

I. Up Against the Wall

Western readers of international news and travel blogs may be faced with a wide variety of somewhat shocking impressions with regards to the phenomenon of public urination in South and East Asia, as well as in nearby Oceania. Attributed to everything from drunkenness and poverty to rebellion and simple cultural difference, one may be prone to reservations about sanitation and hygiene or even to giving the once offensively racialised "yellow countries" an entirely new etymology.

Scholarly treatments of public urination have been no less mixed, with the act taking as wide ranging symbolic functions as an aspect of counterculture (Pickering 2010) to serving as a tribute to capitalism in Chinese film (Li 2007, 299). Indeed, Shanthi Vavani V Raja Mohan and Mohd Tajuddin bin Ninggal, in their study on Malaysia, go so far as to list public urination as a possible example of a sex crime (2008, 3).

To better help the reader navigate the complex world of public urination in this specific, regional context, I present the following paper, divided into two main parts. The first presents a survey, by no means comprehensive, of various examples of public urination and associated controversies deriving from a number of nations in the region. Although many of the media sources used for this survey are local, care should be taken to be aware of the possibility of "Orientalizing" (Said 1979) influences in the presentation of this media information in a Western context. The second section will delve deeper into the contemporary history of struggles over public urination in a specifically Indian context. While similarly not comprehensive for reasons of space, this analysis should help elucidate many of the broader issues in question with regards to larger contemporary struggles over sanitation, poverty, identity, equality and personal freedom with regards to this phenomenon.

II. Peeing Across Borders

Standards for the proper disposal of bodily fluids are hardly uniform across the region. They vary from country to country, and perhaps more importantly, across borders with regards to region, gender and social class. The issues relevant to public urination may differ wildly, ranging from those issues faced by women in poor rural communities to those faced by wealthy urban men. Nonetheless,

some effort has been made to organize the discussion according to country of origin, touching lightly for each region upon the most readily accessible materials, with some sensitivity for those materials' origins.

Particular amounts of such sensitivity must, of course, be applied to early portrayals of public urination in China, particularly when depicted by U.S. outsiders in text that may easily be described as "imperial" or "hegemonic" (D'Archangelis 2008). Depictions of this type present the Chinese as unsanitary, spitting and publicly urinating (D'Archangelis 2008, 434). On the other hand, while they may generalize and stereotype, they cannot be completely false, as evidenced by the need for some tenancy rules, threatening to evict residents on the grounds of public urination or spitting, or based on dated Chinese cartoons, used to compare men who urinate publicly with dogs (Nakajima 2008, 59). Although such things give evidence that public urination was or has been, at least in some areas, fairly commonplace, they also make it clear that such practices have not (or not always) been publicly condoned. Such rules or illustrations carry the message that "public urination is bad because it is not only unsanitary, but also uncivilized and bad manners" (Nakajima 2008, 60).

In Australia, likewise, incidents of public urination are made visible more by government attempts to bring them into line than by documentation of the problems themselves. Although no laws explicitly forbid public urination in Victoria or New South Wales (FindLaw 2012), people have been arrested in Sydney for "offensive conduct" after publicly urinating (Hall 2011), and others have been found to be a "public nuisance" (Findlaw 2012). The city of Sydney, in an effort to stem public urination, particularly attributed to drunken men late at night, voted to install open-air urinals in 2011, after reporting that the city's cleanup bill related to public urination amounted to \$7 million per year. The new urinals were installed in the hopes that they (open-air constructions that provide only the merest advantage of privacy) would help to "stem the tide" (Hall 2011) and reduce the city's costs. Imperfect establishments, the new urinals offer no place for the washing of hands and are a male-only solution, with no solution yet offered to women.

The city of Perth, meanwhile, has received "ongoing complaints from the public concerning the lack of public toilets" (King 2012) and has responded to its own problems with public urination in a similar way, placing open air urinals at what the city's Works and Urban Development Committee called "public urination hot-spots." Unlike the units deployed in Sydney, however, these units are self-cleaning and stealth oriented, retreating into the ground and only being visible between the hours of 10pm and 5:30am on weekends.

Other attempts to crack down on public urination have been seen as more oppressive and authoritarian in nature, such as in Vietnam, where the city of Saigon, in 2008, declared it to be "The

Year of the Civilized Lifestyle" and took the opportunity to crack down on "littering, swearing, public urination, traffic jams and inappropriate dress" (Lindberg 2008, 3). Not all urinary incidents from Vietnam are about the imposition of government, however, as demonstrated in Hanoi in 2012, as 10-year-old Vu Dang Anh Tho created a major stir by entering a picture in a public contest that criticized adults for urinating in "the wrong places" (Tuotirenews 2012).

Singapore also demonstrated an intersection between art and urine where at least two performance art acts have involved public urination as a major aspect, first in 1994 (in which the performer urinated into a bucket and then proceeded to drink it) and another in 2011 (where the performer would periodically wet his own pants as part of the performance). The first of these was performed on two occasions and contributed to a ban on the funding for performance art in the country that would last for almost a decade (Jusdeananas 2011). The second was featured in the Singapore Survey 2011: Imagine Malaysia.

Travel blogs about Korea express similar levels of shock about local customs, and although they do not typically warn travelers against coming, warnings about public urination are commonplace. "The Korean people are very clean and generally never litter," writes one blogger, "But they don't consider urinating in a public place as particularly wrong, especially while intoxicated after drinking Soju" (Osta 2012). Another states that "Koreans don't seem at all shy at this bodily function[sic]" (ESL South Korea 2012) and another tells travelers, "don't be surprised to see someone peeing behind a car because they were too lazy to walk all the way to the toilet, or women holding a young child over a sewer gate to relieve themselves" (PlanetESL 2012). Even the Koreans have rules, however, as evidenced by the public outrage from a predominantly Korean online community over photos of a man caught peeing on the subway, published by koreaBANG (2012).

In Cambodia, the annual Water Festival has been hailed by some naysayers as an attempt to "set a new world record for mass public urination" (Phnomenon 2006), while for others public urination plays a more personal story, with documented cases of public urination or other "aggravated felonies" (such as shop lifting) forming the grounds for deportation of some Cambodian immigrants to the United States now living in Phnom Penh (Shay 2009).

III. Ur-In(e)dia

The colonial past of India is a long and tragic one, and it might be easy to envision resistance against the use of public or private sanitation facilities in certain regions as an extension of the resistance against that colonial past, with the traditional Indian habit of handling such matters out-of-

doors clashing with the Western, hegemonic standard, but that does not seem to be accurate. As poetic as it might be to posit the conflicts over public urination and defecation in India as a transfer of oppression from John Bull to another John (specifically "The John"), the Indian debate over public urination revolves primarily around issues of sanitation and hygiene on the one hand, pitted against poverty, habit and access to facilities on the other. So entrenched has the practice become that some Indians have come to joke that public urination has become "a national past time" (Tandon 2012).

Multiple attempts have been made within contemporary history to ban or restrict public urination, particularly within certain regions, and first and foremost among arguments used by those who protest against these attempts is that, as one Indian man put it, "There just aren't enough toilets around here" (Tandon 2012). This is hard to deny. At present, nearly half of India's 1.2 billion residents (Couriermail 2012) do not have a working toilet in their homes, according to the most recent census, making access to a mobile phone more common in India than access to private toilet facilities (BBC 2012b), and the problem has actually worsened over the last decade, despite improvements in other areas (Yardley 2012). The problem is significantly worse in rural areas as well, where according to a 2007 summit in Delhi, only 15% of people have access to a toilet of any kind (BBC 2007).

One method used to try to counter this lack in Mumbai are the regular "Toilet Festivals" (Appadurai 2002, cited in Hawkins 2003). The Toilet Festivals were started by The Alliance, a collection of activist groups working to fight poverty in the area, and the purpose of the festivals is to allow for the construction and display of public toilets which are "designed by and for the urban poor" (Hawkins 2003). Organizers of the festivals try to time the festivals to coincide with visits from officials of state and local aid organizations (Appadurai 2002, 39), presumably to draw attention and secure funding for additional facilities.

There are those who doubt the validity of the lack-of-access excuse for public urination, however. Those who express such doubts may cite cases of seeing men publicly urinating just outside of public toilets (something countered by supporters of public urination who argue that the toilets in question are too disgusting and badly maintained to use) (Tandon 2012). Authorities also insist that in rural areas, many often publicly urinate or defecate despite having toilets at home, because they "prefer the outdoors" (BBC 2012c). If this is true, more than just new toilets will be required to put an end to public urination and defecation, although the toilets will be a necessary first step. Awareness of this fact has shown in recent efforts to fight the practice.

One of the earlier among many failed attempts to bring public urination under control was related by Murdur and Lakshmikantha (2011). During the late 1990's in Bangalore, Dr. A. Ravindra, then the Bruhat Bangalore Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) commissioner (since promoted to be the state

adviser on urban affairs), attempted to implement a ban on public urination in the Bangalore area. Launching an information campaign aimed at eliminating the practice, he applied minor fines (Rs.10) to perpetrators, intended more to shame them into compliance with the laws than to actually punish them. Unfortunately for him, public response to his efforts was harsh. Even those assigned to enforce the law, initially enthusiastic, found their enthusiasm quickly wearing off: according to the enforcers' reports, those fined would often urinate on the officials or flash their genitals at them as a sign of defiance, something the enforcers found both humiliating and disgusting. These individual responses were followed by more formal public protests, as those in defiance of the new rules cited the usual lack of public toilets, which they said forced them to urinate openly. Although the rule was enforced vigorously for five months, the plan slowly died away as more and more people on all sides came to object to the new law.

Many other attempts at establishing anti-public urination programs failed to progress beyond the original bureaucratic stages, but the BBMP attempt would not be the last. Finally gaining momentum in 2006, the efforts of public health officials won over on the policy level in Rajasthan, with a ban on graffiti, spitting and public urination through the Rajasthan Prevention of Defacement of Property Ordinance (BBC 2006), a law geared toward making the city more presentable for visitors. Calcutta would take other measures in the years that followed (BBC 2009).

In 2008, the Bangalore case was revisited in the aftermath of the original BBMP failure. A new plan was devised to revisit their attempt to enforce a public urination ban, this time by employing retired military personnel in a 60-man team. Now charging Rs.100 per violation (ten times the original rate), they would carry on the original project and attempt a more definitive crack down on the forbidden practice (Murdur and Lakshmi Kantha 2011). Unfortunately, despite the ambitious plan, efforts were stalled in processing for eight months and ultimately scrapped, probably on grounds related to the 60-member force being relocated to Kashmir.

By 2012, events had progressed to the point that India's rural development minister, Jairam Ramesh, made the claim that the country was in need of more toilets than temples. The comment incited a response from the devoutly religious Indian people, leading to protests outside the minister's own home. Nonetheless, he followed up the comment only days later by urging women not to get married to men who do not own a toilet (Tandon 2012). It's possible that his comments may be related to or inspired by the actions of Anita Narre, who in February of the same year, left her husband's home two days after their marriage, because he did not own a working toilet, or they may be connected to the "No Toilet, No Bride" program discussed later. In Narre's case, she did actually return to the home

eight days later, but only after her husband had built a new toilet with his savings and "some support from the village council" (BBC 2012a). An NGO later announced a reward for the woman of \$10,000 for her bravery.

In November, less than a month before this paper was written, the state of Rajasthan reintroduced the method (which had failed in Bangalore) of shaming people into compliance with public urination standards, this time using drums, whistles and shouting to draw attention to those not in compliance. Excuses about lack of access to toilets were considered less valid in the region now, where nearly 80% of the homes have toilets, and officials hope to encourage the remainder to build some of their own, even offering financial assistance for them to do so (BBC 2012c). More time will be needed to see if these efforts will at last prove fruitful.

Still, one effort has, thus far, proved successful, if only on the small scale. Those wishing to protect their walls from being urinated upon by passing locals have successfully done so, in many cases, by displaying images of gods upon their surface (BBC 2009). This has led one reporter to ironically remark that "divine intervention is the only thing that can stop men from urinating in public" (Tandon 2012).

The steady progress in the fight against public urination in India, however, if progress it has been, has not been without its tolls, both in financial costs, human dignity and even human life. Barely a few weeks have passed since international news agencies aired the story of a seventeen-year-old girl in New Delhi, who was shot dead by a man after she complained about him urinating at the entrance of the building they both stayed in (Couriermail 2012). The man came to the girl's home later with a gun, shot and killed her and wounded her mother. The story made headlines for numerous news agencies, but it was not the first case of such an incident in India. Indeed, India's first killing related to public urination took place three years before.

The first victim of such an incident, Himanshu Sharma, age twenty-two, was shot outside a public gas station in October of 2009. When he began relieving himself near the pump, the manager of the establishment had objected and called out some employees to assist. Sharma's friends had backed him up, and a row ensued, escalating to the point that a gas station guard drew a firearm and shot Sharma, killing him (BBC 2009).

Even more so, in some ways, than for the small number of people actually killed as a result of public urination politics, is the suffering of another, much larger group, oppressed by the lack of facilities and shifting taboos. After all, as Tandon points out, the people spotted publicly urinating are "almost always men" (2012). If toilets are in short supply, but only the men are seen urinating, how do the women fare? Surely the women have the same needs and certainly no greater resources, but their

struggle is altogether different. As Mary Douglas so blithely put it in 1966, "Gendered policing of bodily fluids has been part of the maintenance of every social order." India is no exception.

While men can feel free to take care of their business wherever they wish, many rural women are forced to relieve themselves outdoors in groups before dawn, because like men, they lack facilities to do so indoors and must handle the process in open fields. Unlike men, however, the women need to protect themselves from jeering and sexual assault while doing so (Yardley 2012). In urban areas, where public toilets are available, there is often a clear gender imbalance. The Kusumpur area, a slum area in Delhi, has almost no private toilets, and only one public toilet per five hundred women. The capital, taken as a whole, according to a 2009 study by the Center for Civil Society, had at that time only 132 public toilets for women, compared with 1,534 for men, and of that small selection of available toilets, many of the women's toilets were barely functioning (Roy 2011). In Mumbai, home of the previously mentioned Toilet Festivals (Appadurai 2002) and India's largest city, the balance is somewhat less severe but still very present, with 5,993 public toilets for men and only 3,536 for women (Men also have an additional 2,466 urinals) (Yardley 2012). Many women are forced to cope with what is called the "flying toilet," essentially a plastic bag which is later disposed of (Roy 2011), and many other women, already in destitute financial circumstances, find themselves required to pay for access at many of the scant public restrooms (either as an official policy or as the result of corruption) (Yardley 2012). This imbalance has socioeconomic repercussions as well. Having a public restroom near a workplace can be very important, affecting a woman's mobility, their ability to work, and even their safety, since many rapes occur in slums where women have to walk a long way to reach the toilet (Roy 2011).

These gross (no pun intended) injustices have, in recent times, spawned a number of equal rights movements, from one in Mumbai, fighting for increased numbers of public toilets for women, which the media has playfully dubbed "The Right to Pee" (Yardley 2012), to a movement started by the government of Haryana, called "No Toilet, No Bride," which encourages parents arranging marriages for their daughters to refuse to enter nuptial negotiations until the groom's family either has or can commit to getting a toilet installed in their home (Roy 2011). Unlike efforts against male public urination, efforts to provide facilities for women are showing signs of promise. The Right to Pee campaigners have produced 50,000 signature petitions in Mumbai and report being in negotiations over the gender of the workforce to install new toilets there, while in Haryana, there exists at least anecdotal evidence to suggest progress toward a new emphasis during nuptial negotiations, as some families with daughters begin to catch on with the movement's goals.

IV. Round and Round it Goes

Although public urination occurs as a common theme in news stories and blogs regarding many countries in the region, the nature of that presentation is not always consistent. What may in one area be a culturally embedded practice, where the performance of certain biological functions in the public realms is simply not (or not as heavily) stigmatized, in others it may occur in associations with drunkenness or even be focused most strongly on certain times and places. Some depictions may just be the exaggerated perceptions of outsiders. There can also often exist a disparity between the norms of society and the norms of public policy, and either set of norms may have fine distinctions not readily apparent to those unaccustomed to them. The latter can be seen in the case of Korea, where having a child urinate into a sewage drain is acceptable, but a man urinating inside a subway train is not, or it can be seen in Singapore, where urinating in ones pants is permissible as part of performance art but urinating into a bucket and drinking it is frowned upon. While few sweeping conclusions can be drawn from such a brief survey, it should at least serve to stress the incongruities and heterogeneity of social norms throughout the region.

The case of India is particularly complex, with public urination having a convoluted history of attempted bans and restrictions and social upheavals fought against them. Many programs to cut back on public urination are defeated by inaction on the part of those called to implement them, while those that do go into effect often meet with fierce resistance. A lack of toilets is often cited as the cause for public urination in the country, and programs have gone into place to attempt to counter that lack, but not everyone agrees that the lack alone is the cause of the problem. An early attempt in Bangalore was followed years later by other attempts in Rajasthan and Calcutta. Even the solutions to toilet shortages have produced additional problems, however, since increasing the number of urinals and male-focused public toilets discriminates against women who, while not urinating publicly with the same visibility and frequency as their male counterparts, still possess the same biological needs as they do and may be in more desperate need of the facilities to handle those needs properly. Movements to reduce public urination by males have yet to produce clear results, but movements to provide facilities for women are showing some early signs of progress.

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