

# **An appeal letter sent to the Prime Minister of India by the Founder of Gramalaya S.Damodaran for declaring India as Open Defecation Free**



To  
**Honourable Shri.Narendra Modi,  
Prime Minister of India  
Government of India  
New Delhi**

6.6.2014

Respected Sir,

Sub : Toilets for all – Plea to Make India Open defecation Free – Reg.,  
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Heartiest congratulations for your historic victory as the Prime Minister of India from Gramalaya, an NGO working in the field of Sanitation based in Trichy, Tamil Nadu.

India is the largest democracy in the world. India is blessed with multicultural diversity and is known for its great and marvelous temples and architecture and also for its hospitality the world over. India is a shining example for its great temples, sculptures, architectural wonders, indigenous medicines the world over. India is the birthplace of civilization and culture and is proud of its spiritual lineage. As you have said India is a nation with six different climatic conditions. India has the largest youth population in the world. We have successfully sent space probes to the Moon and Mars. Our country also has developed ultra modern missiles. India is on course to become one of the most developed nations under your leadership.

The above mentioned achievements are well known to us and to our neighboring countries. It makes me really proud to be an Indian. But there is one factor which makes every one of the 120 crores of Indians hang their heads in shame and which results in India being looked down by all the countries. That affects our health, our environment, the dignity, privacy and security of our women and the health of everyone especially the children. As many as five lakhs children lose their precious life every year because of this factor. Our water resources, land, air and environment is deeply contaminated. It is also the main reason why children as well as adults have to undergo treatment in the hospitals for their illness. Every one of our States and our country will not be able to achieve the Millennium Development Goal for which India is a signatory. This is a basic necessity that each and every individual and household should have toilets. The elderly, the sick, the young women, pregnant women and

everyone should have this facility. For over five decades our Indian Economy was seriously affected by absence of this facility. Despite, the efforts from great experts, bureaucrats, NGOs and social and environmental activists, we have failed to provide the toilet facilities resulting in over 70 crores of Indians resorting to open defecation.

Due to absence of toilet facilities our environment is very badly affected. India has the unfortunate distinction of being the capital of Open Defecation in the world. When we talk about our border problems with our neighbours they mockingly say that “first you solve your toilet and open defecation problem within your country and then come to us for talks”. This creates a feeling that even after 100 years we may not be able to solve this problem so that we can hold our heads high. Much smaller countries , less developed countries, poor countries have made remarkable progress in this field of providing access to toilets to their citizens, thereby it is difficult to be proud for me or any Tamilian to say that he is an Indian. I am writing this letter with the fond hope that your government will consider this great challenge with the utmost priority and importance it deserves.

#### **Gramalaya NGO and its achievements in the sanitation sector :**

With the aim of making every village a temple, Gramalaya an NGO was established in the year 1987 and during the past 25 years have been concentrating on the construction of toilets in the households. Prior to that as an employee of Andhyodhaya an NGO working in Kuppam village in Tamil Nadu-Karnataka border in 1984 I constructed the first toilet in my career. This task of construction of toilets is still continuing. It is regrettable that the goal does not seem to be near. We have been working closely with the Government of India, State Governments and International agencies like UNICEF and the World Health Organizations in the task of improving the health of the people by constructing toilets.

In 2003 Gramalaya proclaimed Thandavanpatti village in “Aaraichi” Panchayat in Trichy district as the first Open Defecation village in the country. In 2002 Kalmandhai slum in Trichy city was declared as Open defecation free slum in the country by Gramalaya working closely with Trichy City Corporation and the local community. Gramalaya also designed the first “Child Friendly toilet” in the country and scores of children loved to use the toilet bidding farewell to the Open defecation practice. Gramalaya was the pioneer in establishing the first Sanitation Park in the country where different models of toilets for different groups of people and for different climatic conditions were in view for people to choose the model they wanted.

During the past 25 years the District Collectors from many parts of Tamil Nadu and other States, Sanitation experts, Research scholars in the field of Sanitation and women and social activists have been regularly visiting the sanitation park. Gramalaya provided easy monthly loans to members of Self Help Groups(SHG) for construction of household toilets and so far

over 56,206 toilets have been constructed under the programme. This model is now being replicated by NGOs in many parts of the country. Over one lakh toilets have been built under the Self Help Group in Tamil Nadu so far by Gramalaya. The State government and the Government of India have commended our effort for eradication of Open defecation in the country. For example, the toilets built in 1989 in Rasipuram & Thiruchengodu Municipal towns are still being used by the householders today. The toilets in rural areas of Thottiyam block in Trichy districts over two decades ago are still being used by the people. The programme is extended to rural areas, urban areas, Tsunami hit coastal areas and tribal villages also.

For over 15 years the Community toilets and Child Friendly toilets built by Gramalaya are being also managed by Self Help Groups of Women which has attracted the attention of National and International organizations and also by the Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation of the Government of India. The Ministry has approved Gramalaya as a Key Resource Centre(KRC) for sanitation improvement, teaching and training to the Government officials in the states of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. Gramalaya is also providing training to school teachers and school students on Sanitation education to promote toilet construction in each and every house. Recently, a Government officer who met me after a gap of 20 years asked me “ Are you still continuing construction of toilets and how long will your task last ?”. It was a painful moment for me which prompted me to send this letter to you. With your dynamism and Integrated holistic approach by the bureaucrats we can solve this problem by 2025 and make India an Open defecation free nation. Of course we all have to work hard to work achieve this goal so that we can hold our heads high on the International stage. In our country 90% of the people use mobile phones. Over 70 crores of people have television sets. Over 50% of the people own two wheelers. But it is a tragedy that only 40% of the people have toilets in their homes and much worse 20% of the people use the toilets they have. People do not attach importance to the toilets but to all other comforts and gadgets.

On the eve of the election you had observed that it is better that “we in India build more toilets than temples”. You have given in your 10 point programme, a high priority to education, sanitation and drinking water. Much smaller countries than India like Bangladesh, Vietnam, Sri Lanka are building toilets much faster than Indians. The main reason for people resorting to Open defecation is ignorance, poverty, inability, absence of toilet technology options and not knowing whom to approach and how to approach for guidance and help to construct toilets. Governments should address all these issues and give top most priority for construction of toilets and eradication of open defecation.

Sikkim is the only state in the country which is declared as Open defecation Free state. Kerala and Himachal Pradesh are taking great efforts to achieve the target soon. In Tamil Nadu, Kanyakumari district has 97.5% toilet coverage but one cannot even guess how long Tamil Nadu will take to achieve 100% coverage goal. According to the recent census Odisha, Madhya

Pradesh and Rajasthan are most backward with respect to toilet coverage and its usage. It is said that Odisha will take 160 years to achieve the goal. It is estimated that Rajasthan, Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Jammu & Kashmir, Gujarat, Arunachal Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Assam will take a minimum 25 years to provide toilets in all households and eradicate Open defecation. Proper planning, adequate Financial allocations, implementation and participation by the community are essential to achieve the goal. It should be remembered that the population , Number of households and financial burden will increase fast if time passes and we don't act now.

Open defecation is responsible for high rate of infant mortality, children with stunted growth, serious health problems to women and cause for diseases like diarrhoea , Polio, jaundice, Cholera, typhoid etc. Hence, Open defecation must be eradicated at any cost in the country. All households, schools, public places, bus stands, temples, hospitals, weekly shanties should be provided with toilet facilities. This and this alone will make every one of us, Indians proud of our great culture and heritage and scientific advancements with a humane touch.

Hence, I kindly request you to take all necessary steps expeditiously to make India, an Open defecation Free Country, a reality by launching Sanitation programmes on a war footing and ensure every household should have toilets used by our citizens.

JAI HIND

Yours sincerely,



S.Damodaran  
Founder Gramalaya

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