

Swachh Bharat: A Long Voyage from Rhetoric to Implementation

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Introduction

Indian ancient Ayurveda classics have mentioned Shoucha (cleanliness/sanitation) under Sadvritta and Acharya Rasayana (conducts of ideal lifestyle and social health) as an imperative step to attain healthy body and mind. In Yoga treatises also, Shoucha is mentioned as subcomponent of Ashtanga Yoga, as a prerequisite to achieve Santosha (contentment) and holistic health. Despite all such classical directives, societal overlook and unawareness makes sanitation a great concern for India in both rural as well as urban settings. Recent visionaries aptly introduced and mandated the pressing need of execution of Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM). SBM - the flagship sanitation program of the Indian government is not a new program. Launched in 1986 as the Central Rural Sanitation Program, the scheme has undergone various avatars as the Total Sanitation Campaign (1999) and Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan (2012). However, never before has a sanitation program, albeit a renamed one received the sort of public support and approval as this one. I appreciate the government efforts to inculcate the sense of hygiene and sanitation in masses. However, I wonder, what comes first? Cart or the horse? The rich man is too arrogant and poor is too ignorant. Who is going to listen to government in this long country marathon? The present article attempts to share in depth deliberation on hype, hurdles, and hope toward fruitful implementation of SBM.

India loses a major chunk (about 6.4%) of our gross domestic product on water and sanitation related diseases. In such situation of distress, SBM can be seen with a hope. However, SBM seems to be inheriting some of the same predicaments that its predecessor programs faced. Launched with a great show of fanfare, enthusiasm, and symbolism, with massive support of media, Bollywood celebrities and sports icons, the campaign has been facing formidable financial and implementation challenges. The possible reasons are:

Causes and Concerns of the Mission

- Government has never identified the reasons behind the failures of earlier missions, so no feedback has been obtained from the ground level
- Over emphasis on infrastructure/toilet construction rather than ground work or their maintenance, making them fully functional and leaving out larger issues such as its connection with public health, spread of disease, and nutrition
- Several factors impede sanitation efforts such as: poor access to water facility in rural settings, poor waste management (lacking or overflowing public bins and pathetic waste disposal), poor solid waste recycling, and increasing demand of clean water with increasing population, and inadequate distillation plants to solve this problem. Poor drainage systems and sewage treatment are also a culprit
- The program is not demand driven and local situations are not taken into consideration. For example, water intensive toilets in arid and semiarid areas will not be acceptable to people
- Incoherent monitoring, shortage of funds, rampant corruption, malpractices in the disposal of the funds, underpaid understaffed cleaning department, lack of incentives for officers involved, negligent fines for people who litter. The field staff which is overburdened and under-incentivized also lacks follow-up from local bodies such as gram panchayat in rural areas and urban local bodies in urban area
- Societal notions - considering cleanness a under rated job, no sense of personal accountability, and perception that cleaning work shall be done by those who have been doing it since ages and this movement is nothing but a political card, so there is a lack of interest by some people
- Different components of the mission are being executed by different departments and ministries. Lack of co-ordination among different ministries, government, private players, and nongovernment organizations (NGO's) is also a challenge

- There is no inherent mechanism to spread the best practices adopted in other states and learning like Sikkim and Himachal Pradesh have become open defecation free states.

Global initiatives and programs (viz., WASH, GLAAS, etc.) are running under United Nations, UNICEF, WHO, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and World bank, which issued several guidelines for sanitation and cleanliness, that need to be religiously adopted in Indian context. I believe that all roads to Swachh Bharat pass through the thickest of reforms. In spite of failures, SBM presently needs a dose of optimism and some of the fixes can make it better:

Initiatives Required

- Focus must be on changing people's attitudes, mindsets, and behaviors instead of creating infrastructure. The awareness or education must be imparted efficiently at school level and to the masses to change their habits of open defecation, littering, spitting, and urinating, for apt utilization of provided infrastructure; until and unless this habit will change then only cleanliness drive can gain momentum. It has been shown that behavior intervention related to sanitation and hygiene practices among mothers and children will result in positive outcomes
- Participative and decentralized governance, that is, higher involvement of local governance institutions viz., Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) in planning and monitoring the progress of the mission. Government should devolve funds directly to local bodies (bottom-up approach) and make them accountable
- PRIs, urban local bodies, state governments, and central government must work in sync to provide the right kind of infrastructure required for handling all the waste that we generate. Treatment and processing plants need to be set up. Sanitary landfills and marine outfalls must be designed
- Incentivizing state and local governments, more flexibility to states for implementation and empowerment of states while holding them accountable for outcomes. The flow of funds from the center to the states can also be based on achievement of such outcomes, making it a form of results-based financing. Apt utilization of subsidy provided for toilet construction in rural areas should be ensured.
- Get necessary feedback from ground level to address implementation issues. Learn from the past failures, implement social audit, and stern penalties/ punishment for polluters
- While the expertise of the government lies in ensuring scale (or quantity), the NGOs and private sector partners can ensure quality. Hence, the program must leverage the strengths of both sectors. Participation by all sections of the society is essential and corporates should be encouraged to take lead.
- Notwithstanding initial euphoria, sustained momentum/push for the program is required. Marathons, rallies, painting competitions, prabhat pheries, and media run awareness programs could be helpful.
- Sustainable practices such as vermi-compost formation/biogas formation shall be there in house/ or in the backyards.
- To fully realize SBM's potential, reduce-reuse recycle - 3 simple words are to be instilled in the minds of the citizens of the country to foster in an era of true cleanliness.

Conclusion

To sum up, collective efforts are needed to achieve great objectives and such a large nation cannot be made spot less in a year, it takes time. Rather it is a constant process of communicating, inspiring and educating the people for a mass participation in the same. We all want a changed India. We all want a clean India. We talk about it. We criticize the system, the government, the friend who peed in public, the aunt next door who throws her garbage on the road from her balcony, the Supreme Court and what not. So the challenging chore to every citizen is: Can we rise to the occasion? Can we actually stop to pick up and clean up our own mess, instead of expecting someone else to do our dirty work for us? Can we put our individual ideologies and biases aside for a cause that no right-thinking person can quarrel with? The ministers also must increase above the mere photo opportunities or tokenism and start doing things in reality. Then, only we can hope for a "lean India." We as citizen should

understand that cleanliness is not only a virtue but it is a responsibility as a human and it is imperative for us to come forward and make SBM successful and fulfill Gandhiji's dream of clean India. Hopefully, we will see a better tomorrow!

References

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