

# CITY EXPRESS



THE NEW  
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## Showcasing India from an ambassador

Express News Service

**Chennai:** In a bid to capture the cultural and economic dichotomy of the Indian subcontinent, two Britishers recently embarked on a journey across the two distinct Indias: its culture hubs and its commercial capitals. The result of this month-long expedition has been a BBC documentary *India on wheels* and a rich repository of varied experiences in the country for the travellers.

Sharing some of those vignettes of India during his part of the project on Tuesday was popular BBC anchor Justin Rowllatt, who captured the quintessential culture-dominant India across Agra, Varanasi, Lucknow and Kolkata. And what better way to take a peek at vintage India than through its rickety, old, Indian terrain-friendly Am-



PHOTO: D SAMPATH KUMAR

bassador!

With no door handle on its right rear door, a makeshift cap to fill for a missing fuel tank lid and completely undusted, Rowllatt's constant companion during his tour has been an ambassador from Kolkatta, manned

by a driver Bobby, that fully fits the vintage tag. Travelling in this decade-old, second hand 1996-model Amby has been nothing short of exciting, he begins. "Its iconic design from the 1940s is still recognisable in new India and I thought it

would be more fun to note the country's transformation through this vehicle," he says. Calling it a car of character, Justin called the Ambassador a living part of Indian history and said it should be cherished more.

The vintage vehicle, on its part, ensured him his quotient of 'fun' with its brakes failing during travel, and with a peacock falling on it in the highway Agra-Varanasi highway. "But it was fun all the way," said the Britisher who read up several books on India ahead of his travel to the country.

Speaking about his Indian experience, he says it was completely enriching. "The documentary required me to interact with varied Indians, from the secluded Dongria tribes to farmer families. India is a country where diversities are apparent even on one street. India is more a continent than

a country," he says of his learning from the project. Justin also noted that India had the potential to become a super-power like China, but had not harnessed it entirely.

Justin's part of the project concluded on Tuesday in Chennai, regarded as India's automobile hub. "*India on Wheels* being a project that shows India through its distinct vehicles. So, we decided it made sense to conclude it in Chennai, regarded as the country's automobile hub," he said. Meanwhile, *India Shining*, shot across Jaipur, Ahmedabad, Mumbai, Bangalore and Chennai, was traversed using a slick Mahindra Bolero, with host Anitha Rani, a Britisher of Indian descent.

The documentary, shot as a two-part series lasting an hour each, is expected to be telecast in September.

MALE MODEL GET (only 100-200 per day (only on the rent) based on their hours of use and condition of the vehicle. "With a sizeable chunk of my earnings being spent on paying rent, I decided to buy my own auto. But now instead of paying rent, I end up paying a bigger sum as interest to a private lender who financed my auto," says Pazhaniappan, an auto driver in Choolaimedu.

One of the major barriers in access to credit, have been the tedious procedures and documents demanded by the banks to finance autos, that drivers barely possess. The report says that only 29 per cent of drivers get loans from banks to buy autos while 46 per cent depend on private financiers who charge exorbitant rates of interest.

"While banks charge an interest rate of 11.25 per cent to 13.5 per cent, private moneylenders charge around 24 per cent, which is double the monetary burden," notes the report. "Removal of these proce-

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maximum after repaying rents, interests, spending on fuel, maintenance of the vehicle, fines and penalties, estimates the report. With 60.5 per cent of the drivers surveyed having a 4-5member family to support, a savings of ₹150 or less becomes grossly inadequate — another reason why they resort to fleecing the passengers.

Unlike in Chennai, most prominent cities like Bangalore, Delhi, Mumbai, Pune and Thiruvananthapuram have seen a periodic upward revision of the auto fares. Experts cite this as the primary reason for smooth operations and the arbitrary charging attitude