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RESEARCH ARTICLE

OPEN DEFECATION FREE (ODF) RURAL AND URBAN AREAS: ACHIEVEMENT OF SWACHH BHARAT MISSION

Dr. K. Padmavathi

Assistant Professor & Chairperson, BOS Department of Sociology, UCASS Satavahana University, Karimnagar, TS.505002.

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Abstract

Sanitation is recognized as a basic human right. UN General Assembly in July 2010 had adopted a resolution officially recognising Sanitation access to, and use of, excreta and wastewater facilities and services as a human right. For most of human history, people defecated in the open. But in the last century, a lot has changed with toilets becoming an integral part of homes in most parts of the world. More than half of all people in the world who defecate in the open live in India. According to 2011 Indian Census, 53.00 per cent of households do not use any kind of toilet or latrine. This essentially matches the 55.00 per cent found by the National Family Health Survey in 2005. In this paper I attempt to study the role of government and schemes and people's participation.

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Introduction:-

Sanitation is recognized as a basic human right. UN General Assembly in July 2010 had adopted a resolution officially recognising Sanitation „access to, and use of, excreta and wastewater facilities and services“ as a human right. For most of human history, people defecated in the open. But in the last century, a lot has changed with toilets becoming an integral part of homes in most parts of the world.

Open defecation is not so common elsewhere. The list of African Countries with lower percentage rates of open defecation than India include Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and more. In 2008, only 32.00 per cent of Nigerians defecated in the open, in 2005, only 30.00 per cent of people in Zimbabwe did.¹

More than half of all people in the world who defecate in the open live in India. According to 2011 Indian Census,

53.00 per cent of households do not use any kind of toilet or latrine. This essentially matches the 55.00 per cent found by the National Family Health Survey in 2005.

The Centre's Flagship Sanitation Scheme

Since, 1986, India has spent over \$ 3 billion on constructing toilets across the country. Despite such massive investments, India's sanitation campaign over the years has unfortunately yielded limited results. India continues to have the largest number of people who defecate in the open. Even poorer countries in the neighborhood, such as

Corresponding Author:- Dr. K. Padmavathi

Address:- Assistant Professor & Chairperson, BOS Department of Sociology, UCASS Satavahana University, Karimnagar, TS.505002.

Bangladesh and Nepal, have improved sanitation coverage faster and surpassed India in the last four decades-by all accounts, at a fraction of the cost.²

The Indian government is now gearing up to spend an additional amount through the Swachh Bharat Mission. While sanitation schemes in India date back to the British Raj, Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) is the latest and far most ambitious iteration.

Government's Initiatives Towards Sanitation

The major initiative towards sanitation was the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) with an aim to accelerate sanitation coverage to achieve an Open Defecation Free (ODF) and clean India by 2 October, 2019. When the mission was launched on 2 October, 2014 by the Hon'ble Prime Minister, the challenge was quite daunting. Only 38.7 percent of rural households had toilets and country-level data showed India having the largest number of people defecating in the open. Under such a challenging situation, the PM exhorted people to fulfil Mahatma Gandhi's vision of a clean India by 2 October, 2019 so as to provide a befitting tribute to Bapu when we celebrate his 150th Birth Anniversary.³

Since the launch of the SBM, the government has built 1007.98 lakh toilets in the rural areas. Between 2014 and 2019, as many as 699 districts, 2, 58, 657 Gram Panchyats and 5,99,963 villages self-declared themselves as ODF.⁴ As far as urban areas are concerned, between 2014 and 2019, 60 lakh households and 5.5 lakh public and community toilets were constructed and 79,000 wards (86.00 per cent) with 100.00 per cent door-to-door collection of municipal solid waste were ensured, while 60.00 percent of the practices source segregation.⁵ This is a tremendous achievement, given the fact that only 41.00 percent were practising source segregation in 2014.

While declaring Rural India open defecation free on the occasion of Swachh Bharat Diwas on 2 October, 2019, the Prime Minister congratulated every citizen, especially those living in villages, sarpanches, and all those who have worked for "Swachhata".

Adopting The Western Approach

Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) was an unprecedented nationwide initiative aimed to inspire the Public to voluntarily clean public spaces as a service to the nation. Concurrently, municipalities began to employ more contractual labourers- mostly scavengers forced into the profession by their caste – to remove waste. This approach is an uncritical adoption of the 19th century western model of removing waste from the public gaze. Although stopping the spread of disease was the primary intention in the West, sanitation is now largely an extension of visual aesthetics, sanitation means the absence of filthiness all around us.

The West introduced technologies to systematically remove waste. For example when Londoners experienced the

"Great Stink" in 1858, the government realised that it would need a holistic sewerage plan, which would become part of the London water infrastructure, to remove filth and treat waste from the river Thames in a sustainable way. Soon, the construction of toilets in households and shops became mandatory.⁶

A Toilet In The Front Yard Of The Home Is Considered As Unholy

Open defecation in India is not just about toilet coverage. It is also about deeply ingrained cultural practices. In a lot of homes in India's heartland, a toilet in the front yard of the home – an area earmarked for the holy Tulsi plant – is considered an unholy idea and so, is detested. Toilets are considered impure and a reason for that can be found in India's millennia – old caste system. The reason for this aversion to toilets comes from the fact that manual scavenging was traditionally the job of the oppressed castes.

In Agraharams (exclusive Brahmin quarters), and even in some non-Brahmin households, for example, toilets are constructed behind the house so that the scavenger is 'Unseeable' while walking down an exclusive lane to the toilet to empty the bucket. Similarly, traditional Indian houses had toilets that were often located at the boundary of the compound with an exclusive path for the scavengers. Clearly, Hindu notions of pollution on the one hand, and secular notions of stigma on the other, influenced the building of toilets. Temples usually did not construct toilets. And when they are reconstructed, they are built away from the boundary.⁷

Hostility Towards Toilets Remains In Rural India

A boundary wall was more socially necessary than a latrine at home. A wife's honour may be at risk if people can see her unveiled face, but it is perfectly honourable for passersby in early dawn to see her exposed. Rural women face many problems and they should either go before the sunrise or after the sunset. Safety was a big issue. Going out in

the dark is not safe for young women; moreover the pathways are dangerous in the night as there are snakes and other poisonous creatures. This apart have to wait for hours if there are people in the vicinity. Even in the uplifted Indian villages which are well-connected by mobile phones and satellite television, a girl has the right to food and education but no birthright to use a covered toilet.

Colonial Architecture

It is significant that toilets are not viewed as essential parts of buildings and public architecture in India. For instance, the Indian Institute of Advanced Study in Simla, which was formerly called the Viceregal Lodge, has three entrances: one for residents and guests, one for servants, and one exclusively for sweepers and scavengers. The sweepers pathway which forms an invisible and intricate network of corridors, stairwells and gangplanks leading to the many toilets in the building have now been closed off. Significantly, in colonial Indian architecture, the scavengers/sweepers staircase did not intersect with the servants staircase. The original planning document of the Viceregal Lodge has clear references to this secluded pathway.⁸

Behavioural Patterns

There is a strong relationship between having a separate kitchen and having a toilet. Hygienic Kitchen as a separate place within the house is as important as having a toilet. The predominant reason for toilet construction in the household is privacy and convenience followed by peer pressure, prestige in society, spouse pressure, and persuasion of panchayat leaders, political leaders, health and social workers.

With Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM), the country witnessed a silent revolution in the construction of toilets. A major differentiating feature of SBM from all other earlier programs has been its demand-driven nature where the primary objective is to bring about behaviour change leading to the generation of demand for construction of toilets as well as to increase the use of toilets.

Access to information regarding Government schemes and financial assistance for toilet construction are also contributing factors for construction and use of toilet, respectively. Awareness about Swachh Bharat Mission reduces the chances of open defecation. The health and hygiene condition of the surrounding also impacts the construction and use of the toilet.

Improvement of sanitation is linked with other indicators of living conditions. Hence, it is important to have a better infrastructure at the household level as well as public service. Better water supply service, housing, construction of the bathroom influence the access and use of the toilet. At the same time, high income households with higher purchasing power for durable goods would lead to better living standards of living and thus sanitation practice. Also, emphasis on female literacy is imperative for better sanitation coverage.⁹

Curbing Open Urination

One of the things that the average Indian man, Urban and rural, seems never to have learnt is how not to urinate or spit in public spaces. Under new norms, cities and towns wanting to be declared ODF+ (Open Defecation Free Plus) must also be free of public urination and not just open defecation. This is the first time that the Swachh Bharat Mission (urban) is officially including the elimination of open urination in its agenda.

The rural division of SBM had previously preventing public urination was not on their agenda. Cities are different from rural areas. In the case of urban areas, the problem is not one of usage, but of availability. In cities, if toilets are available, accessible and clean, people will automatically use them rather than using the road.

According to the original ODF protocol, issued in March 2016 'A city/ward is notified as ODF city/ward if, at any point of the day, not a single person is found defecating in the open. The new ODF+ protocol, says that a city, ward or work circle could be declared ODF+ if, "at any point of the day not a single person is found defecating and/or urinating in the open, and all community and public toilets are functional and well-maintained'.

The ODF++ protocol adds the condition that "faecal sludge/septage and sewage is safely managed and treated, with no discharging and/or dumping of untreated faecal sludge/septage and sewage in drains, water bodies or open areas". "Urination has always been implied as part of the ODF agenda, that's why there is a subsidy for urinals, not just toilets".¹⁰

Bio-Urinals(GreenUrinals)

The Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC), the capital of the newly formed Telangana state which has introduced bio-urinals in different parts of the Hyderabad and Secunderbad cities. Also called Green urinals, these Kiosks basically are presented as odourless and waterless, equipped with solar power.

Bio-Urinals are hygienic and come with proper system to ensure that it does not inconvenience pedestrians. A dedicated vehicle also has been deployed to clean these facilities at regular intervals and ensure that cleanliness is maintained. Care was being taken to ensure that bio-urinals do not occupy much of footpath space. They are being installed in corners and since these are being fabricated Kiosks, they could be adjusted accordingly where required. They are setup in just about 20 Sft to 25 Sft space and are taking all possible steps to ensure that these Kiosks do not disturb the footpath space and inconvenience pedestrians.¹¹

Similar facilities not being setup for women. The design for bio-urinals for women are under preparation. Proposal is to have them manned by women workers to ensure safety. The GHMC move to provide public sanitation for men through urinal boxes, has come under fire from the opposition sex. The urinals, which have been placed on footpaths at some places will obstruct walkers and make a mess as well, thereby making it difficult to walk, charge many.¹²

Delhi Metro Rail Corporation-Sanitation In Public Places

The Delhi Metro did not include toilets in all the stations in its original plan. It was only after a PIL that the Delhi High Court directed the Metro Authorities to construct toilets and provide other facilities in all stations.

Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) today operates on a network of 377 kilometres and 274 Metro stations (including the Noida-Greater Noida Metro Corridor). The scale of the operations can be gauged from the fact that more than 30 lakh people avail the services every single day for more than 18 hours. Over 320 trains traverse these distances carrying people to their chosen destinations. With such massive scale of operations involving millions of people, public sanitation becomes an important operational challenge.

As an Urban transit provider, Delhi Metro acknowledges the importance of providing safe, clean and hygienic sanitation facilities to its commuters while they are in the premises of DMRC's network. DMRC provided toilet facility at all of its 274 stations across Delhi – NCR (National Capital Region). This is perhaps the highest number of toilets provided by any urban transport system in the world.

The toilets are built inside the station buildings, making them easily accessible for commuters. While constructing the facilities, Delhi Metro has also ensured that they are easily accessible for the elders, children, and physically-challenged commuters as well. The charges for using toilet facility are kept nominal to ensure affordability.

DMRC roped in the NGOs like Sulabh International and M/S. Civic International to maintain the facilities. Further, Delhi Metro also installed additional public toilet Utilities outside some of the station premises. These facilities are open for use by even those who do not travel by metro.¹³

Swachh Vidyalaya Initiative

In response to the clarion call made by the Prime Minister on 15 August, 2014, the Department of School Education and Literacy launched the Swachh Vidyalaya Initiative (SVI) for the construction and repair of separate toilets for girls and boys in every school which was completed within the timeline of 15 August, 2015.¹⁴

Under this initiative 4, 17,796 (2.26 lakh boys and 1.91 lakh girls toilets) toilet blocks were constructed or made functional in 2, 61, 400 schools within the given timeline. This included schools in the most difficult to remote areas in the country or areas facing Left Wing Extremism (LWE). The Initiative was made successful in partnership with all State Governments, 64 Central Public Sector Undertakings, and 11 Private Corporates. With this, about 13.77 crore children in 11.21 lakh government schools all over the country have access to toilet facilities. This has particularly helped in creation of separate girls' toilets in schools in rural areas.¹⁵

Sulabh International

Sulabh International, a non-government organization that was registered by Bindeshwar Pathak in 1970, with the declared objective of converting dry, household latrines to hand flush water seal-latrines (Sulabh Shanchalaya System). The Sulabh sanitation system, which was designed by Pathak, is low cost, requires little space for construction, one in which the soil decomposes to become manure. Hence, there is no need for scavengers

to remove the waste. The liberated scavengers were given alternative jobs such as sweeping, cleaning and garbage removal by the local municipalities. By 1978, Sulabh International had converted some 10,000 latrines, and the project's success drew attention from the World Health Organization, which subsequently impressed its findings upon the Government of India. Since then Sulabh International has moved into a second phase by constructing "pay and use" public toilets which employ the liberated scavengers as caretakers.¹⁶

Namma Toilet

In December 2011, the Government of Tamil Nadu declared that it would take steps to provide safe sanitation to all its residents by 2015. This ambitious goal led to sanitation being recognized as a priority State issue. The condition of existing facilities were found to be unfit for use by the dependent population like children, the elderly and the differently abled. It was clear that the expansion of facilities could not take place with the existing design of toilets.

The result was a Universal toilet, where every element was designed keeping in mind the user. It was named

"Namma Toilet" to inculcate a feeling of ownership and pride in users. This was designed by IIT Bombay's Industrial Design Centre. The first set was installed at the Tambaram bus station, Chennai. The three free-to-use toilet stalls installed at the site get an average of 600-700 users daily.

Namma Toilets are prefabricated modular stalls and can be assembled at the site within a short period. Based on local needs and availability of space, the toilet can be put up as a standalone unit shared by a family, assembled together to form a row of toilets serving a group of families or the floating population, and even an entire complex for the community. The toilets have louvers on all four sides and a sunroof to allow for optional ventilation, natural light and a feeling of openness without compromising user privacy. The fittings and fixtures are vandal resistant, durable and user-friendly. Each toilet stall is powered by a Solar panel installed on the roof. During the day, the toilets get sunlight while the solar panels charge the battery, and when it is dark, the stalls are lit with motion sensor lighting. The interiors are seamless and can be easily cleaned with the help of a water jet. For treating the wastewater, it has been proposed to provide a range of options to suit site specific conditions.

The usage of recycled flush water is also being emphasised.¹⁷

Construction Of New Toilets

Lack of water and maintenance of toilets are not the issues citizens are facing in the cities. While the central government's guidelines stipulate that there should be a public toilet available for every 500 meters. Construction of new toilets, has become a tougher task, with the local residents and traders unwilling to have them in their vicinity. Many organisations such as Sulabh are ready for construction and maintenance of toilets. But government's are unable to provide them space anywhere. They have convinced some owners of petrol pumps, and hotels to open their toilets for general public.¹⁸

National Statistical Office's (NSO's) Report

According to the Swachh Bharat database 100 per cent villages in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Chattisgarh, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Jharkhand, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand. are open defecation free.

NSO's statistics on toilet usage were also encouraging. It revealed that 95.00 per cent of people with access to toilets in rural India used them regularly, indicating that the Swachh Bharat Mission efforts to change behaviour had borne fruit. Only 3.5 per cent of those with toilet access in rural India found that they never used them. This was aided by the fact that water was available around the toilet in more than 95.00 per cent of cases.

NSO's data indicated that the next big challenge may lie in the disposal of waste. More than 50 per cent of rural Indian households with toilets had septic tanks, while another 21 per cent used single pits, both of which need to be cleaned and faecal sludge must be disposed of safely. Only 10 per cent of toilets were built with the twin leach pit system pushed by the Swachh Bharat Scheme, which safely composts waste on its own without any need for cleaning or disposal.¹⁹

Impact Studies By Various Eminent Institutions/Organisations

Impact studies by various eminent institutions/organisations clearly highlight various benefits across health, financial, and environment parameters linked to SBM achievements. The latest Environmental Impact study by UNICEF found that in terms of faecal contamination, non-ODF villages were 11.25 times more likely to have their groundwater sources and

1.13 times more likely to have their soil contaminated and 1.48 times more likely to have their food contaminated and 2.68 times more likely to have their household drinking water to be contaminated.

A WHO 2018 study had estimated that over 3 lakh lives will be saved by 2019 when India turns ODF.

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) in a study conducted in 2017 reported that non-ODF areas have around 44 percent higher cases of diarrhoea among children.

Another UNICEF study earlier in 2017 suggested that in an ODF village, each family saves over Rs. 50,000 per year on account of avoidable medical costs, time savings, and lives saved.

IMF 2017-18 Gender Equality study indicated approximately 10 per cent reduction in time spent by women in household and child care and 1.5 per cent increase in women participation in the workforce. Broadly, the studies are pointers to a new dawn of quality in life ushered in by the new sanitation regime post SBM.²⁰

Conclusions:-

The Swachh Bharat Mission had become a "People's Movement" after it was launched as a government project. The program has really caught on as a Jan Andolan. It has captured the imagination of the country. It has addressed centuries-old practices on open defecation, and it has had a major health and economic impact.

Swachh Bharat Mission uses a range of motivational messages in an effort to trigger change, including the honour and dignity of women, safety and convenience, children's health, savings in medical costs, and the introduction of a toilet as a status symbol. Especially in villages with active *safai karmis*, or village sanitation workers, some of these messages have been absorbed.

India's Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) is an example of how difficult it is to change people's sanitation habits. Even though the SBM aims to eliminate open defecation by 2019, data from the 2015-16 National Family Health Survey show the campaign hasn't changed much since it began. Almost halfway through the SBM, open defecation remained quite common in rural India.

It is time for communities, leaders and organisations throughout India to make eliminating open defecation a top priority. This means much more than merely building latrines; it means achieving widespread latrine use. Latrines only make people healthier if they are used for defecation. They do not if they are used to store tools or grain, or provide homes for the family goats, or are taken apart for their building materials. Any response to open defecation must take seriously the thousands of publicly funded latrines that sit unused (at least as toilets) in rural India. Perhaps surprisingly, giving people latrines is not enough.

Ending a behaviour as widespread as open defecation is an immense task. To its considerable credit, the Indian government has committed itself to the work, and has been increasing funding for sanitation. Such a big job will depend on the collaboration of many people, and the solutions that work in different places may prove complex.

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