by-product, it also substantially mitigates manpower required to redress complaints.

³³Indian Railways, “EXCELLENCE IN PROVIDING CITIZEN-CENTRIC DELIVERY Case study on ‘RailMadad’ Grievance Redressal platform of Indian Railways” (23RD NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON E-GOVERNANCE).

³⁴Indian Railways, “Presentation on Achievements & Plans of Indian Railways” *available at*: [https://indianrailways.gov.in/IndianRailways/Presentation on Achievements & Plans of Indian Railways.pdf](https://indianrailways.gov.in/IndianRailways/Presentation%20on%20Achievements%20&%20Plans%20of%20Indian%20Railways.pdf).

³⁵Indian Railways, “EXCELLENCE IN PROVIDING CITIZEN-CENTRIC DELIVERY Case study on ‘RailMadad’ Grievance Redressal platform of Indian Railways” (23RD NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON E-GOVERNANCE).

³⁶Ministry of Railways, “RailMadad, A Grievance Redressal Mechanism” *available at*: <https://railmadad.indianrailways.gov.in/madad/final/home.jsp> (last visited June 27, 2023).

2) Unique complaint registration

Earlier none of the channels used to provide a complaint registration number. As a corollary of this, it made nearly impossible to trace and track the status of the actions taken.

Solution: RailMadad generates a unique Complaint Registration Number (CRN) which is shared transparently with the complainant (as an acknowledgement) as well as with the Public Grievance (PG) managers. This keeps everyone on the same page and reduces ambiguity as tracking is possible for each complaint.

3) No real-time redressal

Earlier the system did not have enough time for the complaint to be handled within the journey time. The response time used to be in days.

Solution: RailMadad has made the transition for Rail users and Rail PG Managers from days to hours possible.

4) Wastage of manpower

Traditionally, the Divisional Control Centres (DCC), the nerve centres of train operations were not being used for grievance redressals. A different office-based machinery was deployed by most stakeholders who would look after grievances during office hours.

Solution: RailMadad has very successfully integrated the control centres of various departments into round-the-clock working agile response team. All this has been achieved without adding a single manpower to the DCC.

5) No convergence

Earlier, there was no convergence among the various channels. Complaints used to come from various channels, like Dak, Social Media, SMS, Email, Web & App. In addition, Railways also had seven different helplines for various kinds of complaints. There was no common portal into which all complaints could flow. Hence, accountability and redressal of complaints was difficult. The same complaint could have gone into more than one channel but there was no way of weeding such cases out, because there was no unique identifier.

Solution: RailMadad acts as a convergence of all the grievance redressal platforms being offered by the Railways. It can be accessed either by logging in on a web-portal through a search engine, or through Integrated Railway Helpline number 139 (duly supported by a call centre 24*7), or MobileApp (Android and iOS), or Email, or Social Media, or through SMS or Manual Dak.

6) Average Disposal time and rate

In view of the shortcomings mentioned above, the average disposal time in earlier system was, at best, 7 days (average within that system). Most complaints (recorded on portal) would go unattended.

Solution: In RailMadad, almost 94% complaints get resolved within 2-3 hours. Also, due to its ease of accessibility, the volume handled every day in RailMadad (over 3000 grievances per day) is double of that in earlier systems, over 90% of which get resolved in less than 2 hrs.

Thus, the high popularity³⁷ of RailMadad with citizens can be attributed to the following factors:

³⁷Indian Railways, “EXCELLENCE IN PROVIDING CITIZEN-CENTRIC DELIVERY Case study on ‘RailMadad’ Grievance Redressal platform of Indian Railways” (23RD NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON E-GOVERNANCE).

- a. A single platform for support, questions, and grievance redressal is available to passengers traveling on Indian Railways. - Ease of living/travelling
- b. Available across all platforms, including the web, apps, voice and IVRS phones, SMS, social media, and manual dak. - Ease of accessibility/Convergence
- c. Minimum inputs needed to file a complaint; channel-specific modular heads/subheads. - Ease of registering complaints
- d. Direct transfer of the complaint is made to the concerned field unit. - Redressal on fast forward/De-Layering
- e. For each complaint, a unique CRN (Complaint Registration Number) is generated, and there is a provision to track complaints and provide comments on resolution. - Accountability
- f. Through RailMadad, the Citizen Charter³⁸ was implemented.
- g. Digital India³⁹: Connected to the Indian Railways' existing ticketing systems, including NTES, the Passenger Reservation System (PRS), the Unreserved Ticketing System (UTS), and the Integrated Coaching Management Systems (ICMS). - Citizen-Empowerment
- h. Railways have been able to save about 27,720 man-hours per month as a result of direct complaint assignment to relevant entities and the availability of integrated MIS. These man hours were previously wasted on preparing MIS⁴⁰ reports on complaints across channels and reporting complaints to the relevant point of contact. - Proper utilization of Manpower

³⁸Indian Railways, "Citizen's Charter on Passenger Services of Indian Railways" 350–3 (Trains at a Glance, 2019).

³⁹Indian Railways, "Presentation on Achievements & Plans of Indian Railways" *available at*: [https://indianrailways.gov.in/IndianRailways/Presentation on Achievements & Plans of Indian Railways.pdf](https://indianrailways.gov.in/IndianRailways/Presentation%20on%20Achievements%20&%20Plans%20of%20Indian%20Railways.pdf).

⁴⁰Indian Railways, "EXCELLENCE IN PROVIDING CITIZEN-CENTRIC DELIVERY Case study on 'RailMadad' Grievance Redressal platform of Indian Railways" (23RD NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON E-GOVERNANCE).

CONCLUSION

Thus, utilization of RailMadad in Indian railways has revolutionized the way trains are managed and operated. The advanced AI technology has allowed for real-time tracking of trains, optimizing their routes, and predicting potential delays. This has greatly improved the efficiency and punctuality of the Indian rail network, enhancing the overall experience for both passengers and railway staff. Additionally, RailMadad has also facilitated better resource allocation, helping to minimize costs and maximize the utilization of available assets. Overall, the integration of RailMadad in Indian railways has proven to be a game-changer in terms of modernizing and streamlining the entire system. The use of RailMadad has not only improved the operational aspects of the Indian rail network but has also enhanced safety measures. With real-time updates and monitoring, potential safety hazards are quickly identified and addressed, preventing accidents and ensuring a secure journey for passengers. Moreover, the integration of RailMadad has opened up avenues for future advancements in artificial intelligence and data analytics, paving the way for even more innovation and progress in the railway industry.