

## **Revolutionizing Sanitary Habits of the “Common” Indian: Story of the “Poop Guy”**

Prof. Amarnath Mitra, Research Scholar, IBS, IFHE Hyderabad.

*Revolutionizing Sanitary Habits of the “Common” Indian: Story of the “Poop Guy”*  
*What does GDP mean for a woman who has to spend over an hour to find a place to defecate?*

### **The Problem**

According to WHO, as on year 2014, more than 50% of Indians (i.e. over 600 million people) have no access to toilets<sup>[2]</sup>. Most of the public toilets and communal restrooms in Indian cities are either dysfunctional or lack proper hygiene. The condition is much worse in the semi-urban areas and in villages, where there is a near complete absence of public toilets. Worst than that, in villages, where 70% of Indian population reside, there is a severe dearth of private toilets in households. Only a handful privileged ones have access to toilets at home. Here, people are left with no choice but to defecate in open.

The practice of open defecation creates extremely unhygienic conditions that leads to disease, malnutrition and other environmental hazards<sup>[3]</sup>. Open defecation increases the risk of microbial contamination of water (with bacteria, amoeba, viruses, etc) which causes malnutrition, stunted growth, diarrhea and infections such as pneumonia in children. In India, diarrhea and worm infection are the two major causes that affect children impacting their growth and learning abilities<sup>[4]</sup>.

The most affected are the girl children and women who live under a constant fear for their safety from the sexual predators. In India, it is a common practice for the females, who lack access to private toilets, to wake up before sunrise or wait until dark to pass their urine. Moreover they have to walk miles to find the right and safe place to defecate. Also, venturing out alone in search of a suitable place to defecate is not a safe option. In most cases women and children have to look out for some companion to accompany them in order to avoid the perils of getting in the hands of sexual predators or human traffickers.

All these environmental conditions lead to holding up urine and other body wastes inside ones body which becomes highly discomforting and pose serious health hazards.

### **The Possible Solution**

Many public and private organizations have taken up the task to provide clean sanitation to the deprived lot. Several NGOs<sup>1</sup> are working in villages to setup toilets in schools and other public places. Several media houses, such as NDTV<sup>2</sup>, have raised to the occasion with their campaigns on public sanitation. Corporate firms, like Unilever India<sup>3</sup>, are generously participating in sanitation drive as a part of their CSR activity. International institutions, like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, are also actively providing funds and logistics to various sanitation programs in India.

Global organizations such as WHO and UNICEF are working relentlessly towards spreading awareness on sanitation and public health in India<sup>[5]</sup>. They provide funds for community driven movements on sanitation. They are working closely with government and non-government organizations to open up avenues for hygienic and accessible sanitation.

The Indian government too, with renewed vigor, has up the ante by launching the “Swachh Bharat Abhiyan” or Clean India campaign, in year 2014, which aims to sensitize the general public on issues of sanitation<sup>[6]</sup>. The government is working with private-public partnership to build clean toilets and public restrooms<sup>4</sup>.

And finally, courageous individuals like Swapnil Chaturvedi, who have taken up the challenge to tackle the problem of lack of clean public toilets in cities and restore dignity of women and children by providing them with clean, enclosed and safe urinals. Since 2010, Chaturvedi has been working tirelessly to create hygienic and accessible public toilets for the people of Pune, the city where he resides. Today, he is fondly known as the “Poop Guy”.

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<sup>1</sup> SaniShop. Source: [www.worldtoilet.org](http://www.worldtoilet.org)

<sup>2</sup> Swachh India Campaign in collaboration with Dettol. Source: <http://swachhindia.ndtv.com/>

<sup>3</sup> Lifebuoy's Social Mission. Source: <http://www.lifebuoy.com/socialmission/>

<sup>4</sup> For a detail list see <http://swachhbharat.mygov.in/participants>

### **The Beginning**

Before he became the “poop guy”, Swapnil Chaturvedi was living the American dream. An engineering graduate from Northwestern University with a nice job in the IT sector, Chaturvedi was living quite a comfortable life in the US with his wife and daughter<sup>[7]</sup>. But all that changed in 2007, when he visited his native place in India. On his trip he witnesses the enormous disparity in the income and lifestyle between the rich and poor. More than anything, he was appalled to see the abysmal state of basic sanitation facilities in Indian cities. During their stay in India, Chaturvedi’s little daughter often used to complain about the stinking toilets at her school. He found out that, her daughter used to painfully hold her bladder during school time and would get relieved only after coming home<sup>[8]</sup>. This proved to be the turning point for Chaturvedi, who himself, set out to clean toilets for the India’s urban poor.

In 2011, Swapnil Chaturvedi founded “Samagra Sanitation”, in Pune city, in order to provide the much needed sanitation services to the urban poor. His sole mission was to enable the marginalized communities to lead a healthier, dignified and productive lives, which he relentlessly continues to pursue<sup>5</sup>.

### **The Challenges**

Even though providing sanitation to the deprived seem to be a noble enterprise, yet there were several impediments to it. The first and foremost being the existing environment. Even in tier-two cities like Pune, the public toilet were unusable due to lack of maintenance. Few toilets which were functional, were dirty and unhygienic. They were a breeding ground for all kinds of germs and posed serious health risk, like urinary tract infections (UTIs), for the users. As such, people avoided using such public toilets. Moreover there was quite a dearth of public restrooms solely catering to the needs of women and girls. Most of the ladies urinals are constructed alongside the gents urinal, which prompted ladies not use them because these public toilets often left them exposed to leching, harassment and attacks by onlooking men.

The second challenge was lack of mindset and intent. In rural India, it is almost customary to defecate in open. The same habit can be observed in urban cities which contain far more literates and privileged people. Contrary to the villages where there are virtually no public toilets, in urban cities the excuse is often related to the lack of clean public lavatories. While defecating in open grounds over dirty urinals seem convenient, but in reality, they do more harm to general population. People, especially those living in slums, are used to open air defecation and it has developed into a habit; one which requires time, patience and proper guidance to change.

The third and most important challenge was sources of fund. Maintenance of public toilets was not an easy task, let alone the construction of new toilets. It involved availability of large amount of water for cleaning, disinfectants and germicides for sanitization, regular restoration of wear and tear, and above all, man-power. Moreover, there was an earnest need to educate the public about the perils of open defecation. All these required a steady inflow of funds. Most importantly it was quite a challenge to involve people and firms with deep pockets in this noble mission, since it was more of a social work than a business model.

### **The Endeavor**

Chaturvedi’s Samagra Sanitation is currently providing clean sanitation services to over 3300 daily users across two slums in Pune city<sup>[9]</sup>. Not only, the company work towards increasing ventilation, and overall cleanliness of the existing public toilets; it also educates local public to improve their hygiene routines.

Swapnil chaturvedi is an entrepreneur with a difference. He has successfully converted a social work into a sustainable business model. With the grant obtained from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Chaturvedi and his team has developed a toilet that converts human waste into electricity and fertilizer. Availability of funds has always been an issue. Thus, in order to involve more people Chaturvedi decided to tap the enormous cell phone usage by Indians<sup>6</sup>. Chaturvedi created a startup in 2011, called “Poop Rewards” which creates an incentive program using cell phone talk minutes and other prizes to encourage people who don’t have easy access to toilets, use the designated public lavatories in their area<sup>[10]</sup>. Chaturvedi’s aim is to target those cell phone users who are extremely price sensitive and believes that this demographic section of society, in order to save little bit of money<sup>7</sup>, will be willing to change their behavior by adopting the use of public toilets. Swapnil Chaturvedi is a man who cleans toilet for a job and lives as the Poop Guy, all for the dignity of his

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<sup>5</sup> Mission Statement. Source: <https://in.linkedin.com/in/pooguy>

<sup>6</sup> It is estimated that the number of active cell phone users in India, by 2014, is over 800 million. Source: TRAI

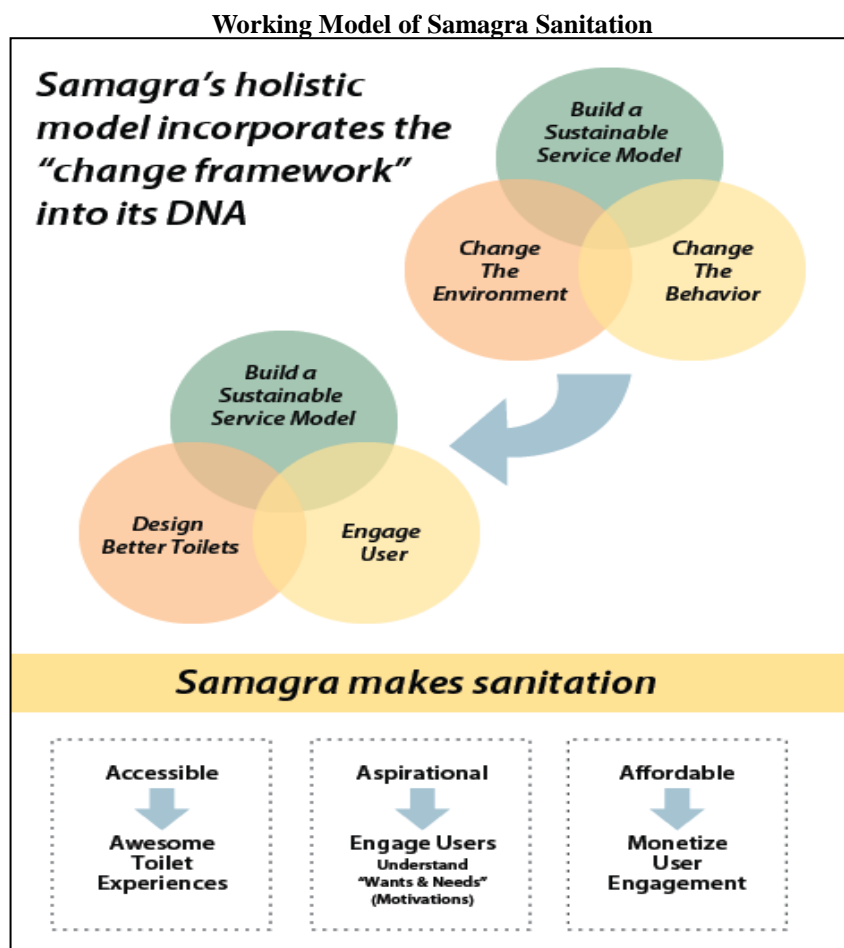
<sup>7</sup> Earning free cell phone talk time

daughter and girls like her.

**The Way Ahead**

Chaturvedi and his team of experts use information and communication technologies (ICTs), behavioral sciences and human centered designs to make public toilets accessible, affordable and aspirational for the poor. He is already working on eco-friendly and sustainable toilets that can convert human waste into electricity and give away bio-fertilizes as byproduct. With funds coming in Chaturvedi, aim to open up “Poop Franchises” which will combine Poop Rewards and the renewable waste-to-fuel toilets to build sanitation networks in Urban as well as rural India<sup>[11]</sup>.

**We learn new things every day and are busy making shit happen**  
 - the Poop Guy<sup>[12]</sup>



Source: www.samagra.com (2014)

**Awards and Recognition**

Year	Award	Achievement
2014	Ashoka Fellowship	For Work in Urban Sanitation
2011	Winner, Startup Weekend Delhi	For Startup “Poop Rewards”
2011	StartingBloc Fellowship	For Social Innovation
2011	Grand Challenge Exploration Grant (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation)	For Sanitation Work in Urban Slum
2010	Green Technology Entrepreneurship (University of California)	For Developing Ripe Energy’s Business Model
2010	ISEN Grant (Northwestern University)	To Test and Develop Ripe Energy’s Business Model

Source: LinkedIn Account of the Poop Guy (2014)

**Appendix**

**Sanitation Facts for India (2014)**

<b>Grey Facts</b>	<b>Silver Lining Facts</b>
Globally, India has the largest number of people practicing open defecation	The number of schools having toilet facility in India has increased from 0.6 million (52%) in 2005-06 to 1.14 million (84%) in 2010-11
Over 50% of Indians (i.e. over 600 million people) have no access to toilets	In Indian rural schools, toilet facility increased from 0.4 million schools (49%) in 2005-06 to 0.7 million schools (79%) in 2009-10, where they have at least one toilet facility
About 48% of children in India suffer from various degree of malnutrition cause by microbial contamination of soil and water. One of the reason being open defecation	The number of schools having separate toilet facility for girls is increased from 4.20 lakh (37.4%) in 2005-06 to 10.05 lakh (72.16%) in 2011-12
Almost 28 million school children across India do not have access to school toilet facilities	
7 states in India (Orissa, Meghalaya, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Assam, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar) account for almost 50% (13.8 million) children without access to toilet facilities in schools	
At the current rate of progress, India will only achieve the sanitation target of MDG 7-c by 2054	

Source: UNICEF India website (2014)

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