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Special Feature – “Swachhta Hi Sewa” Pakhwada

**Gandhi Jayanti
Swachh Bharat Diwas**



V.SRINIVAS

Public sanitation was a subject about which Mahatma Gandhi was deeply interested throughout his life. Gandhi devoted a great deal of time to instilling in Indians an appreciation of the importance of sanitation and tried to rouse the Nation's consciousness on this vital issue. It is important to note Gandhi's published works devote significant attention to the cause of public sanitation, on parity with his focus on Satyagraha, Ahimsa and Khadi.

Gandhi's vision of an ideal village was one with perfect sanitation, village lanes and streets free of all avoidable dust. In his book "*Ashram Observances in Action*", Gandhi writes that sanitary service is an essential and sacred service and yet it is looked down upon in society, with the result that it is generally neglected and affords considerable scope for improvement. The Ashram laid emphasis on engaging no outside labor for this work. The members themselves attend in turns to the whole of the sanitation. The Ashram designed simple, easy to use latrines that did not require a scavenger to clean. The Sevagram Ashram rules laid down that it was necessary that inmates must wash their hands with pure earth and pure water and wipe them with a clean napkin.

Public Sanitation has been accorded significant importance in Gandhi's life in South Africa. In his book "*Satyagraha in South Africa*", he describes his life on Tolstoy Farm - "The spring was about 500 yards away from our quarters and the water had to be fetched on carrying poles. Here we insisted that we should not have any servants... Everything therefore from cooking to scavenging was done with our own hands... The lion like Thambi Naidoo was in charge of sanitation... In spite of the large number of settlers, one could not find refuse or dirt anywhere on the farm. All rubbish was buried in trenches sunk for the purpose ... A small spade is the means of salvation from a great nuisance."

In his book "*My Experiments with Truth*" Gandhi writes, plague broke out in Bombay in 1897 and there was panic all around. Gandhi offered his services to the State in the sanitation department. Gandhi laid special emphasis on inspection of latrines and carrying out improvements. In his inspections of untouchables' quarters Gandhi found that they were beautifully smeared with cow dung and the few pots and pans were clean and shining. There was no fear of an outbreak in those quarters. Gandhi also records that he visited the Vaishnava Haveli, and was pained to see uncleanness about a place of worship. He knew that the authors of the Smritis had laid the greatest emphasis on cleanliness both inward and outward. Gandhi further notes that sanitation was a difficult affair in penetrating Indian villages. The people were not ready to do their own scavenging. Gandhian volunteers concentrated their energies on making villages ideally clean, they swept the roads and the courtyards, cleaned out the wells, filled the pools and persuaded the villagers to raise volunteers from amongst themselves.

Gandhi sensed a relation between poor sanitation and practice of untouchability. People neglected sanitation because it was considered to be the responsibility of the 'untouchables'. Gandhi felt that untouchability must be abolished and at the same time the conditions of public sanitation must be improved. Gandhi repeatedly forbade his followers from hiring anyone from the so-called lower castes for sanitary work. Gandhi felt that once the 'untouchables' whom he christened Harijans – children of God, were freed from the occupation of scavenging, their rise to a position of equality with others in the society

would be facilitated. Following independence, untouchability was abolished by law. Gandhi's vision is embellished in the Fundamental Rights – Article 17 which proclaims abolition of 'Untouchability' and forbids its practice in any form. The enforcement of any disability arising out of "Untouchability" shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law. The principal object of Article 17 is to ban untouchability in any form.

In 2017, the Government is celebrating Gandhi Jayanti - October 2 as Swachh Bharat Diwas. Government is also celebrating September 15, 2017 to October 2, 2017 for the Swachhata Hi Sewa campaign to mark the third anniversary of the Swachh Bharat Mission to provide an impetus to the largest sanitation campaign of India. The Swachh Sarvekshan conducted in several States on the impact of the Swachh Bharat Mission brought forth several success stories in 3 years of implementation – complete behavioral changes in people to keep villages clean and use toilets, people selling family jewels to construct household toilets, vanar senas of children blowing whistles and accosting people at 5 am to prevent open defecation and significant improvement in school enrolment through the Swachh Bharat Mission. The Swachh Bharat Mission has become a massive peoples movement.

Come, let us celebrate Gandhi Jayanti October 2, 2017 with the Gandhian ideals of public sanitation for a Swachh Bharat.

**V.Srinivas is an IAS officer of 1989 batch and is currently posted as Chairman of the Rajasthan Tax Board with additional charge of Chairman Board of Revenue for Rajasthan.
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