

LET CLEANLINESS PREVAIL IN THE BACKYARD OF OUR SWARAJ

by Priti G. Adani



Dr Priti G. Adani is the chairperson of the Adani Foundation, which under her leadership is focusing its activities in four core areas of education, community health, sustainable livelihood development and rural infrastructure development. The foundation is engaged with communities and their upliftment across 12 states of the country where the Adani Group operates.

As I pen down this piece, it evokes me to tread a little back to the 1990s when the writings of Mahatma Gandhi on cleanliness, health and hygiene, were reproduced and hugely circulated post the unfortunate outbreak of plague in Surat, Gujarat. Only for the reason that we were all sensitised and motivated so much on maintaining sanitation and hygiene, Surat was transformed to become one of the cleanest cities of the nation. And, it continues to be so till date.

Although, the "medieval disease" became a blessing in disguise for Surat; we, as a nation, still have a long way to pave as far as sanitation and hygiene are concerned. I just wish that we do not need to have such a dreadful occurrence to make our people painfully aware that cleanliness is the prerequisite for a healthy living.

Not only healthy living, sanitation is, in fact, the first parameter to pass through when we calculate the socio-economic status of a country. To corroborate this fact, I would like to quote an incident. Once Mahatma Gandhi had visited Kumbh Mela and upon encountering the grave sanitation situation there, he excruciatingly said: "While I realised the grandeur of the holy Ganga and the holier Himalayas, I saw little to inspire me in what man was doing in this holy place. To my great grief, I discovered insanitation, both moral and physical."

Fenced upon this passion and concern of Gandhiji on sanitation, our respected Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, rolled out the ambitious Swachh Bharat Mission

(SBM) in 2014. While there are myriad of opinions and sentiments on the campaign; all I want to say is it does not matter how slowly you progress as long as you do not stop.

And the way we as a nation have come together speaks volume about the momentum of this campaign. Numerous corporates have joined hands in meeting the objectives of SBM. Individuals alike are also contributing their bit in one way or other. In a nutshell, the campaign has made all of us more conscious and concerned

towards maintaining cleanliness in our surroundings.

For us at Adani Foundation, sanitation has always been viewed with great gravity.

The Adani Group has interests across agriculture, logistics and energy around the world. The Ahmedabad-headquartered conglomerate filters through its corporate social responsibility (CSR) with an environmentally friendly approach through the Adani Foundation.

To complement government efforts towards cleanliness, since 2008 the Adani Foundation started providing material support for individual household toilet construction in the villages. I am very pleased to write that 26 villages in Mundra block (Gujarat) and two villages in Tiroda block (Maharashtra) were converted into 100 per cent Open Defecation Free (ODF) villages. Coming to numbers, in Mundra (Gujarat) and Tiroda (Maharashtra) alone, we built a total of around 4,000 toilets for individual households. Under our Rural Infrastructure Development activities, we laid an 81 km long drainage line covering 16 villages of Mundra.

This initiative was done with partial financial support from WASMO and a minimal 8-10 per cent contribution from the beneficiaries, just to instil a sense of ownership and belongingness among them.



Besides, we ensured that the all government schools and aanganwadis had appropriate number of toilets especially for girls at various locations. Apart from the schools, around 100 aanganwadis were also provided with toilet facilities, in and around Mundra.

Having mentioned all these, I would like to reaffirm that women in particular can play a key role in changing the mind-set and behaviour of the people toward using toilets. Since women have a direct bearing on other family members, we roped them in along with the adolescent girls to create awareness and motivate communities to promote and accept the general concept of household sanitation. With a quest to mobilise support, a number of innovative methods were put into practise to make the women aware about the vital issue.

For instance, 'Matka' (pot) meetings were conducted, wherein discussions and deliberations would take place till the 'matka' runs out of water. Further, interesting and innovative ways like 'Thali bajao' (beat the plate) activities etc. were organised with the help of the children of the community. The kind of buzz these initiatives created, it was way beyond what we had envisaged.

In another modest step to support municipal schools in Ahmedabad, we facilitated transforming the sanitation infrastructure of 40 such schools through an NGO. The transformation has been so impactful that I can comfortably say that the children in our facility now have access to clean drinking water and cleaner toilets.

Since we as a group are into ports, a humungous part of our social endeavours have always been centred on the marginalised communities of the operational locations. Fisher-folk community in Kutch (Gujarat) have been the cradle of our interventions. Among other regular CSR initiatives on education, health, livelihood and infrastructure, we had recently conducted a day-long cleanliness drive at Juna Bandar, Mundra, which is a temporary habitat of the community for as long as eight months in a year.

Apart from rigorous interaction with the women of the community on the co-relation of hygiene and health, the drive urged the women to inculcate the habit of using toilets amongst all their family

members. Further, while attempting to instil into them a sense of personal hygiene, we also took to the distribution of small gifts like a small set of a nail-cutter and toiletries etc. Waste bins were also distributed to all the dwelling unit holders and the fishermen for dumping the garbage of their houses and boats.

Giving a further thrust to this momentum, we have envisaged a nation-wide campaign which is inspired from the first and largest mass movement – "Satyagraha" – and is complementary to SBM. Like Satyagraha, we intend to make a cleanliness movement; a movement of the people, by the people and for the people. The initiative has been envisioned to rope in future generations of the nation and help them be the change agents to create a culture of cleanliness in the entire nation. I anticipate the movement will ensure that India not only achieves the state of cleanliness but also remains litter-free beyond 2019 and forever.

As far as our regular course of action is concerned, we are incessantly working towards providing several varieties of sanitation infrastructure in and around our operational sites for the rural populace. Having a stringent belief in investing towards promotion, protection and up-gradation of physical capital, i.e. infrastructure and equipment, we attempt bridging the gaps on community needs by ensuring that our infrastructure development programs are firmly footed and responsive to the actual needs of the community.

Lastly, as I believe in the reinforcement theory, let us keep reminding ourselves that this clean India fire that our Hon'ble PM has kindled must not douse off. It's time to make cleanliness, integral and important to our nation.

Let's blur the boundaries and make our public places as spic and span as our households, because it's undeniable that the entire nation is our home and it is our responsibility to keep its backyards, hygienic and sanitised. After all, a nation's cleanliness is its nationals' pride.

Jai Hind!