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A REPORT ON - THE LACK OF PROPER TOILET ACCESS FOR WOMEN IN DELHI



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INTRODUCTION

We are a fast adapting race. As we go about our daily lives making space in the hustle bustle of the city, there are things pleasant and unpleasant we see. Conveniently we choose to ignore the unpleasant. We eventually become so habituated in ignoring the unpleasant, that it ceases to exist for us. So while we consume the beauty of the city, we turn our faces and look the other side when the not-so-beautiful comes in our view. Gradually we lose the sense of reality of the inconspicuous and it's problematic.

The decision to reach this topic had similar roots. It was as visible as it could be, but we were so busy ignoring it, that we struggled to reach it. Since those childhood days spent in train journeys, we would always turn away from some sights Indian railways failed to hide. From laughing shamelessly at the 'shamelessness' of people to looking away and raising our eyebrows at the state of our state, we did it all as we grew up, seldom bothering ourselves with the criticality of the problem we had just turned away from – Open Defecation.

We started situating the problem in the everyday lives in the city. A city like Delhi has different faces. It has a huge population of migrants, casual workers, contract labourers who flock the city in the hope of making money. Unable to afford a permanent abode, they are forced to settle on the margins of the urban city, usually in slums or *jhuggi jhopri* clusters. These slums and unauthorized colonies have the obvious problems of overpopulation, density, unhygienic living conditions, one of the critical ones being – lack of proper toilets and sanitation. While some of the slums have a public toilet in the vicinity, some continue to live by open fields being used for defecation.

We started thinking of the dynamics of the problem people face in these areas when confronted with the lack of a basic service – sanitation. The problem becomes particularly aggravated for women as their safety is attacked whether they are out in the field or within the four walls of a toilet. How do women in particular cope up with the problem of lack of proper sanitation? Are they comfortable in going to the public toilets? Can they access the toilet at any point of time in the day? Are there toilets at their workplace? Are they able to pay for their toilet use independently? Do they feel safe in going to the toilet and to the fields? What do they do when they need to urinate and not defecate, especially when they are out on the roads?

While the sight of men taking to the walls of the city confronted us, we gradually realized the absolute silent absence of one section of the population from urinating in the open on city roads/ walls – the other gender – the women. Does that mean they always use a toilet when they need to urinate? Maybe not. Then what to do they do? Where do they go?

Do they go?

When caught in desperate need, middle class women can afford using the private toilets of coffee shops, theatres, eateries or showrooms; however the lower class women on the other hand do not enjoy that privilege and are forced to make do with whatever minimal facilities they can find. What are the practices they adopt to cope with the problem? How do these women negotiate and lay claim to a space - as basic a necessity as the toilet?

The fieldwork exposed us to the many difficult questions which the topic on the face of it doesn't indicate. It is layered and often the surface hides the perplexities of what lies beneath. This report is an effort to present our understanding of the issue, our experiences and the criticality of a critical problem – The Implications of Lack of Proper Access to Toilets for Women.

By the way of this report, we hope to familiarize the reader not so much with the technicalities of the issue, but with the politics of the issue and related concerns. The report has its own limitations of time and space, but we have tried to carry out our research in different parts of the city and in different living conditions so that a comparative analysis can be reached.

METHODOLOGY

The predominant method of data collection followed in the fieldwork was semi-structured interviews and interview schedules. To supplement the interviews, we had designed a questionnaire, questions from which were asked to the respondents and filled in by us. After initial days of fieldwork, we depended majorly on in-depth conversations with the respondents of the areas we visited. The public toilets at all the sites were visited and inspected by us to get a sense of their condition.

We met a few officials of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi and a former private player in the business of toilet construction to understand the working, operations, management of public toilets but most importantly to understand their take on the problem of toilets. Our fieldwork also included a visit to the Sulabh International Toilet Museum at Palam, Dwarka.

We interviewed a few people who have been closely associated with understanding the problems of resettlement along with NGOs working in these areas to get an understanding of the area and its problems. Interviews with doctors at field-sites were also undertaken to get an insight into the health problems faced by the women in these areas.

Finally, a review of literature before, during and after the fieldwork helped us to place the topic and draw linkages from studies and researches done in and outside of Delhi. The reference to the articles, reports, films reviewed is made wherever we have drawn from them in the course of this report.

THE FIELD, THE FIELDWORK AND THE TOILET

We conducted our fieldwork in May-July 2013 in Janta Mazdoor Colony (New Jaffrabad, East Delhi), Bawana resettlement Colony- Bawana (North-West Delhi), Jai Hind Camp-Masoodpur (South Delhi) and Annanagar and Sanjay Amar Colony (near ITO, Central Delhi).

We spent around six days in Janta Mazdoor Colony, six days in Bawana , three days in Masoodpur and a day long visit to Annanagar and Sanjay Colony.

Each site had its own peculiar make up and its corresponding characteristics which contributed to the issue at hand. While the problems cross-cut the dimensions of this circular city and all sites had some common tangents of the problem, the weightage of different problems differ from site to site.

JANTA MAZDOOR COLONY

We started our fieldwork by visiting Janta Mazdoor Colony, New Jaffrabad in Seelampur. It is an unauthorized colony stretching along a few blocks on both sides of the road and comprises mostly of rickshaw pullers, white washers, plumbers, domestic workers, construction workers and daily wage laborers.

The houses vary from being semi pucca to pucca houses and are constructed so close to each other that the sun beams can't penetrate on a bright summer day. Initially this colony which is sub divided into twelve blocks had four public toilets but is currently survived only by **one** (near block D) which is geographically behind the settlement. We visited the blocks A to E which are on one side of the road. Most of the residents had built toilets in their homes and had stopped going to the public toilet complex. But as the use of land is not architected, none of these houses have septic tanks where the human excreta can be flushed down. Rather these are drained straight into the sewerage blocking the sewerage line. The MCD '*safai karamchari*' clears this blockage and piles it on the sides of the roads. These piles are the location for insects and flies to breed which as a result have hazardous health ramifications.

However, during the fieldwork we observed that not all houses have a home toilet. The front blocks (especially E) are more congested and the houses have no space to construct their own toilets. They are dependent on the sole public toilet of the colony. People from other side of the road also usually come to use this toilet.

We were majorly helped by Kaushalya and Rama Ji on our first day in Janta Mazdoor Colony. They are one of the oldest residents of the colony as well as vanguards of social awareness in the community. Crossing the breadth of the colony, we made our way to a small open space where children were playing badminton with makeshift rackets and shuttle cocks. On the left was the public toilet with two openings,

one for men and the other for women. Men were coming out of the toilet draped in towel after bathing. There was an attendant sitting outside the men's compartment. We entered the other compartment which was absolutely quiet and empty at that point – the women's toilet.

As we entered, the toilet expanded on equal dimension to left and right with cubicles on both sides with clean tin doors enclosing the cubicle. A dilapidated elongated wash basin with three taps looked dry with water dripping scarcely from one. It was not that what we saw was something we hadn't imagined. While we were well acquainted with the conditions of public toilets, but as the secondary data and imaginations of mind transformed into the actual field sight, we stifled, something we hadn't expected that early.

Behind the grey tin doors, lay Indian style latrines. Being dry toilets, they are supposed to be cleaned twice a day, however at the time of our visit (10 AM), the toilets were overflowing with the excreta which covered the entire latrine and in certain cubicles defecation laid outside the latrines. The cleanliness of this toilet was preposterously below standards. As there was no dustbin in the toilet, the sanitary napkins and stained clothes lay stuffed behind the hinges of the doors and in the pot. The area joining the breadth of the toilet, also had latrines constructed without cubicles and a few women chose to defecate there to avoid the suffocation inside the cubicle.

We then moved to see the other half of the rectangle, the bathing and washing compartments. The cubicles were broken and there were hardly any taps. And soon we realized a fact which was to confront us throughout our fieldwork in all the sites – women hardly ever use the public toilet to bathe.

The predominant problem in Janta Mazdoor Colony from the point of toilets was the condition of the women's toilet in particular. Another problem was the geographical location of the toilet which was behind the colony thus making the cubicles inside look isolated and lonely. The architecture of the toilet contributes to one of the biggest problem, i.e. the low walls which are often used to attack women's modesty and safety. The complain which we got universally from all our respondents in this area was of the toilet being very dirty and repelling, but most importantly being unsafe.

As we stood outside the toilet, the sight of irony was inescapable. The dry women's toilet with these two women standing with bottles in their hand and the quick entry and exit of men to and from men's toilet draped in a towel; their wet naked bodies and spiked wet hair signifying their having taken a bath. We asked Kaushalaya Ji the reason for the stark contrast of conditions. We observed that men's toilets charged a fee of Rs.2,3,5 depending on the function of toilet use i.e. bathing , washing; whereas the women's toilet were free. The supervisor was there to collect the money from men. We had entered the field with one of the hypothesis of pay per use toilets for women and its difficulties. But the implications of toilet being free didn't seem any better. Men's toilet was at least functional. We didn't know which situation was better? Paid toilets which could be functional? Or free dysfunctional toilets with no supervisor? To ask for free functional toilet with an attendant seemed a demand too ambitious. Later in the course of our fieldwork, we were to realize that the paid men's toilet also had its own mystery!

BAWANA RESETTLEMENT AREA

Our next site was the Bawana Resettlement Colony, also referred to as Bawana JJ cluster in common parlance. It is located in North West Delhi, adjoining the Bawana Industrial Estate. This is the largest resettlement colony in Delhi, with over 6000 plots of which about 5000 have been developed so far. Communities evicted from Yamuna Pushta, Kusumpur Pahadi, Jahangirpuri, Banuwal Nagar, Vikaspuri and Bhati Mines have been resettled here.

Bawana Resettlement area can be understood as consisting of two series of blocks. One set of the *bastis* came here in 2004 and settled in what are now called the old blocks, and another one in 2009, called new blocks. Blocks A, B, C, D, and E are the old blocks where the *bastis* had come from Yamuna Pushta, whereas F, G, H, J, K, L, M are the new blocks, where people came from the *bastis* of Balwanagar, Rohini (F, G, H), Saraswati Vihar, Ashok Vihar, Ravidas Camp, Mandawali, Vikas Puri (J, K, L, M) Nizammudin and Naglamachhi. Those who have not got plots have constructed their tents in this colony itself and stay in tent clusters near Block C and near Block F.

Residents of Bawana Resettlement Colony are mainly factory workers, while some also work as auto-rickshaw pullers, *jali* workers, masons, plumber etc. If one looks at Bawana spatially, it lies on the periphery of the city, away from the centre of the city. It would take us 2 hours one way to reach Bawana. It is obvious that when people are resettled here, their ties with the city are broken. While people in Janta Mazdoor interact daily with the adjacent areas of Subhash Park, Welcome Colony, Seelampur; Bawana is devoid of that luxury of interaction. The colony in itself is so huge that people of old and new block seldom have any interaction with each other. While Bawana is away from the main city, the city comes to Bawana in different forms. This happens in the form of political rallies, visiting doctors, media channels covering it at times, a weekly bazaar, though a bazaar comes to life everyday in the evening.

All blocks have public toilets. Toilets in the Old blocks are under the MCD, whereas the toilets in the new blocks are currently under the purview of DDA and will soon be transferred to MCD. While the old blocks have a much greater population, there are fewer toilets as compared to the population there. The new blocks, where most of the plots are yet to be constructed, have many more CTCs, demand of which is currently less because of less population. Another interesting fact is that while the new toilets are currently free, the old toilets charge a fee of Rs 2, 3, 5. While old block toilets shut at 11pm, the new block toilets shut at 6pm.

The toilet structure was standard with one complex having a common entrance and then separate entrance to men's and women's cubicles. However, the distance between the two entrances was very less, much lesser than in Janta Mazdoor Colony where there are two separate entrances altogether. In the new blocks, people have divided the entire toilet complex between sexes. So some complexes are entirely for women and some entirely for men. This is a temporary arrangement as the population in this side is less. The toilets have cubicles for latrines, cubicles for bathing and a common washbasin.

Unlike the other sites, Bawana is a planned resettlement area, with neat demarcation of roads and blocks. The lanes are broad with road signs bearing direction and plot numbers. The condition of toilets, especially the new block ones is much better than CTCs at other sites. However, a few CTCs in both old and new blocks are in a bad state resembling some of the features of the CTC at JMC (especially Block F CTC). As more construction follows in the area, the area of barren land has decreased but open defecation is still resorted to considering the odd timings of the toilets.

MASOODPUR

Our third site was Masoodpur in South Delhi. The settlement is easily 33-55 years old. This area is forest land and hence the settlement is illegal. Eviction with bulldozers has been tried many times, but the clusters continue to exist.

The area we studied in Masoodpur is the slum settlement on the hilly area called Bengali Colony as it is majorly inhabited by people who belong to West Bengal and migrated here in search of employment. Houses range from *pukka* to semi *pukka* but predominantly there are shacks. Majority of the population is Muslim by religion and the majority of them are Solid Waste Management (SWM) workers. A sight from a distance shows a cluster of beaming satellite dishes with collected waste (waiting to be segregated) lying nearby.

There are two major problems in this area – water and toilet. The area (South west Delhi) falls in Aravali zone which is very dry. Unlike the previous two colonies, neither are their toilets in houses nor any public toilet in the area. The adjoining stretch of open fields is used for open defecation which is the norm. Both men and women carry a container (*lota*) to the forest/open land (*jharris*). If ever they come face to face, then it leads to another big problem - teasing and molestation.

ANNANAGAR & SANJAY COLONY

Annanagar and Sanjay Amar Colony are slums adjacent to the WHO (World Health Organisation) building in ITO. Two tracks run through these slums, the overhead Delhi metro track and the railway track, the latter being more important to the slum. There isn't any physical demarcation between the two areas as they lie together one at the end of the other. People here are from all over India – Tamilnadu, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan etc. People from these regions also dwell in Annanagar. Sanjay colony, in terms of its physical and hygienic conditions is better than Annanagar and we were told by the people that the area and its environment is better than the latter.

In terms of the facilities of the toilets, it's however difficult to judge which of the two sites is better. There is only one public toilet catering to both the clusters which is in Annanagar. At the time of our visit, the female wing of the toilet was under construction and women were using a part of the men's toilet demarcated by a temporary wall. The condition of the CTC was terrible but the overload on one particular wing also couldn't be ignored. In Sanjay Colony, we met two women who inquired about

our fieldwork. As soon as we mentioned toilets, they flinched at the word, describing how bad the conditions were but one of them volunteered to show us the toilet. "*Arre itni gandi cheez kyun dekhoge?*" (Why would you want to see such a dirty thing?)

This particular toilet was a specimen of sorts. In a small rectangular area, rested the toilet with 2 small parallel compartments which the people have divided amongst the sexes. It looks like a mobile toilet made stationary. We are shown the inside low roof which is ready to fall anytime. This toilet is without any building. It looked like 5-6 toilet cubicles are attached together on a temporary cart.

As the slum is adjacent to the railway line, many people (especially women) go to the track for open defecation as that is one open space around the area and probably a better one than the existing facilities. But it comes with its own risk; there have been cases in the past of people being mowed down by the trains. Women have to be careful; most women check the signal and then answer nature's call.

A few commonalities among CTCs at Janta Mazdoor Colony, Annanagar and Bawana (some CTCs) were starkly evident. They were marked by lack of running water, broken doors & windows, open cubicles, clogged urinals. Majority of the respondents complained that the CTCs were so dirty that often women had to hold their breath while defecating.

Women going to the CTC in Janta Mazdoor Colony and Block F toilet in Bawana have to bear the sight of fermented feces, stained sanitary napkins in every corner of the toilet which made it very difficult to visit the CTC and forced them to visit the field instead. As a result of dirty toilets in schools, young girls are forced to miss schools, especially on days when they would be menstruating.

Respondents from JMC and Bawana in particular complained that they couldn't eat food immediately after going to the toilets. While women blamed the toilet attendant for not cleaning the CTCs, the *safai karamchari* blame the women for not leaving the toilets clean.

While there are commonalities, the particular composition of the sites and their respective availability-non availability of toilets show a diverse range of problems from the point of view of sanitation.

The report is divided into themes and sub-themes which lay out the different dimensions of the problem. Each theme presents the case at different sites as well as a comparison of these sites.

WOMEN & TOILETS – THE PRACTICE

There are a few practicalities associated with the public toilet which cannot be ignored. The first is that the public toilet is out there. It is public and hence can't be inside one's private abode. That is indeed the idea behind these toilets so sanitation can be provided to as many people of a particular area where private toilets may not be a feasible solution. The second practicality associated with the toilet is that it opens at a particular time and shuts at a particular time. While the idea behind this can be argued, currently that is the case in majority of the areas. These practicalities combine in various ways to raise some problems which invariably are graver for women.

7.1 TOILET TIME

The toilet in Janta Mazdoor Colony is open from 5am to 11pm. The old block toilets in Bawana and the toilet in Annanagar have similar timings. However the new block toilets in Bawana shut at 6pm as of now (at the time we were conducting our fieldwork. It was due to be changed later).

We questioned the women about what if there was an emergency and they were to use the toilet **at night?** While Bawana still has open fields, Janta Mazdoor Colony is a packed, congested colony with no open spaces or surrounding green patches. Women told us that they often keep a check on what they are eating at night so the need itself never arises. Kaushalya Ji informed us that during her field visits she was told by a couple of women that they skip meals at night to thwart the naturalness of nature's call. It was due to these difficulties with the public toilet that around 80% of the houses in the Colony had constructed their own toilets. These toilets are however not linked to any proper sewage lines and contribute to the blocked drains.

In both Janta Mazdoor and Bawana we came across a commonality. When young girls need to use the toilet at night, their mothers either request the landlord having a home toilet to allow their daughters to use them, or they make them use the drain outside the house. What do the women do themselves when they are in a similar situation? Their immediate response to this question was that they (women) try to ensure that the situation doesn't arise.

Women in new blocks in Bawana have no other option but to take to the fields. Evening is when most of them return from factories, and if the new block toilets shut at 6pm, they have to go out. The new block is comparatively empty and has open spaces all around, so women take refuge in the long grass.

7.2 THE PREFERRED TIME

Not only does the toilet have its particular time, women too have a particular time at which they prefer to go to the toilet. At all three sites having public toilets, majority of the women prefer to go in the morning. The toilet in Sanjay Colony having only four-five cubicles makes it difficult for everyone to access it. Women start queuing up around 4 AM in order to avoid the rush. While many prefer to go in the morning, a lot of women also use the toilet during early evening when it is not yet dark. We didn't come across a single woman who used this toilet at night. Also electricity inside the toilet is never functional. There were hardly any bulbs and tubelights in Janta Mazdoor Colony, further discouraging women to use the toilet in the dark. Rumors of a *chudail* in a red attire (bridal) frequenting the public toilet further discourages some women from using the toilet at night.

We met a newlywed woman who stays in a joint family in Janta Mazdoor Colony which doesn't have a home toilet. She goes to the toilet at 4AM in the morning to avoid the embarrassment of going when the elders are up and on their way to the toilet. As the entire family uses the public toilet, she avoids being seen in the toilet queue by the men of the family. To prevent any *sharam*, she wears her veil, her *burqa* even to the toilet.

Masoodpur shows an important contrast from the other sites in terms of the time women prefer to go for open defecation. A middle aged woman told us that she preferred going to the forest around 10 in the night. She finds that time safe as the dark camouflages and gives her invisibility.

7.3 HOW MANY TIMES?

Can women go to the toilet whenever they feel the need? "*Agar kabhi pet kharab ho to ek-do se zyada baar bhi jana padta hai*" (If one's stomach is upset, then one has to visit the toilet more than once/twice a day), a woman interviewed in Janta Mazdoor Colony told us. Evident here is *majboori* (helplessness) as most of them told us. However, an important discrepancy we found throughout was - though all women laughed at this particular question and answered that they would access the toilet whenever they feel the need to, they however personally visited the toilet **only once a day**. Given the dirt, filth and the overall unsafe environment of the toilet, they wouldn't want to visit it a second time.

When asked that weren't their husbands and fathers concerned? Would they accompany women to the toilet if the need be? They laughed and asked how can one expect men to be ever concerned?

It wasn't only women, but girls as young as fourteen years also choose to visit the toilet in Bawana only once. They are conscious of boys around and conscious of themselves too at this age of puberty and coyly responded that they don't like going to the toilet. "*Accha nahi lagta*"

If once a day seemed unrealistic, we were left utterly shocked with what we came to know in Annanagar and Sanjay Colony. The condition of toilets (currently half of MCD men's wing and an immobile mobile toilet like structure arrangement) was so bad that a woman accounted for not going to toilets for **three-four days at a stretch**. Though she knows the health hazards of this practice and recalls falling ill a couple of times, the plight of the toilet repels her from using it and she delays it till her body control gives up. To

understand the extent of the problem, another woman told us, '*Agar chai pe kar jaoge, to wo bhi muh se nikal jayega*' (If you go to these toilets with as little as a sip of tea, you'll vomit that too).

These facts show that going to the toilet more than once to defecate is often not a simple choice for women. It is a calculated, contemplated decision after weighing the costs and benefits. Either way they endure. At times they prefer to endure the pain than to endure both the smell and the shame.

7.4 COMPANY

While younger daughters are always accompanied by their mothers to toilets in all these areas, women themselves, especially those above forty years of age go alone. Younger women prefer company especially if the toilet is at some distance. In Bawana, as each block has minimum one toilet and maximum three, women don't have a problem in going to the toilet alone. However in Janta Mazdoor Colony, women prefer being accompanied by a friend/relative/neighbor as the toilet is at a distance and being behind the area is also secluded from the colony. Also as most people have home toilets in this area, the toilet, unlike the one in Bawana remains comparatively empty during certain hours of the day. Going in company to the CTCs also serves another purpose other than providing psychological security, i.e. toilets often become the **social meeting points**. The process of defecating together creates sociality. The travel to and back from toilets and the company therein-i.e. the toilet time gives women time to talk to each- other and gossip.

7.5 SAFETY

" Sharam, chichorapanti to hain hi. Boodhon ko nahi chhodte.. Par ab kya kar sakte hain? " Majboori hai"

The most crucial problem associated with toilets for women, a fact which cross-cut throughout our study was – the problem of safety of women. Often women get eve-teased, mocked at, molested and face harassment ranging from verbal, visual, physical, flashing, stalking, violent physical attack, sexual assault or rape. In one of our visits to the toilet complex at Janta Mazdoor Colony, we were shown this particular cubicle which had its wall broken. Incidentally a few men had **climbed the wall of the toilet** (the low walls are a perpetual security threat) and tried to enter the cubicle while a woman was using it. While there were no latches in cubicles, even latching can't be resorted to for maintaining privacy, it shows.

On the other hand, as the toilet is at one end of the *basti* in JMC, slightly away from the houses, the cries of help seldom reach out. *"Gents baith jaate hain aur aurati ko daboch lete hain... Yahan se to aawaaz bhi bahar nahi jayegi"* (Often men hide in the ladies toilets and attack women. From here even the cries of help or shouting do not reach out). The area behind the toilet is barren land where men often loiter and do drugs. Women in this colony as well as in Annanagar complained that young boys and men are a source of constant nuisance- they get drunk, climb the walls of the cubicles and harass women and at times in their inebriated state hurl abuses too, thus making it difficult to visit the

public toilet during afternoon and night. In Janta Mazdoor Colony in particular, there have been instances when **men even wore a burqa and sat inside the cubicles in a disguised manner to attack women**. Such cases take place in Bawana too where men try to enter ladies toilet and try attacking them with blades.

Another woman told us that she tries not to verbally fight back with men who comment at her or her daughters on their way to the MCD toilet complexes. According to her it is pointless to argue with them, it will result in further harassment. Due to lack of water, women carry water in a container which makes their purpose obvious to anyone they come across. She recalls, '*kabhi kabhi awara ladke dabbe pe haath maar dete hain aur jaan boojh ke paani gira dete hain*' (Sometimes men who are loitering around intentionally spill water from our containers). Reluctantly she says, '*Par yeh to rooj ka mamla hai*' (It is now an everyday affair).

The lack of gender friendly and proper, functional toilets contribute to rampant violence and harassment directed towards women. Hence it is not surprising that women find these public toilets unsafe. For instance in Bawana, in the old blocks (unlike the new blocks) one toilet complex is used for both sexes with separate entrances as it is architecturally constructed to be. '*Yahaan bawana ka mahaul aisa hai ki akele jaayenge toh khatre se khaali nahi honge, aadmi log yahaan tak ki yeh naujawan ladke bhi bahut chhedkhaani karte hain*'. (The environment is such that going alone means inviting danger. Not only men but even young boys indulge in eve-teasing. Even older women are teased at times) '*Neher ke paas toh itne rape hote hain kii poochho hee mat. Saari factories neher ke paas hain jis wajah se kaafi auraton ke marad unhe factory mein kaam nahi karne dete hain*'. (Near the drain there have been many cases of rape. As the factories are located there, many men don't allow their wives to work there.)

Based on our interaction with Jagori, a Delhi based NGO working in Bawana what emerged was that unemployment has led to a lot of men drinking and hence creating nuisance when they are unconscious. Some peep in through the windows because the walls around the toilets are not high enough and sometimes they hit with small pebbles, '*Kankad marte hai*'.

Practically every second respondent we spoke to mentioned the **lack of sufficient distance/demarcation** between men's and women's toilet cubicles. In fact when women are urinating inside the cubicles, the *safai karamchaari* doesn't even wait and enters the women's section. Many times these *safai karamchaaris* are drunk and they misbehave. Because **there aren't any female attendants/ supervisors** in the toilet, majority of the women feel very scared to use the public toilets and some are compelled to defecate in the open and almost all the women prefer accompanying their daughter(s) to the toilet.

These cases show that women's safety is threatened by a number of factors when they access the CTC: poor/ faulty design of the cubicles (open roofs where men can peek in); poor maintenance (broken latches and doors); no female attendant; men and boys loitering around the toilet complexes; inadequate lighting (women find it difficult to get back home in the dark and fear it is easier for men to attack them in the CTC compound at night).

Safety concerns take their own form in Masoodpur which is void of any public toilets and the entire population is dependent on open defecation near the jungle on the margins of Delhi –Gurgaon border.

While **Insects and dogs** are a major source of trouble during open defecation, **weather** plays an important role too. In monsoons, open defecation is troublesome due to slippery ground and water logging leading to marshy land; while in summers, if the trees and plants dry up and die, the problem aggravates for women due to insufficient green cover.

Here the security of women is threatened by the **outsiders** than by the local men (as they told us). The women claimed that their colony is safe due to the unity amongst the community members. The inbuilt segregation of space in the open jungle, over a period of time, hints towards this understanding. Area reserved for women is closer in terms of distance than that for men. This however doesn't put an end to the troubles faced by women here. There are innumerable instances of women being attacked or assaulted by strangers and young girls being kidnapped.

In Masoodpur, where no strict segregation of spaces is followed, there has been a case of a woman being molested as she happened to sit in the vision range of a man while out in the jungle for defecation. When men are called for counseling sessions in Jagori in Bawana or in Bal Vikas Dhaara in Mahipalpur, they retort by saying that it's women who instigate them by defecating in their range of vision. *"Ladkiya uksa deti hain"*

Cases like these particularly point at the **vulnerability of women when they are out for open defecation**. But is this vulnerability duly realized by the state?

The gravity of the situation can be gauged by a recent legal stride of Government of India which set up Verma committee on anti-rape laws so a new Charter of Rights can be granted to victims of sexual offence. The committee submitted the report recently and recommended that 10 new Charter of Rights be enacted into law to prevent gender violence. The Charter states that a woman -

*"can seek prosecution of somebody who, without her consent, watches her in **a private act** where her genitals, buttocks or breasts are exposed or covered only in underwear or she **is using a lavatory** or doing a sexual act not of a kind ordinarily done in public."*¹

This specific Charter intends to protect Indian women who have access to private spaces. This working premise does not include the women defecating in the open. It depicts **clear ignorance towards 68% of the Indians (including men, women and children) defecating in the open**. This space is devoted especially for women because as Judge Ilana Rovner puts it, in her opinion,

*"The fact is, biology has given men less to do in the restroom and made it much easier for them to do it."*²

Contextualizing it in the Indian urban milieu, this stands true even outside the rest room. The spate of rape and sexual assault records of women attending nature's call is worrisome and obviously not adhered to. **Both nature and culture are working against women**. Dasra published an extensive study

¹ <http://www.thehindu.com/news/resources/full-text-of-justice-vermas-report-pdf/article4339457.ece>

² <http://www.law.uchicago.edu/files/files/tperae.pdf>

in 2012 which states that approximately 30% of women from the underprivileged sections of Indian society experience violent sexual assaults every year because of lack of sanitation facilities forces them to go long distances to find secluded spots or public facilities to meet their bodily needs. This report specifically highlights that in “Delhi slums, up to 70% of girls experience humiliation every day in terms of verbal harassment and half of them have been victims of grave physical assaults.”³

Women and girls in Anna Nagar, Bawana and Seelampur and Masoodpur risk sexual harassment when they have to go to the bathroom, whether they go to the open fields or to a toilet complex. This fear of being attacked has made many women, especially the younger ones, less assertive of claiming their right to the CTC. While many try complaining, at times they are silenced by the family and at times a complaint doesn't help. Many women in Bawana are also victims of domestic violence and find going to the police a futile exercise. *“Jab ghar me hi jagah par apna haq nahi jama sakte, to bahar kaise karenge?”* (When we can't claim our spaces within the household, how can we claim it outside the house?)

7.6 HONOUR AND SHAME

“Hum auraton ka mazaak udta hai, hum besharam banate hain, humari hee izzat uchhali jaati hai , unki nahi”

Our findings suggest that the concept of safety is closely related to the way women and their families perceive honour and shame. Thus women are very careful while going to the toilets to avoid any intrusion on their modesty which would bring shame to their families. This throws light on how a woman's sexuality and control over woman's sexuality is of utmost concern to her family in a patriarchal society.

Almost all the female respondents we spoke to, unanimously complained that whenever they go to the field to urinate, men and boys tease a lot, hoot and whistle unnecessarily. Further, the supervisors in these toilets are all men. They pose very inappropriate questions and discomforting enquires such as whether the woman is going to bathe or to the toilet or the latrine. If a woman washes her face or her clothes have blemish of splashes of water on her clothes they ask, *‘Naha kar aaye ho kya’* (Did you take a bath or what?). Such questions are mostly baseless and evidentially weak. This clearly **deprives a woman of her privacy** and pries into unnecessary details that the supervisor should not be concerned with. Many young respondents shared that while defecating in the open or in the public toilets; it is scary when they are caught off guard by the presence of a male supervisor.

Often cases of sexual harassment against very young girls do take place but often they are **not reported** for the fear of damaging the societal image of the girl and her family. Women of Janta Mazdoor Colony always have the fear of their **daughter's safety** at the back of their mind. They are concerned that their daughter(s) might be harassed or molested in the public toilet and the resultant shame it would bring

³ Dasra Report. “Squatting Rights: Access to Toilets in Urban India.”

upon the family. **'Agar kal ko humari ladki ke saath toilet mein koi chhedkhaani karta hai toh hum kahaan mooh dikhaane layak reh jaaenge, itni badnaami hogi'**. (If tomorrow someone eve teases my daughter in the toilet, how will we show our face to the world.) At the same time, some households in Janta Mazdoor Colony have constructed their own personal toilet. The reasons for constructing toilet at home also has to do with the **fear of the possibility of their daughter being harassed or molested** in the public toilet and the resultant shame and insult it would cause.

However, a few women interviewed, especially the older ones were very assertive of going to the CTC confidently and challenged that no one could harm them come what may. They denied feeling shy or embarrassed and claimed that they go to the toilet whenever they would feel like and that too alone. Nevertheless, we were told that even older women at times are not spared from being eve-teased. It was observed that younger women and girls and their families were more concerned about *sharam and izzat* as they being young posed the maximum risk to their sexuality and virginity and subsequently the honour of their families.

While women going to the CTCs are careful of not venturing out at night, Masoodpur women, on the contrary, safeguarded their honour by going to the forest around 10 PM in the night. A woman whom we interviewed told us that she found that time safe as the dark camouflages and gives her an invisibility to defecate. **Nobody can see her and that saves her from sharam.** Often **when men are in the visibility range, she pulls up her salwar immediately and stands up.** As the women go nearby and that too in a comparatively trustworthy environment, the fear of being molested in the dark is much lesser than it is in other sites.

In Annanagar, where women prefer to go in the open than to bear the dirt and foul smell in the toilet, the choice of place of open defecation brings an important fact to light. While men go nearby in the bushes, women travel and go up to the railway track. The fact seems perplexing as to why this segregation and why can't women go to the bushes? A probable reason could be that women prefer to travel some distance away from where the entire habitation is so that they are not seen. They negotiate their invisibility by going away from their neighbourhood, their *biradari*, their community.

While in Masoodpur, women go nearer and men farther, it happens the other way round in Annanagar, but in both, there is segregation and an effort on the part of women to veil their honour and veil away sharam.

This shows that whether women go to the toilet or go out in the field, whether they go in the morning or at night, whether they go nearer or farther; their safety and honour is what they are most concerned with. They cannot be seen urinating/defecating in the public. The reason for this is that women's body are the obvious sites where men negotiate the shame and honour of families. These bodies are to be preserved. They cannot be revealed in the public. So these mundane activities need to be done in hiding, away from the sight of men, away from shame and humiliation. The time they choose to go – their preferred time, the place they choose to go to and company they choose to take along all reflect upon how going to the toilet, a basic process, involves various complexities and its consequences for women. The echoes of patriarchy haunt women wherever they go.

7.7 BATHING AND URINATING

“Jab toilet aane mein hi daar hai to nahane mein to kya hi hoga?”

We hardly came across women who would use the public toilet for taking a bath. While the facilities at Annanagar and Sanjay Camp and Janta Mazdoor Colony thwarted any possibility of bathing owing to the dilapidated bathing compartments of women’s toilets, even in Bawana, where there were functional bathing compartments (women have to bring their own water though), women seldom chose to bathe in the public toilets. When asked, a woman said that wasn’t going to the toilet to defecate a risk enough?

All women in these areas had mostly made a makeshift structure in their homes to bathe. Women staying in camps in Bawana couldn’t even do that as they didn’t have a house. Living in makeshift tents, **they bathe with their clothes on** and bitterly question this way of bathing ‘*ye bhi koi nahana hai*’ (Is this how you bathe?)

One reason why women avoid bathing in the public toilets is that there is insufficient space for them to change. While men can walk the distance from toilets to home draped in a towel, women however can’t do the same. To avoid the ordeal of carrying clothes to change and wash, they prefer to bathe at home and thus bathing cubicles of the sites we visited were seldom used. Secondly, they want to avoid the supervisor’s uncomfortable questions; thirdly, the charge for bathing is an additional Rs.3 over Rs.2 for latrine. Finally, women know the threats to their safety which the public toilet poses; **bathing entailing complete nakedness is a huge risk keeping in mind the broken latches, low roofs and loiterers.**

Women from an early age are socialized and taught the womanly virtues of pain bearing, tolerance and patience. This is most clearly seen in the case of Urinating! Often when they are out for work, what do the women do when they need to urinate? While men can urinate facing the wall, women can’t. Along with toilets, urinals for men have been constructed in the entire city. What about women? The movie ‘Q2P’ directed by Paromita Vohra satirically shows how women would need to put the ‘magic cone’ at their uterus and urinate through it like a man. That is the only way they can access public urinals! While few relieve themselves by hiding somewhere, we were shocked to find out that most of the women we interviewed told us that they hardly urinate, except when they go for defecation. They would drink less water to avoid the very effort. This disciplining of body has a critical effect on their health and many never realize the relation their ill-health has with their toilet practices.

7.8 AVAILIB ILITY OF TOILETS AT WOMEN'S WORKPLACE

"Yeh mera adhikaar hai"

The women of Janta Mazdoor Colony work as housemaids in the nearby area of Subhash Park and are very assertive when it comes to using toilets at their workplace. Most didn't have a problem using toilet at the workplace. A woman left her job when she wasn't allowed to use the toilet. '*tatti peshaab karne par koi rok nahi laga sakta hai. Yeh mera adhikaar hai. Vo to main garib hun warna mere ghar mein latrine zaroor hota. Ghar bhale hi kachha ho, par latrine hona bahut zaroori hai. Khule mein jaane mein kitni sharam aati hai humein.*' (Nobody can stop me from going to the toilet. Its my right. Had it not been my poverty, I would have surely constructed a toilet at home. We the poor too feel ashamed going out in the open).

One of the respondents from Janta Mazdoor Colony shared that there is a lot of prejudice among employers regarding whether the maids/servants can use their toilet. They say that they can use the toilet only if they clean it. As a result, the respondent takes up work in a house only if they allow her to use the toilet. In the past, she even refused to work at a particular household because she was denied the right to use the toilet there, and on the contrary was forced to clean the toilet but was still not allowed to use it. As a result, now she is very careful- she takes up work in a particular house only if she is allowed to use the toilet.

Another woman told us that she is not allowed to use the toilets at her work place (a middle class surrounding). On further probing she says, '*kaha jati hu kya? Aage ppeche dekh ke, gaadi pe paas kar lete hu*' (where do I go? I see around and sit behind a car and do it). In Bawana, as working women go to the factory, they use the toilets at the factory. Women in Masoodpur work as maids in the adjacent colonies of Vasant Kunj and are at times not allowed to use the toilet at the owner's workplace. When they are allowed, they are expected to clean the entire toilet. Some were even told to go back to their place to use their toilet and then rejoin for work. While women cope with the availability and non-availability of toilets, not one respondent told us of using the public toilets on way to work. Maybe the routes they take, don't have this facility; or maybe they have never considered this option.

7.9 FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS

The CTC at Janta Mazdoor Colony and the toilets in old blocks in Bawana charge a fee for toilet use, the former charges only men. The charges are usually Rs 2, 3, 5 for latrine, bathing and washing respectively, though the costs differ from site to site. The supervisor usually asks for money only once and not for subsequent visits.

Often people living in these areas find the cost burdensome. A resident of Janta Mazdoor Colony having a family of 8 with 4 men, shells out Rs.9 for toilet use. If all 4 men go to the CTC, the family ends up spending Rs. 36 a day on toilet use. He believes that once the colony is passed, then some arrangement can still be done, but as of now, they hardly have space to construct a home toilet. '*Aadmi se bhi nahi lena chahiye*' (the men shouldn't be charged either).

At Bawana Resettlement Colony, in old blocks, men and women both have to pay. The women who are not working, depend solely on their husband's income for their daily toilet costs. A respondent told us that at times her husband loses patience when she approaches him for money for toilet each day. These women don't blame their husbands entirely. They understand the constraints the family has. Most women strategize by washing clothes and bathing at makeshift arrangements at home. Women in staying in camps in Bawana bathe in groups with their clothes on. The reason why more women choose to let go of bathing in toilets than men also has to do with their safety as discussed above.

When women in Masoodpur were asked whether they would want to have CTCs in the area, they candidly told us that while they may feel the need for an enclosed space but if the CTCs levy charges, they would rather not have them and continue their negotiation with the open fields as they have continued to do so.

7.10 SCHOOLS

When essential services fail to consider the particular needs of women and girls, they face serious challenges - including safety and health hazards - and are prevented from being able to access and benefit from opportunities such as employment and education.⁴

Lack of sanitation is detrimental not only to women's health and their dignity but also to their education. Girls are reluctant to attend school, and parents are disinclined to send them, if there are no safe, private toilets for them to use.

Girls and boys use the same toilets but each group has designated 'shifts' so that there is no overlap. Since the school toilets are very dirty and hardly ever cleaned and there is no provision of menstrual waste disposal, girls do not use the toilets at school at all and have learnt to control themselves, or go home before the school day is over. Some girls do not even go to school when they are menstruating due to the dirty toilets.

The young girls we spoke to told us that many of them do not go to the toilet alone because they are scared of someone entering the cubicle as there are no latches or locks. They also don't drink water during school hours to avoid going to the dirty toilets.

⁴ UNICEF India, Water, Environment and Sanitation

7.11 WHAT ABOUT PREGNANT WOMEN AND DIFFERENTLY-ABLED?

If public toilets seem to suggest that women in general are not welcome in public space, they also seem to suggest that menstruating, pregnant and lactating women simply do not exist¹. For pregnant women, the lack of toilets at a time when bladder control is near impossible makes being out in public

¹ Phadke, Shilpa, Khan, Sameera, Ranade Shilpa. 2007. Why Loiter- Women and risk on Mumbai Streets. Penguin India

an unpleasant adventure. But they don't have the luxury of having access to personal toilets either. (Phadke, Khan, Ranade 2011:84)

A respondent from Annanagar shared with us the problems she faces on an everyday basis because of lack of 'proper' toilets. "Now that I'm pregnant it is very difficult to go to the open field or the toilet. It is

10 minutes away, always crowded, extremely dirty, the foul smell always adds to the nausea. Because of this, I eat less which results in severe fatigue and weakness. I cannot even walk for a km to go to Block J, K, and I toilets. It's very far, I feel very weak."

Because of the deplorable condition of the toilet, she consciously eats very little and also drinks little water. As a result she feels very fatigued all the time. During pregnancy, hence, it is very difficult to use the public toilet. Her four year old son also doesn't like going to the toilet. She can never go to the toilet at night, she feels ashamed asking her husband to accompany her to the toilet at night. She isn't allowed to go anywhere without her sister-in-law especially to the toilet, because it would bring a bad name to the family.

At all the three sites, it was observed that the design and location of public toilets does not consider the needs of women and men with disabilities and pregnant women. Even when cubicles are demarcate for differently abled persons, they are usually in a dilapidated condition and make it impossible for these people to use the toilet on their own. This reflects how there is absolute apathy towards the very acknowledgement of existence of differently abled persons and pregnant women.

HEALTH PROBLEMS

As a misfortune of lack of safety and comfort experienced by women in Seelampur, Bawana, Masoodpur and Annanagar they often avoid relieving themselves more than once a day. This has devastating consequences on their health as they avoid drinking water and urinating for as long as possible. Many women do not eat and drink at night in order to evade having to go to the bathroom at night.

Women at all the four sites reported feeling nauseous using dirty and unclean toilets, but they continue to do so as due to lack of alternative. In Masoodpur and Annanagar, women reported that parasitic insects are often a problem owing to open defecation (particularly in Masoodpur), combined with complains of dog bites.

With no water supply and toilets within their homes, and their inability to openly defecate during the day due to lack of privacy and fear of harassment, they wait for the night to find a secluded spot to defecate, a practice which has serious side effects.

The lack of access to clean toilets and lack of personal hygiene result in serious health problems and increases chances of contracting chronic constipation, severe white discharge, heavy menstrual bleeding i.e. dysmenorrhea, menstrual problems, bladder inflammations, stomach aches, kidney stones, skin problems, urinary tract infections, jaundice, nausea, psychological stress, anxiety attacks and feelings of social shame. That apart, it creates irreparable complications during pregnancy and postnatal recovery.⁷

We interviewed a few doctors in Bawana and Annanagar and at both places there was a consistency regarding the problems which women experience. White discharge was one of the most common problems women complained of stemming from lack of awareness of proper sanitation. The doctors complained that women don't wash their private parts frequently and properly. As there are dry latrines and people have to carry their water containers, most don't use water when they go for urinating. These problems get aggravated during the time of menstrual periods. Due to lack of disposal facilities, women throw the sanitary napkins either in the field (when no one is around) or stuff them in the latrines which further contributes to diseases being spread. Using dirty toilets or unclean fields also leads them to contract severe urine tract infection. Women, on their part approach doctors only after their ailment reaches a peak.

Lack of safety and inadequate provision of essential services is constantly putting women and girls in positions where they are forced to make decisions that they hope will help them to ensure that there is no violation of their bodily integrity.⁸

A few women blamed themselves and other women for the sorry state of affairs. We were surprised to learn they don't blame the authorities right away but also consider themselves responsible for not

⁷ Dasra Report. "Squatting Rights: Access to Toilets in Urban India."

⁸ Jagori report on gender and essential services

keeping the toilets clean. They blame women from their blocks, other blocks and more frequently the blame shifts to the people of 'other' religion for making the toilet dirty!

As far as children are concerned, they often use spaces nearer the settlement to defecate - open gutters right outside their own houses, nearby parks and playgrounds, open spaces adjacent to streams and water sources, thereby contaminating their surroundings and drinking water sources. In most cases, open spaces used for defecation are also the only open spaces for children to play in. Regular exposure to and direct contact with fecal matter and drinking contaminated water induces transmission of fatal diseases such as diarrhea, parasitic infections, and worm infections, killing people, especially children.

Even when diarrhea does not kill, it severely debilitates, making children more susceptible to a host of conditions such as respiratory infections and chronic under nutrition. The cost of treating diarrheal disease drains family finances, and denies them resources for other development objectives such as education and nutrition. Furthermore, according to a survey by UNICEF, decreasing immunity suffered by children in their early years as a result of sanitation-linked diseases significantly hampers their **cognitive development**, with a lifelong impact on their growth and progress.¹⁰

Illnesses caused by lack of sanitation compel adults, especially women, to take care of ailing members of the household. This means they either forego productive labour, or risk their own health to fully realize their productive potential.¹¹ The economic deprivation of the urban poor increases manifold when healthcare expenses and the cost of lost potential due to sickness arising from inadequate sanitation is added.¹²

⁹ UNICEF India, Water, Environment and Sanitation

¹⁰ Sustainable Sanitation: the five year drive to 2015

¹¹ Water and Sanitation Program, The Economic Impacts of Inadequate Sanitation in India

¹² WSSCC, Don't Waste a Good Investment

POLITICS OF SPACE

Railway tracks, behind the bushes, behind parked cars, open spaces, urban jungles, near the nalas – these are the very spaces where these women attend the call of nature. They are metaphors of ‘going to toilet’. They take these spaces and try to claim them, but what is more important, are the mechanisms they employ in order to negotiate within these spaces. According to Certeau, strategy is ‘*a place that be circumscribed as proper and thus serve as the basis of generating relations with an exterior distinct from it*’ (Certeau xix: 1984).² In Certeau’s *Practice of the Everyday* as the name suggest, however fragmentary a practice might be it always adheres to a formal structure and certain degree of conformity and logic. Similarly, women and men when using a bounded space for open defecation also inculcate certain informally laid rules.

The men and women use the strategy of demarcating their spaces used for open defecation so that the ‘honour’ and ‘shame’ of women is not jeopardized. This strategy is strictly followed in Masoodpur and Annanagar. In the former, men reported going farther into the jungle in the favor of convenience of women. In the latter the farther off railway tracks are used by women as compared to ‘nalas’ by men. This politics is related to the familiarity and solidarity within communities of a given site. Women in Annanagar don’t know how this demarcation and delineation of spaces had come into being, but it has become a norm now. Women choose to go farther away to the railway track to veil themselves from their neighborhood and the *biradari* (community). Women of Masoodpur don’t have to go farther as they use the open grounds at night when darkness veils them from the community.

Women use these tactics to safeguard themselves from the sight of men during the act. “Tactic depends on time- it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized ‘on the wing’”. (Certeau xix:) Hence most of the women who responded positively to open defecation nuanced it further by saying that they attended nature’s call early before dawn or during night. The incidence of voyeurism has a direct correlation with women’s exposure of their genitals. The inadequate urinals, unhygienic conditions of the CTCs, perpetual dirt and stink of the toilet along with them being unsafe spaces have led women to master the practice of control. Often the women don’t even see trespassers but the headlights of cars or the sounds of approaching men has such an effect that they immediately stand up when in fields and pull up their salwars instantly in a robotically programmed manner. Gradually, they have made their bodies so habituated, that they do not even realize the health implications of their practice, which are indeed grave.

The ‘gaze’ or ‘stare’ inflict the women with ridicule and constant fear of being stared at. The gaze passively attacks the women and the fear of being attacked gets accentuated each time she is out there. The body has to time itself for minimum expose time and the act of ‘relieving’ oneself is paradoxical when it is fraught with danger.

² ¹³ Certeau, Michel de 1984: *The Practice of Everyday Life*. University of California Press, Berkeley.

¹⁴ *ibid*

While strategies are resorted to in the practice of going to the field and to the toilet, at times certain spaces by virtue of being repulsive and unsafe has another impact on women – that of disciplining their bodies. The women have trained their bodies to go to the toilet once a day and they ensure this by consuming less fluids and food at night. The effects of space disciplining the body in a Foucault-ian sense are starkly evident here. Further, the gaze like the Panopticon¹⁵ embarks itself across space and time, and is inevitable. The body overtime acutely becomes aware of time and space, but simultaneously, like in any form of violence, the oddity practice gets desensitized, internalized and normalized. There is a complete lack of alternative and everyday practices as these can in no way be dismissed and discontinued. The shock of ‘gaze’ and ‘being looked at’ create mechanisms of coping- the strategies and the corporeal body. In the process the body is stripped off its agency and subjectified by the non-existent infrastructure.

¹⁵ J. Bentham, *Le Panoptique*, preceded by M. Foucault, “L’oeil du pouvoir”; “The eye of power” and followed by a translation by M. Sissung of the first part of the original version of *Panopticon*, as published by Bentham in England in 1791.

THE STAKEHOLDERS

Often the facts on the face of it lead us to blame the authorities. However, we thought it was important to know the side of the story of the authorities to get a holistic picture of the problem. We met a few MCD officials, working in East Delhi Municipal Corporation and North Delhi Municipal Corporation and a private player.

Under the Yamuna Action Plan and with the aid of the Japan government, 1000 toilets were constructed in the city to check open defecation. However with the gradual introduction of sewer (in homes) people started constructing home toilets and around 50% of the Community Toilet Complexes (CTC) became redundant. We were told that of the 1,544 CTCs, 900 are running and 600 are closed or redundant with the CTC building being put to use for other facilities. It served no purpose and no wonder that an old out-of use toilet complex in Janta Mazdoor Colony is now being set aside for a community hall.

CTCs fall under the ambit of MCD, SLUM, or private players. Sulabh International, a NGO is another key player which manages toilets at various public places such as metro stations, pilgrimage sites or tourist destinations (The CTCs at the sites we visited were not under Sulabh and hence no assessment of the latter is made in the report). In the case of private players, the operation is outsourced where the companies which buy tender usually charge a fee of Rs 1 / 2. (Sulabh International also charges a nominal fee, but those who are unable to pay due to financial constraints aren't forced). While it may seem that the outsourcing of operations divides accountability and lightens the burden on the government, we were told that there wasn't much improvement and subsequently the contracts to Sulabh and NGOs were cancelled. On the other hand, in our interview with Sulabh International, we were told that the quality of toilets further degraded on being transferred to MCD!

Amidst this blame game, one fact left us shocked at our own ignorance. We realized in the course of our interview that the MCD toilets are supposed to be absolutely **free of cost**. How were we to place the people paying for toilet use in Janta Mazdoor Colony and Bawana? Well, how were we to forget an important part of the entire system – corruption.

The toilet attendants draw a salary from MCD and they are not supposed to charge. However, they charge this amount which becomes their private income. On assumption, this money doesn't reach MCD and often people have the impression that they pay for the services they use and yet the services are not upto the mark. Cleverly, at many CTCs, the board which reads *Ni-shulk* (free of cost) is hidden by a cloth! Also at many CTCs, since the public paid the amount of Re 1 and Rs 2 when it was managed by Sulabh, **unaware and habituated** they continue to pay and sometimes they want to willingly pay so that the toilets are kept clean. Even though MCD claims to provide the service '**free of any cost**' the public which is reported to be LIGs (Lower Income Groups) ends up shelling out money out of their meager incomes.

Another loophole, a gap between the rule book and reality which confronted us was the **mysterious female toilet attendant**. Of all the 52,000 employees employed by MCD, 20,000 are women. MCD's information shows the names of 2 employees – 1 man and 1 woman at most of the CTCs. When we told the officials that we never came across any woman at the CTC, we were told that often toilet attendant get their relatives to sit at the toilet duty. We saw this for ourselves at the CTC at Annanagar where two old men were sitting at the CTC. One of them was the maternal uncle of the toilet attendant and the other was there to accompany him. Maybe this is one way to secure the government salary and also the time to do something extra. However being prudent, at times of inspection, the attendants are careful and also warn the public using the toilet not to disclose the discrepancies. But where was the toilet attendant? All we were told was that he was not there that day! Where was the female toilet attendant? Is she herself safe when on toilet duty?

As we were told, it is impossible to keep a check on all employees. Of all the work under MCD, priority of toilets lies much behind more important priorities like road, water and education. The government is aware of the situation of toilets but the population is too huge to fit into the frame of consideration. Individual monitoring is not possible.

Interdepartmental feuds and corruption is another parasite on the basic amenities of the masses. There is an overlap in functions and jurisdiction of urban authorities like DDA, Delhi Jal Board (oversees the water supply and sewerage) and MCD causing significant coordination problem in the city. While cleanliness comes under MCD, road comes under PWD and sewer under Jal Board. The departments require coordination among them, but more often there is shifting of responsibility as the boundaries separating them are thin. There has been acute lack in the unified planning of Delhi hence leading to the fragmentary growth especially in giving rise to *“the two-faced personality of the city, one representing the elite and the affluent and another, the impoverished and the deprived. This set in the process of uneven growth of the city, with its separate and distinct identities.”*¹⁶ The inequalities trickle down to the lower income groups, highlighting the tensions finely. This situation is further aggravated with the expansion of bureaucracy based on vote bank politics with politicians obsessed with patronizing certain individuals and communities.

As government ombudsmen there the officials raised the question of **public’s civic sense** in the maintenance of the services provided. Ladies themselves don’t leave the toilets clean. They were aghast with the **theft** of fittings from the public toilets. According to them this lack of public accountability has led to the abortion of implementation of projects because any misuse of resources or any glitch leads to a legal action against the emissary of that particular project. Often the department is blamed for callousness. However there is water scarcity and often septic tanks in unsewered area leads to clogged drains. How many times can a toilet be cleaned?

There is a risk of misuse at night with people wanting to park their animals and motorcycles in the toilet complex. The toilet attendant cannot at all times risk having a brawl with the residents. Hence the toilets are kept locked at night.

They added that proposing anything related to the convenience of the **women** adds to the burden of the officials because then the security and safety of the women also comes into the ambit of the project. Monitoring of such projects is an added cost and risk as well. It’s a cost in terms of female supervisors, guards and resources. It’s a risk to the safety of women given the statistics of sexual harassment and the risks of the emissary being charge sheeted and eventually lead to suspension if any such event happens on his/her proposed project sites.

Toilets, where the women privates (genitals) are exposed to its maximum and its location in the public arena poses a critical paradox. The women’s insecurity will continue to lurk as long as their ‘izzat’ (self-respect) is being attacked with ogling, eve-teasing, sexual comments and shocking rape cases. The officials clearly fear the safety of the woman when they try implementing a convenience scheme for them. This fear is in perfect alignment with the fear of the women of Seelampur who avoid the public toilet and have opted for the exorbitant construction of toilets at home, women of Bawana who defecate in the open even after the existence of quite many CTCs, women of Anna Nagar who defecate in the hush of the morning, absolutely ignoring the presence of one MCD toilet.

¹⁶ Center for study of Developing Societies, “Urban Tensions in India”, 223-24

The lack of public accountability, high rate of misuse, boisterous behavior and reckless inter-departmental problems and the constant safety threats unfortunately amounts to no proper projects on women's toilet being implemented. But what this suggests is another thing. The conceptions of honour and shame return but now at another level – moving beyond the family, they get associated with the state and its bodies. Any threat to women safety in CTCs would definitely harm the honour of the woman but would also jeopardize the honour of the state bodies which constructs these toilets. Sadly, in a patriarchal society, conceptions of shame and honour always take precedence over the questions of women's need and desires.

Women in the communities we studied also feel overwhelmingly powerless to improve the sanitation condition in their communities or to reduce its negative impact on their lives. To begin with they feel that they are not recognized as stakeholders and their opinion, their safety concerns do not seem to be of paramount importance. Men dominate this arena too, while they are less affected by inadequate sanitation conditions as opposed to women.

Men are more likely to leave the community to go to work during the day, thus they are likely to have access to more or better toilets. In comparison to women men need less privacy, as women require a toilet both to urinate and to defecate while men can urinate in the open without any sort of negative stigma. This also means that men need the use of a toilet less and so are not faced as often with the problem of lack of toilets or with the grim prospect of using a dirty communal toilet. In short the female respondents strongly feel that despite inadequate sanitation putting a greater burden on them as compared to men, they are not considered worthy enough to be consulted.

With little knowledge of how sanitation links to health and productivity and the high costs of building a toilet, marginalized households are unable to invest in sanitation. On the other hand, urban local bodies such as city municipalities are unmindful of the harmful effects not only on the poor but on society as a whole, resulting in low priority for the issue at both the household and city level. Even when there is latent demand for facilities among the poor they often lack the political voice needed to claim their basic right to sanitation. Tackling the problem of inadequate sanitation not only requires building infrastructure but creating greater awareness of the issue, its magnitude and its real costs – not just to poor people, but to societies as a whole.

DISCUSSIONS & CONCLUSIONS

“Toilets are more important in India than temples” - Jairam Ramesh

India after 66 years of independence is still grappling with the problem of open defecation. The fact that a statement by the Union Minister for Rural Development creates such a furor shows that sanitation still struggles to acquire the status it deserves. ‘What are they objecting to? Mentioning the word “temple” in the same breath as “toilets”¹⁷. While temples are conveniently the most sacrosanct places, toilets in the country unfortunately have to struggle with their image of profanity. Since the times of privy architecture, toilets were constructed outside the household, outside the sacred. While gradually they have found their place inside the architecture of the house, precautions are taken to check the profanity. What happens in the context of women and toilets? What happens when two profanities confront each other?

In India, a hierarchical Hindu social order structured around stringent rules of cleanliness and dirt-exemplified in the caste system permeates society at large. It reflects underlying notions of purity and pollution, especially those connected to the female body.

Since both women and toilets are seen as contaminating in relation to public space, a language of shame pervades any discussion of toilets for women. This adversely affects the actual provision of toilets for them. Any discussion of women's bodily functions is immediately seen as linked to their sexuality and hence to be silenced. Women's bodies are associated with bodily secretions- menstruation, ovulation, and lactation- seen as sources of ritual contamination at particular times of the month or year. These notions of contamination are so much part of women's conditioning that many women are usually too embarrassed to even ask for directions to a toilet. (Phadke, Khan, Ranade 2011:84)

This embarrassment runs deeper. It stems from a culture of certain things not being talked about or being hushed “It has also been observed that women or men do not speak about defecation, urination or bodily functions such as menstruation in public. It is assumed that women would ‘do their business’ in the darkness of early morning or night and hence considered inappropriate for them to attend to their bodily functions in the daytime. If discussing the need to urinate is embarrassing for women then menstruation is a complete taboo.” (Phadke, Khan, Ranade 2011:84)

Also for women in our society, because their sexuality needs to be guarded at all times, toilet is a liminal space where their private parts are exposed. This exposure needs to be hidden away; so much so that even attempts at molestation need to be hidden away, lest it brings shame to the woman and her family. The onus of being careful lies with women. They are the ones who have to be careful when they map their way to the fields or to the public toilet.

¹⁷ Amrit Dhillon.2012. Temples, toilets & India's shame. The Globe & Mail

The term 'public toilet' itself puts forward an interesting **paradox**. There are two parallel movements taking place simultaneously- Women leave their private abodes and enter the CTCs which are open to the public. These toilets also serve as social meeting points for women where they shed their inhibitions and talk freely. Along with this, there is another movement – women leave the public arena and enter the toilet which is a space for doing private functions. The toilet at once becomes a movement from the private to the public and a movement from the public to the private. The boundaries of public and private become weak. Women defecating in the open try to create their own 'private' by covering or hiding themselves, taking refuge behind their *ghunghat/ burqa*, tall grass or the dark. But often this 'private' they create is intruded by trespassers or by men trying to break into the cubicles of public toilet or by being caught in a Goffman-ian 'unforeseen event' when they are caught off guard by the male toilet attendant. They answer nature's call always being on the threshold of public-private and on the threshold of saving face and losing face.

Can this state of flux be resolved?

While Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan encourages construction of toilets at home in rural areas and slogans like "*ghar mein hai shauchalaya aaj pati ne rakhi meri laaj*" do the rounds, the same can't be applied to urban slums devoid of proper drainage and sewage facilities. These places need CTCs and hence the 'public' can't be done away with. But these public toilets can be made cleaner and safer so they ensure more privacy and allow women to access them in a confident manner.

The women we interviewed want privacy and desire clean and safe toilets. The private players in the business of toilets believe that toilets in these areas should be the counselor's responsibility and should charge a nominal fee so that there is accountability. We doubt if that can be a feasible solution considering that many women told us that if toilets would have to be pay-per-use, they would rather not have them and continue going to the fields.

A suggestion which we mutually agreed upon after much thought is adequate demarcation and spacing between men's and women's toilets, along with planned architecture. This suggestion looks anti-progressive as by creating distance, safety can't be guaranteed, more importantly segregation wouldn't lead to men respecting women and their privacy more. These arguments run across debates on women's compartment in the metro, women's special buses, etc. But the immediate need of the hour is to ensure that women feel confident in accessing these spaces without worrying about a man jumping from the low roof and entering her cubicle. It is important that women feel comfortable when they visit the toilets.

Many women feel that if women *safai karamchaaris* would be positioned at the various CTCs, it would be easier to ensure that toilets remain clean as it is easier to put pressure and ensure accountability from a female *safai karamchaari* than a male *safai karamchaari*. This is something which already exists in the rule book of MCD and needs to be sincerely implemented. The Community Toilet Complexes can also have a duty system in which women from the area only are made in-charge of the toilet to keep a check on cleanliness as per their duties. It will encourage accountability from within the community.

Most importantly, there is a need for more women toilets in public spaces. The discrepancy in the number of urinals, as per a report in 2008 was shocking. There were 132 female urinals as compared to

3192 urinals for men in the city¹⁸. Though they aren't seen urinating on walls, it doesn't imply that they don't need urinals. If solely urinals can't be constructed for women, small separate toilets for women need to be stationed in the city.

The report is not intended to show how men are much more privileged. Neither has it intended to show that they are shameless. They face the wall and show their back when they pee in public and try creating their own little 'private'. The problem however gets aggravated for women as there are far lesser toilets for them while they need toilets more, especially at times of pregnancy and menstruation. Further, men are more likely to leave the community for work during the day, and thus potentially have access to more or better toilets. Most importantly, threats to the safety of women make them less assertive of claiming their right over indeed a basic human right.

We understand that these suggestions look easy on paper, but so does the problem on the face of it. There are specialists who would know how to construct and what to construct. We honestly wouldn't. We only aim by the way of this report to bring out the criticality of this problem. The need is indeed urgent as the health of these women isn't getting any better, their safety isn't getting secured and they struggle to lay claim on a space as necessary as a toilet. They fight with something as basic as biology.

It is important that they don't control. That will indeed be liberating.

“Log kehte hain ki sabse zyada shaanti khaane se milti hain par main maanti hun ki sabse zyada shanti tatti karne se (latrine jaane se) milti hain !”

“Kisi ki majaal jo mujhe kuchh kahe ya meri izzat loote ya koi mujhpe hase kyunki main latrine karne jaa rahi hoon. Yeh jo baawle launde hanste hain, in chhichauron ka kya , yeh toh kahin bhi khade hoke mootne lagte hain.”

18

Sheikh, Shahana. 2008. 'Public Toilets in Delhi'. Centre for Civil Society.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 – Mobile Toilets

The fact that women avoid going to dirty toilets challenged our biggest prejudgment - that people in slums or unauthorized colonies must be habituated to live with dirt and filth around. What stinks, stinks for everybody. If we entered toilets holding our breath, they too had a dupatta covering their nose. While the non-availability of other options forces them to bear the stink, there were many women who chose to give the toilet a miss. We interviewed people who were relocated in camps near Mayur Vihar in the aftermath of rising water level of Yamuna. Despite mobile toilets being stationed there, we were shocked to find that people hardly used it. The toilet was being used only by children and men and women, complaining of the toilet being dirty, preferred going to the Mayur Vihar naala for their toilet use. They have always been going to the naala and the open air helps in subsiding the stench. The mobile toilet doesn't amuse them.

APPENDIX 2 – School

One of the limitations of this report is that we couldn't visit schools in these areas due to them being shut for summer vacations. However we interviewed some young girls and boys to know the condition of toilets in their school. The data we received was diverse. The schools had toilets; however they were insufficient in proportion to the number of students. Often, there were water problems and the toilets were dirty. Many girls informed us that chose to miss schools on days they had their menstrual periods as they couldn't access the toilets when they were dirty and the water supply uncertain. Government schools distribute sanitary napkins to girls, however often there are no dustbins in schools.

Often resettlement plays havoc to the continuity of education and the child has to learn to adjust again in a new environment. When we questioned the parents regarding schools, toilets weren't the concern for many. The primary concern of parents was education with which they were unsatisfied. Their children, even after reaching class 4th didn't know counting and alphabets. Lack of space and electricity further hampers their attention. '*Sabzi ki bori ya rashaan ki bori ke samaan hain classroom. Naam ki padai hoti hain*' (the classroom is like a sack of vegetables – Devendra Baral). Many parents complained that they weren't satisfied with the quality of meal being provided to children. The dissatisfaction with the quality of education led to many parents irrespective of their financial conditions incurring an additional cost – the cost on tuitions.

ILLUSTRATIONS

JANTA MAJDOOR COLONY:



Clockwise description from top left: 1. Kauslaya Ji and Rama Ji during a conversation. 2. Broken window in the women's section of the public toilet. 3. Overflowing latrines. 4. Garbage piled up in the cubicles. 5. Latrines without any water supply. 6. Disfigured structure of the public toilets.

BAWANA RESETTLEMENT COLONY:



Clockwise description from top left: 1. sanitary pads and used clothes forming a mound in one corner of public 2. toilet. 2. Wide open drainage and sewerage inside the toilets. 3. Low walls and wide open, naked ventilation windows of women's section of the public toilet (a view from outside) 4. No door on women's bathing cubicle. 5. The open area/ field used for open defecation. 6. Unflushed, unclean latrine.

MASOODPUR:

Clockwise description from top left: 1. Aluminum, asbestos jhuggis lined one after the other. 2. Housefly, carrier of contagious diseases, is in incalculable in Masoodpur. 3. The only source of water is from Delhi Jal Board, and that where it's all stocked. 4. Forest beyond this heap of garbage is the site for open defecation. 5. No garbage disposal or MCD support in this area. 6. Spread kilometers beyond what the eyes can meet, without any basic amenities.

ANNA NAGAR AND SANJAY COLONY:



Clockwise description from top left: 1. The condition of Yamuna that flows along Anna Colony. 2. The WHO office on the other bank of Yamuna, opposite Anna colony. 3. Children doing the household chores while mothers are at work. 4. Clogged bathing cubicle in both men and women compartment in the public toilet of Anna Nagar. 5. Unhygienic condition of the mobile toilet parked in Sanjay Colony for over a year but never cleaned since then. 6. Houseflies thriving on the dirty toilets and hence spread diseases. 7. No supply of water inside the toilets and hence the use of jars and cans. 8. The site for open defecation cross cutting among, the banks of river Yamuna, the bushy field and the railway tracks far beyond the field.

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