Working Session
Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

SPEAKER:
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SEMINAR ON SANITATION

SULABH EXPERIENCE
IN PROVIDING MODERN PUBLIC CONVENIENCES IN INDIA

PRESENTED

By:
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India had and has problems of defecation in the open and manual cleaning of human excreta by a class of people called “untouchables”.

Both these practices have continued from nearly 5000 years ago. The British Government introduced sewerage system in India in 1870 in Calcutta to end both the practices, but it could not happen.

Mahatma Gandhi was concerned for keeping India clean and for restoration of human rights and dignity of untouchables.

In 1968 I joined Bihar Gandhi Centenary Celebration Committee and I invented two technologies, one for individual houses and the other for public places for treatment of human waste in a decentralized manner – a paradigm shift and popularized it in the name of ‘Sulabh Shauchalayas’.
In the first technology, there are two pits; one is used at a time and the other is kept as standby. Both the pits are used alternatively. In the first pit after 2 years human excreta gets converted into manure to be used as a fertilizer in the kitchen garden or in the field. It requires only 1 to 1.5 litre of water to flush.

On this technology Sulabh has built 1.3 million individual toilets and 8000 public toilets. Government of India has built 54 million toilets on the same design.

In the other technology human excreta goes into the biogas digester built with a gradient where biogas is produced. In this technology, the effluent discharged is treated through UV rays and the water becomes pure to the extent that it contains less than 10 Biochemical Oxygen Demand (BOD) per milligram per litre. This water is safe for discharge in water bodies or to be used as a fertilizer. Sulabh has built 200 biogas plants linked with public toilets based on this technology.
Uses of Biogas

- Biogas used to warm oneself in winter
- Biogas used for lighting of mantle lamps
- Biogas used for cooking
- Biogas used for Lighting of Street Lights
These two technologies helped to stop open defecation. There is no chance of snake biting or criminal assault by anti-social elements. Women now go to toilets with dignity and safety. Girls also go to schools regularly with provision of toilets.

Women defecating in the open can be bit by snakes or be sexually assaulted

Women can attend to natures call with dignity and girls don’t have to drop out of school
I introduced the system of maintenance of public toilets on ‘pay & use’ basis. Initially, there were skeptical views about the success of this methodology. But now it has become popular throughout the country.

On the first day, in 1974, 500 people used the toilet with ‘pay & use’ system. **Now 20 million people use the facilities.** We have also constructed five public toilet complexes linked with biogas plants in Kabul, Afghanistan.

Largest Sulabh Toilet Complex in the world at Shirdi (Nasik), Maharashtra.

Sulabh Toilet Complex (Air-Conditioned), Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh

Sulabh Toilet Complex at Kabul, Afghanistan
The untouchables who used to clean night-soil manually have been given education, as well as vocational training to earn their livelihood and helped to perform rites, rituals and ceremonies of the upper caste people. Now they have become a part of the mainstream of the society. Now they have a cup of tea and lunch with the upper caste people. They go to work and do facials in the same families where they used to go to clean night-soil and were treated as ‘untouchables’.

Millions of scavengers have been relieved from this sub-human occupation. In two towns of Alwar & Tonk of Rajasthan human scavengers have been freed completely from untouchability and now the untouchables are at par with the upper caste people. In this way the dreams of Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Ambedkar have been fulfilled. These two technologies, mentioned above, can help to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for the 2.5 billion people who have no access to safe and hygienic toilets at present.
Erstwhile women scavengers being given education

Training in beauty care

Breaking taboo – entering temple

Erstwhile women scavengers dined with the upper caste people
Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak received Stockholm Water Prize from the hands of H.R.H. Prince Carl Philip of Sweden in 2009