

# THE SENTENCE

TOILET  
TALES  
SO FAR

## THE NECESSITY OF HIDDEN ESSENTIALS

A toilet is the most intimate space within a building- a space where we demand complete privacy. Ironically, it is also one of the most overlooked components in a building. Why has society grown to deny its biology? If excretion is important, why are our essentials limited to obscure backyards? Architecture grew, cities grew so did the need for public spaces. Any living space would need a place to sit, eat and urinate. Public toilets are honest footprints of our culture. They have evolved alongside architecture. In due course the two got integrated showcasing the change in the perception of personal privacy of people.

In light of our experience of a simple journey in India, began Toilet Tales. In November 2017, Recycle bin launched a campaign to study, quantify and enhance the toilet culture of Kerala.

The campaign intended to study the situation of public toilets in Trivandrum and to generate a new design paradigm for public toilets that is sensitive to and inclusive of people from all walks of life. The uniformity in the social construct of the state ensures that the pattern or the toilet language identified in any one place in Kerala can be applied throughout the state.

What started off as an introspective discussion was furthered to a more public realm through the toilet debate. It provided a common platform for architects, urban designers, transgender activists, differently abled and psychologists, each and every one of them adding a new layer to the discussion, parallelly introducing the Kakkoos App. Voices to be heard and toilets to be seen, the Kakkoos App gave way to the accessibility of ones' need, locating and rating our sanitary facilities.

*"A holistic research on the phenomenon of public toilets."*  
- Recyclebin



*why not a democratic toilet?*

The process did not reveal ~~glad tidings~~ shady corners, unlit alleys, isolated places often ward off users. But even security was not a uniform concern. It can be said without doubt that inherently and inadvertently most of the public spaces that we use are designed with least consideration to the comfort of genders other than the masculine. This power dynamic is well illustrated by the fact that out of the 50 toilets surveyed, only 37 are open to women. An ideal solution to any issues in relation to toilet quite usually rounds to increasing numbers. Its maintenance, functionality, accessibility or location takes minimum priority. The survey indicates clear disconnect between the physical and phenomenological aspect of toilet design. It calls for a framework for governance in order to develop a successful system of our most private yet public place. While developing this framework, the real question arises whether it's equity or equality that a progressive society aspires. Equitable distribution of toilets ensures that everyone gets a fair share of the public facility. Again we are talking about toilets in a quantity oriented manner. There is often one thing that is missing from these toilets - sensitivity. Public infrastructure should never discriminate based on a person's caste, class, gender or any such grounds. It is first and foremost a facility made for the people utilizing their tax money. To limit a person from using it on any grounds is indeed a botch on democracy. What should be aspired for is an equitable distribution and access to these facilities which are sensitive and inclusive at the same time. Leading up to the question, a society that works on a democratic system:

SNIPPETS

WE DONT GET WATER EVERYDAY,SO IT IS  
DIFFICULT FOR US TO CLEAN IT PROPERLY

WE HAVE ASKED SEVERAL TIMES FOR ASSISTANCE  
FOR MAINTENANCE BUT HAS NOT RECIEVED ANY.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?  
WOMEN DONT COME HERE.

C  
O  
G  
N  
I  
T  
I  
O  
N



A B A D O N E D



B V C K A V B D



E D G E



When finding a toilet is a major concern, there always looms the question of their usability. One of the toilets is abandoned altogether, another in a dilapidated condition, one hidden and the conditions of the others are quite deplorable.





**THE OBVIOUS,  
OBSCURE AND  
OVERLOOKED**

# THE BACKYARD OF COLLECTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS

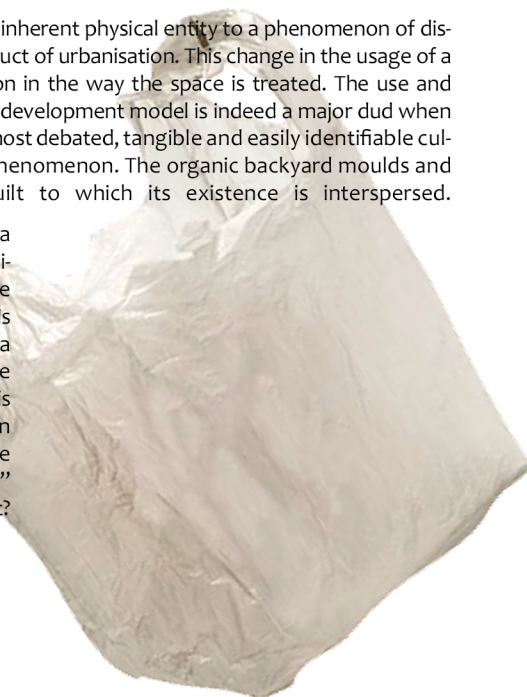
## THE BACKYARD PHENOMENON

A backyard is an inherent part of any space characterized by an activity. The scale of the backyard can vary from a person's last footprint to a whole land-mass. When an individual does not feel a sense of responsibility to any product that he has produced, used or exhausted, the very need of discarding the same arises. So here the consumer gets transformed into a reckless depositor, who is looking for ways to rid themselves of this used up entity. This mentality often distorts the way backyards are viewed. The backyards with its inherent feature of being hidden, often serves as the sink to all these nebulous entities. Anything from a footprint, to road and railway edges, to vacant plots and even to ecologically sensitive areas can transform into a backyard. It is indeed quite phenomenal that a physical entity in the natural cycle gets converted into an externality after a point of time. These backyards are could be either physical or those that exist purely in the human conscience.

**"EXCUSE ME, COULD YOU TELL ME WHERE I CAN FIND A TOILET?" | A QUESTION OF ESSENTIALITY AND INEVITABILITY. HOW DO WE ACTUALLY RESPOND TO IT?**

The meaning of backyard, from being the inherent physical entity to a phenomenon of discard and neglect is undoubtedly a by-product of urbanisation. This change in the usage of a word is reflected with much magnification in the way the space is treated. The use and throw outlook of an infrastructure driven development model is indeed a major dud when looking at the future. Waste is one of the most debated, tangible and easily identifiable culprit for this distortion of the backyard phenomenon. The organic backyard moulds and responds in accordance with the built to which its existence is interspersed.

But what of when the built itself becomes a backyard? Either it is the built and its condition that caters to this or it could be the sheer aversion to the function for which it is meant. When the first case is more or less a question about the infrastructure itself the second is more of a cultural by product. It is indeed difficult to generalize culture in pragmatic terms but culture here is a more blended entity. How does this "culture" produce an ambiguous entity called toilet?







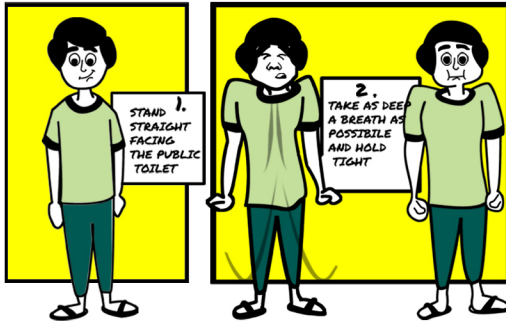
Let's take a quick detour to the crux of anything and everything that has ever been designed- the human body. After hundreds of years of human civilizations and milestones in all fields, it is a mystery that we humans tend to have an anathema towards our 'certain' biology. This culture (heavily influenced by the Victorian ideals) thawed and moulded through ages, sees the body as something to be contained or covered. The most intimate functions are expected to be the most privately done or else there arises a question of modesty. This so naturally leads to one word that is undeniably associated with the human body- SHAME. When the response to the body's basic need is correlated with shame, the function of excretion is related to another interesting phenomenon which is DIRT. There is always a layer of hostility associated with the term "dirt". The perception of dirt is always as a pollutant that should be concealed or isolated. In this respect, excretion is inadvertently viewed as a dirty process. What the body does not need, it discards. Now both shame and dirt is associated with the body.

As mentioned this is a culturally evolved correlation. At one point of history toilets were a place of social gathering, as seen in the communal toilets in Greece. In fact, when the concept of shame is viewed through the perspective of gender, this even has the nature of a propaganda, which is another discussion on its own. So when these attributes are placed, what image does a toilet, the infrastructure that caters to this function, have?

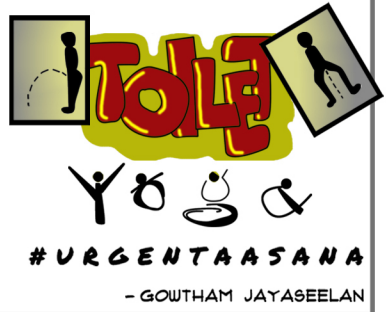
## THE DIRTY AND DISCONNECTED FUNDAMENTAL

When a function associated with so much aversion and shame is brought within the framework of an infrastructure, the built itself starts reflecting the same disgust. Though intimately connected with the body, there is no other public amenity that is victim to this aversion as the toilet. As said in *Toilet: Public restrooms and politics of sharing*, the toilet involves doing the private in public and under conditions only loosely under the control of actors involved. This when combined with the attitude of keeping the dirt away, toilets often tend to be ignored and exploited at times; in short a backyard. This backyard nature first and foremost develops from the attitude of the people. The toilet and its function resides in the backyard of the public consciousness, disconnected from it. This being in the background tendency makes toilets an extremely vulnerable space— a space that in itself is vulnerable to exploitation and at the same time a space where its users feel vulnerable. We tend to connect toilets, foremost public toilets, in many issues like hygiene (being the most common concern), usability, facilities, built condition etc. There are other obscure layers like that of gender, access, safety, to name a few, that emerge from the disconnection from the collective consciousness. Toilet is thus an ambiguous module showcasing the various social layers and how humans respond to it. So the next time when someone asks where the toilet is, just pause and introspect "Where, in fact, can the toilet be found?"





NOW YOU'RE ALL SET WITH "THE URGENTAASANA".  
:TIP  
PRACTICE WHENEVER YOU ARE IN URGENT NEED OF USING A PUBLIC TOILET.



### AM I DOING IT RIGHT...!

THERE IS A WAY TO CHECK WHETHER YOU ARE DOING IT RIGHT OR WRONG!  
IF YOU HAVE DONE "THE URGENTAASANA" CORRECTLY TWO THINGS WILL HAPPEN FOR SURE.  
#1... YOU WILL WET YOURSELF  
#2... YOU WILL FART, BUT NO NEED TO WORRY BECAUSE YOUR NOSE IS ALREADY SHUT AT STEP 3.



HAVE AN URGENT DAY!



# - P - H - L - U - S - H -

## PUBLIC HYGIENE LET US STAY HUMAN

Public Hygiene Lets Us Stay Human. Through education and advocacy, PHLUSH helps local governments and citizen groups to provide equitable public restroom availability and to prepare for a pipe-breaking seismic event with appropriate ecological toilet systems.

### HOW - P - H - L - U - S - H - BEGAN

For decades the lack of public restrooms had been a problem for business owners, employees, residents, and visitors in Portland's Old Town Chinatown district. In early 2005, following a dialogue initiated with the then Mayor, the neighbourhood took on the challenges of engaging the issue of public toilets as a part of a collaborative process with the city. The PHLUSH initiative originated in mid-2005 when a small group of residents, business owners and staff of human services organizations stepped up to study the restroom problem and recommend ways to address it. In late 2006, City Council allocated funds to increase public restroom availability in Portland's downtown core and three PHLUSH co-founders were added to the Restroom Implementation Team. This team reopened a number of stalls and negotiated a 20-year city lease to open public facilities in a privately-owned parking structure. Toilet opening hours were standardized, new restroom signage put up and distinctive bicycle racks designed and installed. Finally, they launched a community based design process which involved local community members, artists and planners. Toilet availability plays a key role in urban living conditions. Planning for restrooms in public areas has not, however, received the attention it deserves. Although growing interest in urban living and shared open space may be focusing more attention on public restrooms, the literature remains



## ART + TOILETS

Artists can engage people in the discussion about toilets and in designing them. They have played a major role in bringing attention to issues people are reluctant to speak about. Great contemporary restrooms incorporate art, culture and information into the design. People enjoy interesting and attractive toilets that make them think. Restrooms and areas around them where people gather can be dramatically used to inform, educate, inspire and amuse. PHLUSH collaborates with artists, musicians, writers, designers, social entrepreneurs and members of the “creative class” enabling them to engage the public both in the discussion of the need for public toilets and in their design. The early collaboration of PHLUSH with Portland’s City Repair Project brought the creative heads in touch with specialists in city bureaus and facilitated early progress. In 2006, PHLUSH Volunteer and City Repair liaison Sally Nobel organized an event to design and build the attention-getting PHLUSH kiosk as a part of the annual Village Building Convergence. The toilets envisioned are safe, accessible and welcoming. They include a portable-sanitation-unit-in-disguise, a parking-lot-restroom, and the sidewalk-kiosk-with-attendant.

### *A letter of distress*

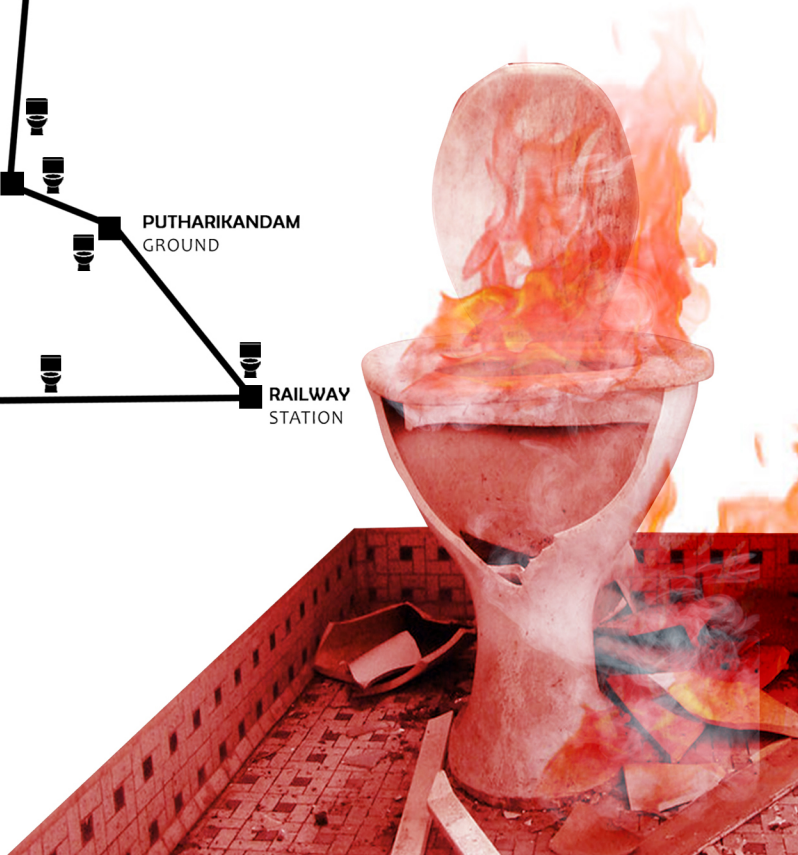
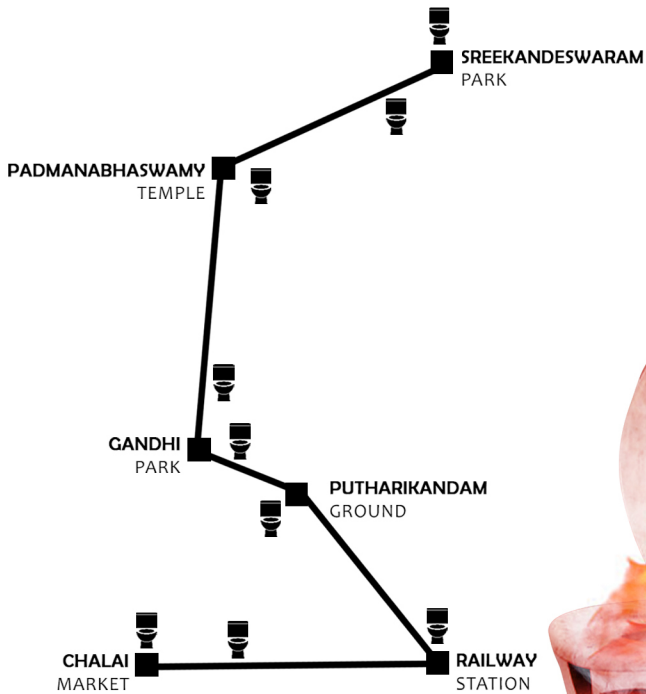
I am arrive by passenger train Ahmednagar station and my belly is too much swelling with jackfruit. I am therefore went to privy. Just I doing the nuisance that guard making whistle blow for train to go off and I am running with 'lota' in one hand and 'dhoti' in the next when I am fall over and expose all my shocking to man and female women on platform. I am get leaved at Ahmednagar station.

This too much bad if passenger go to make dung that dam guard not wait train five minutes for him. I am therefore pray your honour to make big time on that guard for public sake. Otherwise I am making big report to papers."

This phenomenal letter was written by Okhil Chandra Sen to the Sahibganj divisional railway office in 1909, regarding his plight while he went to the toilet. The letter, now on display in Railway museum New Delhi, purportedly led to the introduction of the phenomenal Indian train toilets.

## HOW MANY TOILETS IS **TOO MANY TOILETS**

There are 10 toilets within a radius of around 700m. Which means in terms of quantity, the city has a surplus of toilets. But what about their usability?



Presented by



Campaign partner

