

Estate Chronicles: Pit 'holes' were scary

By [Ravindran Raman Kutty](#) - June 25, 2023 @ 7:45am



Young girls, who did not use the pit toilets, would usually go into the rubber plantation, in groups of five or six, to find covered bushes to ease themselves. FILE PIC

EVERY home in the estate had a bathroom, but not a toilet. Instead, we had pit toilets. Trust me, easing ourselves was not exactly as easy a task as it may sound.

A pit toilet was a large hole in the ground, about 1.2m wide and 3m deep. Once this pit was dug, a concrete floor with six holes was constructed over it.

Each hole would have its individual chamber with its own door, and an airy zinc roof to allow wind and rain drizzle to flow through.

The chambers were painted black. There was no segregation between males and females. The distance between a pit toilet and the houses was about 100m. There was no electricity supply or lights, so we had to ease ourselves in the dark.

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A new pit toilet would smell of fresh paint, but soon after, its stench would be unbearable. Every morning, with a torchlight in his hand, my father and mostly the other men of the neighbourhood would make their way through the 5am darkness to it.

Most of them would smoke while using it. This made me wonder if the smoking was to deter the stinging mosquitoes or the stinking odour.

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The scenery inside the pit toilet was no better. Not only were there no lights, but there was no water supply either. Whatever fell through the chamber hole went into the pit; near misses would be left on the cemented floor, mainly by the elderly folk who found it hard to squat, hence they would miss their target. The estate management and residents paid little or no heed to the hygiene of the pit toilets.

These were not cleaned. They were also not provided with any liquid waste management service.

No one would enter the dirty compartments until the faeces dried up and got washed away by rain. However, the pit toilets would be closed once when the users complained of faeces splashing on them, indicating that the pit was full.

This condition worsened during downpours, which would lead the pit to overflow.

Known as a scary place, pit toilets were never used by young children.

Instead, they eased themselves into the surroundings of the toilets. The stray dogs in the area would "clean up" after the children had left.

The children would frequent the area during the daytime as they were too afraid to go at night when it was too dark and parents were scared that the young ones would fall inside the pit toilets.

Also, the 100m passage to the lavatory, especially in the darkness of the night or early morning, made the situation even scarier. There were often stories of venomous snakes being spotted in the area.

The pit toilets were not patronised by young girls. In the afternoons, they would go into the rubber plantation, in groups of five or six, to find covered bushes to ease themselves.

Fortunately for them, as well as all of us in the estate, there were never any incident of mishap or safety issue among the young ladies.

Unfortunately, the absence of proper toilet hygiene resulted in water contamination stemming from the pit toilets. There were estate houses situated beside the lavatories that depended on water from the well.

The E-coli. contamination was very bad, but none of us was aware of it at that time. The estate dispensary would have crowds of children between the ages of 2 and 5 with bloated stomachs, looking anaemic and seeking treatment for tapeworms.

These were children who grew up with the well water in those nearby estates and kampung.

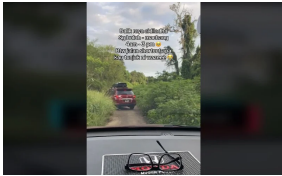
I am proud to say that I have actually had hands-on experience in constructing a pit toilet. I dug a 1.8m-deep hole and carefully moved an abandoned single-door wooden structured toilet, allowing our family to use the toilet.

It was about 10m away. This way, it was cleaner and safer, too. I always kept the surroundings clean and the walking path well-maintained.

Lavatories are a fundamental need and yet it was taken lightly by the estate management and residents in those days. However, the beauty of the estate folk is mainly the fact that they never complained or protested.



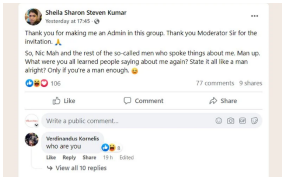
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They kept their patience and tolerance of horrifying toilets, and spent their days building happier moments with family and friends.

Without a basic hygienic toilet almost every estate dweller and their children has grown up for the past 100 over years.

This is a challenging feat as there are issues related to unhygienic pit toilets. Today, the new generation is fortunate to grow up with push-button power switches and swift toilet levers to their rescue.

I appreciate the change from pit toilets to modern toilets, but there are still estates that are using the former, which is scary and unsafe.

The next instalment of the Estate Chronicles will be published in a fortnight

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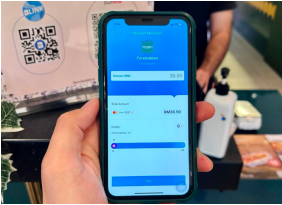
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