

Swachh Bharat Abhiyan: A Study

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Introduction

Swachh Bharat Abhiyan was launched on 2 October 2014, at Rajghat, New Delhi, and the place where Mahatma Gandhi, revered as the Father of Nation was cremated. The Prime Minister of India, Mr. Narendra Modi launched the programme by cleaning a road using a broom himself. The programme spread over 4041 towns aims to clean roads and other public infrastructure. The Centre decided to spend about Rs. 2 lakh crores on this five-year plan. For the purpose of promotion, the Government made sure that at least 30 lakh central government employees and thousands of school and college students took the oath for the programme. National icons including business tycoon Anil Ambani, Bollywood superstar Salman Khan and cricket legend Sachin Tendulkar are chosen as ambassadors for this programme.

Critics see the Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan as BJP's way of re-returning the favour. However, due to the way the Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan has been marketed, it becomes difficult to look at it merely as a political gimmick. This paper thus looks into the possible drawbacks of the Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan and analyse as to whether it can actually do the job it intends to accomplish. It contains several thoughts and anecdotes from Gandhi's life, extracted from several books, including his Autobiography.

Cleanliness

This programme announces that every citizen should take up the responsibility of keeping their offices and their surroundings clean. However, in the absence of any monitoring mechanism, there is no guarantee that this initiative will be successful in breaking the shackles of mere symbolism. This can be made possible by designing proper wage employment schemes and social security benefits as alternatives for accommodating the displaced human scavengers in the mainstream. This can be ensured only through proper legislation. Also as observed in private hotels and shopping malls, introduction of improved technology for waste and sewage management would assure that the initiative entails all sections of the society, thereby moving beyond barriers in asserting that waste disposal is no longer a "castely" affair. As rightly said by Abhijit Banerjee, Ford Foundation International professor of economics, MIT and director, Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab on the Swachh Bharat, "again the problem isn't just getting people to clean, but also figuring out what to do with trash. And unless you deal with the back-end, the front-end isn't going to be the solution — the trash has to go somewhere, you clearly can't burn it"

Development for all, Who's Responsibility?

With the growth of "municipal socialism" in the late 19 Century, the local bodies are seen as providers of public health and economic and social benefits. Despite the efforts of governments of various countries as well as international agencies like the World Bank, private participation in providing facilities like safe drinking water etc is very low. For example in Hungary, despite privatisation of water in most major cities, tax revenues of central government continue to be the main source for financing investment in infrastructure. In India, the private sector contribution is also close to zero, with national, State and local governments financing nearly all the investment." Amidst, this the Clean India Mission claims of the Rs.64, 000 crores of which Rs, 14,000 crores is expected by the government and the rest of the amount from sourced from private sector and the corporates. Some Rs.40, 000 crores have been allocated for the improvement of toilets. The total number of people who need this is 2.5 crores, which comes to Rs.1, 600 per family which is certainly inadequate.

Only the middle class and the well-off will make use of this subsidy. The corporate sector in India though has pledged to make toilets a part of its CSR, sewage disposal and management remains a unsorted issue inevitably falling on the government. Quoting figures from the Planning Commission of India, Hall and Emanuele Lobina wrote in this regard that while there had been an investment of over \$22 billion in water supply and sanitation in the period 2007-12, the contribution of the private sector was only 0.4 per cent.

Are We Ensuring a Healthy India Through a Clean India?

The current initiative ensures a cleaner India by 2019. But, does it guarantee an improvement in the health scenario? An increase in latrine coverage is perhaps not a certain indication of the decrease in the exposure to diseases. The total sanitation campaign, one of the biggest of its kind, provided almost 25000 households with an access to latrine. But unfortunately that it did not reduce exposure to faecal pathogens or decrease the occurrence of diarrhoea, parasitic worm infections, or child malnutrition. One explanation to this apparent paradox is unawareness of larger sections of our countrymen about the need of cleanliness and hygiene which is positively correlated with the health status of the society. There is evidence to show that toilets built through government schemes lie unused—livestock is sometimes kept in such places—because of the lack of running water to flush down the sewage. An evaluation study of the Planning Commission showed that while “mindset” problems, traditional practices and lack of awareness were factors leading to lack of sanitation, inadequate availability of water and the lack of maintenance funds were the biggest reasons for it.

A study has been conducted by Lancet Health Foundation states that interventions like the sanitation campaign increased the average proportion of households in a village with a latrine from 9% to 63%, compared an increase of 8% to 12% in control villages. However, the researchers found no evidence that the intervention protected against diarrhoea in children younger than 5 years: 7-day prevalence of reported diarrhoea was 8.8% in the intervention group (data from 1919 children) and 9.1% in the control group (1916 children).. The intervention also did not reduce the prevalence of parasitic worms that are transmitted via soil and can cause reduced physical growth and impaired cognitive function in children. There was also no impact on child weight or height—measures of nutritional status. The prime reason cited for this is the lack of household participation in this as well as inadequate coverage of the programmes. Amidst this scenario, it worries skeptics how far the Clean India Mission will be successful providing a redressal mechanism to this problem.

What lies beneath?

A punitive action on the part of the government can be thought of as a plausible solution to this problem. Setting up an exemplary tax mechanism for punishing those guilty of dirtying streets and other public places can be thought of as a solution. Monitoring mechanisms like CCTV cameras in strategic places might be one of the solutions for a developed nation with low demographic pressure. But this makes the control process all the more complex as it would entrap a huge work force to man these footings at every nook and corner. The process would also involve a mammoth expense which is unrealistic for a country like India. The problem of open defecation on places like railway tracks etc also cannot be tackled in this fashion. Therefore, the emphasis should be more on endogenous factors like increasing demand for cleanliness rather than command and control mechanism which is exogenous in nature. This brings us back to the Gandhian philosophy of self restraint and dignity of livelihood.

Awareness campaigns to bring about behavioural changes through various forms of mass media can be resorted to in this regard. The role of celebrities sets in amidst this scenario where via their public image they can appeal to their enormous fan groups in semi urban towns and villages.

Incentivising the rural masses through social welfare schemes is perhaps not enough and hence instead a community based ownership scheme for toilets constructed in rural areas

should be designed wherein communities would be incentivised to maintain their respective toilets and ascertain the role of every member of the community in preventing open air defecation. Here, the role of Community peer pressure for deviators is significantly high. This covers only one part of the story. The other part of the story would require effective mechanisation of techniques for disposal of garbage and human excreta. It has been pointed out that cleaning and garbage disposal work is largely done on a contractual basis and that those who do it are ill paid, are not provided with the necessary protective gear and lack any form of social security against the morbidity and mortality that results from the work they do. The figures obtained from the Central Pollution Control Board reveal that in cities where municipalities exist (30 per cent of Indian cities are not covered by municipalities), 1.3 lakh tonnes of solid waste is generated daily. Urban India generates a total of 68 million tonnes of solid waste annually. But, only one-third of this is cleared; the rest lies around in streets, lanes and drains.

Above all thousands of the Safai Karmacharis (cleanliness workers) die every year by inhaling the poisonous gases that are generated from the waste and excreta. Some even die of ulcers and other serious digestive disorders after starving for long hours of the day, while doing this menial job. However, lack of adequate water supply leads to travelling for long distances in search of water after cleaning of excreta. In metro cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Calcutta etc the heavy pressure of traffic during day time, leads to cleaning of these toilets at night when there is insufficient water supply and lethal gases come out of these waste.

Thus providing cleanliness gear, ensuring vats in proper places providing adequate water supply and waste recycling mechanism will perhaps go a long way in mitigating these problems

The Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan has not yet drawn the contours of its path of progress. Amidst this, a possible roadmap to this programme would include:

- Eradication of human scavengers through enforcement of human scavenging act and making arrangements for their proper rehabilitation.
- Improvisation of waste disposal techniques including provision of safety gears, waste recycling and sufficient water supply as means to ensure health and hygiene
- Ensuring mass participation and thereby doing away with the stigmatization of Safai Karmacharis.
- Appropriate budgetary allocation for meeting the needs
- Ensuring the presence of a monitoring agency at urban and rural levels to monitor problems of open defecation, littering of public places, solid waste and sewage management.
- Effective coverage of the benefits of the Clean India Mission

The budgetary allocation for Total Sanitation Campaign in 2011-12 was only 0.04% of India's gross domestic product which is quite an appalling figure. Any such programme cannot run without proper funds. Thus providing for adequate budgetary allocation is perhaps one of the most important criterion for the success without which this entire initiative would end up in a fiasco.

Conclusion

With the instances of sexual violence and rapes on women germinating in our society like a venomous plant especially in villages, putting an end to defecation during day time and specifically during night demands immediate attention. The rape and murder of two cousins in the Badaun district of Uttar Pradesh when the two innocent victims on their way for attending nature's call has been an eye opener in this regard and also emphasize that we no longer can afford to take a sedentary position in this regard.

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