

# ROLE OF SWACHH BHARAT IN WOMEN SANITATION ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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## Abstract

Sanitation is the root problem for major social traumas. Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, an extended version of Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan was introduced on October 2, 2014 with aims of declaring India as Open Defecation Free Country and improving the women workers in manual scavenging by October 2, 2019. This paper with sheer cognizance to women safety and sanitation focus at the programmes so far initiated by Government of India for sanitation. Right to Health is a guaranteed right under Article 21 which can be achieved through proper access of sanitation. About 300 hundred million women in India do not have access to toilets and defecate in the open. The paper studies the mechanism of Swachh Bharat in women sanitation through two categories of women. One category is sanitation of women involved in manual scavenging and other is sanitation of women in urban, rural areas. The paper shows various studies which are evident that women who use open defecation sites are having chances to be sexually assaulted and are prone to diseases. And also covers the issues of gender and caste based discrimination among women Safai Karamcharis, which is violative of Article 14, 15, 17 and 21 of Indian Constitution. Manual scavenging women have less opportunity to access proper sanitation than other women which is violative to Article 14. Though both men and women involve in manual scavenging, women employees should be given more attention when it comes to sanitation as it has gender specific problems, which is violative of Article 15 when it is neglected. They are oppressed, marginalized and victimized in both social and household spheres of life. Health stigmas and discrimination of safai karmachari women at workplace are neglected. People have to change their mindset about deciding their usage for the need and not for the wealth. The notion of women scavengers must be taken by academicians in order to form welfare policies and programme by realizing their real conditions and needs. The paper discusses various inequalities and how it affects sanitation of women.

**Key Words :** Sanitation, Swachh Bharat, discrimination, manual scavengers, policies and programme.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION :

*“Sanitation is more important than political freedom”*

**- Mahatma Gandhi**

Access of hygiene sanitation will be one country's inert solution to all its enigmas. Especially for India facing democratic hindrance of huge population, namely world's 2<sup>nd</sup> populous country, it is a baffler to find solution among its diversities. But sanitation will definitely be a good solution as it connects all the societal corners interlinked. Though men and women are equally parted with sanitation stigmas, the adverse effects are gender specific. Poor access to water, sanitation and hygiene make remarkable effects on women rather than men naturally. Women faces enormous issues by open defecation. According to United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) Open Defecation (OD) perpetuates a vicious cycle of disease and poverty.<sup>1</sup> Backing up the words of Matt Damon “ You will never solve poverty without solving water and sanitation”, nothing is coherent that sanitation is the key answer for all the entrenched social evils. Throughout the decades of evolution, the Government of India has launched Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM), the nation's flagship Clean India programme. It is a mission with a aim of making India Open Defecation Free (ODF) by October 2,

2019.<sup>2</sup> The mission focused on converting dry toilets into pour flush toilets, eradication of manual scavenging, awareness and access of women to menstrual hygiene.

## 2. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM:

- I. Do the campaign of Swachh Bharat really resolving inequalities?
- II. Are Women not realizing the danger of Defecating Open?
- III. Do Swachh Bharat serves sanitation upliftment of every section of women?
- IV. Is there Low accessibility of sanitation tools for women?

## 3. METHODOLOGY:

The researcher has adopted a doctrinal approach. As part of the doctrinal research the researcher has collected data from different sources i.e. primary and secondary. Under primary source of data, data from substantial and relevant authority has been availed. Under the secondary source of data, the researcher has collected published books and articles.

## 4. OBJECTIVES:

The objective of the study is to examine the mission of Swachh Bharat in women sanitation and inequalities and discrimination of women insanitation.

## 5. EVOLUTION OF SANITATION THROUGH GOVERNMENTAL PROGRAMME:-

<sup>1</sup>United Nations Organizations (1948), Department of Economic and Social Affairs, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/en/>

<sup>2</sup>Government of India (2014), <https://swachhbharatmission.gov.in/sbcmcs/index.html>.

Sanitation a historical view with regards to women :

### **I. CENTRAL RURAL SANITATION PROGRAMME (1986)**

The programme is the first comprehensive national level sanitation programme was launched by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1986. In 1985, management of rural and urban water supply and management and sanitation was transferred to Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation (MDWS). Many of the principles of Swachh Bharat Mission(SBM) are similar to Central Rural Sanitation Programme (CRSP). The programme was the first ideology to provide financial assistance to below poverty level families for constructing individual household toilets. The guidelines of Central Rural Sanitation Programme mission focused women:<sup>3</sup>

- (i) To acquire the technological improvisations of sanitation in Women groups, Self Help Groups(SHG), NGOs specific for women.
- (ii) It aimed to provide separate urinals and toilets for girls in all the schools and anganwadis in the rural areas of the country.

By 1991, rural sanitation had improved to 9.7% The Planning Commission estimated that

<sup>3</sup>Guidelines of Central Rural Sanitation Programme ( Dec 2007), Total Sanitation Campaign , Department of Drinking Water Supply , Ministry of Rural Development, <http://jalshakthi.ddws.gov.in>

between 1986 to 1997 over 40 lakhs toilets were constructed with total expenditure of Rs.757.62 crores.

The noteworthy achievement is in the states of Sikkim and Kerala have made commendable achievement of cent percentage sanitation coverage in individual households, which ultimately results in welfare of women sanitation.

### **5.1. NIRMAL BHARAT ABHIYAN (2012)**

In 2012, the Central Rural Sanitation Programme (CRSP) was renamed Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan with the modified object of achieving the vision of Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan (Pure India) by 2022. The massive campaign was launched by the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government and carried through his successor Manmohan Singh.

The programme does not explicitly covers women. Some of the objectives which may indirectly benefit women are:

- i. To cover the remaining schools not covered under Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA) and Anganwadi centres in rural areas.
- ii. To undertake proactive promotion of hygiene education and sanitary habits among students.
- iii. To develop managed environmental sanitation systems focusing on solid and liquid waste management for overall cleanliness in the rural areas.

This mission created a dent in India's sanitation status and failed, the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) said in a report.<sup>4</sup>

## 5.2. SWACHH BHARAT ABHIYAN (2014)

On October 2, 2014 the extended version of SBA was introduced by PM Narendra Modi with the aim of making India Open Defecation Free country by October 2, 2019. While with the active functioning of SBA all over the country women have enabled awareness of both on the construction and the use of toilets. The absence of focus on Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) in the programme design and its implementation and roll out is glaring.

The mission looks at sanitation from all encompassing gender perspective that focuses not only on the safety of women but also MHM mechanism, which severely constraint and in the long term, impair the full capabilities and contribution of women in their socio-economic life.

The body of SBA, Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) has its guidelines favoring women.

- I. To become empathetic to girl's needs and challenges
- II. To develop convergence with departments and schemes
- III. To create awareness of MHM through well targeted communication and media plans.

## 6. ANALYSES OF THE STUDY

WHO (World Health Organization) defines "sanitation as the provision of facilities and services for the safe disposal of human urine and feces".

The highest attainable standard of health is a Fundamental Right (FR) of health to everyone. Gender based discrimination, however undercuts the right. Also various studies that confirm the adverse health impact of OD on women's genitor urinary tract. While there are few studies on women's health and ODF, a study by Shah Alam Khan of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), analyzing the data from Integrated Disease Surveillance Program run by the National Centre of Disease Control on Epidemic Outbreaks from 2011-2017.

About 300 hundred million women in India do not have access to toilets and defecate in the open. A study showed women who use open defecation sites are having chances to be sexually assaulted. A 2016 study done at the University of Michigan in its data analysed through its researches that about women in India who use open defecation sites like open fields or the side of a railway track or having chances to get raped when compared with women using a home toilet.<sup>4</sup>

In May 2014, two girls were found raped and murdered in a village called Badaun in Uttar Pradesh. It was a case that shook the country with its brutality. It was also a case that

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<sup>4</sup>Vyas s and D Spears, "Sanitation and Religion in South Asia: What accounts for differences across Countries?", Journal of development sciences, 2018, Vol 54,

tragically highlighted another glaring issue faced by almost 300 hundred million girls and women across the country the lack of access to toilets. The sisters in Badaun had gone out to fields at night to relieve themselves. They thought, mistakenly, that there would be safety in societies and went out together. Having no other choice in their home they had to relieve themselves in the nearby bamboo fields. That fateful night, they did not return.

Once that sinks in, here is another tragic statistic. A study done in 2012 showed that about 23% of our girls drop out of schools when they start menstruating. Which is the probability of almost 1 in every 4 girls. We keep hearing words like ODF without fully realizing what they actually mean. The difficulties faced by woman who has „controlled“ herself until it is dark, or who wakes up before dawn, who must then rally a group of other women and make a long, arduous trek to a desolate spot just so she can answer nature's call are ignored.

The mission of Swachh Bharat has equally overlooked by its two machineries. The Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation (MDWS) overlooked the rural area development and Ministry of Housing Affairs overlooked urban development. As the result, the construction and accessibility to water and sanitation doesn't result for end for ODF but the people who own a toilet continue to defecate in open. In a recent RICE survey, conducted among district officers in rural areas, several villages in Uttar Pradesh are using toilets to keep feed of their cattle and

still practising OD. It includes people of Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, which have been declared ODF states.

Naturally, the risk of infection is higher than normal days during menstruating days. It is because the blood coming out of the body creates a pathway for bacteria to travel back in the uterus. Unsafe practices like using rags for absorption is totally supporting the growth of unwanted bacteria by the insertion of these rag clothes through vagina.

Here the paper finds its objective of economic inequalities through a real incident of Mr. Arunachalam Muruganatham, popularly known as „Padman“, an entrepreneur in Coimbatore. His small scale industry is now successfully supplying low cost sanitary napkins in 4500 villages of India. Arunachalam Muruganatham, being a school dropout and having no degree in his hand introduced the low cost sanitary making pads in the year 2004. His plan was successful and won the National Innovation Foundation's Grassroots Technological Innovations Award at IIT Madras in 2006. He received Padma Shri Award for his service in 2016. Muruganatham on speaking for an interview said, "During my early ages, I found my wife is managing her periods in an unhygienic manner. She was relying on nasty rag clothes which I wouldn't have used to clean up my two-wheeler. When I asked my wife why she is adopting unhygienic ways to manage menstruation and not relying on sanitary napkins. She replied, "If all ladies in our family start using sanitary napkins, then

we will have to cut our milk budget”<sup>5</sup>In 2000, Muruganantham started researching extensively on sanitary napkins companies in US and started experimenting with his wife and female students of medical college. With continuous failures in his research he decided to experiment on himself by filling animal blood in football tied around his waist. So, whenever there was pressure, blood used to come out. With his keen and rigorous effort of research he innovated the low-cost cellulose fibre pads with Rs. 2.50 each. His ultimate aim is to make India a sanitary napkin using country and generate 100% employment opportunities. It would be encouraging if Government identifies and promotes such economic friendly sanitation practices. The 2018 survey by the Research Institute for Compassionate Economics also found that Dalit and Adivasis, that is, SC and ST group of people are threatened and harassed by government officials of the SBM campaign. One visible trouble that the paper work to resolve is, the sick is not in making the people to construct toilets. The proper drainage scheme has to be constructed for the areas where the government demands ODF status. As of poor drainage facilities it was held up in making manual scavengers to clean the human excreta from the pit.<sup>6</sup>Manual scavenging is a

profession which has been in existence since the human civilization and its differentiation as Varna system in India.

*“I may not be born again but if it happens, I will like to be born into a family of scavengers, so that I may relieve them of the inhuman, unhealthy, and hateful practice of carrying night soil”*

*-Mahatma Gandhi.*

Tracing back the motto of Swachh Bharat programme was protecting dignity of women in our society by providing them with safe private sanitation spaces. But still one group of women remain excluded from the conversation about dignity in sanitation. Rooted within the caste system is an additional layer of patriarchy where the most dehumanizing jobs fall to women. Of the 1.3 million manual scavenger in the country most are women. In the current form the government, sanitation strategy focused on increasing the number of toilets built. But a truly equitable sanitation policy will be one that is committed not just to end open defecation but abolishing manual scavenging.<sup>7</sup>

“The local government officer is only concerned with building latrines, not about how the pits of these latrines will be emptied”, says Sangita Vyas, Associate Director at the Research Institute for compassionate

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5 D Wai, Based on a true story, Indian film 'Padman' deals with period poverty and taboos in a heart warming way. ( Mar. 25, 2019)<https://www.scmp.com/yp/discover/entertainment/movies/article/3061586/based-true-story-indian-film-padman-deals-period>.

6Gupta A, N Khalid, P Hathi,N Srivatsav, S Vyas and D Coffey, "Coercion, Construction and ODF paper pe"

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Swachh Bharat According to Local Officials," India Forum, 5 April, 2019

7Salve, P., Bansod, D., & Kadlak, H., “Safai karamcharis : A study in the perspective of caste”, Economic & Political Weekly, 52(13), 2017 at pg. 38–41.

Economics that conducts research on sanitation in rural India.<sup>8</sup>

The practice of manually removing human excrement from dry toilets with brooms, bare hands, metal scrapers. On 26<sup>th</sup> January 1950, The Constitution of India came into force, with the grund norm of civil rights protection and the source of caste and class annihilation. Unfortunately, the spirit of Article 17 was followed in principle rather in practice.

According to Article 14,<sup>9</sup> *“The state shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of laws within the territory of India”*

Sanitation workers are exposed to multiple occupational and environmental hazards, such as coming into direct or close contact with fecal sludge and treatment of fecal sludge and wastewater; and working in confined and often dangerous spaces. They are exposed to hazardous gases and biological and chemical agents in septic tanks, sewers, pumping stations, and treatment plants.

In such a condition Women are more prone to menstrual infectious diseases in addition to tuberculosis such as campylobacter infection, cryptosporidiosis, giardiasis, hand, foot and mouth disease, hepatitis A, meningitis (viral), rotavirus infection, salmonella infection, shigella infection, thrush, viral gastroenteritis, worms and yersiniosis. It is a discrimination as

women are given with same safety parameters as men when women are more vulnerable to disease and it is violative of Article 15.<sup>10</sup>

Women Safai Karamcharis are not given with equal access to hygiene sanitation as other women as it is violative of Article 14. They are even deprived from their rights by contacting directly with fecal sludge without proper precautionaries other than hand gloves, brooms and masks. These women face problems during pregnancy because of the profession. So many children are born with abnormalities. Deformities are more and skin infections are common owing to constant exposure to human excreta. Many dies at young age.

Article 17, *“The practise of untouchability is an offence and anyone doing so is punishable by law”* of the Indian Constitutions, though these rights are fundamental to every human, they become spiritless in case of women. In 2013, after decades of Independence, the Government of India passed a dedicated Legislation *“Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act 2013”*(PEMSR) to ban the inhuman and degrading practice of manual scavenging.

Women face multiple forms of discrimination. They become vulnerable due to their gender, Dalit identity and being a manual scavenger. They are oppressed, marginalized and victimized in both social and household spheres of life. Surveys have revealed that 95 to 98 percent of the manual scavengers in the country are women. The majority of women

<sup>8</sup>Government of India (2009) <https://www.irri.org/>

<sup>9</sup>Constitution of India, 1950

<sup>10</sup>Constitution of India, 1950

safai karmacharis are less than 10 years of schooling. This is not surprising as because the lack of education is one of the major hindrances of their respect.

**SafaiKaramchariAndolan V. Union of India**,<sup>10</sup> in the case the Supreme Court acknowledged the menace of manual scavenging in India as an inhuman degrading and undignified profession. The Supreme Court observed that PEMSAR Act 2013 expressly acknowledges Article 17 and 21 of the Constitution as the Rights of persons engaged in sewage cleaning and cleaning tanks as well as persons cleaning human excretion on railway tracks. Chief Justice Sadhasivam said that, *“The official statistics of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment for the year 2002-2003 put the figure of identified manual scavengers at 6,76,009. Of these over 95 % are Dalits compelled to undertake this denigrating task”*. The Supreme Court also refer to several international instruments to which India signatory. Instruments like UDHR 1948, Convention of Elimination of Racial Discrimination and Convention for Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women were dignified human life is guaranteed are taken into account. Hon'ble Supreme Court laid down following propositions with regards to rehabilitation of manual scavengers: Provide dignified livelihood to Safai

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10 safaikaramchariandolan and ors v. union of India and ors AIR2014(4)165.

Karamchari women in accordance with their choice of livelihood schemes. Railway rag packers should take time bound strategy to end manual scavenging on the tracks. Women released from manual scavenging should not have to cross hurdles to receive what is their legitimate due under the law. Rehabilitation must be based on the principles of justice. It was also guided that entering sewer lines without safety gears should be made a crime even in emergency situations. For each such death, compensation of Rs.10,00,000 should be given to the family of the deceased.

A research conducted by International Institute for Population Sciences, Mumbai along with Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai on its survey founded that men rule the Trade Union of Safai Karamcharis. None of the women were found in high positions at the Trade Unions. It conductively paved way for not discussing issues related to women. For instances, there are more than 50 big and small unions in the municipal corporation of Mumbai, but women participation in these unions are invisible. The women of Safai Karamchari said that the Union representatives come to them asking for donations for welfare of workers, but none of them are useful to them. Since the trade unions are dominated by men, and the women have their own problem to address.<sup>11</sup>The temporarily manual scavenging women are worse than regular workers. Manual scavenging women

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11 Hemangi Kadlak, Pradeep S. Salve, Payal Karwade (2019) : " Intersectionality of Caste, Gender and Occupation: A study of Safai Karmachari women in Maharashtra." 2(1), 25 - 27



employed by contract hardly earn Rs.150-200 as daily wages. There are no protective measures made available to them. They get works on days were no regular employees available. In case of an accident heading to sewage death there are highly chances of denying the deceased family from the compensation by the influence of contractors in order to dump their flaws.

The ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment initiated the self employment Scheme for Rehabilitation of Manual Scavenger (SRMS) in 2007. According to Ministry Rs.231 crores were released to scheme, which benefited 13,275 individuals. Rashtriya Garima Abhiyan conducted a survey on the implementation of the SRMS in three states of India in 2010-11.<sup>12</sup> Here are some findings of the survey:

- I. On the whole of 98% of people engaged in the profession are women yet 51% of the Scheme for Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers (SRMS) benefits were received by men in these three states.
- II. People are fond of middlemen or agents for the fear of commissions.

However, with launch of Swachh Bharat Mission aimed at improving the working condition of women manual scavengers. But it only puts women manual scavengers in hazardous situation where the government

<sup>12</sup>Government of India(March 2012) (Uncompleted and Unsuccessful Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers in India, Study on Rehabilitation of Manual Scavenging ( implementation status of SRMS scheme) in India by Rashtriya Garima Abhiyan \_ Jan Sahash<http://www.dalits.nl/pdf/120328.pdf>

claims to have constructed 95 million toilets under SBM and reported that 93.1% households have access to toilets. But a large number of these toilets have been constructed using technologies that would require periodic emptying and offsite treatment of faecal matter, as per the new report. “Around 90% of all toilets built in 2017 were twin-pit toilets,” said Parameswaran Iyer, 59, secretary, ministry of drinking water and sanitation, in an October 2018 interview. No more than 13% of the toilets constructed under SBM had twin pits, while 38% had septic tanks with soak pits and 20% had single pits, both needing manual scavenging, as per an analysis of raw data from the National Annual Rural Sanitation Survey 2017-18.<sup>13</sup>

## **7. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

The study found following major issues during the review of sanitation of women in India through Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM). Women are the vital players in raising awareness about sanitation and water issues in their communities. Improved Water and sanitation for women are the first step to empower women in developing countries.

#Awareness must be publicized around MHM through well targeted communication and media plans. Women should be educated about the adverse effects of Open Defecation and the stigma of shame of menstruation can be resolved by such eye awakers.

<sup>13</sup> Government of India (2017), Ministry of Jal Shakthi, <http://ddws.gov.in/publication/national-annual-rural-sanitation-survey-narss-2017-18-report>

- I. As the current policies does not serve sanitation upliftment to every section of women, new policies must be framed with the interests of effective latrine construction with drainage system for its disposal, as well as changing social attitudes and behaviour towards proper waste disposal in the hopes of bettering the lives of billions.
- II. Encouragement of new inventions for the purpose of disposal of human excreta would highly resolve the problem of low accessibility of sanitation tools.

As manual scavenging has received considerable attention since independence. Government of India has taken several measures from time to time by appointing several committees and commissions suggesting practical recommendation for scavenging communities. But the result is pathetic that still the section of Dalit women and other deprived class of women are under trauma and facing discrimination within their community itself.

## **8. SUGGESTIONS**

MHM remains another area for improvement in toilet and facilities. Inadequate MHM provisions pose privacy related concerns for women and girls and introduced hygiene related issues for the entire community.

**The guidelines of MHM should be much more diversified with caste, religion and region.**

The greater efforts are made throughout India through SBM to construct toilet facilities in schools, MHM remains an issue in this setting also. Difficulties are associated with disposal of cloths and napkins have led girls to miss their classes during menses.

**Innovative solutions to disposal problems may be welcomed, depending on culture and context.**

The issue of women Safai Karamcharis are less discussed in academic sphere compared to male Safai Karamcharis. The new academic purview must be established to bridge between workers and academicians who form the policies and welfare programmes for the benefit of the manual scavengers. According the 2011 census of India women's work participation rate in manual scavenging is 26% as against 52% of men.<sup>14</sup>This paper recommends the Government of India to make place for a female scavenger in Trade Union representing women workers of scale.

The Government of Tamil Nadu has launched the scheme „Napkin Revolution“ all over the state, providing free sanitary napkins for over 41 lakh adolescent girls in the 10-19 age group in rural areas, 7 lakh new mothers and over 700 women prisoners. This napkin are distributed to these peoples through Government hospitals, primary health centres, village sub centres, anganwadis, rural nurses and Integrated Child Development Schemes

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<sup>14</sup> K Chellapan, Jayalalithaa launches free sanitary napkin scheme in Tamil Nadu ( Nov. 11, 2015), <https://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-jayalalithaa-launches-free-sanitary-napkin-scheme-in-tamil-nadu-1610745>.

Centres.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, The Government of Oddisha approved the sanitation scheme named, "KUSHI" with the fund allocated Rs.466 crores. Likewise, The Government of Kerala has launched a „She Pad“ scheme in the state to ensure menstrual hygiene among girls studying in classes 6 to 12.<sup>16</sup> The working of these schemes is only centralized in rural areas. So, in order to promote these schemes, the government should advertise in media on large scale for its usage in rural and urban women as well. The central government launched its Bio-degradable sanitary napkins priced at Rs. 2.50 per pad available at Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana Kendras. It was launched on the evening of International Women's day. It is highly to be marketed for the generation of income to the government. The shares of the scheme have to be highly purchased by stock traders.

## 9. CONCLUSION

This paper attempted to investigate and discuss poor sanitation of women in India through SBM. Improved and adequate sanitation will have profound implications on human and society. The maintenance and cleanliness of women sanitation has to be strengthened by removing the behaviour complexities of society towards women. Just as the mobile phone through technological innovation intervened in human life, so also the innovation of women sanitation should also intervene the life of people. If the usage

of mobile phone become inevitable, why can't sanitation of women which holds their dignity become inevitable. People have to change their mindset about deciding their usage for the need and not for the wealth. Media should also play a part in promoting women sanitation and not upholding the vulnerability of women.

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<sup>15</sup> Government of Goa (2018); [//gaodisha.gov.in](http://gaodisha.gov.in)

<sup>16</sup> Government of Kerala (2019)  
<http://sanitation.kerala.gov.in/>