

Editorial Article

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Toilet for all by 2019, can India reach there?

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Honourable Prime Minister Shri Narendraji Modi has launched Swachh Bharat Abhiyan programme on 2nd October 2014. The Govt. of India is committed to end the practice of open defecation by 2019 as a token of tribute to Mahatma Gandhi on his 150th birth anniversary. Beyond debate, toilet is one of the basic necessities of every household and one of the important criteria to assess where we stand in public and private health. On the other hand, about 50% on Indian population (around 600 million) have habit of open defecation. Open defecation causes many public health problems including many water & insect borne diseases which most Indian are not aware of, resulting in stunted growth & poor intelligent quotient (IQ) in young children. It is really a great idea to provide a toilet to every Indian household.^[1]

Let us assess the causes for such unhealthy practices. First is Indian mindset. Open defecation is a many century old tradition. Water sealed toilet in a western invention brought to us by British. One recent survey shows that many rich farmers of rural Uttar Pradesh, Haryana & Punjab prefer open defecation in spite of having household toilet. Many people enjoy morning breeze & openness of nature in the process than that of a closed room. At the same time, multiple government schemes have given incentives to construct household toilets. Another practical problem for big part of rural India is majority of household do not have sufficient amount of water for cleaning, flushing the toilet. Dry toilet is still in practice with shameful act of manual scavenging. So, dry toilet can never be the option to eradicate open defecation. Then what is the answer to this shameful state of public health?^[2]

First to construct a real toilet in every household with incentive or vouchers for cement, iron, pan, pipes etc instead of cash. This will bring down the construction cost and will help who cannot afford the same. Second is to make sufficient water available for flushing. This is a

more difficult problem in many dry part of India which needs special initiative to address.

Last, but not the least, is to change the mindset/attitude of young people. It is not possible to achieve this without active participation of community. Major community involvement is must with commitment involving young men & women. First of all, people must be convinced beyond doubt about the same. They must be the messenger for the rest making it a social movement. It is a very distant dream for India with all its complexity. Let us join hands for that distant & difficult dream, because every reality starts with a dream.

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