

EDITORIAL

“Swachh Bharat”, A challenge: ‘Sanctity of sanitation’

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“Purity is internal and external cleanliness”

Bhagvad Gita, Chapter 18.

When Hon Prime Minister, Sri Narendra Modi, kick started the “SWACHHATA ABHIYAN” on 2nd October 2014, there were varying responses from various strata of public. Some viewed it as a political gimmick, and some commented that it amounts to loosing sight of your priorities as they felt that there were much more important things to be done.

We, as “keepers” of community health should look at the “Abhiyan” through our own glasses and should have our own views about it. We should look beyond the media pictures of celebrities with broom in hand. The symbolism behind the “you tube” videos and photographs should not be lost. We must remind ourselves that one of our primary aims is to create awareness at grass root level about health and ways to preserve it.

Forgive the repetition, but we must constantly reiterate and remember the concept of Hygiene and public health importance of cleanliness, personal as well as environmental.

The depth and breadth of the issue could be fathomed by perusing a report by the World Health Organisation (WHO) which has shown specific diseases and injuries caused by environmental factors, which include unclean surroundings among others. The report indicates that as much as 24 per cent of global disease is caused by environmental exposures, which can be averted. The WHO, stressed that well-targeted interventions can prevent much of this environmental risk.¹

More than 33 per cent of disease in children under the age of five is caused by environmental exposures. It has also been shown that preventing environmental risk could save as many as four million lives a year in children alone, mostly in developing countries. Indeed, by focusing on the environmental causes of disease and how they are influenced by environmental factors, the report breaks new grounds in understanding the interactions between environment and health. The study reflects how much death, illness and disability could be realistically avoided every year as a result of better environmental management. The report indicates that more than 13 million deaths annually are due to preventable environmental causes. Nearly one third of death and disease in the least developed regions is due to environmental causes. Over 40 per cent of deaths from malaria and an estimated 94 per cent of deaths from diarrhea, two of the world's biggest childhood killers, could be prevented through better environmental management.^{2,3}

Measures which could be taken now to reduce this environmental disease burden include the promotion of safe household water storage and better hygienic measures; the use of cleaner and safer fuels; increased safety of the built environment, more judicious use and management of toxic substances in the home and workplace and better water resource management.⁴

Interfering with and/or ignoring the “nature” is one of the main causes of environmental damage and its catastrophic aftermaths. A slide-show, recently, in circulation, shows the Nature and what we made of it. The pictures speak for themselves and do not need captions !!!.



The “sanctity” of sanitation:

A little treatise into history of sanitation : “In Deuteronomy 23:9–14, we learn that human wastes were to be buried, away from human dwellings. Today we call this sanitary waste disposal, and its benefits are widely understood but not always practiced—especially in poverty-stricken areas. History is filled with epidemics of typhus, cholera and dysentery, linked to the careless dumping of human waste into streets and rivers, or feeding human waste to animals that are then eaten. Burying human waste breaks the life cycle of many parasitic organisms that spread disease. This simple practice is much more effective, and less expensive, than treating disease after it breaks out—and God put this principle in the Bible thousands of years before mankind's science understood its benefit! ⁵”

How many of us remembered, let alone organizing related activities, that November 19th, is designated as “WORLD TOILET DAY” ?.

Like “sex” , “toilet” is taboo for many to talk about though both are integral part of human biology. If we shun the inhibitions and start talking about them openly, many sex crimes would not have occurred and many health problems related to lack of sanitation could have been solved.

Many diseases are spread from person to person by *germs* in faeces. Some experts believe health problems from poor sanitation can be prevented only if people change their personal habits, or “behaviours,” about staying clean. But this idea often leads to failure because it does not consider the barriers that people face in their daily lives, such as poverty or lack of

access to clean water. Then when behaviour does not change, people are blamed for their own poor health. Other experts look for technical solutions, such as modern toilets that flush water. Technical solutions often come from outside a community and may not fit the traditions or conditions of the community. Sometimes they create more problems than they solve!

The diseases caused from poor hygiene and sanitation will not be prevented if people are blamed for their own poor health, or if only technical solutions are promoted. To improve health in a lasting way, health promoters must listen carefully and work together with people in the community. When communities use hygiene and sanitation methods that fit their real needs and abilities, they will enjoy better health. Pouring concrete will not in itself solve India's problems. Leaders need also to confront the cultural reasons for bad sanitation.

Health is not always the main reason why people want to have clean toilets, better water supplies, or improved hygiene. There are other needs which include:

* **Privacy:** A toilet can be as simple as a deep hole in the ground. But the need for privacy makes it important for a toilet to have a good shelter. Making a door or enclosed entrance to a toilet, or building it away from where people usually walk, will make it nicer to use. The best shelters are simple and are built from local materials.

***Safety:** If a toilet is badly built it can be dangerous to use. And if it is far from the home, women may be in danger of sexual violence when they take care of their sanitation needs. For a toilet to be safe it must be well-built and in a safe place.

***Comfort:** People will more likely use a toilet with a comfortable place to sit or squat, and a shelter large enough to stand up and move around in. They will also be more likely to use a toilet that is close to

the house and that gives protection from wind, rain, or snow.

***Cleanliness:** If a toilet is dirty and smelly, no one will want to use it — and it may spread disease. Sharing the task of cleaning or paying for cleaning with money or other benefits will help to ensure that toilets are kept clean.

***Respect:** A well-kept toilet brings status and respect to its owner. Often this is a very important reason for people to spend the money and effort to build one. Safe water for washing and drinking is also important for health. So are other kinds of cleanliness such as ensuring that women have a way to keep clean during monthly bleeding.

When planning or making changes in household or community sanitation, keep in mind that every sanitation method should do these things:

- **Prevent disease** – it should keep disease-carrying waste and insects away from people, both at the site of the toilet and in nearby homes.
- **Protect water supplies** – it should not pollute drinking water, surface water, or *groundwater*.
- **Protect the environment** – ecological sanitation can prevent pollution, return *nutrients* to the soil, and conserve water.
- **Be simple and affordable** – it should fit local people's needs and abilities, and be easy to clean and maintain.
- **Be culturally acceptable** – it should fit local customs, beliefs, and desires.
- **Work for everyone** – it should address the health needs of children and adults, of women and men.

Millenium Development Goals & Its linkage to sanitation and hygiene:

1. Eradicate extreme poverty

It was found that girls stay home for fetching water & don't go to school. Fetching water from long distances consumes lot of time & contributes to malnutrition and reduces productivity. OE Poor water, sanitation and hygiene are the

principal reason of diarrhoeal diseases and waterborne disease.

2. Achieve Universal Primary Education

Poor water, sanitation and hygiene reduce enrolment levels, educational achievement and the quality of education, and keep girls out of school. So there is need of safe, private sanitation and washing facilities in schools.

3. Promote Gender Equality & Women Empowerment

Due to lack of private sanitation facilities in schools, girls are severely affected. Boys are also affected but girls are more affected.

4. Reduce Child Mortality

Poor water, sanitation and hygiene are the primary reason of diarrhoea, which annually kills between 1.6 million and 2.5 million children under five – more than any other illness or disease. Improving water, sanitation and hygiene is the only way to reduce the burden of chronic diarrhoea morbidity in young children.

5. Improve maternal health

Safe delivery is impossible without an accessible source of water & basic hygiene knowledge and practices, especially hand washing.

6. Combat HIV/AIDS malaria & other diseases

Unclean sources of water and unhygienic environments lead to chronic diarrhoea, which is a major cause of mortality and morbidity in AIDS patients.

7. Ensure Environmental sustainability

The safe disposal of faeces, waste and the management of water resources are key to environmental sustainability.

8. Develop a global partnership for development

Broad partnerships among civil society and the public and private sectors can improve service delivery while ensuring equitable access to water and sanitation.⁴

In the contemporary context of the growing environmental challenge, leading to the mankind's worst ever global crisis, Gandhiji is becoming increasingly relevant in a rather unexpected area of ecology. In a way Gandhi was the world's early environmentalist – in vision and practice. It is high time that we absorb and assimilate the ideas of the Great man. Let us start "walking the talk" and lead from the front.

"Mahatma Gandhi never compromised on cleanliness.

He gave us freedom.

We should give him a Clean India"

Tweet- Sri Narendra Modi, 2 October 2014.

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