



MAHATMA GANDHIJI VISION ON SANITATION AND CLEANLINESS IN INDIA

Prof.(Dr.) Ramesh H.Makwana

Professor.P. G. Dept of Sociology, Sardar Patel University, Vallabh Vidyangar (Gujarat)India.

Abstract

On 2nd October, 2014, the Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, launched a nation-wide cleanliness campaign on the occasion of Mahatma Gandhi's birth anniversary. The concept of Swachh Bharat is to provide sanitation facilities to every family, including toilets, solid and liquid waste disposal systems, village cleanliness, and safe and adequate drinking water supply. We have to achieve this by 2019 as a befitting tribute to the Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi, on his 150th birth anniversary. As a searcher of Truth, Gandhiji maintained meticulous life style and accorded highest importance to cleanliness. As father of the nation, he realized indispensable place of sanitation in nation building and stated 'Cleanliness is only next to Godliness' He made cleanliness and sanitation an integral part of the Gandhian way of living. His dream was total sanitation for all. Cleanliness is most important for physical well-being and a healthy environment. It has bearing on public and personal hygiene. It is essential for everyone to learn about cleanliness, hygiene, sanitation and the various diseases that are caused due to poor hygienic conditions. According to World Bank study, lack of toilets and other proper sanitation facilities costs India nearly \$54 billion a year through hygiene-related illness, lost productivity and other factors stemming from poor sanitation. Census of India collected data on access to water and sanitation shows that only 31 per cent rural households were having any toilet facility in their households. According to Census 2011, at national level only 32.7% HHs have toilet facilities. Poor performance of sanitary facilities continues to be serious concern for the country. In fact, Even after more than 68 years of Independence from British rule, over 60 per cent of Indians including women still use open air and unhygienic facilities for answering the call of nature. Thus, Gandhiji's vision of Clean India to not fulfill after 68 years of Independence. Modi also delivered a short speech highlighting the need of cleanliness to fulfill Gandhiji's vision of Clean India. Through this paper I would like to discuss the importance of sanitation and cleanliness, rural sanitation scenario, sanitation campaigns and its performance with factors attributed to poor performance and also to suggest strategies to improve the impact of sanitation.

Keywords: Mahatma Gandhi, Sanitation, Hygiene, Harijan, Campaigns, Cleanliness.

Introduction

On 2nd October, 2014, the Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, launched a nation-wide cleanliness campaign on the occasion of Mahatma Gandhi's birth anniversary. The concept of Swachh Bharat is to provide sanitation facilities to every family, including toilets, solid and liquid waste disposal systems, village cleanliness, and safe and adequate drinking water supply. We have to achieve this by 2019 as a befitting tribute to the Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi, on his 150th birth anniversary. As a searcher of Truth, Gandhiji maintained meticulous life style and accorded highest importance to cleanliness. As father of the nation, he realized indispensable place of sanitation in nation building and stated 'Cleanliness is only next to Godliness' He made cleanliness and sanitation an integral part of the Gandhian way of living. His dream was total sanitation for all. Cleanliness is most important for physical well-being and a healthy environment. It has bearing on public and personal hygiene. It is essential for everyone to learn about cleanliness, hygiene, sanitation and the various diseases that are caused due to poor hygienic conditions. According to World Bank study, lack of toilets and other proper sanitation facilities costs India nearly \$54 billion a year through hygiene-related illness, lost productivity and other factors stemming from poor sanitation. Census of India collected data on access to water and sanitation shows that only 31 per cent rural households were having any toilet facility in their households.

According to Census 2011, at national level only 32.7% HHs have toilet facilities. Modi also referred to a WHO report that says every average Indian has to spend Rs 6500 every year due to poor sanitation. If there are hygienic conditions in the country, substantial money can be saved every year. Poor Sanitation and lack of toilets cost of India nearly three lakh crore rupees because of hygiene related illness resulting in poor productivity. The Problem is not only economic but of human dignity also. The practice of manual scavenging still exists very much in our country which is the worst violation of an individual's right to life with dignity. Poor performance of sanitary facilities continues to be serious concern for the country. There are several problems existing in the whole sanitation campaign. In fact, Even after more than 68 years of Independence from British rule, over 60 per cent of Indians including women still use open air and unhygienic facilities for answering the call of nature. Thus, Gandhiji's dream of Clean India to not fulfill after 68 years of Independence. Modi also delivered a short speech highlighting the need of cleanliness to fulfill Gandhiji's dream of Clean India. Through this paper I would like



to discuss the importance of sanitation and cleanliness, rural sanitation scenario, sanitation campaigns and its performance with factors attributed to poor performance and also to suggest strategies to improve the impact of sanitation.

Relevance of Sanitation and Cleanliness

India has progressed at many fronts over the decades since independence in 1947 but on other hand, India has the largest numbers of with people malnourishment in the world. That malnourishment is not only due to scarcity of food but also due to scarcity of safe drinking water and sanitation. Many water borne diseases like diarrhea, dysentery, typhoid are related to huge morbidity burden and loss of working days. Access to safe water and sanitation has been considered one of the most important social determinants of health. Water related illness constitutes one- third morbidities among adults and two-thirds among children. In India, cleanliness should consider as important as praying to god. By tradition, the Indian society and culture value personal hygiene, but give little importance to clean and healthy community environment. Sanitation is an integral component of public hygiene and health care. Sanitation contributes to clean and improved environment, social development and generates significant economic benefits. Sanitation has, however, been seen as a matter of individual understanding and initiative rather than a collective responsibility of the community. Investment to promote environmental sanitation in this fast changing socio-cultural background is accorded the low priority. A sanitation facility is the important indicators of health system. Proper sanitation is very much essential for improving the quality of life of the rural people and to provide privacy and dignity to women. Affordable sanitation undoubtedly remains a challenge.

Gandhi's Views on Sanitation & Cleanliness

Indians gained freedom under the leadership of Gandhiji, but his dream of a clean India is still unfulfilled. Mahatma Gandhi said "Sanitation is more important than independence". He made cleanliness and sanitation an integral part of the Gandhian way of living. His dream was total sanitation for all. Cleanliness is most important for physical well-being and a healthy environment. It has bearing on public and personal hygiene. It is essential for everyone to learn about cleanliness, hygiene, sanitation and the various diseases that are caused due to poor hygienic conditions. The habits learnt at a young age get embedded into one's personality. Even if we inculcate certain habits like washing hands before meals, regular brushing of teeth, and bathing from a young age, we are not bothered about cleanliness of public places. Mahatma Gandhi said, "I will not let anyone walk through my mind with their dirty feet."

Gandhiji dwelt on cleanliness and good habits and pointed out its close relationship to good health. No one should spit or clean his nose on the streets. In some cases the sputum is so harmful that the germs infect others. In some countries spitting on the road is a criminal offence. Those who spit after chewing betel leaves and tobacco have no consideration for the feelings of others. Spittle, mucus from the nose, etc, should also be covered with earth. (*Navajivan* dated 2 November, 1919).

Important Elements in Rural Sanitation

In accordance with the studies and various findings, there are a few most important elements involved in rural sanitation. If these elements are handled properly, many public health problems can be solved. So far, majority of the diseases are spreading due to lack of proper sanitation and availability of protected drinking water sources. Even though the protected drinking water source is available, if there is no proper sanitation or water handling and better sanitation practices, the problem will be the same. Keeping this in view, the most important elements have been identified to address rural sanitation issues in a focused manner. Later these were identified as better sanitation hygiene practices. They are: i) Safe handling of drinking water, ii) Disposal of waste water, iii) Safe disposal of human excreta, since human excreta is associated with more than 50 per cent of diseases, iv) Safe solid waste disposal, v) Home sanitation and food hygiene, vi) Personal hygiene, particularly, washing one's hand with soap, and vii) Sanitation in the community. The above-mentioned best hygiene practices are unavoidable aspects in the process of rural sanitation. So far, due to lack of awareness, rural communities are generally not familiar with the hygiene practices. Many studies have shown the importance of washing one's hands with soap as it reduces diarrheal disease by 43 percent. Respiratory problems, such as sniffles and coughs cases were brought down by 45 per cent when hands were washed five times a day. Safe sanitation practices should be a compulsory part of school curricula and of all programmes where women are trained in community, economic and health issues affecting the household. After many studies, surveys and consultations, the government of India decided to tackle rural sanitation issues through a strong communication strategy. From then, the government started a pilot programme as part of the sector reforms in water and sanitation.(Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-2007) on Water and Sanitation (2008).

Rural Sanitation Scenario in India

The 69th round of the national Sample Survey Office (NSSO) in its nationwide survey on "Drinking water, sanitation, hygiene and housing in India" has sketched a shaky picture on these basic requirements of civil life. The survey was conducted from July to December, 2012, covering 4, 475 villages and 3,522 urban blocks. The survey reveals that nearly 60



per cent of rural households in India do not have latrine facilities as late as 2012. According to Census 2011, at national level only 32.7% HHs have toilet facilities. The States with HHs more than national average include Kerala [94.40%] Goa [72.06%], Panjab [71.09%], Himachal[67.05%], Harayana [57.07%], Maharashtra [44%], Andhra [34.09%], and Gujarat[34.02%] whereas the states with HHs below National average include jarkhand [8.3%] Madhyapradesh [13.06%], Odisha [15.3%], Bihar [18%], Utterpradesh [22.9%] and Tamilnadu [26.7%] Dismally the number of HHs with toilet rose only 16.5% between 2001 to 2011. Increase is, however, just 4.8 in Bihar, followed by 6.12 [UP], 6.3% [MP], 8.3% [Odisha] and 8.4% [Rajasthan]. (Kavita Kalkoti:2003:5).

It's surprising that state a reported HHs with toilets, on website of the TSC run by the union Ministry of Rural Development, are significantly higher than that under census 2011, viz. national average [68.15%], Kerala [100%], Himachal [100%], Haryana [96.04%], Utter Pradesh [81.76%], Gujarat [81.6], Tamilnadu [78.11%], Andhra [77.07%], Goa [76.24%], Madhya pradesh [76.37%], Maharashtra [71%], Odisha [53.89%], Jharkhand [42.37%] and Bihar [32%]. This invariably needs to be corrected since States in their enthusiasm to complete among them have reported significantly high achievement. It is also questioned whether toilet are really being used. People may agree to use toilet. But it is a challenging task to change to new habit when for generations they have been used to open defecation. It is necessary to sustain behavioral change.

Sanitation Campaigns

The total sanitation campaign is now operation in 572 districts with an outlay of Rs 11,375 crores. Most of the money comes from the Central government with smaller contributions from states and some community efforts. The programme, launched in the year 2003, has built 31 million household toilets, 9997 community sanitary latrines, 357 school toilets in Anganwadis. The TSC is implemented as a community-led and people-centric approach to generate effective demand for sanitation facilities through creating awareness among village communities, educating them and providing all required information that can help them to avail Government's subsidy and technical services under the TSC program. The Nirmal gram Puraskar incentive scheme has been launched to attend a 100% open defecation-free environment. Under the scheme a total of 25,145 gram Panchayats, 166 intermediate Panchayats and district panchayats have received the award in the last six years. Sikkim has become the first state to receive the award. Within a decade all 2.5 lakh Gram Panchayats are proposed to be converted into Nirmal Gram Panchayats. The thrust is not just to construct toilets, but to ensure their continued use keeping clean and maintaining properly which of, of course, calls for behavioral change. From June 1, 2011 to motivate the community towards creating sustainable sanitation facilities and their continued usage, the financial incentive in the form of subsidy for individual household latrines for BPL families has been raised from Rs.2200 to Rs.3200 and for hilly and difficult areas from Rs.2700 to Rs. 3700. The Progress under the TSC has been significant, with some surveys estimating that at an average 2.8 million individual household latrines (IHLs) have been constructed annually over the 2001-2005 period. A significant achievement has been the construction of 0.4 million-school toilets, 0.15 million-child care center toilets, and 8,000 rural sanitary marts. (Government of India: 2006 & 2011).

Though efforts are being made in the right direction, there are several problems existing in the whole approach to sanitation. While reluctance to use a major impediment, the other problems includes: (i) lack of cleanliness and unhygienic conditions; (ii) scarcity of water in certain places to clean toilet at regular intervals; (iii) inadequate toilet in schools and separate toilet for girls in rural areas; (iv) lack of fresh air in toilets which motivate people to defecate in open spaces; and (v) Superstitious attitude regarding use a toilets.

Performance of Sanitation Facilities

Poor performance of sanitary facilities continues to be serious concern for the country. Factors attributed to this include, inter alia [i] cultural and traditional reasons and practice [ii] most of SCs, STs, BPL families and lower income group generally are not aware of the importance of sanitation for better health and clean environment. Sanitation is not a "felt need" for them and therefore, they do not participate in sanitation programs [iii] low sanitation coverage due to inadequate and lack of concerted efforts to create awareness among rural households, motivate them to have toilet facilities, lack of affordable sanitation technology and trained implementing agencies and [iv] non-availability of choice of toilet designs and area specific technologies, inadequate supporting delivery systems and absence of trained masons, skilled workers and technical manpower are reasons for low coverage.

Role of Women in Promoting Rural Sanitation

- Women always play the decisive role in promotion and proper management of household-level sanitation in a family.
- In absence of a toilet at home, women and young girls suffer the most, which also make them vulnerable to different diseases.



- Compared to men, women pay more attention towards basic sanitation and hygiene principles, which we apply in our daily life.
- Children from female-headed families were found much more conscious and concern about personal hygiene norms than that of male-headed families.
- Strategies of Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC) would have been much more effective to ensure full-sanitation coverage in rural areas, if the gender component had been given much more priority.

Ensuring a Healthy Rural Environment through Proper Sanitation:

- Encouraging more and more fundamental research in the sphere of rural sanitation with a special focus on different issue of environmental sanitation of rural India.
- Encouraging the development of indigenous, affordable, eco- friendly and culturally acceptable sanitation technologies in rural India
- Generating awareness and creating demand at community level for safe access to water and sanitation through community participation
- Integration of poverty reduction and environmental regeneration through participatory watershed management
- Promoting behavioral change towards adoption of environment- friendly practices among the rural mass
- Creating provision for livelihood security to resource- poor household through sustainable access to basic needs such as food, fodder, fuel and water

Awareness Campaign

It is necessary to design and implement a location-specific Information, Education and Communication Strategy throughout the country create a massive awareness among individual households, communities and institution on the importance of sanitation on the health of individuals, public and environment and bring custom, cultural and attitudinal change in individual households. Need of the hour is to launch a social movement against caste prejudice and manual scavenging. While the NGOs, Civil society, Community-based-organizations and women Self-Help- Groups will have to play significant role in mobilizing individuals and communities and in working with poor to assist them in finding affordable community- managed solutions to day-to-day problems, electronic and print media will have added responsibility to make the awareness campaigns result- oriented.

Elected Representatives

Experiences suggest that top-down, supply-driven programmes have not worked and will not work. Learning from the experience of a community-led and demand-driven Total Sanitation Campaign, India does not just need toilet technology and a budget, but the involvement of elected officials, effective monitoring, transparency to eliminate corruption and accountability to achieve targeted outcomes. While elected representatives of the panchayat should be primarily responsible to identify, initiate, plan and provide urban sanitation seeking user's participation as an integral part of Swachh Bharat Mission, the Member of the Legislative Assemblies and Members of the parliament and Rajya Sabha will have added role and responsibility in achieving the targeted outcomes under the program through quarterly monitoring the implementation process and resolving the identified issues inhibiting the progress.

Training of Cleanliness

During Gandhiji's second trip to India from South Africa, he attended the Congress session in Calcutta to plead the cause of the ill-treated Indians in South Africa. The sanitary condition of the Congress camp was horrible. Some delegates used the veranda in front of their room as latrines, others did not object to it. Gandhi reacted immediately. When he spoke to the volunteers, they said; "This is not our job, this is a sweeper's job." Gandhi asked for a broom and cleaned the filth. He was then dressed in western clothes. The volunteers were astonished but none came forward to assist him. Years later, when Gandhi became the guiding star of the Indian National Congress; volunteers formed a *bhangis* (sweeper) squad in the Congress camps where for once the Brahmins worked as *bhangis*. Two thousand teachers and students were specially trained for doing the scavenging at the Haripura Congress. Gandhi could not think of having a set of people labeled untouchables for cleaning filth and dirt. He wanted to abolish untouchability from India. Whenever Gandhi got an opportunity to do a little bit of cleaning work, he felt happy. (Speech at a prayer meeting on 3 September 1946 in New Delhi)

Use of Media to Create Awareness on Cleanliness

In South Africa the whites despised the Indians for their slovenly habits. Gandhiin specked their quarters and asked them to keep their homes and surroundings clean. He spoke about it at public meetings and wrote in newspapers. Gandhi's house in Durban was built in western fashion. The bathroom had no outlet for water. Commodes and chamber-pot used by his clerks



residing with him had to be cleaned. He compelled his wife Kasturba to do the same. He also taught his young sons this work. Kasturba once expressed her disgust when asked to carry the chamber-pot used by his caste clerks. Gandhi rebuked her and told her to leave the house if she wanted to observe caste bias. He was once socially boycotted by his own sympathizers for admitting an untouchable couple to the Sabarmati Ashram. (Harijan,18/08/1940 and Harijan,05/12/1936:64,105).

Responsibility of People towards Cleanliness

Gandhiji said, "So long as you do not take the broom and the bucket in your hands, you cannot make your towns and cities clean." When he inspected a model school, he told the teachers: "You will make your institution ideal, if besides giving the students literary education, you have made cooks and sweepers of them." To the students his advice was, "If you become your own scavengers, you will make your surroundings clean. It needs no less courage to become an expert scavenger than to win a Victoria Cross." All scavenging work in his ashram was done by the inmates. Gandhi guided them. People of different races, religions and colours lived there. No dirt could be found anywhere on the ashram ground. All rubbish was buried in pits. Peelings of vegetables and left-over food was dumped in a separate manure pit. The night-soil, too, was buried and later used as manure. Waste water was used for gardening. The farm was free from flies and stink though there was no *puck* drainage system. (Hairjan, 8 February, 1935)

Conclusion

The hard fact would be a sustained camping for educating people to use the facilities through attitudinal change. It has been the experience that most rural people are comfortable with open spaces as this has been their practice for long. A distressing feature, however, is the fact that in many rural areas of the country public toilets have been abandoned either because of the reluctance of the people not to use them as a lack of motivation or because of no proper planning to clean them at regular intervals. India, as an emerging economy, must introspect as to why it cannot emulate and deal with the issues of Rural Sanitation as have been dealt with by developed countries since decades. The stark reality is that India urgently needs commitment of the experienced, seasoned and trained administrators to navigate our way out of this predicament. In today's India, the youth will have to place the demand of neat and clean India on their elected representatives who are policy makers and administrators who have to implement programs totally involving youths and the users. The government has to rely on the grass root organizations that are capable of carrying the work faster and with efficiency and simultaneously motivate the people to use sanitary latrines to protect their health. The government, civil society and community should work together to achieve the vision of Swachh Bharat by Mahatma Gandhi.

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