

Using the Bodna

This tongue in cheek article was written by Russ Toevs for the 'OH', the in-country newsletter for MCC Bangladesh volunteers. Although this was written a long time ago, the substance of the article is still valid.

Upon receiving the July issue of the "OH" I was rather shocked to read that a certain person in Saidpur, who shall remain unnamed for reasons of propriety, seemed ignorant about the use of one of the most basic and essential items in South Asia. What I am referring to, of course, is the *bodna*, that slender-spouted water pot found beside millions of squat plates throughout this sub-continent.

Anthropologically speaking, this lack of knowledge--whether feigned or real--regarding the bodna's use, is especially disturbing considering that it comes from one who is as well acquainted with the ins and outs of squat plates as is any MCCer in Bangladesh. If such a wise sage has questions, what of the other MCCers here, especially those just newly arrived from the elevated West? What mental anguish must be theirs as each day this unanswered riddle sits staring back at them in silence? Little do they realize that so easily within their grasp, this aesthetically pleasing little pot with the slender spout sits ready to soothe aching, tired, overworked muscles, and to free one from the economic bondage of the international paper merchants.

The East, in fact, has much to teach the west, not the least of which is the use of the bodna, and the superiority of water over mere paper. Are dirty dishes cleaned with paper towels? Are muddy hands cleaned with a rag? So then why should we presume--with apologies to Mr. Whipple--that a few flimsy sheets of paper can adequately suffice when that "universal solvent", water, is so readily at hand. There are, in fact, millions upon millions of people in this part of the world for who water and the bodna fulfill a sore-felt need, especially for those on the run.

Admittedly, for those of us brought up on porcelain thrones in the West, there is a certain psychological stigma or mental loathing that must first be overcome before one can become accustomed to the habit of using a bodna. This writer well remembers his biggest fear while in orientation at Akron namely, the supposed lack of T.P. in Bangladesh. And when that fear turned out to be unfounded, it took considerable resolve and determination to learn to use water anyway. Similar to diving off the high board at a swimming pool, the first time is by far the hardest, with each succeeding attempt becoming easier and easier, until one becomes accustomed to it. Eventually, one can even see the merits of the bodna, and wonder how one ever got along otherwise. For in actual fact, water does clean better than paper, as one who does the laundry can quickly verify.

A final word to the squeamish: the mother of a new baby learns to live with soiled hands, as does the farmer manning the 'honeywagon'.

While overcoming one's initial reluctance is the first and probably hardest thing to learn, there are a number of other more practical lessons which, when learned, facilitate the use of the bodna. The practical steps given below come from this writer's many years of experience as well as from

the helpful suggestions of fellow

First of all, after finishing one's movement, grasp the bodna firmly and fixedly in front of one's person with the right hand. The left hand is used for the dirty work. Then wet the left hand (this may seem trivial, but this is one of the most helpful suggestions I received from a fellow MCCer in 1976. Suffice it to say that it is analogous to oiling the skillet before frying an egg. As an aside, there is also advantage in thoroughly wetting the squat plate basin before even beginning, for a similar reason). Next--this takes some practice--pour water into the cupped left hand and splash one's 'odious rumpus' (well, what did you want me to call it?). This is repeated, and after the first or second time a wipe is added in conjunction with the splash, and then this splash-wipe stroke is repeated until clean (the use of the water left in the bodna to dislodge anything left in the basin usually prevents the need for using a brush later on). Next, the toilet is flushed by pulling the over-head tank chain if available, or by dumping in a full bodna of water, after which one proceeds to wash up thoroughly with soap and water. With a view towards cleanliness and sanitation, one should, of course, not touch water spigots, flush chain, bodna, etc. with the left hand until one has washed.

It would be wise to first practice the procedure, as outlined above, in the privacy of one's home. There is a tendency to feel a certain amount of paranoia upon emerging from a bathroom into a roomful of people, certain that everyone is staring at you with the knowledge of what you've just done, as you walk about the room with your left arm hanging lifeless at your side.

Hopefully this article will not be too offensive to the erst-while readers of this tabloid. It is most assuredly written with everyone's well-being in mind, for who knows when or where that flimsy roll of white might vanish--whether on a crowded train hurtling towards Madras in the dark, or at 15,000 ft. on a much traveled trail in Nepal, or even in a small village set amid lush paddy fields on the Gangetic flood-plains of Bengal.