

## **OPEN DEFECATION**

### **Global Reduction**

**O. S. Verma**

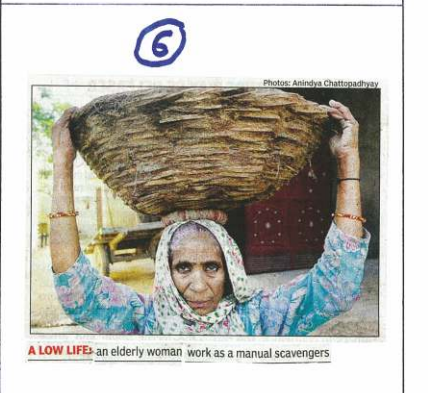
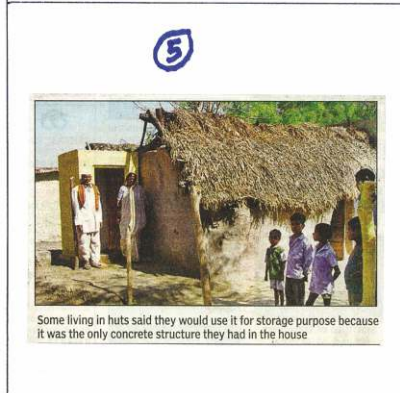
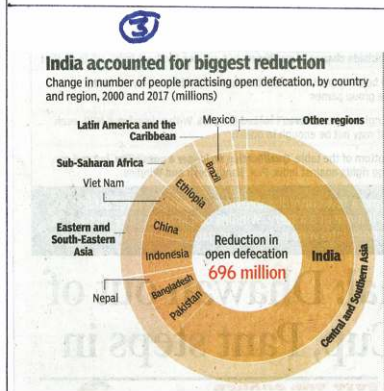
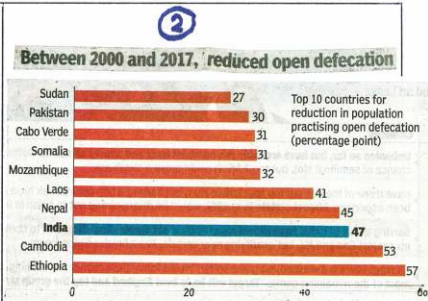
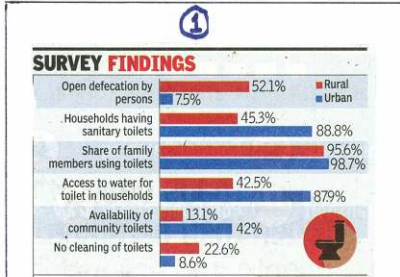
National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) conducted a Survey covering 73176 Indian Households living in 3788 villages and 41538 households living in 2907 Urban Blocks. Findings revealed that 52.1 per cent persons in rural areas and 7.5 per cent in urban defecate in open (see graphic table-1). Survey was conducted between July-2014 and June-2015.

In order to meet UN's Sustainable Development goals, a massive improvement was needed in open defecation. India made strides with Swachh Bharat Programme providing added impetus in recent years. Launched in 2014, Swachh Bharat Mission has led to rapid reduction in open defecation especially in rural areas despite stiff resistance to having toilets in residential premises. Just 22 per cent of rural families had access to toilets in 2001. The sustained campaigns pushed through Swachh Bharat Programme, this figure touched 50 per cent by February-2016.

In other words, 66 percent Indians were practising open defecation in 2001. According to World Bank and WHO data, this rate came down to 47 per cent (see graphic table-2) in 2017. The latest Swachh Bharat Programme data (2019) speak that 99.2 per cent of Indian households NOW have access to toilets.

India is in the top 10 countries worldwide that have reduced open defecation by more than 20 percentage point since 2000 with only Cambodia and Ethiopia doing better. Between 2000 and 2017, 91 countries reduced open defecation by a combined total of 696 million people with Central and Southern Asia accounting for three quarters of this reduction. India is a part of this Region (see graphic table-3). However, in the same period, 39 countries recorded increase in open defecation totalling 94 million people mostly in Sub-Saharan Africa which has seen rapid population growth since 2000.

Ahead of UN's World Toilet Day on November 19, a report released by Charity Water Aid says that Ethiopia is less likely than anyone else worldover to have access to a Decent Toilet (see graphic table-4). 620 million kids in the world do not have access to decent school toilets. This as a result killed 1,40,000 school-age children every year, mainly due to diarrhoea and intestinal infections. India, however, is making dramatic improvements in delivering decent school toilets. But great inequality still persist in access to Basic Sanitation in the country. While Swachh Bharat



has greatly expanded sanitation cover, the poorest fifth of the population still lacks access to basics. Data presented in graphic table-1 show that only 42.5 per cent toilets in rural India have access to water for cleaning the toilets. The objective of achieving complete sanitation under Swachh Bharat Mission is, therefore, self defeated as almost 58 per cent toilets do not have water connection at all. Similarly, there are 13.1 per cent Community Toilets in Indian villages and nearly 23 per cent of these toilets are not being cleaned at all by any body. Basic sanitation is, therefore, starker in India as only 10 per cent of the poorest quantile has access to it.

Drive to construct toilets in rural India gained momentum under Swachh Bharat Mission which aimed to build 12 crore toilets in rural India by 2019. Over 2.40 crore toilets have been built in Indian villages by mid-2017 as a part of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's show-piece Clean India Campaign since it was launched on 2 October-2014. But officials are facing a more daunting challenge "Making Villagers use them". The NSSO survey found not even half of these toilets are being used for a variety of reasons. A large number of rural households are still going to the fields for open defecation. A lot many toilets are being used as general storage space, grain store, keeping valuables, and bathrooms. See graphic table-5 which shows that a tribal family in Maharashtra is using the toilet for storage. What they say is that it is a beautiful structure not to be used for dirty purposes. Many other such Misconceptions are taking the round: (1) It is impossible to relieve inside four walls. It looks like defecating in the house, (2) All my life I have defecated in open air, (3) There is so much empty space to defecate, (4) If one defecates outside there is no health problem, (5) Toilets need a lot of water, (6) Toilet is everything but not a place for defecation, (7) Toilets are not comfortable to old-age elderly persons. They feel suffocated. In order to make a gradual shift in people's attitude towards the use of household toilets, there is a Need to give emphasis on Interpersonal Communication and Personal Influence techniques to convince rural people to stop open defecation.

What is still worst is the prevalence of Manual Scavengers, lifting night soil from dry latrines, scrapping the shit, and hitching it over the head in a basket, and dumping the faeces along the way on garbage piles. See graphic table-6 which shows how an elderly woman works as a manual scavenger. Each of these women has an average of 20 homes to cover daily. What is more ironical is that the social ostracisation is so pervasive that villagers of upper strata boycott the Scavengers Community for social functions and festivities. Untouchability is thus vastly exercised in Indian villages. There are 1.8 lakh Manual Scavengers as per Socio-Economic Census 2011. In 2013, the practice of manual cleaning of night soil, septic tank, and sewers were banned and the

rehabilitation of manual scavengers scheme was launched. But the road out of hell does not go to heavens. Even after the ban, sporadic manual scavengers is still in cursed existence. For them, Swachh life seems to be a distant dream.

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