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Swachh Bharat- Swasth Bharat: A Jan Andolan

The Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) is the ambitious cleanliness drive launched by the Union Government of India. There is absolutely no denying of the fact that the Swachta Abhiyan has captured popular imagination by leaps & bounds. For the first time, the print, audio and visual Media are reverberating the ideals of the SBM, by laying down the advantages of cleanliness at homes, offices and surroundings. They are also promoting elimination of open defecation through the construction of individual, cluster and community toilets.

The SBM was launched by Prime Minister (PM) Modi on 02 October 2014, marking the 150th birth anniversary of the father of the nation. This mission certainly carries the essence of the Gandhian philosophy of dignity of labour; as Gandhiji always said, “so long as you do not take the broom and bucket in your hands, you cannot make your towns and cities clean”. In fact, Gandhiji went a step ahead in declaring cleanliness next to godliness. One can say that his emphasis was clearly on inculcating healthy habits and hygienic living which would go a long way in nation building. A nation can prosper not only when it is technically, scientifically and financially sound, but also has a healthy reserve of human resources, which can contribute greatly in the process of development and nation building. In other words, it is the “Swachh Bharat” which would automatically lead to “Swasth Bharat”. The SBM has two sub-missions, namely Swachh Bharat Mission (Rural) and the Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban). Both these sub-missions are aimed at achieving ‘Swachh Bharat’ by 2019. The rural sanitation programme is not new to India as it was first introduced in 1954, as part of the first five year plan of the Government of India. Over a period of time, the advantages of rural sanitation were emphasised to improve the quality of life in rural India. The late 1990s was also marked by total sanitation campaign succeeded by the Nirmal Bharat



Abhiyan, where emphasis was more on building toilets with a target-based approach.

However, the Swach Bharat Mission stands out to be very special and distinct in many ways. Prime Minister Modi has always emphasised on the mission turning into a Jan-Andolan or the people's movement with the focus on behavioural change, making each individual's efforts count. Hence, under the able leadership of the PM, this mission has made from the highest officers to the common citizens accountable of how they are contributing in making their environment clean and sustainable. It can thus be said that cleanliness and sanitation, both at the urban as well as rural level, have become a national agenda with an emphasis on spreading awareness through Swachagrahis. These trained motivators would persuade people to inculcate healthy and sustainable ways of sanitation through interpersonal communication. In some parts, they have launched the "Darwaza Band Karo!" campaign, meaning to shut the door during defecation, which is targeted towards both men and women.

The SBM stands out to be a remarkable step taken up by the PM, especially because a large number of population is deprived of access to clean and safe private toilets even today, as a consequence denying them their basic human rights. The lack of sanitation not only obstructs the right to a dignified life, it also leads to various health hazards. Open defecation leads to transmission of several diseases including Cholera, Typhoid, Diarrhoea, Hepatitis or Polio, mostly affecting children and the poor. In this regard, SBM is an important step in giving back people their lost dignity by ensuring them their basic human rights. Open defecation has remained one of the biggest challenges, be it in the cities or villages, due to lack of toilets and unhygienic defecation habits. This is one of the primary reasons why SBM lays so much of stress on the behavioural change. Going out in the open for defecation has been more of a social practice, and interestingly also a mode of socialisation, where the village elders would travel some distance and would often meet after carrying their daily ablutions. There are separate time slots decided for men and women. The ghunghat-clad women go out together hiding their faces. In some villages women would go out in the night or at the break of dawn, because



there are less chances of being spotted. The concept of 'Izzat' (meaning honour), which is very crucial to the existence of a woman belonging to an Indian society, would remain secure through her ghunghat even if she has to go out in the open to defecate.

During one of the village visits, some ghunghat-clad women were observed walking together, carrying torches at night. Some women were spotted seating in the bushes, who would suddenly stand up on seeing the car's light. It was realised that they had gone out in the open to relieve themselves. This practice is really inhuman, as it not only compromises the dignity and privacy of an individual, more so of a woman, and in the long run leads to several health hazards. Such inhuman practice has become part and parcel of the Indian rural women's lives, which is seldom questioned or challenged by these women in particular or by the rural community at large. The practice of open defecation also poses challenge with regard to women's safety and security. Women going in the open for attending nature's call tend to become easy targets for harassment, sexual assaults and molestation, making them all the more vulnerable. These problems multiply during the rainy season leading to spread of the filth and diseases. The SBM hopes to solve these problems, though it is a herculean task.

It needs to be emphasised that the Swach Bharat Mission has catapulted the need for sanitation to a whole new level. The villages are encouraged to attain and sustain the Open Defecation Free (ODF) status with the focus on the solid and liquid waste management. SBM is promoting the concept of visually clean villages which would be manifested through a change in people's behaviour. In order to initiate this attitudinal change, communication is used as an important tool through Swachgrahis. The Swachta Preraks at the grass root levels propagate the benefits of healthy habits with regard to sanitation. Access to clean water and hygienic sanitation facilities are crucial for the survival of human beings, and is directly related to their human rights. Hence water and sanitation are two sides of the same coin and go hand in hand. The water and sanitation related diseases affect huge number of people, especially children, and are major cause of death around the world.



Lack of water has also been one of the major causes of people defecating in open, hence sustainable use of water is crucial, especially in those areas where water is a scarce resource. Therefore, apart from building toilets in rural and urban areas, there is a greater need to ensure sustainable clean water supply which would ensure bare minimum standards of sanitation and hygiene. Under the SBM, steep slope toilet pans are being provided in the rural areas, which require less water for flush. Twin pit, septic tanks or bio toilets are some of the innovations that would be implemented to maintain safe sanitation technologies for the proper disposal of waste. The emphasis has also been laid on solid and liquid waste management, which forms a key component of the mission. This is extremely significant in order to improve cleanliness, hygiene and quality of life in rural areas, aimed at safe disposal of waste through sustainable technologies.

One of the exceptional facets of the SBM is that almost all the government institutions are responsible for its implementation and execution. Here, the governmental machinery at the grass root level is going to play an important role, with the help of several woman groups, Anganwadi workers, school teachers and Swachta motivators creating a participatory model and a sense of responsibility within the community. Over the years the school dropout rate of girls in India has been quite high. Among other socio-cultural factors, lack of proper sanitation facility, privacy, separate toilets or presence of unhygienic toilets, are some of the primary reasons for this. It has been estimated that a large number of girls drop out of school when they hit puberty, unavailability of sanitary pads remains a major reasons. Some of these roadblocks are being addressed by the SBM which is a step forward in improving the health of rural population, consequently creating a healthy society. The mission also remains committed to promoting values through education, which would go a long way in ensuring gender equality. Providing for clean, safe and separate toilets for girls in schools is one of the major interventions of the SBM. On 15 August 2014, PM announced that all government schools in the country should have separate toilets for girls within one year leading to Swach Bharat- Swach Vidyalaya Campaign, so as to provide for functional toilets in school that would lead to enhanced



sanitation, better health and hygiene, and consequently, retention of students in schools especially girls.

It can very well be said that the initiative would result in the improvement of over-all health of children, improvement of school enrolment at the same time enhancement of nutrition. Schools with young and fresh minds would certainly serve as a golden platform for spreading awareness about sanitation, as schools, colleges and students are seen more of potential agents of change. Internalising the values of hygienic living through safe and clean sanitation practices would go a long way in solidifying the values of SBM.

Under the SBM (rural), an incentive of rupees 12000 is provided to the Below Poverty Line (BPL) households, with an emphasis on promoting a sense of ownership among the beneficiaries for the construction of toilet units. However, one of the greatest challenges is whether these sums really reach the beneficiaries considering the amount of corruption that prevails with regard distribution of funds. Even if these funds are reaching the beneficiaries, are they really ready to utilise that sum for the construction of toilets? After the launch of the SBM, many household as well as community toilets were constructed in various parts of India. However, there are issues relating to these newly constructed toilets. There are several toilets where the pits are missing. Many toilets do not have water supply taps or the flushing facilities. Moreover, instances of inflated figures have also been reported. The wider question remains that even if the toilet units are constructed, by the government or otherwise, there is no guarantee that it is serving the purpose of the mission. It has been reported that in many villages the sums given to the individual households have been used for other purposes, like building cowsheds or constructing storage facilities. This is reason why the SBM lays emphasis on attitudinal change as well as cultivating healthy habits through mass awareness programs and interpersonal interactive sessions. Merely building of toilets does not mean that people will start using it. Nevertheless, such cases are reported to the government officials and appropriate actions are being taken. In the urban areas also, the cleanliness drive has gained momentum with an emphasis on keeping one's surroundings clean. State has



been spreading awareness about the segregation of wet and dry waste; at the same time scientific disposal of mounds of urban garbage is also being looked into by the government. The treatment of urban industrial waste and sewage water still remains a challenge. There is also an increasing need to connect remote areas and develop a comprehensive planning for urban poor as well as slum dwellers visa vis the SBM.

The Swach Bharat Mission has played a crucial role in giving people especially women their dignity. Moreover, it is also time to give the one's responsible for door to door collection of waste, popularly called the 'Safaiwalas', their dignity too. One way to achieve this is by giving them clothes, gloves, shoes as well as other materials that are resistant to disease carrying microbes, so that there can be safe handling and disposal of waste materials. Hence, as part of the SBM, there should be guidelines for infection control and awareness programmes among the staff responsible for handling, disposing and segregating waste so that they themselves do not suffer from any infection.

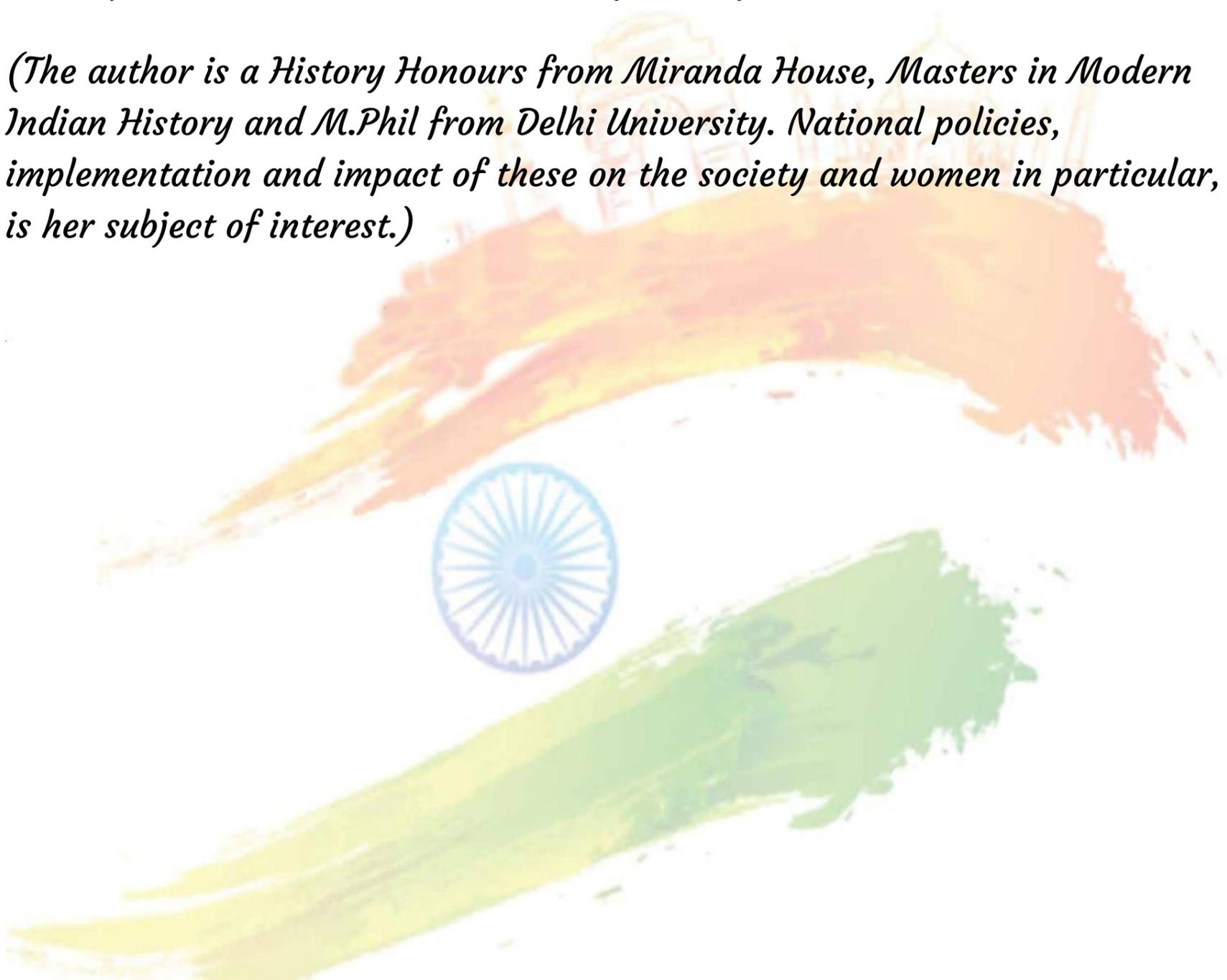
It can very well be said that PM Modi has played a pioneering role in several areas and the SBM remains to be one of his dream projects. His endeavours have taken the mission to new levels. For the first time an Indian Prime Minister has given new strength and vitality to a mission which remains committed to cleanliness and hygiene. His vision has strengthened the resolve to change the image of India globally. India under his leadership has launched a comprehensive programme of Swach Bharat Mission, which is interlinked with crucial areas of human development be it health, hygiene, nutrition, right to education as well women empowerment. The PM has mobilised almost all the economic as well as scientific sectors of India committing into the mission through innovations, accountability and Corporate Social Responsibility. His vision has made the mission into a mass mobilisation programme with an emphasis on healthy habits and behavioural change while making each individual's effort count in this whole scheme of things.

The Prime Minister has laid the red carpet for the citizens of India that would improve the standard of living manifold, at the same time success of the mission largely depends upon its implementation at the grass root levels and



its execution through change in our behaviour. It is time to honour and imbibe the principles of cleanliness in our daily lives. It is time for us to pledge to keep not only our home and premises clean, but also the streets, railway stations and other public place that we use; to stop spitting on the roads, and to start using public toilets built for the purpose. In this cleanliness drive, accountability and onus mainly lies on shoulders of common citizens like us. As we are the once who can take this Janandolan to its logical conclusions, as Gandhiji had once said, "Be the change that you wish to see in the world".

(The author is a History Honours from Miranda House, Masters in Modern Indian History and M.Phil from Delhi University. National policies, implementation and impact of these on the society and women in particular, is her subject of interest.)



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