

# Awareness of Sanitation among the People of North Lakhimpur Town, Assam – A Case Study of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan

Nabanisha Bhuyan

Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Rajiv Gandhi University, Arunachal Pradesh (India)

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### \*Corresponding Author

Email: nabanisha\_cec[at]rediffmail.com

## ABSTRACT

Good hygiene and sanitation leads to socio-economic development of a nation. Poor Sanitation is the greatest threat to healthy living. It is the leading cause of diseases like Jaundice, Diarrhea, and Malaria etc. especially among the children below the age of five years. Sanitation Programmes started in India since 1954. But those sanitation Programmes could not bring the desired results. Swachh Bharat Abhiyan as a sanitation programme mainly emphasized on ODF India. India is leading among other countries in terms of Open defecation. Wastes both in solid and liquid form also affect public health and cleanliness. The problem of waste disposal is more in urban areas than in rural areas. Sanitation goals cannot be achieved if waste is not safely disposed off. Sanitation is a key to good health and Swachh Bharat Abhiyan is important in this respect. The very success of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan lies with the acceptance of cleanliness by the people. In this paper, an attempt is being made to assess the status of sanitation through the light of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan among the people of North Lakhimpur town. The study is mainly based on primary source and interview schedule is employed to derive data. The result derived through the study is that the sanitary condition of North Lakhimpur town is not satisfactory one even though awareness of the mass people in Swachh Bharat Abhiyan is seen.

## 1. Introduction

Sanitation is a global issue. It is an unrecognized basic need of people. Access to water and sanitation is considered as a human right. It also comes under the provisions of Article 21 of the Indian Constitution- Right to Life. The World Health Organization has defined Sanitation as – “Sanitation refers to the provisions of facilities and services for the safe disposal of human urine and feces. Inadequate sanitation is a major cause of diseases world-wide and improving sanitation is known to have a significant beneficial impact on health both in households and across the communities. The word ‘Sanitation’ refers to the maintenance of hygienic conditions, through services such as garbage collection and waste water disposal. (<http://www.who.int/topics/sanitation/en/>)

India is recognized as the second populous country after China. But India is lagging far behind in terms of sanitation. The responsibility of providing adequate sanitation and water supply rests with the respective State Governments but the State Governments had neglected this sector from the past. Union Governments mainly emphasized on investments in other developmental sectors of the country but failed to recognize the need of adequate sanitation for its citizens. Such negligence affects the well being of the people of the country. On the other hand, people in India have greater interest in procuring luxurious assets like cell phones but fails to realize the necessity of toilets and sanitation. In India nearly 626 million people practice open-defecation which is equivalent to 60% of open defecation in the world. Adequate sanitation not only promotes a healthy living but also leads to economic development of a nation.

Inadequate sanitation is a problem in both rural and urban areas in India. The growth of urban areas is increasing at a faster pace in India. The population growth in urban areas in India has increased from 27.8% in 2001 to 31.80% in 2011. Unfortunately these urban areas are lacking in adequate sanitation facilities and thus the majority of urban population in India could not lead decent standard of living.

Poor sanitation is the leading cause of diseases among individuals particularly for children below five years of age. The children mainly defecate in the open ground. Their contact with excreta in the open ground affects their health. A human excreta is always considered as unsafe and carrier of diseases. India is leading among other countries in terms of Open defecation. Diseases like Jaundice, Diarrhea, Malaria and other water-borne diseases are caused by poor sanitation.

### 1.1 Gandhi on Sanitation:

Gandhi was a staunch supporter of cleanliness and he showed concern in cleanliness of street, roads, temples etc. Gandhi was astonished by the discrimination made by Indians on cleanliness. He realized the relevance of sanitation in nation-building. Gandhi in his book ‘Harijan’ wrote that Indians are more concerned about personal hygiene but lacks interest in community cleanliness. He felt the need of educating the villagers on hygiene practices and sanitation. Gandhi felt that the indifferent attitude of people towards community cleanliness has turned villages into dumping yards. Gandhi had widened the areas of sanitation from health to entire environment. In his book ‘Harijan Sevak’ he stated about cycling and re-cycling of waste.

## 1.2 Swachh Bharat Abhiyan:

Swachh Bharat Abhiyan is considered as India's largest ever cleanliness drive. The acting Prime Minister of India, Shri. Narendra Modi launched the Swachh Bharat Mission on Oct 2, 2014 at Rajghat, New Delhi. The Swachh Bharat Mission is unique from the earlier sanitation initiatives from the point of view that the Prime Minister personally took part in it. Swachh Bharat Abhiyan would be the best tribute that India could pay to Mahatma Gandhi on his 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary. Swachh Bharat Abhiyan includes certain components within it such as Open defecation; Sanitation, Solid and Liquid Waste Management etc. There are two sub-missions of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan - Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin) and Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban). Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation runs the Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin) and Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs runs the Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban) for urban areas. Though the main concern of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan is making India Open Defecation Free, it is more focused on behavioral change rather than just construction of toilets.

## 2. Research Objectives

The objectives of the research are as follows:

1. To assess the status of sanitation and basic hygiene practices among common people.
2. To identify the problems related with poor sanitation in different areas of the Lakhimpur town.
3. To understand the system of garbage collection in different localities of the town.
4. To understand the level of awareness about Swachh Bharat Abhiyan among the common people.
5. To identify the types of individual latrines among the people.

## 3. Methodology

**Sample Design:** This study has been carried out with the primary survey at the designated areas i.e. the three selected wards of the North Lakhimpur town. The justification for the selection of this specific area is that North Lakhimpur is one of the oldest towns in Assam and it is the major commercial centre of the entire Lakhimpur district. This area is also well equipped with all sorts of modern infrastructural facilities and this area is progressing at rapid pace. The rate of migration to this city has also increased rapidly. From the 14 wards of the town, three wards are selected from three corners of the town. These wards are selected on the ground that each of these areas are unique in some respects. Ward no.14 with a population of 15,192 persons is the most populous ward. Ward no.13 is less populated area with population of 1, 973 persons and the Government has allotted land for the Harizans in this Ward to settle themselves. The total population of Ward no.03 is 5,489 and it is the main centre of the town.

**Sample Selection and sample size:** The samples were selected with simple random sampling method. The justification for using Simple random sampling method is that the subject matter of the study is related to each and every member of the society. Since the research is locality based, therefore household survey is not taken into consideration. From each ward, only 30 respondents are selected randomly

irrespective of sex, caste, class, age groups etc. Therefore a total sample size of 90 respondents is selected for the study.

Interview schedule and interview guide is used in the study. Interview schedule is selected on the ground that the respondents comprise of both literate as well as illiterate people. The interview schedules consisted of questions relating to personal information of the respondents, questions relating to personal hygiene, sanitary status in the localities etc. Majority of the questions are open ended questions and are of common nature. The questions are related to our everyday life. Since the spoken language of the area is Assamese, therefore the questions need to be translated into Assamese while interviewing. Secondary data are also derived wherever necessary from internet, journals etc.

## 4. Findings

- It has been found that the sanitary condition among the mass people in North Lakhimpur town is not satisfactory. The problem of environmental sanitation is more serious than it seems. The level of uncleanliness is more within the town. But Open defecation is almost negligible within the town. It can be assumed that almost all people practice common personal habits related to hygiene. Hand washing after using toilets is found common among all people. People are found conscious of their health and hygiene. As such the condition of health of the people seems to be well enough. But drainage and garbage disposal system is not improved within the town.
- The study reveals that certain problems relating to poor sanitation is prevalent in Lakhimpur town. Insufficient dustbins for waste disposal, improper drainage system, and impure drinking water are very common. In some of the areas, people face the dual problems of waste disposal problem and improper drainage system. Dustbins are either seen as insufficient or as located far off distances. As such people have adopted other ways of dumping their garbage other than dustbins. Most of the people of the localities dispose off their house hold waste within their own compound. Very few people use dustbins to dispose their wastes. The available dustbins are mostly cleaned by municipal workers at duration of 2-3 days. For each area mostly one dustbin is allotted which is insufficient for all the residents.
- A sizeable number of people of Lakhimpur town are seen well aware of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan except a few. This unaware group might constitute the poor people or the uneducated group. Majority of them has become aware of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan through T.V., newspaper etc. Most of them consider Narendra Modi, as the main person behind Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and consider Swachh Bharat Abhiyan as only cleanliness activity. Motivated by its popularity, majority of them has shown interest in organizing such Abhiyan in their localities. They feel that such Abhiyan would transform unclean localities into clean localities. But in spite of their awareness of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, it has not brought any significant results.

Uncleanliness is still prevalent in many areas of the town.

- The analysis on household latrine system in the localities reveals that almost all people have latrines in their households. Although the number of latrines in the households may vary depending on the number of members and preference on the style of latrines as either Indian or Western in the households. Majority of the households' possess sanitary type of latrines which is considered suitable in terms of health and hygiene. Those people who could not afford sanitary latrines have also shown keen interest in sanitary latrines. In ward no.03 almost 90% of the respondents have sanitary latrines. Similarly in the other two wards majority of them have sanitary latrines and those minimum numbers of respondents having pit latrines could not afford due to poverty or allied reasons. They are in expectation of financial aid from the Government. In the North Lakhimpur town except in Harijan colony in Ward no.13, the Government has not provided financial help for latrine construction in the households.

## 5. Conclusion

Thus it can be said that cleanliness implies nothing but behavioral change. Even though people of North Lakhimpur are seen aware of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, they could not implement it into action in the real sense of the term. Only joining the campaign in the localities does not change the situation. Swachh Bharat Abhiyan should not only end up with photo sessions with a broom in the street. People should understand the real implication of the Abhiyan. The dream of Gandhiji for a clean India should be realised. The cleaning activity should proceed from the grassroots level i.e. from homes to own surroundings, then to locality. If we clean our own surroundings we can expect a clean locality. People should realize their locality as their own asset. Therefore the

responsibility lies in every member of the locality. In this way we can achieve the status of a clean nation.

- 6. Suggestions:** The young members of society should be educated on this lines right from childhood. Cleanliness activity should not be only the responsibility of Municipal authorities but the common masses should also consider it as their primary responsibility. Strict supervision should be done in keeping the locality clean and fine should be imposed for unclean localities. Provision for awards should be made for clean localities or due recognition in the forms of designations should be given to clean localities. Swachh Bharat Committee should be formed in each wards constituting of Chairman, Ward Commissioners and at least two representatives from the locality to work for cleanliness in the localities. N.G.O'S and such other voluntary organizations should come forward to assist in cleanliness activity. Community awareness programme on health and hygiene should be organized in each locality.

Along with this the Government machinery should be more active. Due emphasis should be given in improvement of the infrastructural facilities by the Government. Sufficient dustbins should be provided by the Municipal Authorities for garbage disposal and proper procedure for Solid and Liquid Waste Management should be adopted. Planned drainage systems should be framed and implemented. The Government should consider it as their duty to provide congenial environment for the common people to lead a disease free happy life.

Swachh Bharat Abhiyan has a noble cause behind it. If properly implemented it would give fruitful results. We should not let Corruption to enter into this field. Thus it requires full participation and co-operation of common masses with the authority meant for it.

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