
The Relevance of Gandhi's Thought on Sanitation

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*Abstract:*We know Gandhiji only as a political leader and patriot. But he was a also a famous social worker. He was quite conscious about health. He thought that if people were not aware of health, real freedom will not come to the country. He emphasized on cleaning. He thought that if people were not health conscious diseases like Malaria, Cholera, and Typhoid would be not removed from the society. He used to talk about pollution free environment where everyone will be healthy. He emphasized on cleanliness of hospital, railway, public toilets everywhere. He thought it would be difficult for the government to do this alone, if ordinary people would not cooperate with the government. Gandhiji spoke of wearing khadi made clothes. Because it does not contain chemicals, it is eco- friendly and very useful for health. If we can follow Gandhij's thinking about health then we can go one step further on the path to a healthy India. Only with this, Gandhi's dream of a healthy India will succeed.

Keywords: Broom, Clean, Disease, Epidemic, Health, Khadi, Polluted, Latrine, Vector.

Date of Submission: 25-05-2022

Date of Acceptance: 29-05-2022

Introduction

By Sanitation we mean public health conditions related to clean drinking water and adequate treatment and disposal of human excreta sewage. Preventing human contact with faces is part of sanitation, as is hand washing with soap¹.The main goals of the sanitation system is to protect the health of the people by creating a clean environment. So that bacterial infections can be

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prevented; e.g. are diarrhoea, cholera plague etc. Sanitation has been the topmost priority of India since ancient times. In the Indus valley civilization, we have seen that the toilets were of very high quality. Sanitation was given more priority during colonial rule².

I

Sanitation has been a major priority in India. In ancient India especially during the Indus valley civilization, the sanitation system at an advanced stage. The hygienic practices that were emphasized during the Vedic period of Ancient India are identified in the Vedic scriptures. Medieval Muslim rulers were aware of sanitation. Because we know the two word 'Hammam' and 'Gosolkhana' from the system of Governance different Muslim rulers. This two-word associated with cleanliness. Gosolkhana were built in different parts of the country during the reigns of Mughal emperors Akbar and Jahangir. Public health and sanitation were never given priority during the colonial rule. After independence the five-year plans focused on public health and sanitation of India. In ancient Europe France, England, Rome in these countries knew about sanitation. Currently, the journey of toilets in Europe and America is over but toilet awareness campaign is still going on in developing countries like India.³

Many authors have written books on sanitation. Chelsa wald famous book is '*Pipe Dream's: The Urgent Global Quest to Transform the Toilet*'. This book discusses health issues related to water conservation and human waste. Another writer name Ankur Bisen in his book is '*Wasted- the messy story of sanitation in India, a manifesto for change*' this book discusses the problem of sanitation and how to solve it. The book '*The politics of sanitation in India cities, services, and the state*' by Susan Chaplin. This book also discusses whether sanitation services are functioning properly in major cities of India.

There is no doubt that Gandhiji was a great leader and patriot. But beside him he was also a social worker. He had sufficient knowledge in all spheres of society. Gandhiji throws light on the issues of sanitation in his constructive program. In present days Gandhiji's advice about the sanitation policy is very fruitful in every stage of our present-day life.

II

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The health system of India was in a very bad condition during Gandhi's time. In his political Programmed, Gandhiji used to visit various parts of India to see the state of the health system in different parts of India. He thought before the independence of India people need to be made aware of the health system. As well as this people need to be aware of cleanliness and core. For the purpose of building a disease-free India, Gandhiji did a lot of work with sanitation. He emphasized on cleaning everything from toilets to dirty garbage. Because of the negligence of people about the health, many people died of cholera and typhoid. Gandhiji gave a lot advice to the common people about health system. And he himself would go out into the street with a spade shovel to clean the dirt. He always encouraged the backward people to be aware of the disease. He called upon the common man to maintain a clean and hygiene environment in all areas of railway, hospital and ships.

Gandhiji wanted to write a book with experts to increase the public awareness of sanitation. And those books should be related to school and college education⁴. So that there will be an awareness among all the students about the health system. They acquire such knowledge; as if sick and poor people may get proper health in danger. Gandhiji asked the students to organize 'Bhajan' and games in the evening, which was beneficial for health.⁵ Gandhiji spoke of giving fundamental reform to the army and police. Everyone should come forward in this work in a multi-religious way. Gandhiji himself did sanitation work in the camp shootings at the Kumbhamela. He dug holes at the Kumbha fair and used latrines, and gave this advice to others as well, without polluting the environment. The use of human faces as organic fertilizer was also among his thoughts. Gandhiji admitted that he had learnt the work from the British. If the police administration does these things, then the public come forward spontaneously. Again, we should not waste water. Because there are many places where people have to suffer a lot for water⁶.

Cholera and malaria were more prevalent during the time of Gandhiji. Many villagers would die from this cholera epidemic. And this cholera is more spread than these dirty ones. Gandhiji repeatedly called for cleaning the latrines in the hospitals. In this case he spoke to a lady named Sushila Nair, who worked in an Irish hospital. She was very caring and very conscious about cleanliness⁷. Gandhiji wanted the government to create a team that would go to the town colony and make the public aware of the suggestion⁸. He believed If the colony became health conscious then the disease would spread less among them. So Gandhiji requested the government to decide to keep every railway station clean. Along with that the government should give special importance to Dharmasala, public latrine and urinals⁹. If these places are not clean, the chances of spreading the disease are high.

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Gandhiji thought that every private or public toilet should be kept clean and the public should have a responsibility to keep it clean. Then there could a lot of improvement in human health, accordingly to him if people followed regular diet and yoga, then the disease would be cured automatically for the less spreading of disease, the less necessity of doctors.¹⁰ He also thought that in order to keep the village holy the river creek and sewers have to be kept clean regularly. And if the villagers are well educated about this, the villages become a role model for health. So Gandhiji advised every member of the congress on the teaching of sanitation, so that they could also explain to different people about sanitation in different places¹¹.

It would be a great approach if Any official book on health combined with education to create awareness among the people of the village then some new people will be able to know about health. The reason for the high mortality rate among the poor is that they are not health conscious. They live in a dirty environment. In that case Gandhiji said, if we stay healthy then we need to be health conscious. We will be clean of each of our work then we will have self-satisfaction in our inner work. A balance will be established between physical and mental work¹². Another important dream of Gandhiji was to wear clothes made of *Khadi* and work in *Khadi*. Because he thought that working through them would alleviate human poverty. There will be employment for many people; if one wanted to do this thing one had to be healthy because if one did not have a good body one could not work. That is why Gandhiji emphasized on health. No machine is used in *Khadi* clothing made of *Khadi* because it is very beneficial for health and comfort. If one wants to stay healthy one has to follow the rules of hygiene¹³. Gandhiji repeatedly mentioned village sanitation in his constructive programme¹⁴. The village used to dig wells for drinking water and farming. Ordinary people used these wells. Gandhiji thought that government employees should clean the outside and inside wells. Because if you don't clean it for a long time, it can spread the disease. If there is public urine and latrine near the wells that should be kept clean with the cooperation of the villagers. This will keep the village healthy. Gandhiji also called for emphasis on maintenance of village ponds as most of the people used pond water as drinking water. According to Gandhiji the first wish of the villages would be to make people aware of the disease. The village is often judged by wise men; their wise people will be ordinary people aware about sanitation¹⁵. Because if the ponds become dirty then the disease will spread to all villages. So, he says, 'Prevention is better than concerned'¹⁶.

Gandhiji laid emphasis on the welfare of women and children. He asked the government to keep a fixed budget where women have to bear the cost of free maternity and child hospitalisation¹⁷. Gandhiji thought it was not possible to raise health awareness especially among

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the lower classes without the cooperation of the upper classes in the society. He used to say that if upper class people in the society would come to the lower-class house and mingled with them and ate and drank in their house and if they tried to teach how to stay clean, soon there would be health awareness among the common people¹⁸. Gandhiji mentioned a caste called '*Bhangi*'. They used to do cleaning work. Gandhiji mentioned that the profession is greater than the caste said in various lectures¹⁹. He hoped to learn a lot about our health from the western country. He also said that there was no shame in learning something good for someone. Gandhiji himself admitted that he had learnt a lot about health from western country²⁰.

Gandhiji praised the various *seva sangha* of that time. He said that this educational institution emphasized on rural vision, sanitation and cleanliness and they would take the rural society forward²¹. If the people of the village clean up their own backyards and surrounding jungles with their own enthusiasm, then the common man will be freed from malaria and dengue at least a lot. In this regard Gandhiji asked people to come forward. He thought that this would be the welfare of the rural welfare society²². It would be great if voluntary teams were formed in collaboration with the government to carry out sanitation work in the villages. Gandhiji thought that sanitation work was more difficult than all other work. There is hatred and feelings in this work. Very few people can do the job. So, if the volunteer's team is involved in all crimes in cleaning work including the village roads then the disease of the villages will be eradicated, in this case the people of the villages have to cooperate. These volunteers will make the people of the villages aware about cleanliness²³.

Gandhiji asked the villagers to keep cows. This is because cow's milk brings nutrition to the human body. Many poor people in the village went on hunger strike. If they keep cows, cow's milk will be very good for their health²⁴. Gandhiji asked the teachers to provide adequate knowledge about sanitation to the students as it would make the people of the village and the people of the town aware of the sanitation. He did not like to speak loudly. Teachers need to be very aware of the fact that speaking too loudly to students is harmful to their health²⁵. When cattle died they were thrown away, as a result the air in the open is polluted and the disease spreads immediately. Gandhiji spoke of burying dead cattle under the ground²⁶. There were many Indian prisoners in British jail under British rule. Gandhiji spoke of enforcing sanitation laws in these prisons. He also appealed to the prison authorities to be humane towards the prisoners²⁷. Gandhiji had done it in different parts of India and had seen it in different places. He said the streets of Madras were dirty. He said that the roof of the house in Punjab is dirty. Again, in Bengal he saw the snacks of the people and animals in one pot. That is why Gandhiji said, if you are poor the

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disease does not spread but if you are dirty the disease spreads. As a result, many people died of typhoid, cholera and stomach ailments in India. The reason was that many people are not aware about sanitation policy. If people were not aware of this, it was not possible for the government to do these things alone. So Gandhiji said freedom will not come in an unclean body. A clear mind is needed to get freedom²⁸.

III

One thing that surprised Gandhiji was that educated people were less aware of the cleanliness. They used water for drink from that pond where they bathed their cows, washed clothes, cleared utensils etc. They are not at all concerned about sanitation. Thus, the disease is spreading more and more due to unconsciousness and negligence of the people. Gandhiji told us to live a harmonious life. We all need to be aware of health²⁹. Gandhiji advised the municipal workers to keep the roads clean and transparent³⁰. Fairs are organized at different times in different parts of India. Gandhiji thought that if the fair committee in the districts took special initiative on sanitation, they would be able to make environmental pollution free. And after the fair, if pieces of iron, glasses are lying here and there and they were kept buried under the ground everyday they would not harm the common people. Gandhiji also said that if there were holes in any part of the house they should be closed. Otherwise the accumulation of rain water in them could increase the breeding of mosquitoes and therefore cause malaria, dengue etc. And these insect-borne diseases could easily ruin people's lives³¹. As much as Gandhiji tried for the independence of the country, he was desperate to keep India clean. So, he said, "I want to clean India first and independence later, sanitation is considered by Gandhiji as an integral part of his life. His dream is a complete sanitation for everyone. He believed that cleanliness was the most important thing for physical wellbeing and a healthy environment as well. Even if we washed our hands twice before and after a meal and brushed twice, the common man would be benefitting a lot.

Gandhiji did not want industry destroying the ecosystem, agriculture and environment³². Gandhiji thought that India would improve if the village improved. So Gandhiji asked the people of the village to pay attention to health and cleanliness. Because the people of the village produced crops by physical labour and we ate those crops as food. Gandhiji insisted on eating vegetables. It is very beneficial for health³³.

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Gandhiji once visited every house in Rajkot to clean latrines when the plague broke out in Bombay. And he made people aware. He thought cleanliness was the most important thing for physical well-being and a healthy environment. Mahatma Gandhi said “sanitation is more important than independence”. And with that also said, ‘I will not let anyone walk through my mind with their dirty feet’³⁴. His dream was total sanitation for all. Cleanliness is most important for physical wellbeing and a healthy environment. Even during Gandhi’s stay in South Africa, he used to do sanitation work. The importance of sanitation work was given later in India. He said that, ‘rid ourselves of our dirty habits and have improved latrines, Swaraj can here no value for us’³⁵. Gandhiji emphasized on the sanctity of the river Ganga. He tried to clean the villages in an ideal way, and therefore prohibited them not to think of the garbage in the river. Besides, he emphasized that they accumulated the household garbage in a certain place.

Gandhiji wanted to introduce a reward system for the people of the village, one who kept his house clean would get the reward. In this case it was seen that compared to high caste Hindus the house of Dalits were seen cleaner and therefore good rewards in some villages³⁶. He wanted to eliminate untouchability. Especially Dalit families who did cleaning works should not be looked down upon. Society should have a high opinion of them. Gandhiji himself went out to clean with a broom. He considered himself a ‘*Bhangi* caste’. Gandhiji did clean-up work even before he came into politics. The initiation of the sanitation came as a natural reflection of the core ideals of his life³⁷.

Gandhiji emphasized on cleanliness of ships as well as railways because he had to face dirty once. Gandhiji wrote in his autobiography, “one the boat going to Rangoon I was a deck passenger. Even to the elementary comforts of deck passengers, was our lot on the boat. What was an apology for a bathroom that was unbearably dirty, the latrines were stinking sinks. To use the latrine, one had to wade through urine and excreta or jump over them. This was more than flesh and blood could bear. The passengers furnished it by their thoughtless habits. They spat where they sat, dirtied the surrounding with the leaves of their food, tobacco and betel leaves. There was no end to the noise, and everyone tried to monopolize as much room as possible. Their luggage took up more room than their”³⁸. Gandhiji saw dirty clothes lying on the dirty bodies of the people of many villages. In that case he spoke of a village called *Bhitiharva*. People in many villages contracted skin diseases due to being dirty. Gandhiji campaigned in the villages with the help of his close friend Dr. Dev and with the help of volunteers. Gandhiji treated these people and made them aware of cleanliness. In this case Gandhi’s wife also came forward³⁹.

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IV

So it turns out that thoughts on Gandhi's sanitation are especially important and necessary today. Although 'Central Government Transparent India' campaign and 'Clean India' are taking the sanitation work forward through these projects. But one should keep an eye on how much they are actually being applied. It feels bad to say even today in the 21st century people are still not aware of health. As a result of being affected by various diseases.

If we think if the policy maker can give importance to Gandhi's thinking about health, then the common man in India will be benefited a lot. Gandhiji wanted to improve the environment and society which would be an eco-friendly society, where health is given more importance. Soil, water conservation, organic fertilizers should be used more, high factory waste must be used properly⁴⁰. He did not want to establish industry by destroying the environment, ecosystem and agriculture. Because he thought that if these were destroyed, the health system would collapse.

Conclusion

It turns out that Gandhi's thoughts on health were very important to society. Village and city sewers should be kept clean. In this case ordinary people have to come forward because in some places the sewer is still dilapidated as a result; there is a possibility of carrying insect borne disease. In this case VRP's (Village Resource person) are playing a significant role in keeping the villages clean and raising awareness in West Bengal.⁴¹ They go from house to house and talk about creating a pollution free environment for ordinary people. Off late in West Bengal they are a kind of workers called VCT (Vector Control Team), Spraying disinfection in dirty places.⁴² There is a problem with drinking water people are still using arsenic-contaminated water in some places. People are suffering from various diseases. Wastewater also needs to be used on property. Otherwise, there is a fear of spreading the disease in those areas.

At present the government has taken a good step to select a model village under each gram panchayat to on cleanliness in which Vector Borne Disease Control workers are trying to create a pollution free environment. The urinal and toilets in the area adjacent to the market, hat, are found to be in a very dirty condition. These can often lead to infections. So, it is good for society, if everyone should come forward with the help of the government. Only with this, Gandhi's dream of a healthy India will succeed.

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