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Modern Toilet

G. Gobi

Translation by

Arunesh Babu, Theatre Artist at 'Yaazh Art Academy', Pondicherry

As light enters the stage, a house is seen. From a room inside, a mid-aged man wearing only pattapattiⁱ trousers and vest comes to centre of the house. In his hands, he holds a pant, shirt and an electric iron box. He keeps the pant and shirt on a table near a wall, and connects the plug of iron box to socket. After that, as he irons his clothes, looking at the audience, he starts talking.

My name is Razzak. Like you all, who live with Aadhaarⁱⁱ card number, trustable voter identity card and other verifiable identities, I am an ordinary Indian citizen. And now, I am a Government servant too! Yes, I am a government servant who is hired for a period of 5 years on contract basis. With hope, I am waiting for this job to become permanent as time passes, like every other common man of India. (Irons his shirt in a different angle as he speaks) But, to not stay as a common man forever, I'm trying to utilize this great opportunity rightly. (As he wears the ironed shirt) Ah! You're thinking what that opportunity is, aren't you? I have got power... responsibility! (He begins ironing his pants)

Yes, three years ago, there was a 'ritual' to elect the leader of the health department I am working at. I too had my voting right. As I was new to work and to vote, I cast my vote to the person who the majority of the department wanted to elect and spoke about. (Putting on the ironed pants) We can't waste our vote, right? (Slowly coming to the front stage) especially, in turning my job into a permanent one, the leader will play a huge role, right? A bit selfish, yes. But, the head being a lover of public interest, and also the idea of "New", was spread by the advertisements. (As he combs his hair before a mirror) Yes, as expected, the head we elected started making unexpected changes, once he came to power.

ⁱ An inner garment looks like short trousers, mostly white, with thin blue striped over it.

ⁱⁱ An All-in-one identity in India based on biometric and demographic data.

As his first act, he started his foreign tours all around the globe. You might think, "Why should a health officer tour the world?" Well, back then, I had the same question too. (Now, he keeps the lunch boxes in his bag) Shocked, on a Friday, all the officers gathered and started discussing why the head goes on foreign tours. What's more shocking is that, the very same evening, the head arranged a meeting with all the officers, as if he knew what being spoken behind him. He then started stating the reasons for his foreign trips point by point. They are...

Point number 1. My travel to foreign nations is to learn how to use the modern toilets and the process of recycling human shit and wastes to produce food and ornaments, to adapt technological advancements in our country too.

Point number 2. As the second step, I tour to bring our investors in foreign nations and ask them to make the parts for their toilets in our office.

Point number 3. Workers of all stages in this office, who get used to the modern toilets, as the next step, must go to the common folks in person, and give them the instructions to use the modern toilets. That is, our people's homes will become our new office.

Point number 4. We will demonetize the money earned using corruption by the people in power last term. We will take them out legally and then use them to develop our office.

At last, with a smile, looking at us who voted for him, he said, "your jobs will be made permanent and your will be promoted based on how faster you execute the plans I mentioned regarding the modern developments".

"Our office has never seen an officer like him. Because of him, our nation will become clean. For such a clean state, every material will be produced in our own place and used not just in our country, but will be exported to foreign nations too setting an example." Everyone in my office believed this. So, we ended up deciding every single person's contribution is necessary for such a change. We vowed to work with our leader as his arms and legs, heart and brain, thoughts and actions, timelessly. (*Acting absent minded*) I started somewhere and ended up talking all these! Argh! (*Regained the lost thought*) Yes! My responsibility in the department is, people's who come to the office to submit petition for their issues. My duty is to guide them about the modern toilets and how to use them. That's my job!

That is, I must practically explain how one must sit in the modern toilet, when to release water and how one should sprinkle the scent in that room. That is clean India, a step ahead!

(He exits to go to office. From the other side, the stage appears to be his office. After entering, he places his lunch bags in one shelf. From another shelf, he takes items like gloves, mask and heavy boots and wears them. He slowly moves and tries to enter a room, but steps back outside closing his nose as he entered inside.)

Argh! Even before I came, someone must've entered and left. Looks like today also I have cleaning work before instruction work! Again!

(He speaks as he entered and cleans) Last week, someone who stood in queue and used this 'New' toilet asked me, "Why should we get used to this 'imported' method?"

So, I said, "Truly, I have no idea what my leader meant by those. If you know, please tell me". So, he responded, "Well, I don't have any answers too, but i have questions. Why these modern toilets, anyway? Is it not to segregate us, branding us 'useless' because we don't know how to use these modern toilets? Isn't modern toilet a way to establish the idea that class with Imported knowledge and exported mentality alone are the fittest to survive here?" and before I could react, he was gone.

(As he sprinkled the phenylⁱⁱⁱ, he talks) I graduated Chemical engineering. Like everyone else here, I too studied to merely pass. It was a time when many jobs bloomed like Data entry and programming. Then, I was scared of computers, so I threw tantrums as if I wanted only Chemical field. That didn't happen either and with time, there was pressure from family too. So, I settled down for jobs like hotel supervisor, lorry booking officer and life went on. At last, I took this job as my uncle advised. Well, this is just another hope too. This is an unfamiliar space. I just tell people whatever my officers instruct me to say. I know that many in this office are in the same mental state as mine. *(Chuckles)* They'll be talking when we meet in the evening in the tea shop, "we're working as we're directed... We don't have answers for anything!"

(Exhausted, he goes to keep his things in some corner, but suddenly, with shock, he fears doing that and resumes his work) Permanence! As the illusion of stability, created in our minds and lives, keeps chasing us, we learnt to grit our teeth and tolerate. Obedience became the essence of life.

(As he speaks, he checks out time; Sighs with relief and removes his gloves. He comes out hastily and takes out a water bottle and drinks...) Yes! This is growth. A modern toilet in this

ⁱⁱⁱ An aromatic liquid used in toilets and bathrooms for fragrance

office is definitely a growth. It is growth for it turns the savage into the civilized, right? Many products of private industries have now reached the homes of common people through this office! Yes, those who fall here, associates their failure with their status. The advertisements produced in our office help that too.

(As if he heard someone coming, he rises and rushes to his place and prepares to recite what he memorized) Welcome to Modern Toilet, may you have a sweet day! Listen, as you walk inside, on your right side, you can see a machine which looks like a box. Place your left thumb's on it, to register your fingerprint. At once, you will a door opening on your left. If you remove your lower garments and place them there, another door will open next to it. There, you will find a new towel. Robe the towel, and get on the escalator with green lights. It will take you to the toilet. After finishing your business there, if you register your retina scan in an eye recorder, you will get your water. Once you finish washing off, you will find something like a fan regulator behind you. If you press that, it will scent the whole place. Return the same way you entered, wear your dress and exit. When you reach the entrance, you will receive a receipt of the time you spent in the toilet from a small machine.

(He slowly comes to the front stage) Here, did you notice the left thumb of the guy who entered the toilet? *(Laughs to himself)* That's right, why should you notice! The ink he touched on his thumb to sign hasn't dried up yet. Definitely, he's going to stumble inside. When he comes out, he'll be a changed man who believes in the modern and advanced products of this advanced office. *(Laughs)*

Ah! I was saying something before I went to my instructor job... Yes! They will equate that with our status and motivate the markets. They'll struggle, and eventually they'll kill themselves.

(Phone rings. Takes the phone from his pant pocket and listens. As an 'obedient' worker, with shock, replies with only "Okay, sir!" multiple times. In the end, he turns off the mobile and with nervous body language...)

The speaker was the Health officer. The context is, a VIP who came to discuss new deals is about to use this modern toilet, here and now. All I need to do is *(gets up as if he decided something and presses a button outside the toilet and switches off. Mimicking the man who was inside earlier, shocked and hurried outside...)* Sir, there is a huge problem with the toilet equipment. Please, go outside and shit in open land nearby. Apologies. *(He acts like walking him out)* From tomorrow, I assure you that the modern toilet will work efficiently as always.

(He walks with him for some distance and watches him go after sending him off. As the guy fades away, he rushes back to the toilet and presses the same button to switch it on. He adjusts his gloves, mask and boots and stands there. After a short span, he acts as if the guest arrived at the toilet and hurries to greet him and talks...)

Sir, as you enter inside, on your right side, you will find a machine that looks like a box...

(He stops talking as if the officer asked him to. He shuts his mouth with his hands. Again, he goes and stand in a corner as if the guest asked him to. In some time, he acts like the guest who entered inside comes out, running back to his original place and greets him. He stays frozen until he fades away. Then, as if he heard some disappointing news, he moves to the front stage with a tired body language, standing broken and starts talking over his phone)

Anna^{iv}... is Uncle there?

Yes, this is Razzak.

Sorry?

Oh! He's with the head?

Okay...

Anna , can you do me a favor?

Uncle got me a job in this health department and now there's a new problem.

No, no, not a social issue... This is a personal problem, my job's at stake.

Yes... A manufacturer of the equipment for modern toilet just visited the office I'm working at and used the toilet I'm in charge of.

No... I didn't make any mistake.

When he left the place, he spoke with our officer something in English. He said that the instructions I'm giving to people could be recorded and played to the users inside and outside the toilet. That will also spare the money they credit me for this job. Anna, please tell Uncle about this and ask him to talk to the head about this. As the officer in my department is also a 'practical' person, he will comply to the new plan. As I'm not a permanent employee, the

^{iv}Anna, meaning Brother, but also used in addressing with respect.

workers' union can't help me. I'll come to the party office by evening. I'll hang up. Yes. Thanks *Anna*. I'll hang up.

(He hangs up the phone. He sits up straight to see someone entering the toilet. He rushes back to his place and stands there...) Welcome to Modern Toilet, may you have a sweet day! Listen, as you walk inside, on your right side, you can see a machine which looks like a box. Place your left thumb's on it, to register your fingerprint. At once, you will a door opening on your left. If you remove your lower garments and place them there, another door will open next to it. There, you will find a new towel.