

Is Any Relation between Cleanliness and Healthy Environment: Thought Provoked by Gandhi

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ABSTRACT

This study aims at showing whether there is a relationship between announcement of Government of India as Clean India (Swaccha Bharat) and its behavior in the maintenance of a healthy environment. The usefulness of academic study expected to be useful in order to develop a scientific perspective in the knowledge and behavior for maintaining the cleanliness of the environment, and the applicability can be input for the citizens of India, as implemented by Mahatma Gandhi in South Africa. The community of the people and the issue announced by the Government of India as Clean India (Swaccha Bharat) has major role in research studies and engineering analysis; on that basis, society can be ignited to follow it judiciously. In this study, it was found that there is a significant relationship between awareness to the society at large and its behavior in the maintenance of environmental hygiene. The higher the knowledge is provoked in the society, the more positive behavior in the maintenance of environmental hygiene will be obtained. Thus, it can be stated that the knowledge or awareness in the society with behavior in the maintenance of environmental hygiene has a direct relationship.

Keywords: Clean India (Swaccha Bharat), healthy environment, knowledge and behavior, environmental hygiene.

1. INTRODUCTION

On 2nd October, 2014, the Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, launched a nationwide cleanliness campaign on the occasion of Mahatma Gandhi's birth anniversary. The concept of *Swachh* Bharat is to provide sanitation facilities to every family, including toilets, solid and liquid waste disposal systems, village cleanliness, and safe and adequate drinking water supply. We have

to achieve this by 2019 as a befitting tribute to the Father of Nation, Mahatma Gandhi, on his 150th birth anniversary. Modi said that the *Swachh* Bharat mission is beyond politics, inspired by patriotism and not politics. He also asked people to pledge '*na main gandagi karoonga, na main gandagi karne doonga*' (I shall not litter and won't allow anyone to do so). He further flagged off a walkathon as part of the *Swachh* Bharat Campaign, which is not

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just a slogan, but our responsibility. This turned the people's thoughts to Gandhi's idea of cleanliness. What is the need of it? How did Gandhiji influence and communicate this idea to the nation? To answer these questions it is necessary to know Mahatma Gandhi's views about cleanliness.

2. IMPORTANCE OF CLEANLINESS

Indians gained freedom under the leadership of Gandhiji, but his dream of a clean India is still unfulfilled. Mahatma Gandhi said "Sanitation is more important than independence". He made cleanliness and sanitation an integral part of the Gandhian way of living. His dream was total sanitation for all. Cleanliness is most important for physical well-being and a healthy environment. It has bearing on public and personal hygiene. It is essential for everyone to learn about cleanliness, hygiene, sanitation and the various diseases that are caused due to poor hygienic conditions. The habits learnt at a young age get embedded into one's personality. Even if we inculcate certain habits like washing hands before meals, regular brushing of teeth, and bathing from a young age, we are not bothered about cleanliness of public places. Mahatma Gandhi said, "I will not let anyone walk through my mind with their dirty feet." Gandhiji dwelt on cleanliness and good habits and pointed out its close relationship to good health. No one should spit or clean his nose on the streets. In some cases the sputum is so harmful that the germs infect

others. In some countries spitting on the road is a criminal offence. Those who spit after chewing betel leaves and tobacco have no consideration for the feelings of others. Spittle, mucus from the nose, etc, should also be covered with earth. (*Navajivan* dated 2 November, 1919).

3. SCAVENGING STARTED FROM SOUTH AFRICA

Gandhi learnt scavenging in South Africa. His friends there lovingly called him the great scavenger. Mahatma Gandhi said, "Everyone must be his own scavenger." (The mind of Mahatma Gandhi). After a three-year stay in South Africa, he returned to India to fetch his wife and sons. Plague had broken out in the Bombay Presidency at that time. There was a chance of it spreading to Rajkot. Gandhi immediately offered his service for improving the sanitation of Rajkot. He inspected every home and stressed the need of keeping the latrines clean. The dark, filthy, stinking pits infested with vermin horrified him. In some houses belonging to the upper class, gutters were used as a privy and the stench was unbearable. The residents were apathetic. Poor untouchables lived in cleaner homes and responded to Gandhi's pleadings. Gandhi suggested the use of two separate buckets for urine and night-soil and that improved the sanitation.

4. TRAINING OF CLEANLINESS FOR EQUALITY

During Gandhiji's second trip to India from South Africa, he attended the Congress

session in Calcutta to plead the cause of the ill-treated Indians in South Africa. The sanitary condition of the Congress camp was horrible. Some delegates used the veranda in front of their room as latrines, others did not object to it. Gandhi reacted immediately. When he spoke to the volunteers, they said; "This is not our job, this is a sweeper's job." Gandhi asked for a broom and cleaned the filth. He was then dressed in western clothes. The volunteers were astonished but none came forward to assist him. Years later, when Gandhi became the guiding star of the Indian National Congress; volunteers formed a *bhangi* (sweeper) squad in the Congress camps where for once the Brahmins worked as *bhangis*. Two thousand teachers and students were specially trained for doing the scavenging at the Haripura Congress. Gandhi could not think of having a set of people labeled as untouchables for cleaning filth and dirt. He wanted to abolish un-touchability from India. Whenever Gandhi got an opportunity to do a little bit of cleaning work, he felt happy. To him, the test of a people's standard of cleanliness was the condition of their latrines. He described himself as a *bhangi* and said he would be content, if he could die as a sweeper. He even asked orthodox Hindus to make him suffer social boycott along with the untouchables.

4.1 Use of Media to Create Awareness on Cleanliness

In South Africa, the whites despised the Indians for their slovenly habits. Gandhi

inspected their quarters and asked them to keep their homes and surroundings clean. He spoke about it at public meetings and wrote in newspapers. Gandhi's house in Durban was built in western fashion. The bathroom had no outlet for water. Commodes and chamber-pot used by his clerks residing with him had to be cleaned. He compelled his wife Kasturba to do the same. He also taught his young sons this work. Kasturba once expressed her disgust when asked to carry the chamber-pot used by his caste clerks. Gandhi rebuked her and told her to leave the house if she wanted to observe caste bias. He was once socially boycotted by his own sympathizers for admitting an untouchable couple to the Sabarmati Ashram.

4.2 Mass Contact Programme

Gandhi's group launched a mass contact programme in the villages. "At the end of the morning's march," writes Tendulkar, "a batch of men and women from his party visited the *Harijan* quarters of the village near the camp, taking with them brooms and spades." They talked about the "necessity of sanitation, about keeping their yards clean, of burying rubbish, instead of leaving it to blow here and there. While Gandhi was engaged in talks, people who had accompanied him would begin cleaning up the *basti* themselves. They highlighted the need to prevent excrement lying in the open, as it attracted flies and spread disease.

Even when talking about health and pointing out that disease could sometimes be traced to overeating or eating the wrong food, and therefore called for self-restraint, he did not fail to emphasise the need to educate villagers on hygiene and sanitation. The true function of the Ashram, he said, was to show people how they could avoid disease.

On February 4, 1916, almost a century ago, he spoke at the inauguration of the Banaras Hindu University, at the invitation of Madan Mohan Malaviya. At one point, Gandhi said, he wanted to ‘think audibly’ and proceeded to recall his visit to the Vishwanath temple. Apparently disappointed at the dirty state of this house of God, Gandhi said, “Is not this great temple a reflection of our own character?” The houses around had been built without regard to any norms, the lanes were tortuous and narrow and of course, dirty. “I speak feelingly, as a Hindu,” he added to emphasise his pain, asking whether the temples would be clean once the British had left the country, bag and baggage. (The speech has been reproduced in *The Penguin Book of Modern Indian Speeches: 1877 to the Present*, edited by Rakesh Batabyal).

Once, during his tour to promote *khadi*, the sweepers were not permitted to attend a public meeting where Gandhi was to speak. When Gandhi came to know of it, he told the organisers: “You may keep your purses and your addresses. I am going to

have a meeting with the untouchables only. Let all others who want, come there.”

Two years before his death, Gandhi stayed in the sweepers’ colony in Bombay and Delhi for some days. He wished to share the same lodging and partake of their food but then he was too old for the experiment.

Gandhi once went to Shimla to have an important meeting with the Viceroy. He sent one leading co-worker to see the *bhangi* quarters there. He was told that they have reduced the *bhangis* to the level of beasts and that they earn a few coppers but only at the expense of their human dignity. “Look at a *bhangi* as he eats surrounded by filth. It is enough to break one’s heart”.

Neither temples nor other public spaces are free from filth. Neither leaders nor citizens are particularly engaged with the problem of cleaning up our cities and towns with genuine measures – reducing needless consumption, reducing waste, confining dirt to its designated place, cleaning up our rivers and lakes and treating our environment with greater respect.

In D. G. Tendulkar *Mahatma, Volume Three*, there is a reference to Gandhi leaving for Orissa from Patna in 1934, as part of his *harijan* tour. At Champapurhat, finding that there was a dispensary on the grounds of the Gandhi Seva Ashram, he used that occasion to give a lecture on the need to rely not on medicines for a cure, but to prevent disease.

4.3 Need for Cleanliness Everywhere

After twenty years stay in that alien land, Gandhi, at 46, finally returned to India with his group. During his visit to Kumbh Mela at Hardwar that year, he with his Phoenix boys served as *bhangis* at the mela.

The same year Gandhi visited the Servants of India Society's quarters at Poona. The members of the small colony saw him cleaning the latrines one morning. They did not like it. But, Gandhi believed that work of this kind qualified one for Swaraj. More than once he toured all over India. Wherever and whenever he went, he found unsanitary conditions in some form or other and said that though few could afford shoes, it was unthinkable to walk barefoot in India. Even in a city like Bombay, people walked about the streets under the fear of being spat upon by the occupants of buildings around. The filth and stench of public urinal and latrines on railway stations and in *dharmashalas* were awful. Gandhi deplored the passengers' habit of dirtying the railway compartments. The roads used by the poor villagers and their bullocks were always ill-kept. He saw people taking a dip in a sacred pond without caring to know how dirty that bathing place or the water was. They themselves dirtied the river-banks. It hurt him to see the marble floor of Kashi Vishwanath temple set with silver coins collecting dirt and wondered why most entrances to abodes of God were through narrow slippery lanes. In talking with municipalities, Gandhi often said; "I congratulate you on your spacious roads,

your splendid lighting and your beautiful parks. But, a municipality does not deserve to exist which does not possess model water-closets and where street sand lanes are not kept clean all the hours of the day and night. Have you ever thought of the conditions in which the sweepers live?"

Gandhi emphasized that servants' quarters should be as clean as the masters' bungalows. "There is no gainsaying that we have not learnt the art of external sanitation to the degree that the English have. What is so distressing is that the living quarters of the menials and sweepers employed in the Viceroy's House are extremely dirty". These states of affairs the ministers of our new Government will not tolerate. Although they will occupy the same well-kept bungalows, they will see to it that the lodgings of their servants are kept as clean as their own. They will also have to pay attention to the cleanliness of the wives and children of the staff. Jawaharlal and Sardar have no objection to cleaning their own lavatories. How can they have any in having the living quarters of their attendants cleaned? A one-time *harijan* servant of Jawaharlal is now a member of the U. P. Assembly. I shall be satisfied only when the lodgings of the ministers' staff are as neat and tidy as their own." (Speech at a prayer meeting on 3 September 1946 in New Delhi).

5. CLEANLINESS IS NEXT TO GODLINESS

Mahatma Gandhi freed us not only from the British yoke but many of the bondages

of our own making. Gandhian philosophy can be understood in-depth only in the context of certain basic spiritual premises of Indian history. Of all the revolutions the revolution against an unjust society is the most critical. If we can fight against injustice then humankind is on the right path and that our task of not only nation building but also making the world a better place becomes an easier one. In social sphere, as in politics, the supreme test for Gandhi was not merely the material but also moral growth of humankind equally balanced one with the other. Gandhian approach to social reforms still remains much misunderstood and awaiting a fuller study than so far done.

Gandhi denounced the divorce between intelligence and labour. Manual work for him was a means of identifying not only with the lowliest of the lowly but with the working India as well as with the working world. "He warned that un-cleanliness of the mind is far more dangerous than that of the body. The latter, however, is an indication of the former". For Gandhi, "a meticulous sense of cleanliness, not only personal but also in regard to one's surroundings, is the *alpha and omega* of corporate life." And that, "he who is truly clean within, cannot remain unclean without, How wrong it is to ask others to be clean when we ourselves remain unclean!" There have been great reformers before Gandhi, but he alone stands out as a person who practiced what he preached. Gandhi shook the very foundation of social reforms by questioning the caste requirement

for personal behavior. From the very beginning he revealed his resolve by "touching the untouchable the rest was verbiage for him". Even as a little boy he wondered why scavenging is not one's own responsibility.

Aurobindo Ghosh, a great intellectual and one of the most prominent Extremist leaders, who inspired and maintained links also with some of the revolutionaries, had understood the nature of the crisis faced by the nationalist around that period in India:

"All great movements wait for their God-sent leader, the willing channel of force, and only when he comes, move forward triumphantly to their fulfillment. The men who have led hither to have been strong men of high gifts and commanding genius, great enough to be the protagonists of any other movement, but even they were not sufficient to fulfill one which is the chief current of a world-wide revolution. Therefore the nationalist party, custodians of the future, must wait for the man who is to come, calm in the midst of calamity, hopeful under defeat, sure of eventual emergence and triumph and always mindful of the responsibility which they owe not only to their Indian posterity but to the world."

6. RESPONSIBILITY OF PEOPLE TOWARDS CLEANLINESS TO PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT

- Gandhi said, "So long as you do not take the broom and the bucket in your hands,

you cannot make your towns and cities clean.”

- When he inspected a model school, he told the teachers: “You will make your institution ideal, if besides giving the students literary education, you have made cooks and sweepers of them.”
- To the students his advice was, “If you become your own scavengers, you will make your surroundings clean. It needs no less courage to become an expert scavenger than to win a Victoria Cross.”
- The villagers near his ashram refused to cover excreta with earth. They said: “Surely this is *bhangi*’s work. It is sinful to look at faces, more so to throw earth on them.” Gandhi personally supervised the scavenging work in villages. To set an example, he, for some months, himself used to go to the villages with a bucket and a broom. Friends and guests went with him. They brought bucketfuls of dirt and stool and buried them in pits.
- All scavenging work in his ashram was done by the inmates. Gandhi guided them. People of different races, religions and colours lived there.
- No dirt could be found anywhere on the ashram ground. All rubbish was buried in pits; peelings of vegetables and left-over food was dumped in a separate manure pit. The night-soil, too, was buried and later used as manure. Waste water was used for gardening. The farm was free from flies and stink though there was no *puckka* drainage system.
- Gandhi and his co-workers undertook sweeper’s work by turns. He introduced bucket-latrines and bicameral trench latrines. Gandhi showed this new innovation to all visitors with pride; rich and poor, leaders and workers, Indians and foreigners all had to use these latrines. This experiment slowly removed aversion for scavenging from the minds of orthodox co-workers and women inmates of the ashram.
- The sight of a *bhangi* carrying a night-soil basket on his/her head made him sick. He explained, how with the use of proper instruments, cleaning could be done neatly. Scavenging was a fine art and he did it without becoming filthy himself.
- He wrote, “Village tanks are promiscuously used for bathing, washing clothes and drinking and cooking purposes. Many village tanks are also used by cattle. Buffaloes are often seen wallowing in them. The wonder is that, in spite of this sinful misuse of village tanks, villages have not been destroyed by epidemics. Medical evidence shows that lack of pure water supply in villages is responsible for many of the diseases suffered by the villagers.” (*Hairjan*, 8 February, 1935)

7. CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that cleanliness is important in our life as well as for the nation. It is well known that Mahatma Gandhi personally took the effort to achieve the change that he wanted to see. It is, of course, too much to expect our present day leaders to go around the cities with their rising number of slums, and initiate a genuine drive to clean-up the surrounding. It is even less probable that they will pull themselves away from their market-focused pursuits and ineffectual, exclusive pursuit of GDP growth, to focus on the task of nation-building.

Teachers' and Students' role is very important to create awareness on cleanliness. In today's world, the role of social media is important to create awareness among the people and inculcate a feeling of nationality among them. Cleanliness is not only the responsibility of the '*safaai kaamgar*' (sanitation worker) or local government, it is the responsibility of all Indians.

It is the responsibility of the Government officers, NGOs and the local community to make India completely clean. It's need of the present hour ; all the people should actively participate to clean India to fulfill the dream of Mahatma Gandhi for the

protection of the environment, for our safety, and for a healthy future.

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