

Strange tales from *Time Out India*.



Mumbai

Rajpal Valmiki takes surprisingly long strides for his diminutive stature. His eyes scan the ground as he marches up and down the Marine Drive promenade. Newspaper roll in one hand, Valmiki tugs at the leash of a golden retriever with the other. His canine companion tries hard to keep up, yet Valmiki moves ahead with purpose. A 28-year-old domestic helper, Valmiki also doubles up as Marine Drive's own dog-poop scooper.

As he scans the area for poop,

Valmiki elicits nods of recognition from pet walkers. They have reason to be grateful. In October, the A Ward of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation imposed a ban on walking pets on the Marine Drive promenade. "We were very outraged. Where would we take our pets?" complained Shailesh Sheth, a Churchgate resident who formed the Marine Drive Promenade Pet Lovers Group online to express an organised voice of opposition to the ban. The pet walkers approached the BMC and assured the authorities that they would keep the stretch between the Marine Drive Flyover and the Marine Plaza signal free of dog poop if the ban was lifted. They hired Valmiki as a poop-scooper in November, paying him Rs 2,000 a month for his efforts.

"Most walkers have always picked up after their pets. It is the excreta of stray dogs that was littering the area," said Mihir

Amin, a member of the pet-lovers group. "For the sake of our pets, we didn't want to get into the question of whose poop that was. So, we formed a group and got someone to do the job."

Ever since then, Valmiki has patrolled the area twice a day, spending an hour every morning and evening, scooping up all the poop on the promenade. When he's not walking Sheth's golden retriever, Valmiki abandons the newspaper for a hand-held plastic scooper. "Since there are no dustbins along the promenade, walkers leave poop wrapped in plastic or paper by the kerb," said Sheth. "Valmiki then picks up the packets." The BMC's Cleanliness and Sanitation By-laws of 2006 do not allow dog poop to be dropped into public dustbins. So Valmiki drops off the poop bundles at a garbage collection point at Churchgate. "On most days I have to scoop at five or six places, but

sometimes I find nothing," Valmiki said.
Zeenat Nagree

Delhi



Quoting Ghalib (by writing the lines on Post-its and reading them out at performances) is one of Dharamvir

Singh's oldest habits. The 80-year-old lawyer studied the poet's works in college and has been reciting them everywhere, even in the middle of a game at the Noida Golf Course. He even arranged for Urdu lessons for his children so that they can read the poems with him, but only his daughter has picked up the language.

OPINION by Shyam Bhat

Elevator rules

A few years back, I was in a lift in a hotel in London. There were four or five of us, staring up at the numbers, or at the door, lost in our thoughts as we waited for the lift to get to our floor. On the second floor a young man walked in.

"Hiya, guys," he said in a singsong Welsh accent. Nobody replied, and the lift started to move again. The friendly Welshman persisted: "I know we are not supposed to talk to people in lifts but look at you all, just standing there and not saying a word to each other, pretending that the other people don't exist. There's something wrong with that."

Although I agreed with his logic, I had become uncharacteristically reticent as a result of my recent move to England, so I didn't say anything. Neither did anyone else. An old lady nodded in a vague manner. A surly teenager with purple streaks in her hair looked up for a second, before returning to the examination of her black fingernails, and a stiff couple

wedged against the mirror at the back stared stonily ahead, ignoring the exchange.

By the time the lift reached my floor, the Welshman had given up trying to make conversation and had joined the rest of us in a silence that had become even more uncomfortable by his earlier attempts at inspiring some kinship and connection with this transient group.

Of all the ironies of postmodern living, the lift is definitely the most striking – even though you are in close proximity to people, so close that you can almost smell them (more on that later), this proximity has nothing to do with intimacy. Indeed, when we are forced to stand close to strangers, we often ignore them as a means of retaining and enhancing our personal space.

So most of us "normal" people are not like the Welshman. Most people choose silence over conversation and adopt a whole range of behaviors that are designed to ensure maximum

comfort for all.

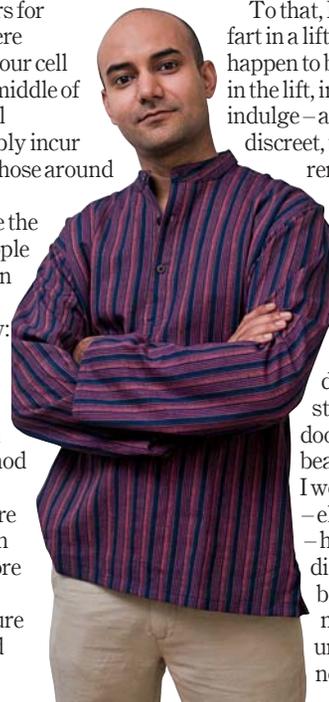
Indeed, social behavior on lifts is fast becoming as codified as behavior in other public areas, like movie theaters for example, where talking into your cell phone in the middle of the movie will understandably incur the wrath of those around you.

So what are the rules that people follow while in an elevator? Here are a few: don't make eye contact; keep greetings to a minimum, a nod and hello at most; if you are speaking with someone before entering the elevator, ensure that you wind down the

conversation when you are inside; don't sing, or hum loudly, and reduce the amount of personal space you are occupying.

To that, I add a final rule: do not fart in a lift (unless of course, there happen to be more than two people in the lift, in which case feel free to indulge – as long as you are discreet, the perpetrator will remain unknown.)

This last rule, I learned the embarrassing way when after a heavy meal I stepped into the elevator and let one off (if you catch my drift) only to have the lift stop at the next floor. The door opened to reveal a beautiful young thing and I would have spoken to her – elevator rules be damned – had not her smile disappeared probably because the fragrance of my Polo Black mingled uneasily with the top-notes of flatulence.



Overheard on Neo Cricket "Praveen Kumar swings both ways."