

Socio-economic development of untouchables by Dr. Bindeshwar pathak

***Pragya Nema**

Abstract

Untouchability, a word which act as a curse for the Indian society since the Post Vedic times still exist in the modern Indian society. India has reached to moon and Mars excelled in science and technologies and continuously working on new inventions. On one hand India has established itself as a mature democracy but on the other hand untouchability and discrimination is still alive in the society. The person who showed courage for uprising of the problems faced by untouchables, specially scavengers who come from the lowest strata of the society was Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak. He is the founder of Sulabh international social service organisation. He is widely known in the world for dedicating his life to build a nationwide sanitation movement which is spanning over five decades. It was not just a sanitation revolution but it was an socio-economic revolution. It has focused on the social inclusion of untouchables and their economic development.

Keywords : Untouchability, discrimination, Sulabh, socio-economic revolution.

Bindeshwar Pathak has contributed his life in the field of sanitation, faecal sludge management, manual scavengers, dignity for widows, education programs and toilet museums. His contribution has made a critical difference in the life of severely disadvantaged who could not afford toilet and those who worked as manual scavengers and has faced severe discrimination in the society due to their low caste. Dr. Pathak is inspired by Mahatma Gandhi, subsequently his work was intrinsically contributed to the purpose and principle of the United Nations. In the last 50 years Dr. Pathak has worked tirelessly for human rights for manual scavengers specially who clean dry latrines, come from lowest stratum of the society and mostly women.

Swachh Bharat mission a campaign inaugurated by PM Narendra Modi was not basically his mission but a mission started decades ago from a very small village of Bihar, admission started on Gandhi's ideology of swachh Bharat and untouchability by Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak.

According to UN report

- 2.5 billion people still do not use and improved sanitation facility and 1 billion are practicing open defecation.
- In 2011, around 64% of the people in the world had access to safe toilet facilities. The greatest progress has been made in Eastern Asia, where sanitation coverage has been increased from 27% in 1990 to 67% in 2011.

* Research Scholar, Govt. V.Y.T. PG Auto. College, Durg (C.G.)

From curiosity to decision

Dr. Pathak born in an era when in discrimination and untouchability was at its peak as Bindeshwar Pathak was growing old his curiosity to know the reason for neglecting behaviour towards untouchables is started rising.

In 1968, when Pathak had joined Bihar Gandhi centenary celebration, he was sent to the town called Bettiah in Bihar to live and understand the suffering of untouchables. It is here that Pathak learn about the severe discrimination community was facing in their day to day lives. It was the same place where Pathak decided to dedicate his life for the manual scavengers.

It was a journey from curiosity to decision to work for the lowest stratum of the society that were untouchables. Dr.Pathak has himself stated several incidents in his life which made him to think deeply about these problems and to find solution for them.

- When Dr. Pathak was a child, he touched a manual scavenger who came to his house to collect excreta with curiosity to know what will happen as he was taught not to touch or talk to them but when he touched the women consequences were worst, he was punished by his grandmother. Pathak was made to eat cow dung, drink cow urine and was forced to take bath with cold water in that shivering morning of winter.
- Pathak stated an incident which left lasting impression on him following which he vowed to work for the betterment of low class community across India the incident was: In 1968,he was in Bettiah town of Bihar is a boy wearing red t-shirt being attacked by bull people rushed to save him, but somebody in the crowd shouted that young boy belonged to the colony of 'untouchables'. Hearing this everybody moved away and left him to die. Pathak quickly rushed into the help and took boy to the hospital but boy died.

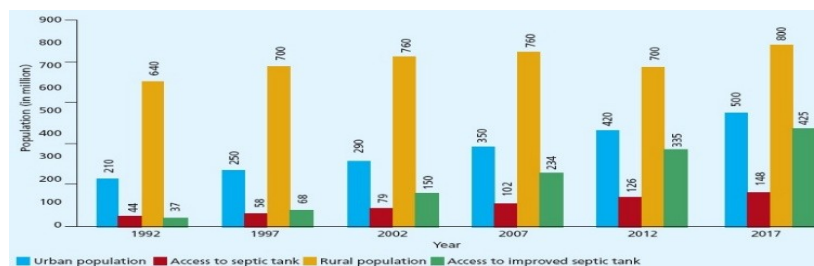
This was the level of superstition and discrimination that prevailed in rural India against untouchable. That day he vowed to dedicate his life for the emancipation of people labelled as untouchable.

Condition of women

In those days most of the households in villages did not had any toilets. Some household had dry latrines which where cleaned by untouchable specially women. That days open defecation was a common phenomenon. Women were the worst sufferers. They had to go out for defecation in the cover of dark that is early in the morning or after sunset and hence there where very high risk of being exposed to crime, snake bite and even animal attacks.

According to a report, innumerable cases are registered in the police station by the women who was the sum wrong actions while they we are going in open for toilets. Lack of toilet expose children to diarrheal disease and some died before attaining at the age of 5 the concept of public toilet were non-existent.

According to UN report, problem of open defecation was 24% in 1990, it has reduced to 15% in 2011. In numbers this signifies a drop of 244 million from 1040 million.



Dr. Pathak's Idea-starting the sulabh Champaign

In 1968, troubled by the pathetic condition of untouchables and inspired by Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy and teachings, Pathak came up with the technology that could replace dry latrines. He hoped that this technology would eventually bring an end to the problem of cleaning bucket toilet by the community of untouchables in India.

Pathak stated, 'My Idea was not just to provide a solution but to liberate the society that remained imprisoned in the formulaic traditions. I was determined to restore the dignity of manual scavengers'. Headed 'for these women their freedom, voice, human rights where fortified the moment they were perceived to belong to the lowest stratum of India's caste based society. By virtue of there birth they as manual scavengers, clean and dry latrines and faced severe social discrimination'. These statements are enough to know about the condition of women at that time

According to a report in 1968, in rural areas 70% of people did not had access to safe hygienic toilets where as 23% of people in urban areas were suffering from the same. People going outside for toilet suffer from around 50% of diseases including diarrhoea, dysentery etc.

Dr. Pathak's proposal

Dr. Pathak has proposed a solution of 2 soak pits toilet where solid waste will get converted into the soil after sometime due to the presence of bacteria and water will get absorbed by the soil and work as groundwater recharge. These words are given holes at particular interval of distance to soak water and gases. These are free from smell, the excreta which has converted into soil become great and natural fertilizers for farm without any harmful chemicals. The methane gases comes out in the sludge digestion process are used in biogas cooking in several areas.

Challenges Pathak faced for starting sulabh



Despite these use social challenges, Pathak's project was initially a non starter and got entangled in perennial bureaucratic process Pathak was underrated.

Dr. Pathak stated - 'I was in need of funds, I sold a piece of land in my village and my wife ornaments and even borrowed some money from friends to run the organization. That period was difficult part of my life'. At times I even contemplated suicide since I had no money, I slept on railway platform and even skipped meals. For long, there was no site of any work. I was going to a miserable phase and was on the verge of breakdown.

In 1971 during the phase of struggle Pathak received an important piece of advice, one civil servant who had gone through the Pathak's file which was pending for government approval of fund was impressed by his noble cause and the massive impact that it was likely to create in resolving India sanitation problem. Advised that instead of asking for grant sulabh should take money for implementing project and from the saving runs the organization.

In 1973, Pathak wrote to the PM Indira Gandhi through MLA about the condition of scavengers and their solution to liberate them to which Indira Gandhi replied instantly and stated that she is writing to CM to give his personal attention to the matter. Although the government took note of Mrs Gandhi's letter and started to act upon it, the issue again got lost in the cobweb and red tape of bureaucracy. Thus the problem remained unsolved.

A hope for pathak

In 1973, officer of Arrah municipality small town in Bihar issued 500 rupees to Pathak to construct two toilets for demonstration in the premises. This toilet impressed the authority who sanctioned a project for its wider implementation. Pathak moved from door to door to motivate and educate the beneficiaries to get their bucket later converted into Sulabh toilet. The project was a runaway success Pathak was invited to replicate a project in Buxar and within a year syllabus started working in capital state of Patna.

Successful sulabh campaign

In 1974 Bihar government contributed for Pathak's Sulabh campaign by issuing circular to the local bodies to take help from sulabh for conversion of bucket toilet into sulabh 2 pit pour flush toilet which was designed by Dr. Pathak to relieve scavenger from their sub human occupation. This program soon expanded throughout the state of Bihar and then India. At that time the concept was very new in India but in no time sulabh gained popularity all over the India and even in world. By 1980, 25,000 people where using sulabh facilities in Patna.

Children in slum areas and other weaker section of the society who do not have access to use toilets can use sulabh at nominal or no cost these are the major initiative for the upgradation of social and economic life of the unprivileged class.

- **Selection of area** - Generally sulabhs are constructed in the public places like bus stops, railway station, market, religious places, office areas, squares. Sulabhs are constructed in the slum areas and area where people are living without shelters for their convenience.

Sulabhs are also found on the outskirts of the cities for the convenience of the road travellers.

- Architecture of sulabh - Sulabh are constructed on the agreement basis. One WC is provided for 50 users. Sulabh are designed on the basis of crowded visitors in particular areas. Toilet complexes have separate male and female entrances. Female sections are provided with toilet seats for children. Urinals have entrance from outside mirrors and wash basins are provided in the male and female sections. Complexes are designed architecturally to match the surroundings of the town and make them aesthetically attractive. Tube wells are drilled at site, fitted with electric driven pumping set, to pump water into overhead tank.
- Facilities in sulabh - Facilities for drinking water, changing rooms, telephone, health care, night shelter and even primary education are provided in some Sulabh complexes.

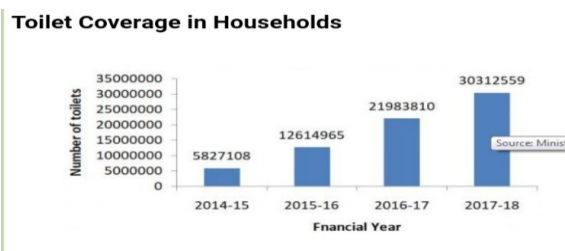
His achievements at a glance		
● Scavengers liberated and rehabilitated		50,000
● Sulabh household toilets	10,00,000	
● Sulabh community toilet blocks	3,154	
● Human excreta-based biogas plants	68	
● Towns made scavenging free	240	
● Scavengers trained and resettled	3,500	
● Towns where Sulabh works	987	
● Districts where Sulabh works	338	
● States/Union Territory	22	
● Persons using Sulabh facilities	10 million every day	
(up to April 1998)		

Economic development from sulabh

Sulabh pay and use facility – Around 3000 sulabs are constructed in 625 towns including metropolitan cities like Calcutta, Mumbai, Delhi, Bangalore. A very nominal amount has to be paid by the users to sulabh to use the toilets and bathrooms.

Sulabh biogas - Sulabh was the first to think of obtaining biogas from human excreta collected in large size public toilets used by 2,000-5,000 persons a day. Dr. Pathak set up first biogas plant in 1982 in patna and after the successful and satisfactory setup of this plant he was encouraged to install this plant in 62 other places including Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and other states of India. Biogas obtained from this plants are used for cooking, street lightning, obtaining hot water and also provides convenient fire for warming the body in winters.

Dr. Pathak stated that absence of proper sewage disposal facilities can be replaced by installation of biogas plants.



Achievements of Sulabh for generating energy from human waste was acknowledged by the ministry of non conventional energy sources, Gujarat energy development agencies and other institutions.



Sulabh integrated healthcare - Health is interrelated to sanitation a new dimension had been added to sulabh moment introduced Sulabh integrated healthcare model. It focused at bringing all component of activity directly and indirectly at a single place it included

- Primary health care to urban slum.
- Healthcare and sanitation cum integrated Village development.
- Teaching project on health, hygiene and sanitation.
- Sulabh voluntary blood donation project

Employment generations - More than 35,000 associated member rendered their social service the total man days created by Sulabh adds up to many million on the construction of 7,00,000 sulabh toilets and maintenance of 3000 community complex.

Role of press in campaign

The program became a huge success and gained attention of national and international press.

- The New York Times, inner peace in 1980 held Dr. Pathak's mission and described him as an articulate advocate of the voluntary organisation in the development". 'The major reason for the success has been Pathak sociological and psychological genius - he knows

how to translate ideas into action and get people to act.” The Washington post in 1985 defined Pathak commission as formidable.

Dr. Pathak's major step for the social inclusion of scavengers

Sulabh sanitation movement was not just about sanitation but also was an idea to make the scavengers free. In 1988, Pathak took a major step and led a group of manual scavenger to the temple of Nathdwara along with Brahman to perform rituals and rites to the God. Initially people denied to take such steps but instead of taking confrontationist attitude Pathak took the path of persuasion and successfully convinced the priest to let them in. It was an historical step as people of the lower caste were not allowed to enter into the temple in India. This is step was widely appreciated.

On the pathak's step Indian prime minister Rajiv Gandhi commented, “unless these things are achieved India cannot be said to be going on the road of development”.

Rehabilitation to scavengers

Alwar and tonk are two towns of Rajasthan which came in front as an example of the Pathak's measure which drastically improved the life of women scavengers. Sulabh establishment have released them from there sub human job. Later with the help of skill development programme aimed at income generation thousand of women where rehabilitate into mainstream society.

Dr. Pathak envision that to be able to free women from their sub human job of being manual scavengers there has to be strong women economic empowerment programme. Realistically it was not possible to get rid of the caste system that sustained untouchability but income in the hand of women through skill development programme could enhance their status and change the power dynamics both in society and within the household.

Nai disha, a vocational training centre was set up therefore Sulabh is providing education to the women and training them to read and write as they believe that education is the key to development. In addition to education stipends are also provided to women who join training centre as an encouragement in the form of cheques. This encourages them to open a bank account and start saving. They have control over their money and that is the first step to make them independent. Sulabh is providing training to women in multiple areas to make them economically strong. Women who has been rehabilitated are getting trained as beautician or in food processing units, sewing or embroidery. They are also providing with personality development classes for building their self confidence

Awards

- In 1991, Dr. Pathak was awarded by Padma Bhushan for his monumental work celebrating and rehabilitating manual scavenger and preventing environmental pollution by providing pour-flush toilet technology which served as an alternative to dry latrines.
- In 1992, Dr. Pathak was awarded by the international Saint Francis price for the environment- canticle of all creature by pope john paul II. The jury give the statement

that Pathak was chosen for his “comprehensive and interdependent nature for his environmental and social commitment to the human responsibility of the earth”.

Sulabh's international museum

Sulabh international museum of toilets in Delhi is tourist attraction, this museum says the untold story behind the history and development of sanitation and hygiene from Indus Valley civilization to the present period. This museum is popular for its uniqueness not only in India but also in other countries. Several development in the design of WC's, urinals, working models of water treatment plants, sludge treatment plants are also found for the better understanding and attraction of tourist.

Young generation from school and college going students are also taken here for the visits with the aim of awaring them from the conditions and reality of the hygiene. This works as a lesson for them to support and enhance hygiene in the country. This museum is important for people belongs to the field of sociology, history, architecture, planners, town development, industrialist etc.

Conclusion

The simple sanitation technique which did not rely on expensive infrastructure. New technologies are not needed to solve this problem but to change in philosophies to stop thinking of sewage is something to be dispensed off. Sewage must be treated as resource with energy and nutrients which can be used to make money and to reduce some of the problems world is facing in present time.

Bindeshwar Pathak has tried to solve the problem that has its roots since the ancient times. He took courage to make Gandhi's ideology a reality, he has tried his best to solve the problem.

References

- a. Pathak Bindeshwar,(2000),Road to freedom: A sociological study on the abolition of scavenging in India,Motilal Banarsidass Publishers.
- b. Pathak Bindeshwar,(2015),Sociology of Sanitation,Kalpaz Publication,New Delhi.
- c. Pathak Bindeshwar, (1993),Rural violence in Bihar,Concept Publishing co,New Delhi.
- d. Pathak Bindeshwar,(1992), Action Sociology and Development,Concept publishing co,New Delhi,
- e. Singh S P,(2005),Sulabh sanitation movement,Sulabh International Social Service Organisation
- f. Handbook of urban statistics
- g. Advisory on public and community toilet
- h. Sulabh public toilet and bath complex handbook