

Our Alumni & Public Toilet for Rural India

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Abstract & Summary: *After some 700 public toilets, KPS Foundation has discontinued its matching funding for our alumni sponsored Public Toilet projects for Rural India. Currently there are 116 sites donated by the landowners, waiting for construction. Neil Pundit is sponsoring 81 sites and 35 sites are being sponsored by Shree N Sharma (1963 CHE). Sponsorship means that we need only 50% of the construction cost from donors, and the remainder will be met by the sponsor and potential users. Our BIT Sindri Association International, a US public charity nonprofit 501c3 organization, is undertaking the project and its overall responsibility. We need donations. First phase of 81 sites of 3 toilets and one bath, each site costing \$6K, is sponsored by Neil Pundit. Phase 2 of 35 sites is sponsored by Shree N Sharma for larger public places, each site to have 5 toilets and 2 baths, costing \$10K per site.*

*Public Toilet for Rural India is a dire necessity because the shrinking land area and increasing population render open-air defecation unsustainable. Filth, odor, and diseases are hazards for public health safety. India is the worst sufferer of open defecation in spite of the national priority. Additional problem is getting rural public, unaccustomed to toilet use, to change their way of life. Men are reluctant, women are welcoming, and children are already exposed to toilet use in schools. BIT Sindri Association International seeks donations from public at large and alumni. The **DONATE** button on our website www.BITSindriINTERNATIONAL.org enables payment through PayPal or credit cards. Facebook is helping with its own **DONATE** button. For large donation or currency difficulty contact Neil Pundit (pundit@ieee.org).*

INTRODUCTION

In July 2013 at the Annual Alumni Meet in New Jersey, Dr Krishna Pal Singh (1967 ME), a Distinguished Alum International), announced matching funding for Public Toilet anywhere in India as his last trip to India changed his heart and mind. Seeing no takers on the offer, in March of 2015 Dr Lakshman P Sinha (1960 EE) and I approached Krishna Pal to consider a limited offering through sponsorship by alumni. Krishna Pal readily agreed, set up a committee of us adding Dr Onkar P Sharma (1959 EE). The PSS (Pundit, Sinha, Sharma) Committee started formulating process, criteria, and got the Sulabh International to take up our requests of small projects as an exception. Soon we found that their cost was more than double compared to that of a small local contractor, as already demonstrated by Dr Anil Singh (1964 MET) and Shree Sharma (1963 CHE) with public toilet facilities in their villages. We refined our process, and

publicized it on our website (www.bitsindri.org). A few inquiries, but still no takers. Lately Shree Sharma was added to the committee. The Committee established guidelines, entertained proposals, and recommended matching funding from the KPS Foundation. This committee is now irrelevant as KPS Foundation funding is discontinued. [However, the Committee did a lot of hard work resulting in a semi-legal document called AGREEMENT that a landowner executes, revised process document, ... all irrelevant now.]

In 2013 I had met a young man in my village who worked for a big construction company in Kanpur. In July of 2015 I asked him if he could get a few public toilets constructed in our village, and he agreed with some hesitation. In 6 months he got 10 sites with a total of 32 public toilets done working part-time. I paid 50% of the construction cost, KPS Foundation did the Matching, and added 2 years of maintenance cost. We require a prominent granite signboard declaring the site as PUBLIC TOILET, along with listing the donor (or honoree), location, enablers and the BIT Sindri Alumni.

TOILET DESIGN

We have engaged the villagers in the evolving design of the toilets. The most popular configuration is a 3- toilet set, one bath, a wash basin, a hand pump, electric motor to pump water to the rooftop tank, running water and electricity in all rooms, and flushable toilets.

In public places, schools, and village commons, we build a 5-toilet set with 2 bath rooms, two wash basins, water tank on rooftop, running water and electricity everywhere. The hand pump area is cemented, and it has become popular for washing clothes.

Women appreciate this life changing event. They urge men to start using, and more importantly to spread the word. Children, exposed to toilets in their school, nudge the parents and elders to use the toilets.

We started with a single underground septic tank, then moved on to a biodegradable and recyclable dual tank system. Lately we have converged on a more robust and a superior system of 3 septic tanks which extends the life of the system to 40 years, and emptying the tanks is less frequent. However, this design requires more land, and costs more.

CONSTRUCTION COST & MAINTENANCE

The average construction cost is Rs 4 lakhs (US\$6K) for the 3-toilet system, and Rs 7 lakhs (\$10K) for the 5-toilet system. The maintenance consists of weekly cleaning with acid and chemicals, and emptying the septic tanks as needed. A single tank system needs emptying once a year, the dual tank system in alternate years, and the triple tank system only once in 5 years or so. The average yearly cost of maintenance is 2% of the construction cost. We plan for a useful life of 15 years.

SITE SELECTION

The site selection is a difficult task involving the community. Major factors are: proper location; getting the landlord to donate the land; and the cooperation of the potential users. For many sites we get some donations from the potential users, neighbors, and the landlord. It takes persuasion and cooperation over a long period of time and it is the most demanding responsibility of the alumni sponsor in addition to the monetary commitment. Shree and I, as sponsors, actively persuade by a personal visit, telephone calls, and continued assurances. For some, land donation is a major sacrifice. The cost of land is usually higher than the cost of construction. Often, it is a significant part of the ancestral family asset.

DOCUMENTING PROGRESS

Our websites list each site with its donor/honoree, location of the site, some details of facilities, enablers, and a photo of the completed facility. We provide a complete listing of all sites. See References.

Krishna Pal extended his generosity to his home village of Barahiya and 15 miles beyond by funding the construction cost 100%. Maintenance is being addressed separately on a continuing basis. With personal visits and persuasion by Shree Sharma and myself, we were able to get only 8 land donations in the area. The land price is higher here, and the reluctance is understandably higher. The progress of the toilet project is updated at BITS international website:

<http://www.bitsindriinternational.org/content/public-toilets-barahiya-plus-area>

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This has been a fulfilling journey. Public toilet in India is an urgent necessity. User response has been heart-warming; sheer joy to see a life changing event for women in particular; gratitude pours in everyday as a new toilet building comes up. The matriarch of my family in India, my widowed bhabhi starts crying with joy with the most significant change of a lifetime for the poor women! The grateful acknowledgement, ease of adapting to a new habit and profuse appreciation have exceeded all expectations. The children in schools are happier not sharing teachers' toilets. The entire community appreciates the 5-toilet facilities in Village Commons and schools which are frequent venues for marriage parties (baaraat) and cultural events.

Krishna Pal has discontinued support of the Public Toilet Project primarily because the alumni did not come forward in large numbers to take advantage of his matching funds offer. We fervently urge the alumni to support the project in a huge way and compensate for Krishna Pal's dropping out. Hopefully, that will bring Krishna Pal back to support the project again!

Go to www.BITSindriINTERNATIONAL.org, click on the **DONATE** button that enables using credit cards or PayPal. There is a **DONATE** button on the FaceBook as well under the named page.

We are seeking donations to complete construction on the sites already donated under our (Neil Pundit and Shree Sharma) sponsorship. We cannot plan beyond that.

REFERENCES

1. The first site is a 5 toilet facility in a Munger girls school sponsored by Anil Singh (1964 MET). <http://www.bitsindri.org/content/first-set-toilets-constructed-bariarpur-munger-bihar>
2. The second site is a 5-toilet site in Village Fulwaria (near Hajipur), in the home village of sponsor Shree Sharma (1963 CHE). He then added another 3-toilet facility nearby.[Since then he has built many other facilities with his own 100% funding in his village and beyond. One site adjacent to a Mosque got local publicity and secular appreciation.] See attached: Fulwaria Toilets.pdf
3. Sites 1 to 97 are listed on <http://bitsindri.org/content/public-toilet-count-exceeds-300>. For each Public Toilet Facility, this gives Site#, Name of Donor/Honoree, Location, Remarks (3 toilets or 5 toilets, electrified, pump, sewage system details), and picture. Each facility has a granite signboard declaring it in Hindi to be Public Toilet, and some other details.
4. Sites 98 thru 195: This listing starts from Site#98 and ends with site #195. The cumulative toilet count thru Site #195 is: 657. It has the same details as described above under #3, and a photo each.

<http://www.bitsindri.org/content/public-toilet-count-exceeds-600>

5. The North America Alumni organization handed over the Toilets projects and its reporting to BITSA International. Since then, we have done only 8 sites (34 toilets) in the vicinity of Barahiya (birthplace of Krishna Pal) and each site has been funded 100% of the construction cost by the KPS Foundation. Maintenance is supposed to be the responsibility of the user community. This is a bothersome issue. Public places like schools and colleges have assumed the maintenance responsibility. For remaining places, currently sponsor Shree Sharma is ensuring the maintenance.

<http://www.bitsindriinternational.org/content/pubic-toilets-barahiya-plus-area>

6. AGREEMENT, a document landowner signs with a witness, donating the land for perpetual use as Public Toilet. The document spells out the perpetual maintenance responsibility.