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SWATCH BHARATH MISSION – MATTER OF DIGNITY AND SECURITY FOR WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

This study has been undertaken to investigate one of the greatest challenges India is facing that is to provide women with the access to decent and safe latrines and bathrooms. It is essential to end open defecation to move forward towards gender equality. Poor Sanitation is a common feature in India. Millions of women in India do not have access to clean water, toilets or personal hygiene. Apart from an important investment in infrastructures, this goal also requires substantial socio cultural and educational advances. Swatch Bharath Mission aims at eliminating open defecation and bringing in cultural and behavioural change towards sanitation practices among the people of the country. Swatch Bharath Mission with its stated objective of eliminating open defecation and 100 percent individual Household Toilets undoubtedly brings Dignity and Security to the Women. The present study is based on discussion with 30 Women of the Households which constructed individual latrine under Swatch Bharth Mission. All the 30 Women unanimously expressed their contentment over the construction of the Toilet and said that Toilet has eased their life, brought dignity and security to their lives. The study also used secondary data from various sources.

Key words: Swatch Bharath Mission, Open defecation, personal hygiene, Dignity and Security.

Introduction

The World's biggest democracy, India leads the world in Poor Sanitation and Open defecation. Poor sanitation results in disease which has huge socio economic implications. More than 60 percent of world's population who defecate in open lives in India. The problem of Sanitation is even more in Rural India. According to 2011 census, 53.1% of the households in India do not have a toilet, 69.3% in rural areas and 18.6% in urban areas. For various reasons the use of the existing toilets in both rural and urban areas is very low. Post Independence initiatives towards sanitation were introduced in 1954 as a part of First Five Year Plan, Central Rural Sanitation Programme (CRSP) in 1986, Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC) in 1999 and Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan (NBA) in 2012 couldn't achieve much. To achieve universal sanitation coverage, to end open defecation, and to put the focus on sanitation, the Prime Minister of India had launched the Swachh Bharat Mission on 2nd October 2014. Swachh Bharat Mission aims at ensuring an open defecation free India along with promotion of dignity of human as such and women in particular.

Right to Sanitation in India

Sanitation: Regulation and Governance

As per the Constitution of India, regulation and governance of sanitation in India's in the domain of state governments and local government. State governments have the power to adopt laws relating to sanitation. While the legislative competence lies with the state government, the Constitution envisages major sanitation related responsibilities to be vested with the local governments (panchayats, municipalities and corporations).

Human right to sanitation

The Constitution of India does not recognize the right to sanitation explicitly. However, the Constitution recognizes the right to sanitation indirectly in different forms. The higher judiciary in India (the Supreme Court and High Courts) has interpreted the fundamental right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution to include the right to sanitation. The right to sanitation is, therefore, a part of the fundamental right to life and is a justiciable right.

Sanitation is also a part of the 'Directive Principles of State Policy' (DPSP) in Part IV of the Constitution. More specifically, it can be read as part of Article 47, which provides that it is a duty of the government to raise the standard of living. Sanitation is undoubtedly a factor that contributes to a decent standard of living. Sanitation is also a part of Article 48A that makes it a duty of the state to 'protect and improve the environment'. Directive Principles are not enforceable and therefore no individual can approach a court against the government for its failure to give effect to the above-mentioned provisions. However, it is important in the sanitation context because they are fundamental norms for the Government to implement.

Cases on Right to Sanitation

Virender Gaur v. State of Haryana, Supreme Court of India (1995)2 SCC 577

Article 21 protects the right to life as a fundamental right. Enjoyment of life and its attainment including the right to life with human dignity encompasses within its ambit...sanitation without which life cannot be enjoyed.

LK Koolwal v. State of Haryana, High Court of Rajasthan, AIR 1988 Raj.

Maintenance of health, preservation of sanitation and the environment falls within the purview of Article 21 of the Constitution as it adversely affects the life of the citizen and amounts to slow poisoning and reducing the life of the citizen because of the hazards created, if not checked.

Women Issues - The taboo of menstruation

A problem that arises when cultural taboos and the lack of facilities meet is the intimate hygiene of women especially during their menstruation. Nowadays, the exclusion many women experience when they have their period is deeply rooted in many cultures around the world where it continues to be a taboo that is largely influenced by cultural and religious practices. This is the reason why women do not discuss this issue and they are not informed on a physiological level.

In India, many women are not allowed to cook or touch certain animals when they are menstruating, as there is some belief that they can spread diseases. The situation can be traumatic for many girls when they have their period for the first time, as no one has explained what is happening to them. The problem worsens when only half of the schools in India have separate toilets for boys and girls, as the shame experienced adds to the lack of privacy to clean themselves and to change sanitary material. This is one of the reasons why 113 million teenagers leave school when they reach puberty; another one is that in large sectors of Indian society menstruation means the passage to adulthood, and therefore when they are 13 or 14 those girls who already have their periods can get married, dropping out of school. As usual this is common in the poorest areas and in the lowest castes, in which puberty coincides with the need to take care of the family, to fetch water and to be in charge of domestic chores.

Only 12% of women use sanitary pads due to their high price and their use is virtually non-existent in the lower castes. Among those who use them, only those under the age of 30 have modern products; older women always use a cotton cloth they clean, but they do not always do this properly or they wash it with contaminated water, and therefore this piece becomes another element to transmit diseases.

The same taboos and the lack of education prevent most women in rural areas from cleaning their vagina correctly, or they do it with leaves or sheets of paper, or use contaminated water. Diseases such as vaginal infections or sexually transmitted illnesses are very common in rural India.

The scope of basic amenities is ever expanding in this modern world where sanitation got a prior importance especially for women in this patriarchal society like India. The lack of basic sanitation facilities, such as toilets, along with social, cultural behavioural norms, makes it difficult for women to perform their daily sanitation routine with dignity and safety.

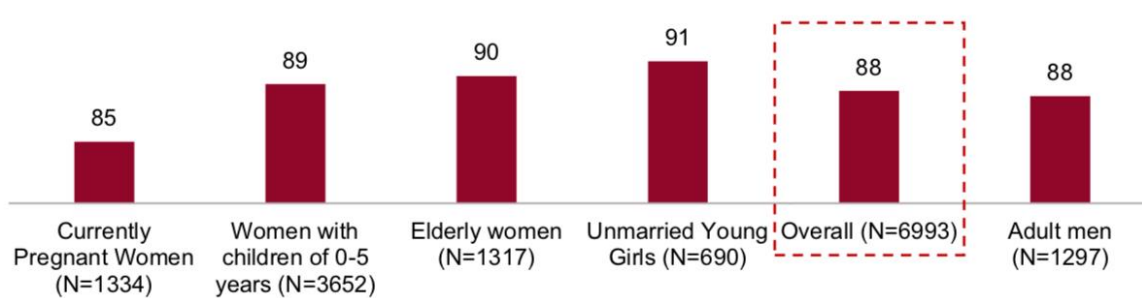
Safety of women at Risk

Women and girls are vulnerable to sexual assaults and abuses, animal attacks, especially from being bitten by snakes and reptiles when they went out in the open to defecate. Defecating in public can make women feel frightened or even helpless. But often there is a sense of shame too. Many of the women with whom we held informal discussions said they felt embarrassed because of the taunting and verbal abuse they would undergo whilst going to defecate in the open. They also reported feeling judged and humiliated. It is very common that Women and girls withhold food and water for fear of the need to relieve themselves in open. . These behaviours limiting the intake of food and water can lead to adverse health impacts, such as dehydration, urinary tract infections, chronic constipation, and other gastric infections. Some of these impacts can be more pronounced in certain categories of women, such as pregnant women.

Self-respect of women

Privacy brings in self respect. Women expressed that they feel a sense of self worth when able to attend to nature calls, change their sanitation materials in private. Owning a toilet made them feel proud. Defecating in public often leaves women and girls exposed to taunts and verbal abuse from others. Sometimes they are also ridiculed about their low economic status. But often the taunting is of a lewd or sexual nature. Obtaining a private toilet can enhance their dignity and self-respect on several fronts.

In a study conducted by Sambodhi Research and Communications Pvt. Ltd on “Access to toilets and the safety, convenience and self-respect of women in rural India” finds “ after getting a toilet, majority of the women, especially unmarried young women, said they were proud to own a toilet. An overwhelming majority (88%) of men also reported a sense of pride in owning a household toilet.



NEED FOR SWATCH BHARATH:-

SBM, the world's largest sanitation program aiming at 100 percent Open defecation free India by changing the behaviour of hundreds of millions of people with respect to toilet access and usage is definitely for Women Security and Dignity.

Health standards improvement- like life expectancy of society at large expands, infant mortality, maternal mortality declines considerably with standard sanitation facilities.

Household water-related impacts: Household treatment of water, use of bottled water, costs of obtaining piped water, and time costs of fetching clean water from a distance.

Access time impacts: Cost of additional time spent for accessing shared toilets or open defecation sites, absence of children (particularly girls) from school and women from their workplaces due to lack of provision of toilets.

Tourism impacts: Potential loss of tourism revenues and economic impacts due to gastrointestinal diseases among foreign tourists caused by poor sanitation in India.

Waste management lacunae associated diseases can be curtailed to promote an eco-friendly environment.

Crimes against women- associated with lack sanitation where women who go out for defecation during odd hours are reported with molestation attacks.

Objectives of SBM-

- Eliminate open defecation.
- Conversion of insanitary toilets to pour-flush toilets,
- Eradication of manual scavenging,
- 100% collection and scientific processing/disposal reuse/recycle of Municipal Solid Waste,
- To bring about a behavioural change in people with regards to healthy sanitation practices,
- Create awareness among the citizens about sanitation and its linkages with public health.
- Strengthening of urban local bodies to design, execute and operate systems,
- To create an enabling environment for private sector participation in Capital Expenditure and Operation & Maintenance (O&M) costs

Components of SBM-

- Construction of household toilets.
- Community & public toilets.
- Solid waste management.
- Information, Education & Communication (IEC) and Public Awareness.
- Capacity building and administrative & office expenses (A&OE).

Sub-schemes of SBM-

•Swatch Bharat Mission (Urban): It seeks to achieve open defecation free (ODF) urban India and 100% scientific management of municipal solid waste in 4041 statutory towns in the country.

Swatch Bharat Mission (Gramin/Rural): It seeks to bring about an improvement in the general quality of life in the rural areas, by promoting cleanliness, hygiene, and eliminating open defecation.

All the components and objectives of SBM are promoting sanitation as a whole to the society at large but their impact in terms of promoting women dignity is commendable.

CONCLUSION

Women and girls have special needs. Availability of Toilets with required water facility is must for their health-physical and psychological and hygiene. Depriving them of this basic necessity has serious health implications which in turn has economic implications. The sustainable development goals (Target 6.2) require India “by 2030, to achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations.” SBM-G has been successful in achieving its objectives of ensuring safety, convenience and self-respect for women in rural India. All the 30 women spoken to were no longer afraid of being hurt by someone or harmed by animals while defecating. This shows a major improvement in the safety of women in rural areas. Women can now use the toilet any time of the day at their own convenience without the need for withholding of food and water.

SBM stands out with women being at the centre of all interventions and also leading the march in many cases and reclaiming dignity and empowerment in the process. Women in rural areas now started discussing freely about sanitation and convincing rest of the folks to construct Individual Toilets. Toilets, now affectionately called 'IzzatGhar' or Dignity Home in many parts of the country.

India was declared 100 percent ODF on 2nd October 2019 and the Mission has entered the Second phase. It is important that the behavioural change is sustained.

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