

SANITATION AWARENESS THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SWACHH BHARAT ABHIYAN

Indu Bala,

Research Scholar,
Department of Human Rights,
School for Legal Studies,
Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University,
Lucknow.

Dr. Shashi Kumar,

Associate Professor,
Department of Human Rights,
School for Legal Studies,
Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University,
Lucknow.

ABSTRACT

Social Media is important because it has the ability to communicate effectively with a large number of people at the same time. Its purpose is not only to inform the public about current events, but it also determines our thinking or perspectives regarding different issues prevailing in the society. Currently, the role of Social Media sources, such as Twitter, Facebook etc., is becoming more prominent in communication for the development. Social Media facilitated easy spread of messages around very fast as well as generate discussions and response within the community. It has always covered social and environmental issues like Sanitation thus it is the most revolutionary device for spreading consciousness about environmental issues.

Cleanliness and hygiene are important for not only the public health, but also for the socio and economic development of the society at large. For this purpose the Government of India has taken steps for promoting sanitation programme i.e. 'Swachh Bharat Abhiyan', which has got success to some extent by the united efforts of Government and Media. For the last few years media is seriously concentrating on the topic of sanitation and it has been covering sanitation related stories and campaigns from the grassroots level. This article analyses the role played by media in creating an awareness and its impact among the Indian public regarding sanitation issues. The findings reveal that a good percentage of people in India still have no adequate means of sanitation.

Keywords: Sanitation, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, Awareness, Education and Communication (IEC)

INTRODUCTION

Clean environment is a basic need for all living beings because every necessity for them depends on it. That is why environmental issues have become globally important. Individual health and hygiene is dependent largely on clean environment and clean environment is depends on adequate availability of drinking water and proper sanitation. Consumption of unsafe drinking water, improper disposal of human excreta, improper high infant mortality rate is also attributed largely to poor sanitation. Poor sanitation and the lack of hygienic practices also affect the economic condition of the individual, community and the nation. One of the largest issues of poor sanitation is open defecation which traps the family in a cycle of ill health, poverty and deprivation. **Over 2.5 billion people mostly in rural areas across the world do not have proper sanitation facilities and over one billion people defecate in the open due to lack of proper toilet facilities.** The situation is no better in our country as well, where more than half of the population defecates in open areas like railway tracks, bank of rivers etc. The lack of sanitation infrastructures like sanitary wares, tools, toilets, products and regular supply of required water is the biggest challenge in this sector. However, availability of such infrastructure will not bring any significant change in sanitation, because sanitation habits are inherited by people through their culture, beliefs and mental attitude. A strong social and behavioural change among people is the need of the hour.

In 2013, the United Nations officially recognized **November 19** as **World Toilet Day**¹, to make sanitation for all and to promote public awareness on the need of adequate toilets for improving health of people and save their lives. UN says that the practice of open-air defecation is “extremely harmful” to public health and more than 200,000 children could be saved with the provision of proper toilets facilities. India is keen to put the sanitation programs on the centre stage by sensitizing the population about hygiene with the strong intent to eradicate open defecation. For this

purpose **Swachh Bharat Mission**, an action plan has been drawn up by the Government of India to make India Free from Open Defecation (ODF) by 2019. But the actual coverage/use of toilets is lower than what statistics suggests. The major cause behind this is lack of awareness or low level of awareness on sanitation, which is the biggest issue. Sanitation awareness may be defined as, ‘to help the social group and individual to gain a variety of experiences to acquire a basic understanding about sanitation and its related other problems’. An effective hygiene education can contribute to creating awareness, understanding and behaviour change about sanitation. Behavioural change on sanitation can only be done when there is a proper awareness about the policies initiated by the Government of India and only media can spread this awareness through its various means.

In the past years, sustainability and sanitation awareness have gained much media attention. Media sanitation promotion includes radio advertisements, printed leaflets, painting walls, newspapers etc. and participatory sanitation promotion activities includes community activities, social mapping, defecation and contamination mapping, group discussions etc. institutional incentives are financial awards for stopping open defecation, bans on open defecation etc. targeted hygiene messages such as household delivery of locally appropriate messages on basic hygiene practices such as hand washing, food and water hygiene (GOI, 2007). **Due to increasing media coverage, our society is becoming more aware of the effects that our activities put on the health of the environment.** In this regard the media has a big role to play in making people aware of environment issues and taking actions to promote sanitation. This study has analysed the awareness level on sanitation through social media and the effectiveness of the prevailing Information, Education and Communication (IEC) approach among rural Indians. So we can say that systematic planning, awareness, implementation and monitoring are required to end this sanitation problem.

SWACHH BHARAT ABHIYAN TO IMPROVE SANITATION

The concept of sanitation was earlier limited to disposal of human excreta by open ditches, pit latrines, bucket system, etc. Today, it connotes a comprehensive concept, which includes liquid and solid waste disposal, food hygiene, personal, domestic as well as environmental hygiene. More than 600 million individuals practice open defecation in India than anywhere in the world. Although access to improved sanitation is steadily increasing in India since the year 2000 but the pace of change is too slow.² With the passing of time people realised the proper sanitation is important not only from the general health point of view but it has a vital role to play in our individual and social life too. The concept of sanitation has been, therefore, expanded to include personal hygiene, home sanitation, safe water, garbage disposal, excreta disposal and waste water disposal.

The Supreme Court of India has also ruled that both water and sanitation are part of the constitutional right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution of India and it is a duty on the state to provide clean drinking water and proper sanitation to its citizens. Realising that, the large scale population was exposed to various kinds of diseases due to lack of sanitation facilities. The Government of India has advancing the earlier target of making India free from poor sanitation by launching a massive program with title, Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC) in 1999. Building latrines to stop open defecation started in 2001 which was taken as the beginning of the program. The design of the TSC incorporated lessons from the poor record of India's earlier centrally sponsored Rural Sanitation Programme, launched in 1985 with a focus on construction of relatively expensive latrines. The TSC gives emphasis on Information, Education and Communication (IEC) for demand generation of sanitation facilities. The key principles of TSC were enunciated as follows: low to no subsidy, focus on awareness generation (IEC), community centered and demand responsive approach, reliable supply

chain, school sanitation and hygiene education and involvement of PRIs and NGOs. The programme guidelines sought to ensure that adequate funds would be allocated for Information, Education and Communication (IEC) and start up activities so as to create demand for sanitation facilities. It also lays emphasis on school sanitation and hygiene education for bringing about attitudinal and behavioural changes in relevant sanitation and hygiene practices from a young age. **To give a fillip to the TSC, the government launched an incentive scheme in the form of an award for total sanitation coverage, maintenance of a clean environment and open defecation-free Panchayat villages, Blocks and Districts, called Nirmal Gram Puraskar in 2003.** The Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC) was renamed to **Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan (NBA)** with the Effect from April 1, 2012. On October 2, 2014, the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, the campaign was re-launched as **Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (SBA)** by Indian Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi. This Mission aims to make India free from open defecation and achieve 100 percent scientific management of solid waste by 2 October 2019. The major component of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan are Construction of individual sanitary latrines for households below the poverty line with subsidy (80 percent) where demand exists, Conversion of dry latrines into low-cost sanitary latrines, Construction of exclusive village sanitary complexes for women providing facilities for hand pumping, bathing, sanitation and washing on a selective basis where there is not adequate land or space within houses and where village panchayats are willing to maintain the facilities, Setting up of sanitary marts, Total sanitation of villages through the construction of drains, soakage pits, solid and liquid waste disposal and Intensive campaign for awareness generation and health education to create a felt need for personal, household and environmental sanitation facilities.

Swachh Bharat Abhiyan now has become a 'Jan Andolan' receiving tremendous support from the social media. Most of the awareness campaigns take with the help of electronic media, however,

most of the rural population in India still not have access to electronic media. Citizens too have turned out in large numbers and pledged for a neat and cleaner India. Taking the broom to sweep the streets, cleaning up the garbage, focussing on sanitation and maintaining a hygienic environment have become a practice after the launch of the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan. People have started to take part and are helping spread the message of 'Cleanliness is next to Godliness' through social media like Facebook, Twitter etc.

ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN SANITATION AWARENESS

In a developing country like India, media can play a proactive role in bringing about behavioural and attitudinal changes in rural masses regarding unhealthy practices of sanitation. It has been effectively used by the media mandarins and the people in power to spread the messages across on the importance of sanitation in life and in motivating rural folks towards accepting the behavioural change. At rural level, folk media has a very significant role to play in people's lives. Modern day social media still seems to alien to the rural people. Folk media mainly includes folk songs, folk dances, folk theatre and other folk performing arts. **They need to get insight into the technical and technological areas to understand the issues and put that in perspective.** It is the rural communities' involvement that needs emphasis on coverage in media, where success stories inspire other members of the community to take prescribed sanitation practices. It is here, role of media and communication turns paramount for any successful implementation of sanitation programs. Moreover, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and the integration in mobile media will also help volunteers to spread messages and share knowledge on sanitation.

Internet, in the new millennium has, facilitated and fostered the understanding of government, government policies and people of different communities. The exchange of information

is on a fast track with options to choose from a variety of services (read mainly government) in the era of internet. There is a growing population of youths that are ardent users of new social media platforms. Social media is being used extensively in this new era of internet. With Facebook, You Tube or Twitter, youths are very connected with each other and other global/local issues through the Social Media. Although not limited to youths only, social media platforms are also utilized by industry and government agencies as a preferred tool of communication with general public. **A campaign of 21,000 trees plantation was carried out in Aurangabad by Divya Marathi Newspaper and the message was spread by social media.**³ The Forest Department of Maharashtra Government has also created a mobile application called '**My Plants**' to record details of the plantation such as numbers, species and location into the computer system of the Forest Department. **India Water Portal** is a website that shares knowledge and builds communities around water and related issues in India. In 2003, the **Government of India** launched an exclusive website for sanitation and drinking water supply. A comprehensive website is offering full information on sanitation programmes and initiatives. These are some examples of different online methods of spreading awareness regarding sanitation.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND SWACHH BHARAT ABHIYAN

Social media has widened a new horizon for social advertisement. Many people have defined social media networks from time to time. But broadly, most of the people find social media networks synonymous with social networking sites, micro blogging, various internet forums etc. Every media whether it is a radio or a news channel or NGO or any source which interacts with public at some levels, has a social responsibility. This responsibility is very important in nature as it affects the development of the society by large means. Thus, the media cannot shirk (avoid) from this social responsibility and thus, making all the prominent

media networks as the “social media networks”. This social media network has the capacity to spread and make widespread awareness about cleanliness and its advantages and provide the right ambience for behaviour modifications. It can make a topic popular, fashionable or worthy of attention. Public awareness campaign also using a social media sites like Facebook, Twitter etc. which are served 24x7 on the smartphones, utilized by maximum number of people across the world. Media has covered miles in improving health of rural India but there are still many more miles to go. This shows how technology-enabled development process is slowly but steadily put in place by the governmental agencies. As of 2011, there were about 121 million people accessing internet in India. According to a report, the overall internet penetration is 35% of total population.⁴ In 2017, 320.57 million people accessed the internet through their mobile phone. Accessing social media is one of the key reasons for people to access the Internet, in fact, for many people accessing the internet for the first time, social media was the reason they embraced Internet. The statistic shows the number of social network users in India from 2015 to 2022. In 2019, it is estimated that there will be around 258.27 million social network users in India, up from close to 168 million in 2016. The most popular social networks in India were YouTube and Facebook, followed by social app WhatsApp. Facebook is projected to reach close to 319 million users in India by 2021.⁵

To provide a fillip to the government’s Swachh Bharat campaign, the local entrepreneurs have come up with several free apps that could aid users in keeping their cities and towns clean in different parts of the country. People from different sections of the society have come forward and joined this mass movement of cleanliness (Swachh Bharat Abhiyan). They are spreading awareness through social media platform by taking pictures and videos of affected areas from poor sanitation and get uploaded them on different social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp etc. and by sharing them again and again with many people. For example, ‘twin pit toilet technology’ is also

circulating through social media. Given the reach of social media, marrying the broom with Swachh Bharat apps is a capital idea. The social media accounts like ‘@swachhbharat’ on twitter, ‘https://www.facebook.com/SBMGramin/’ on Facebook and WhatsApp/HIKE are being extensively used for sharing real life Swachhata Stories from the ground, and also as a platform for cross learning by sharing innovative ideas. Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has appreciated the efforts of people and asked various government departments and organisations for taking part in the Swachh Bharat Mission and for contributing actively toward a mission of cleaning India. For this purpose, improvements have been made in the website of Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation and in its online monitoring system for capturing of achievement data.

This is only apt in the era of crowdsourcing where Indians are increasingly becoming part of online communities and social media platforms. One app, developed in Bengaluru called ‘**Swachh Bharat Swachh Bengaluru**’, marks litter spots in Karnataka’s capital city, another app called ‘**My Clean India – Swachh Bharat**’, allows users to take and tag pictures of unclean areas and invite friends over social media for a clean-up. The Swachh Bharat apps now empower citizens to be part of the solution. They could also be linked to local municipal corporations whereby citizens could direct the **latter** to focus their sanitation activities to specific problem areas in their neighbourhoods. Social media and citizen enthusiasm can provide a vital resource but at the end of the day, it is municipal corporations, who have to deliver.

To convert Swachh Bharat Mission into a mass movement, the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, nominated nine celebrities to help galvanise public support for his SBM and asked them to nominate nine more people each to make the initiative go viral and transform the move into a national mission. Millions of people across the country have been joining day after day the cleanliness initiatives of the government departments, NGOs and local community centres to

make India clean. This is why, from government officials to **jawans**, Bollywood actors to the sports persons, industrialists to spiritual leaders, all have lined up for this noble work of cleanness drive of surrounding areas. Print and electronic media have also been publishing several articles and TV features on sanitation issues and social media through its public message, has given a wider publicity to Swachh Bharat Abhiyan.

CONCLUSION

There is a proverb in Tamil, that goes, “Where there is water, there is civilization; Hygiene provides health and wealth”. Water is the basis for hygiene and civilization. But, improving the water supply and sanitation facilities in a country is not an easy task. It requires huge government infrastructure, resources and financial expenditure. Therefore, public support is very much needed for successful implementation of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan. In our country, **The national budget for sanitation has increased from 1.5 billion to more than 20 billion (DDWS, 2011)⁶**, but the construction of toilets is very slow and there is a less usage of the existing toilets because awareness about sanitation and people’s positive attitude towards the sanitation, cleanness or hygienic life style are very much low. This is also because of poor socio-economic condition and traditional mind-set. Reason for this drawback is the poor and inappropriate communication methods that are used in the process. Regional/district action plans on rolling out the communication strategy and utilizing the Information, Education and Communication (IEC) for sanitation campaigns need to be developed and implemented. Sanitation in the state has to be made aspirational through behaviour change communication campaigns. Study shows that government are extensively using new media technologies and social platforms to not only inform the public about its policies but also as access to a large source of information about citizens’ views and wants in terms of tweets and retweets, Facebook likes and comments, and ideas posted on various government websites (ANI, 2016).

Prime Minister Narendra Modi called on Indian citizens to fulfil Gandhi’s vision of a clean India by his 150th Birth Anniversary in 2019. He advocated every individual to devote 100 hours every year toward cleanliness. He also urged people to share their contributions on social media using the hashtag #MyCleanIndia. He also invited public figures like Sachin Tendulkar (cricketer), Kamal Hasan (Actor and Producer), Salman Khan (Actor), Priyanka Chopra (actress), Anil Ambani (Industrialist), Shashi Tharoor (Opposition Party Leader), Mridula Sinha (governor of the state of Goa), Baba Ramdev (Yoga Guru) etc.

These social media communication strategy recognizes that behaviour change is not a simple matter of receiving and having information and making an informed choice. Therefore, it requires sound understanding of the target audience and the use of an appropriate mix of communication channels, group, community and social media. Successfully use of this new media technologies, particularly social networking services and platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and various party websites are attracting the attention of the educated middle-class youth as well as the mainstream news media because social media is participatory, socially engaging, and reciprocal. It thus provides opportunities not only for information sharing, but also for social networking and interactive engagement.

Overall, the major progress that has been witnessed in access to sanitation over the past few years is a first step forward. It needs, however, to be linked to a series of other actions and an awareness of the social and cultural dimensions of sanitation. Without this, the country is unlikely to achieve full success. Also, avoidance of throwing household garbage on the streets, Open defecation, spitting and urinating in the open, can make India a clean place to live, decrease diseases and hugely reduce the treatment burden on the economy.

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1 The resolution declaring the Day titled "Sanitation for All" ([A/RES/67/291](#)) was adopted on 24 July, 2013, and urged UN Member States and relevant stakeholders to encourage behavioural change and the implementation of policies to increase access to sanitation among the poor.

(<http://www.un.org/en/events/toiletday/background.shtml>)

2 National Sanitation and Hygiene Advocacy and Communication Strategy Framework for 2012-2017 by Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation (MDWS) and UNICEF.

3 Mega tree plantation drive by NSS-VIIT and Tata Motors: The Times of India, August 31st, 2016

(http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/53947427.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=txt&utm_campaign=cppst)

4 Report on 'Internet in India 2017', published jointly by the Internet and Mobile Association of India & Kantar IMRB.

5 India: number of internet users 2015-2022 by Statista: The Statistics Portal

(<https://www.statista.com/statistics/255146/number-of-internet-users-in-india/>)

6 Strategic Plan – 2011- 2022, Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India (https://mdws.gov.in/sites/default/files/StrategicPlan_2011_22_Water.pdf)