

## Research Article

### Dilemma of Open Defecation Free in Manipur Under Swachh Bharat Mission

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**Abstract** : Open Defecation Free (ODF) was a pilot project of India to end Open Defecation (OD) under Swachh Bharat Mission. The question is whether it is relevant to Manipur or not. Manipur's society does not encourage OD from the time immemorial. Latrine facilities have been a part of Manipur's social norms. After the merger to Indian Union and immigration of mainland Indian to the state they bring the culture of OD to Manipur. Apart from this increase in population expansion of markets and existence of several homeless people in Manipur make Manipur a part of OD category of India. Nevertheless, if compare with the rest of India Manipur is at the minimum level. There is no clear and specific data on OD in Manipur. There is no slum in Manipur and in even wider meaning of ODF Manipur hardly falls in the category of open defecation. Manipur since time immemorial have toilet construction in form of pit latrine and is not an OD. The concept of ODF has taken in generalization. There are several regions with proper housing systems without proper latrine for them OD is high but in place like Manipur it is very minimal.

**Keywords** : Swachh Bharat Mission, Open Defecation, Open Defecation Free, Politicisation of Swachh Bharat Mission.

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## 1. Introduction

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

According to TATA AIG Team, an individual can contribute to the Swachh Bharat Mission in the following (TATA AIG Team. n.d.):

1. **Using Toilets:** Access to proper sanitation is not only essential for hygiene but is critical for human dignity. Those with access to toilets must use them to ensure their well-being along with the cleanliness of their surroundings.
2. **Ensuring Proper Waste Disposal:** Littering in public places not only pollutes our neighbourhood but is a serious health hazard. It also destroys the natural beauty of the city, so it is important to dispose of waste responsibly.
3. **Maintaining Personal Hygiene:** The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic instilled the value of maintaining personal hygiene. However, as the situation gradually normalised, individuals started to neglect hand hygiene and this can lead to illnesses. Therefore, it is important to ensure you keep yourself clean and keep diseases away.
4. **Educating Others:** The Clean Indian mission is a collaborative effort towards making India better, so it is important to educate your community and those within your social circle about the importance of hygiene.

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5. Participating in Cleanliness Drives: You can actively contribute to a cleaner society by participating in cleanliness drives held in your city. You can even inspire members within your community to clean local parks, streets, and public spaces by organising cleanliness drives yourself.
  6. Conserving Water: Water conservation is an important element in sanitation. You can reduce water wastage by fixing leaks and being mindful of water usage in your everyday routine.

In Manipur mainly the Meitei community have unique pattern of housing wherein every household have proper toilet system mainly at the extreme corner of south western portion of eengkhol/ingkhoh/ plot. It was a mandatory for every home to have separate latrine or toilet (Khumanthem. Samsan. Personal communication, 14<sup>th</sup> May, 2025). To construct toilet, kundli or horoscope of the head of family was seen by astrologer and an auspicious day was decided for toilet construction (Khumanthem. Samsan. Personal communication, 14<sup>th</sup> May, 2025). After completion of toilet construction, anybody cannot just start using toilet, it was to be first use by the eldest person, and it may be from the owner household member or elderly person of the clan or community (Khumanthem. Samsan. Personal communication, 14<sup>th</sup> May, 2025). It seems like that the use of toilet was a part of customs of the Meitei community. Be it Hindu or Sanamahism follower, toilet for each and every household is mandatory. Meitei community may be regarded as one of the offshoot of the one of human civilisation as it has concerned and conscious about of the health and hygiene.

### **Swachh Bharat Mission in Manipur for Open Defecation Free**

Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh declared Manipur as the 23rd state to become Open Defecation Free (ODF) in India being a 5<sup>th</sup> state in the North East to get the ODF tag (Jimmy Leivon. 2018). Dr Najma Heptulla, the Governor of Manipur handed over the certificate of ODF Manipur to CM of Manipur during the observance of National Cleanliness Day at Gandhi Memorial Hall in Imphal (Jimmy Leivon. 2018).

Dr Najma Heptulla the then governor of Manipur, claimed that, “in last 9 months the progress for construction of toilets is outstanding and the state has built more than 60,000 toilets,” she informed adding that Manipur achieved the status of ODF much earlier to the national target which is set on October 2, 2019 (Jimmy Leivon. 2018). Manipur government work hard to achieve Open Defecation Free (ODF) status in rural areas by 2nd October, 2019 by providing access to toilets to all rural households (Public Health Engineering Department. n.d.).

After the arrival of British in Manipur royal families and some of the influential and rich family began to use pucca form of toilet (khumanthem Samsan. Personal communication, 14<sup>th</sup> May, 2025). Before the knowledge of western style of toilet valley and hill people of Manipur practice pit latrine system wherein earth was dug out and filled it up again when the human excreta had filled up the pit. This system continued even after Manipur became a part of India. Rich family use concrete made toilet, middle class family use semi pucca toilet and the poor family use pit latrine. Thus none of Manipuri who are original settler or indigenous people openly defecated.

### **Public Health Engineering Department (PHED) Government of Manipur on Swachh Bharat Mission, Open Defecation Free**

Manipur Rural sanitation coverage increased from 52% to 100% of households between 2014 and mid-2018 with the behavioural change program under Swachh Bharat Mission and achieving the seemingly impossible task of making a people’s movement at the grass-root level (Public Health Engineering Department. n.d.). This led to the declaration of Manipur as 23<sup>rd</sup> ODF State in 2018. According to the official report in Manipur 4, 51,566 nos. of Individual Household Latrines (IHHLs) were constructed by 2018 (Public Health Engineering Department. n.d.). In addition to these, 102 Community Sanitary Complexes were also constructed, achieving the status, one year ahead of the National deadline (Public Health Engineering Department. n.d.).

Under SBM (G) Phase-I, construction of cent percent IHHLs for achieving ODF status at the Hill districts by Jan Andolan, involving all the age groups actively involvement (Public Health Engineering Department. n.d.). team of students from Don Bosco College, Maram, Manipur bagged the 1st position and 3rd position at the National Level in Swachh Bharat Summer Internship (SBSI) program (university/college Category) 2018 and 2019 consecutively (Public Health Engineering Department. n.d.). Seven villages have been declared ODF plus villages and the State has been making efforts to achieve at least 500 villages as ODF plus status by the third quarter of 2022-23 (Public Health Engineering Department. n.d.).

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The Department is working in the same momentum in SBM (G) Phase-II in terms of capacity building, community mobilization, various training programs, mobilization of volunteers, and swachagrahis (Foot soldiers) despite many challenges of rough terrain and frequent landslides, to make the program a Jan Andolan (People's Movement) a successful one (Public Health Engineering Department. n.d.). Government of Manipur was serious on achieving the target of SBM by declaring all the 2556 villages of the State as Open Defecation Free (ODF) plus villages by 2024-25 (Public Health Engineering Department. n.d.).

### **Dichotomy version of Government official Report and People's Account**

Before the inception of the cleanliness mission, a total of 30,209 households didn't have toilet access in Manipur (Gopi Karelia. 2018). Scholar Gopi Karelia data seem to be a bit far away from the reality. More than 30,000 household not having toilet means out of Manipur's total 456,113 households (Census of India 2011) 15.09% are defecating openly. Every Meitei household have toilet before we SBM for ODF, Meitei are not community who have habit of defecating openly (Yumnam Biren, personal communication, 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2025). One of official at Nambol municipal council also admitted that Meitei have toilet facilities only the difference is up gradation and getting new toilet under this program. The pertinent argument here is how the confusion minted out that government reports and records claim that Manipur is openly defecated and in ground reality and from the people's version Meitei community did not practice open defecation. Hill people from time immemorial are much more conscious about of toilet, so don't practice open defecation (BD Kohrin Anal, Personal communication, 17 July, 2025). The hill dweller as well as plain dweller don't practice open defecation so from where the data and reports comes up regarding the defecation openly.

As per to the PHED of Manipur 52% are only using toilet so it means 48% are openly defecating in rural Manipur. Further, PHED claimed that 4, 51,566 household latrine has been constructed, ironically Manipur has 456,113 households in total, so in Manipur only 4,547 has toilet. This may be either politicisation of the SBM ODF to tune sanction money or somewhere is wrong. Where is the dichotomy really needed to seek out? This article intend to informed the researcher, academician and policy maker to further do more research work where is the false lies. Moreover, the national issue of ODF cannot be generalised with Manipur wherein there is rich culture of hygiene and health care along with the customs of neat and tidy. The existing religion that blend with the culture and custom where pure and impurity is associated not with caste or religion, rather associated with the bath and separation of body waste, has speak louder on false report of open defecation.

### **Conclusion**

SBM of ODF is one of the eye opener to the people of Manipur not for health and hygiene pertaining from open defecation rather on how the government is functioning. The article did not intend to claim that there were no toilet construction at all in Manipur. But on the concept of false information that have harm to the very sanctity of rich Manipuri culture of cleanliness and social sense of dumping human excreta and others. Most of the Manipuri community has Lukhak Kom (pit to throw kitchen waste) and toilet for every households. If the report reflect the up gradation of kuchcha to pucca then it may be to some extend correct. Thus, researcher really need to do more research on SBM on ODF in Manipur.

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