



## IN THE SUSPENDED GONDOLA

Wednesday, July 26, 2017 – from Madurai to Rameswaram (India)

(9.282713,79.197974)

Shortly after passing Mandapam, the train slows down from 40 to 30 km/h, to 20, to 10 km/h, and finally glides over the rails at walking pace, hooting loudly every few seconds. The family, with whom I have shared the compartment from Madurai onwards, begins to get impatient. They press their heads against the bars of the windows to see what's going on outside. Even the delicate-looking mother, who has been looking at me curiously throughout the ride without ever making eye-contact with me, is now holding onto the window-bar and staring out into the tracks. Only the youngest, an infant swaying gently in the improvised little cloth-hammock tied across two berths by his aunt, continues to doze peacefully.

I step out to the entrance area to see what the excitement is all about – and I find that the wagon appears to be flying. When I stick my head out of the

door – which almost always remains open in Indian trains – I see that there's no more ground under the chassis on either side and that the running boards end in nothingness and, far below them, the waves of the sea are churning curls of spinach-green. The Pamban Bridge is so narrow that the heavy train has turned into a floating air-gondola, as it were.

When I point my camera lens at the floating iron to shoot a photograph of it, I see through the lens that the mother is looking directly at me from inside the coach in a friendly, affectionate way – it's a fleeting connect between her and me. A moment later there's a wail, followed by laughter. The infant has woken up, has freed himself from his hammock, and is doing a full striptease, revealing his little member with a glorious chuckle.

Translated from German by Gunvanthi Balaram.

