Solutions to Open Defecation Problem

What is pit emptying?

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- A pit latrine is a type of toilet that collects human feces in a hole in the ground.
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- When the latrine pit is full, the toilet is no longer usable.
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- The emptying can either be done manually with shovels and buckets or with motorized pumps.
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Why Indians don’t want to use pit latrines?

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- As these latrines require periodic manual pit emptying, most of the rural Indians don’t want to use pit latrines.
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- They are afraid of the problems they will face when the pit fills up.
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- For this reason, they build a very large pit that would take decades to fill up.
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- But, latrines with very large pits are expensive. So, most rural families couldn’t afford them and they opt for open defecation.
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What is the government’s response?

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- Government’s solution to the problem of pit emptying is to **promote affordable latrines with two pits.**

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- The two-pit latrine design is a technical and biological solution to the problems of open defecation and manual scavenging.
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- Having a second pit would allow the contents of a first pit to decompose before being emptied.
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- According to the Prohibition of Manual Scavenging Act, emptying human waste that has decomposed in a latrine pit is not manual scavenging, and therefore, it is not illegal.
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- Also some politicians wanted to shame and embarrass people who defecate out in open, as it would force them to use the toilets.
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What is the problem associated with the responses?

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- The two-pit latrine design **does not address the social consequences** associated with pit emptying.
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- Families in rural areas don’t want to empty a decomposed pit by hand as emptying even a decomposed pit is considered as ritually polluting and would cause them to become outcaste.
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- The solution of shaming people is a **double-edged sword,** because it would make people to feel that they are outcastes.
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What is the solution to the problem?

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- It is difficult to get people to change life-long habits. It is a change to their daily routine and social status.
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- We need to disrupt people’s existing behaviour by using powerful motives. But we also want people to have emotional reasons to build and use toilets.
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- Recently, Secretary of the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation, emptied the decomposed waste from a twin-pit latrine in Warangal district.
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- His action deserves praise because he identified the problem of pit emptying must become central to India’s efforts to eliminate open defecation.
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- This effort must not stop and demonstrations must be done from celebrities to village leaders across the country.
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- So the real challenge lies at effort to change people’s minds on how about and where to defecate, who can empty latrine pits, and ultimately, how Dalits should be treated.
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Source: The Indian Express & The Hindu

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