

## Dhillon Marty Foundation Community Week 2014 Design Statement

### Public toilets, a civic necessity

*Sanitation is air-born, in our soil, in our table water.*

*Sonia Dhillon-Marty*

### Vision

Inclusive society is an idea where everyone has the right to reach his or her potential while upholding the balance between his or her needs against the needs of the society. If a society does not have the same basic sense of cleanliness, how can people work or live together? Just creating reserved seats or giving handouts does not build a flourishing society. People, from birth or even prenatal care, need access to food, sanitation, health and education for vocational and ethical development. As a visitor to India, the first thing one sees everywhere is poor sanitation; therefore, we have chosen to present this issue for this year's Community Week as a challenge problem.

### Design Challenge

This issue can be tackled in any form or genre, from a physical design, a public service campaign to a policy paper.

### Social Impact

Sanitation is basic aspect of living a humane life. If a society does not respect its surroundings, how can it value human life? What makes us different from animals or beasts is that we can think how our actions affect us today and in the future. On my last visit to India, I took a train from New Delhi to Jaipur. I had not been to an Indian train station for over 40 years. The Shatabdi first class train journey is very popular, and it is very hard to get the tickets, so I thought that with all the economic growth of India, the train journey would be reasonably comfortable. The express train was scheduled to leave at 6am, so I arrived about 5:30am. The station was crowded with people, people coming to catch their trains, beggars, and homeless people. I had to jump around people still asleep on the platform, but I did not expect that I would also need to watch for human feces. How can Indians not be fazed by such appalling conditions?

Once I got in my first class cabin, I still could not look outside for close to an hour as it was an open toilet and garbage bin, no matter which direction I looked out of my window.

This is a country with billionaires. Wedding parties are outdone by everyone. It is a highly educated society. Every Indian can argue to defend his zealous pride in his country, but how come



people are not ashamed to deprive it? Even luxury buses are not equipped with toilets. The bus journey from Chandigarh to Delhi in an air conditioned reclining seat coach, amply bottled water to drink, and a movie to entertain was very comfortable. As we got closer to Delhi, a male passenger came by to talk to the driver, and a few minutes later the bus stopped, and many passengers started to disembark. I felt nervous, it did not look like a very busy area, the night was starting to fall, and there were only few women on the bus. To my relief and disgust, it was a pit stop on the side of the road so that passengers could go relieve themselves. I could not resist asking the driver, why the Indian women could control themselves, but the Indian men could not. Off course, I did not get any answers. Nobody even cared to acknowledge the issue. This seems to be the way for all of the issues in India. If I do not see it, hear it or say it, then it does not relate to me but to other people whom somehow I have segregated into another group as poorer than me, or from a lower caste than me...

In India there is more mobile phone penetration than toilets in homes. As such, two teenagers were gang raped and lynched when they went out to relieve themselves in the morning. There are not even toilets for on duty police in public places. In addition, people do not use the toilets appropriately. Sewage systems and water shortages are just some of the problems. For many Hindus, women cannot enter a place of worship or a kitchen while they have their periods, but there is no social stigma against public disposal or male defecation outdoors.

Asides from the technological problems, toilets can be a trap for physical and sexual assault. If they are not kept clean, they can be a breeding ground for sanitation borne diseases. They can be a place for snakes, spiders and tarantulas. The objective of this exercise is not only to facilitate public toilets that adjust to local needs, but to raise awareness among people about the importance of sanitation to achieve a developed society.

