A Test in Patience

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People are constantly travelling and therefore continuously having to keep strange company. Being confined to a space with no possible routes of escape, travellers must brace themselves for all kinds of unforeseen elements.

A flight delay can be the worst kind of predicament. You may reach the airport well before reporting time to avoid the crowds but some surly official will announce that the fight has been delayed by three hours. If you are travelling Biman you have only yourself to blame as it is usually considered a semi-miracle when it actually leaves on schedule. But it can happen to even the most reliable of airlines.

A flight delay is like unwarranted detention given by a sadistic teacher who just punishes out of spite. You may not have the opportunity or inclination to go back home. You have said your emotional goodbyes and your ride to the airport has gone and already planning to party with friends. There is little to do but sit it out, contort your body in attempts to dose and shut out the acrid smells from overused wash rooms or just pretend to be busy reading or fidgeting with your cell phone.

Most likely, however, you will not be left alone. Soon enough someone will try to strike a conversation which will end up like a police interrogation – you being the interrogated. If you are the standoffish kind you can weave yourself out of this with noncommittal grunts and mutterings. But if by nature you are a friendly sort you may end up being adopted as someone's temporary guardian. This does not only mean filling out a form or two but lead to you carrying their extra hand luggage and minding their screaming infants while they go to the wash room or browse around the shops. When we travel we cannot choose the people we will hang out with – sometimes for hours on end.

This is especially true when one is stuck with obnoxious fellow passengers on the flight. It is here that you realise how low your tolerance is for your own kind. Almost without fail, there will be someone behind who will be pushing against the back of your seat or placing their hand on the head of your seat, pulling off a few hairs in the process.

Ominous odours from all directions will waft in and all you will want to do is tell yourself *no no just don't think about what it is.*

Wobbling your way to the washroom is a mortifying experience. Especially when it is a good distance away and you must face the onslaught of two dozen eyes staring at you not because they think you're pretty but because your hair is standing on end from the static. Your neighbour at the back has also contributed to the disheveled look.

It is bad enough to have to sit next to a total stranger. But imagine someone looking over your shoulder, trying to read with you the in-flight magazine. Personal space is seldom a consideration while travelling and it is quite normal to have your co passenger infringing on your tiny spot by hogging the armrest or allowing their legs to wander to your side. Usually it is not intentional just part of an overall obnoxiousness.

Mealtimes are particularly trying. If you think you are unlucky that the lamb curry ran out and all they have is the rubbery chicken, just wait till your neighbour starts the meal. Economy class these days seem to have been designed for hobbits or gnomes. Which means knives and forks will fly along with buns, or worse – parts of the rubbery chicken.

Some passengers will go to the washroom every ten minutes or just when you have reached that comfortable state, when sleep will come at any moment. We may think we are very clever by always choosing the aisle seat but it also means being squashed by one's neighbour everytime they decide to visit the lavatory, their friends on the plane or to get an extra packet of peanuts.

Travelling is no doubt an exercise in patience. There will be times when it will seem like an unending journey and the onslaught of annoying co-travellers will seem too much to take. There will be the Nosey Parkers and the nosepickers, the queue-jumpers and the oglers. But the key is to remain seated. Above all, remain calm at all times. ■