

OPEN DEFECATION IN INDIA: CULTURE AND ECONOMIC FACTOR

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: 03/10/2024	Open defecation (OD) in India is a deeply rooted problem influenced by the intertwined factors of poverty, culture, and economic inequality. The poverty limits access to toilets, while deeply ingrained cultural norms and the social hierarchy of the caste system discourage the use of toilet. . Landless people are the major contributor of OD, since to construct toilet there is need of land. India being a religious country people does not move out of the religious sentiment and this has bring in the purity and impurity related with toilet. Ultimately, people choose open defecation. Government has made efforts like the Swachh Bharat Mission aim to address this challenge by constructing toilets and promoting behavioural change, but they must also consider and address the underlying structural inequalities and complex socio-cultural beliefs that sustain the practice of open defecation. Nevertheless, the educated younger generation choose healthy and decent living over orthodoxy of religion and culture. Education also provides opportunity to come out of poverty allowing to have toilet.
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Introduction

The Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) which was launched on 2nd October 2014 aims to end shameful habit of open defecation across the country. It target to achieve Open Defecation Free (ODF) by 2nd October 2019 to all Indian household and have continued till date with Individual Household Latrine initiatives. The main activities of SBM is to interaction with other Ministries, States/UTs and stakeholders through appropriate channels like meetings, conferences, seminars and workshops to take forward the initiative through State institutions for ODF. This pro-sanitation programme became the world's largest toilet-building initiative (TATA AIG Team. n.d.). Indeed SBM, was largest toilet building initiative for a country of world second largest population India.

Open defecation (OD) in India is a deeply rooted problem influenced by the intertwined factors of poverty, culture, and economy. The people living with poverty has a limits in accessing toilets. And landless people are the major contributor of OD, since to construct toilet there is need of land. People of slum dwellers, while deeply ingrained cultural norms and the social hierarchy of the caste system discourage the use of toilet. . . India being a religious country people does not move out of the religious sentiment and this has bring in the purity and impurity related with toilet. Ultimately, people choose open defecation. Government has made efforts like the Swachh Bharat Mission aim to address this challenge by constructing toilets and promoting behavioural change, but they must also consider and address the underlying structural inequalities and complex socio-cultural beliefs that sustain the practice of open defecation. Nevertheless, the educated younger generation choose healthy and decent living over orthodoxy of religion and culture. Education also provides opportunity to come out of poverty allowing to have toilet.

Objectives

The article is to address the reason for failure in materialising Open Defecation Free in India. The role played by the culture and economy for open defecation can be resolve by education will the central argument of this article. This article intend to provide inferences to the government and policy maker in respect to the making of India Open Defecation Free country.

Methodology

The article will put up by using descriptive method comprises of case studies, and historical research to understand economic, religious and cultural context. A study will use historical research to understand traditional practices of defecation and use of toilet and then conduct surveys to see the changing trend brought by the educated citizen of India.

Qualitative tools will explore into the Indian citizen to understand the cultural and religious nuances and daily life that shape the traditions of toilet use. Further, it would able to bring forth the recent changing pattern through education. Furthermore, it will enable to focus on the lived experiences of people in relation to open defecation and prevention.

Review of literature

Coffey et al. (2024) argued that, although some villagers, particularly upper-caste Hindus, find latrines of any sort distasteful, most people feel that expensive latrines with large pits or cemented underground tanks are not polluting, but rather are a natural addition to a wealthy person's home. In contrast, latrines with smaller soak pits, such as those provided by the government, are almost uniformly viewed with disdain.

Almost all of the households that we interviewed had some exposure to affordable pit latrines because of the government's long-running latrine construction programmes. Of the 78 Indian families we interviewed in the formal qualitative data set, 18, or about a quarter of them, had been recipients of government latrines, although of these only eight families had at least one member who was using the government latrine regularly.³ Others had seen or heard about government latrines from relatives and neighbours. One respondent had worked as a mason constructing government latrines.

The latrines that are promoted and built by the Indian government are expensive by the standards of other developing countries. While the Swachh Bharat Mission subsidises latrines at ₹12,000, a Bangladeshi pit latrine costs only about ₹3,000. Despite this, people refer to Indian government latrines as "temporary," "fake," or *kaccha*. Very often, people who receive government latrines do not use them for defecation at all; they may repurpose the materials or use the latrine superstructure to bathe or wash clothes.

In addition to believing that using a government latrine will pollute their homes, people reject these latrines because of concerns about pit emptying. We first started to understand the role of pit emptying in explaining rural India's high open defecation rates by looking at how privately constructed latrine pits differ from the pits recommended by the WHO and the Indian government. In both the SQUAT survey and the qualitative interviews, we asked respondents about the kinds of latrines that they find acceptable and the kinds which they aspire to own.

Nayim et al. (2024) argued that, the reason for the low adoption and utilisation of toilet facilities and the wide practice of open defecation is a question that many have attempted but has remained largely unanswered. The situation as literature has it, is often connected with some identified socio-cultural and economic factors. One of the greatest hindrances in accepting any sanitation system has to do with the financial cost associated with it.

Gauri et al. (2020) argued that, Toilet ownership in India has grown in recent years, but open defecation can persist even when rural households own latrines. There are at least two pathways through which social norms inhibit the use of toilets in rural India: (1) beliefs/expectations that others do not use toilets or latrines or find open defecation unacceptable; and (2) beliefs about ritual notions of purity that dissociate latrines from cleanliness.

Gaps

The above literatures had failed to identify the interplay of poverty, culture and open defecation in India. Further it also fail to identify concretely the contributing factors of open defecation in India clearly. Thus this article intends to relay the how the economic and culture played a role in curbing open defecation.

Interplay of Poverty, Culture, and Open Defecation

More than half of India's population live under poverty and hard to afford latrine or toilet. Ironically those who can afford also defecated openly due to the existing cultural norms.

Poverty

Lack of household income and landlessness prevents many people from affording or building toilets. Poverty also creates conditions that make sanitation difficult, such as living in "kutchra houses" or lacking access to water.

Culture and Social Norms:

Traditional cultural practices and beliefs play a significant role, with sanitation often being a socially taboo topic, leading to a reluctance to discuss or use toilets.

Caste System:

The rigid social hierarchy and beliefs about ritual purity and pollution associated with the caste system contribute to open defecation. Historically, low-caste communities were responsible for manual scavenging, creating a deep-seated aversion to latrine pits and further marginalizing them from adequate sanitation facilities.

Behavioural Aspects:

Even with access to toilets, usage may be low due to ingrained cultural behaviours, perceptions, and norms that make open defecation seem acceptable.

Factors Contributing to Open Defecation

In India people are more prone to the use of toilet openly, it has become one of the major concerned for the health and social thoughtfulness. People living in India openly defecated due to the following factors;

1. Lack of Access:

A primary driver is simply the lack of access to safe and private toilet facilities, particularly in rural areas.

2. Preference for Open Defecation:

In some cases, even when toilets are available, people prefer open defecation due to cultural norms or practical reasons.

3. Household and Structural Factors:

Living in a "kutchra house" (a house with basic, non-permanent materials) and lacking water on the premises are significant factors contributing to open defecation.

4. Child Feces:

There is a persistent belief that children's feces are harmless, leading to their disposal in the open environment, even in homes with toilets.

Addressing the Challenge

The above factors on open defecation can be intervene and make India Open Defecation Free country by addressing the challenge in the following ways;

A. Structural Interventions:

Effective solutions must address the structural inequalities and infrastructural causes that contribute to open defecation.

B. Behavioral Change:

Programs need to go beyond construction to foster sustained behavioral change and challenge existing cultural norms related to sanitation.

C. Context-Specific Approaches:

Interventions must be tailored to local conditions, considering the physical, social, and cultural factors that drive open defecation in specific areas.

D. Technology:

Innovative and cost-effective toilet technologies, such as waterless and bio-toilets, can offer a sustainable alternative to conventional flush toilets

Conclusion

Swachh Bharat Mission initiative is the right step taken up by the government of India to address the challenges face while making India open defecation free country. The challenges can be address properly by constructing toilets and promoting behavioural change. Further, the policy maker must also consider and address the underlying structural inequalities and complex socio-cultural beliefs that sustain the practice of open defecation. Furthermore, the educated younger generation choosing healthy and decent living over orthodoxy of religion and culture may be an assets in making India an ODF country. Moreover, educating people will also provide an opportunity to come out of poverty allowing to have toilet.

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