

DEEMAK – TERMITES

(There is a round stool on the stage. As the play begins, a trumpet man comes on stage. He is dressed like a clown. He enters, prancing around, blowing his trumpet and stands on the stool.)

- Trumpet Man : News in the newspaper...
One : *(Enters from one side of the stage)* Worms have infested the wheat stored in the government warehouses causing a loss of lakhs of rupees. A high level inquiry has been ordered...
Trumpet Man : News on the radio...
Two : *(Enters from the other side of the stage)* Termites have infested the stationary paper stored in the government warehouses causing a loss of lakhs of rupees. The Chief Minister has proposed an inquiry...
Trumpet Man : News on the TV...
Three : *(Enters from backside of the stage)* Fungus has infected the medicines lying in the government hospitals. A Commission has been proposed to assess the loss.
Trumpet Man : But one news that has not come in any newspaper, no radio has broadcasted it, no TV channel has shown it...
Vijay Singh : *(Comes to the front of the stage)* A youngster whose name is Vijay Singh, who has a degree in MA from an Indian university, who has been unemployed for the past four years, his feet are infested with worms, his hands have been eaten by termites, his brain has been infected with fungus.

(He exits the stage while acting.)

- Trumpet Man : No high level interrogation has been ordered, no Minister has proposed an inquiry, no Commission has been proposed...but why?
One : The high level Officers do not have time.
Two : The Inquiry Committee's hands are tied.
Three : The Cabinet could not hold its meeting.
Trumpet Man : But why?
One : The high level Officer's buffalo has died.
Two : The Inquiry Committee has gone out of station.
Three : The Cabinet has gone abroad for a vacation.
All together : Ha-ha-ha-
Trumpet Man : All these are excuses.
One : Laundry men make excuses, when they do not wash clothes on time.
Two : Tailors make excuses, when they do not stitch clothes on time.
Three : Cobblers make excuses, when they do not deliver shoes on time.
Trumpet Man : So what about the high level officers?
One : Worse than laundry men.
Two : Incompetent than the tailors.
Three : Worthless than the cobblers.
Trumpet Man : So then parade them! Put them to shame!
All together : *(In unison)* Worse-incompetent-worthless, worse-incompetent-worthless, worse-incompetent-worthless...

(All exit.)

Vijay Singh : *(Comes from the other side)* But I was talking about an Indian citizen whose name is Vijay Singh, who has an MA degree, who is unemployed since four years – yes, who is unemployed since four years.

(He exit.)

Trumpet Man : *(plays a long trumpet)* Yes, who is unemployed since four years, whose feet are infested with worms, whose hands have been eaten by termites, whose brain has been infected with fungus. I will tell you his story. This story is yours too and of those lakhs of unemployed people – four years ago...

(Vijay Singh is going for taking his exams.)

Trumpet Man : Vijay Singh is going to take his exam?

Vijay Singh : Yes.

Trumpet Man : Did you have porridge?

Vijay Singh : Why?

Trumpet Man : It is auspicious.

Vijay Singh : Why auspicious?

Trumpet Man : So that you do well in your exam.

One-Two-Three: *(All together)* We will tell you how you do well in your exam.

Trumpet Man : You?

One-Two-Three: *(All together)* You do well in your exam by cheating.

Trumpet Man : By cheating?

One : Keep a slip in your pocket.

Two : Keep a slip in your shoes.

Three : Keep a slip in your socks.

One-Two-Three: *(All together)* Keep a slip in your pocket, keep a slip in your shoes, keep a slip in your socks.

Trumpet Man : A fresh formula to pass your exams.

One-Two-Three: *(All together)* Cheat, keep a slip in your pocket, keep a slip in your shoes, keep a slip in your socks and pass your exams ha-ha-ha.

Vijay Singh : No no, this is corruption. I will pass my exams based on my hard work.

One : The moron is a fool.

Two : The moron is stupid.

Trumpet Man : Let him flunk the exams!

One-Two-Three: *(All together)* Keep a slip in your pocket, keep a slip in your shoes, keep a slip in your socks and pass your exams.

(One, Two and Three exit.)

Vijay Singh : I took my exams and I passed due to my hard work. I started my education from A-B-C and now all the knowledge is in my hands. I know the earth revolves around the sun. I know the principle of making the hydrogen bomb. The range of my knowledge covers all that is between a needle and a large machine. Yes, I have a wide range of knowledge. Knowledge of every principle. Yes, yes I have a wide range of knowledge, knowledge of every principle.

(One, Two and Three again enter the stage.)

One : Lie.

Two : Wrong.
 Three : Crap.
 One : You do not have any knowledge.
 Two : You do not know of any principle.
 Three : You do not understand any reality.
 Trumpet Man : Do you know...
 One : Why are the ministers liars?
 Two : Why are they dishonest?
 Three : Why are they corrupt?
 One : Why are they sloganeers?
 Two : Why are they deceiters?
 Three : Why are they bluffers?
 One : Why are they wily?
 Two : Why are they cunning?
 Three : Why are they hypocrites?
 Vijay Singh : I don't know.
 Trumpet Man : Then what have you...
 One : Studied?
 Two : Found out?
 Three : Learnt?
 One-Two-Three: *(All together)* Studied, found out, learnt? Nothing – Nothing.

(All go out while saying this.)

Vijay Singh : But all this is politics, I don't understand politics, how do I know why are the ministers liars, cunning, hypocrites, sloganeers, bluffers – I have just listened to their speeches. Speeches that they gave during the school's prize distribution functions. Speeches that they gave at the time of conferring the degrees.

(A slogan can be heard from backstage – 'Long live pride of the nation'. The Trumpet Man, with great difficulty, helps an aged minister climb a stool.)

One : Young friends, I feel young amongst you. We have high hopes from you, to protect the independence of the country. We have earned this independence after a lot of sacrifices. The father of our nation earned it wearing a loin cloth and consuming only the milk of a goat. *(Claps and slogans.)* I congratulate those who have won an award. They should do more hard work. You should not waste your valuable time in political wrangling. From my side I donate five thousand rupees to the school from my dictionary...I mean discretionary fund.

(Clapping, slogans, 'Long live pride of the nation'. The Trumpet Man takes the minister to one side and brings another minister from the other side. Amidst slogans of 'Long live lion of the nation' the minister is helped on to the stool.)

Two : Respected audience and students, the country is passing through a critical phase – some mischievous elements are trying to drown our boat, we have to bring it back to the shore. While laying the foundation stone for the library I hope the students will use it to read books, earn knowledge and will not waste their time in political wrangling. I am donating twenty five copies of the book 'The story of a parrot and mynah'. *(Claps, slogans.)* The students should read this book and go to sleep, this is the way they can protect the future of the country.

(Clapping, slogans, 'Long live lion of the nation'. The Trumpet Man takes the minister away and brings another minister from the other side. Amidst slogans of 'Long live prestigious nation' the minister is helped on to the stool.)

Three : Gentlemen and ladies...I am extremely happy awarding you the degrees...do not mistake them for mere piece of paper. This is your future – the future of the nation, the future of the country. Stick them in your under-arms and come on to the roads of the country. I cannot give anything else at this time since I do not have anything to give but I promise you that in thirty years' time we will provide employment to everyone.

(Clapping, slogans, 'Long live prestigious nation'. The Trumpet Man takes the minister away.)

Vijay Singh : Yes, I have been told that I have to defend the independence of the country, the one that our father of the nation earned while drinking the milk of a goat. I have to protect the future of the country and that is why it is important to read 'The story of a parrot and mynah'. I should roam the street carrying my degree under my underarm. Just like lakhs of youth in the country are doing – looking for employment, in government institutions, semi-government institutions and non-government organizations...

(Brings a chair on to the stage.)

This is a government institution –

(Brings a second chair on to the stage.)

This is a semi-government institution –

(Brings a third chair on to the stage.)

This is a non-government organization –

(Pointing towards the government institution chair.)

The chair is empty, the government official has gone out for a cup of tea. This is the custom here, if one has to drink tea then it should be during the office time, buying groceries should be during the office time, a visit to the washroom should be during the office time...so here comes the government official. *(The government official sits on the chair. Now pointing to the semi-government institution chair.)*

This is a semi-government institution's chair, you need not be a capable person to sit on it. If the ruling party is that of white caps then you should also be wearing a white cap. If the ruling party is that of saffron clothed people then you should be wearing a saffron turban. If the rulers wear blue turbans, you should too. It does not matter whether you know A-B-C or are uneducated. *(Pointing towards a non government organization's chair where a religious-type man is sitting.)* This is a non government organization. This requires a person to be a rich man's son, who is part share owner of the organization. These people take pride in donating to temples, mosques and gurudwaras and become known as donors. Such people have some

kink in their mind. For example, the person who sat on this chair before insisted that anyone working here must keep his moustache and beard. But the one sitting now insists that no one working here should have a moustache and a beard. And such people are the ones who determine the future of Vijay Singh and millions like him...

(Vijay Singh takes his degree to the person sitting on the government institution's chair -)

Vijay Singh : Sir, I need a job.
One : Do you have recommendation from someone?
Vijay Singh : No.
One : Do you have money?
Vijay Singh : No.
One : Then what do you have?
Vijay Singh : Sir, I have a degree.
One : *(Mockingly)* Use this piece of paper to make and fly an aeroplane.
Vijay Singh : Aeroplane?
One : Yes, a paper plane, the kind that boys throw at girls in a classroom ha-ha-ha.

(Trumpet Man blows the trumpet and Vijay Singh moves on to the person sitting on the next chair.)

Vijay Singh : Sir, I need a job.
Two : What does your father do?
Vijay Singh : He is a common man.
Two : Do you know any minister?
Vijay Singh : No Sir.
Two : Then what do you have?
Vijay Singh : Sir, I have a degree.
Two : Use this piece of paper to make a boat.
Vijay Singh : Boat?
Two : When it rains, row it in the drain and enjoy the fun.

(Trumpet Man blows the trumpet and Vijay Singh moves on to the person sitting on the third chair.)

Vijay Singh : Sir, I need a job.
Three : You have hair on your head.
Vijay Singh : Yes Sir.
Three : You have kept a beard.
Vijay Singh : Yes Sir.
Three : Then you go to the next shop.
Vijay Singh : Sir, I have a degree.
Three : Use this piece of paper to make a tuft.
Vijay Singh : Tuft?
Three : Yes, tie it on your head and roam around on the roads, you will look handsome ha-ha-ha.

(Vijay Singh is standing, resigned and the Trumpet Man blows the trumpet.)

Trumpet Man : So take out a protest against the owners of these seats – ‘Down down, owners of these seats’ ‘Down down, owners of these seats’.

(During these slogans, the three people go out carrying their chairs.)

Vijay Singh : And then I aimlessly roamed around, distressed, tattered. I would apply for jobs advertised in the newspapers, go for an interview and come back dejected. My dejection reached a stage where I would give poppycock answers to the questions asked during the interview. In any case, the right answers were also not landing me a job! Why not use this opportunity to pull the leg of the people who pretend to hold my future in their hands!

(The Trumpet Man blows the trumpet and arranges three chairs for the interview.)

Trumpet Man : And now enters the leader of the interview board...He is the Chairman and he got this position since he is a ruling party member. He got this position since he could have partnered with the opposition to bring down the government. Hence he has been ‘bribed’ with this position. The other members are also someone’s relatives, they are from well off families – they have no experience of anything like unemployment. That’s why interview is a time-pass for them.

(The board’s chairman rings a bell and Vijay Singh enters.)

One : What is your name?

Vijay Singh : Vijay Singh.

Two : Wonderful name.

Vijay Singh : Keep it if you like it.

(One and Three smile seeing Two belittled.)

Three : Vijay Singh, which war did you win to earn your name?

Vijay Singh : I have not had an opportunity to fight in a war.

Two : And if you get an opportunity?

Vijay Singh : If I get an opportunity then I will break the necks of people sitting on official chairs.

(Trumpet Man blows the trumpet.)

One : Your qualifications?

Vijay Singh : They are written in the application.

Two : Did you earn your degree four years ago?

Vijay Singh : Yes.

Three : What have you been doing for four years?

Vijay Singh : I have been flying an aeroplane.

All : *(All together)* Aeroplane?

Vijay Singh : I have been rowing a boat in the rain water.

All : *(All together)* Boat?

Vijay Singh : I have been roaming on the roads wearing a tuft.

All : *(All together)* Tuft?

Vijay Singh : Actually when I went for the first job interview, I was told to use the degree to make an aeroplane. The second time I went for the interview I was told to use the degree to make a boat and enjoy when it will float in the rain water. The third

place I went for the interview I was told to make a tuft of my degree and wear it on my head.

One : Amusing.

Two : Weird.

Three : Quite interesting.

Vijay Singh : Yes sir, it is quite amusing. By the way have you ever flown an aeroplane? Floated a boat in the rain water? Roamed on the roads wearing a tuft? You may not have done it, do all of it and you will know it is quite amusing, weird and moreover it is quite interesting.

(Trumpet Man blows the trumpet.)

One : Do you know who was Uthant?

Vijay Singh : There are four people named Uthant. One was a kabaddi player, one was a Mayor of Mandalay, one was a leader and one was a pleader. Whom are you talking about?

Two : The one who was Secretary General at the UNO.

Vijay Singh : I knew about him at some time but not now.

Three : What do you mean?

Vijay Singh : When I earned my degree, my heart was full of ambition, I had big hopes from life and I knew about everyone. I knew about Jawahar Lal Nehru, about Indira Gandhi, about Morarji Desai, but now I do not know about anyone. By the way, does Uthant know who is Vijay Singh?

One : No.

Two : How can he know?

Three : Where is the need for him to know about it?

Vijay Singh : That's the point – if Uthant does not know about Vijay Singh then why does Vijay Singh have to know about Uthant!

(Trumpet Man blows the trumpet.)

Yes, if Indira Gandhi does not know that there is a youth called Vijay Singh and who has a degree for four years then why does Vijay Singh need to stress his mind trying to know about Indira Gandhi...

All : But we are talking about Uthant...

Vijay Singh : And I am talking about Vijay Singh...

All : You go to hell.

(All three get up from their chairs.)

Vijay Singh : As if I am already enjoying the fruits of heaven!

(All three go out.)

Trumpet Man : There goes the interview awry.
The interview board has run away.
The Trumpet Man has had his say.
All secrets now threadbare lay.

Vijay Singh : As time passed by anger burned through me. But there was no one who cared about me as everyone blew their own trumpet. Everyday there is some new news –

sometimes two ascetics quarrelled with each other, sometimes two religions fought with each other.

Trumpet Man : Hear, hear, hear – there is a fight, there is a brawl, there is a riot, god stands exposed on the crossroads...which guru is better, which holy incarnation is bigger, everything is a puzzle and a paradox. There is a fight, there is a brawl, there is a riot, god stands exposed on the crossroads.

(All three enter, fighting.)

One : Our guru is a holy incarnation.

Two : Our guru is a holy incarnation of all holy incarnations.

Three : Our guru is a holy incarnation of holy incarnations of all holy incarnations.

One : You degrade our guru?

Two : You insult our guru?

Three : You make fun of our guru?

One : I will kill you.

Two : I will behead you.

Three : I will break your teeth.

One : Come, kill me.

Two : You try and behead me.

Three : You try and break my teeth.

(They continue fighting, the Trumpet Man blows his trumpet, the intensity of fighting increases and the trumpet blows even louder – then the Trumpet Man blows a long one and stops the fighting.)

Vijay Singh : *(Enters from one side)* O brave men and warriors fighting over the superiority of your holy incarnations, tell me what will happen to me?

All : You?

Vijay Singh : I am Vijay Singh who has a degree from an Indian university. The one who is unemployed since last four years, whose feet are infested with worms, whose hands have been eaten by the termites, whose brain has been infected with fungus.

One : You keep quiet.

Two : Don't trouble us.

Three : Don't talk crap.

All : Here there is confusion about the holy incarnations and you are concerned about your degree.

(All three continue fighting and go away.)

Trumpet Man : *(Blowing his trumpet)* there is a fight, there is a brawl, there is a riot, god stands exposed on the crossroads. ...which guru is better, which holy incarnation is bigger, everything is a puzzle and a paradox, god stands exposed on the crossroads.

Vijay Singh : Yes, everything is a paradox, which god should I lay my faith on? All gods have become big, all gods have been exposed. What should I do, my hands have been eaten by termites, my feet have been infested with termites, my brain has been wiped off by termites...

Trumpet Man : Vijay Singh, there is only one solution for the termites, burn the place they inhabit....

Vijay Singh : Burn it?
Trumpet Man : Yes burn it.

(Trumpet Man blows a long one. Vijay Singh develops an expression of anger on his face.)

Vijay Singh : Yes, there is only one solution for the termites...
Fire-fire-fire

(The stage resounds with 'fire, fire' from all sides....all three actors come on stage as if their clothes are on fire. They let out a cry, the Trumpet Man continues to blow his trumpet – all three fall down, crying.)

Vijay Singh : Yes, there is only one solution for the termites...Fire-fire-fire...

(With a long trumpet sound, the play comes to an end.)