

India Defeating Pandemic Covid-19 : An Invisible Helping Hand of Swachh Bharat Mission

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The present article is a byproduct of our project of IMPRESS scheme related to the Swachh Bharat Mission, the most comprehensive public policy. The SBM presented as an exemplary example of skillful management on every stage, i.e. planning, implementation and sustainability. The survey-based study projected the SBM (a mass movement) as a successful example of community-led management in the government policy for the first time. It included 360 respondents from different villages of the Nalanda district of Bihar through random sampling among the beneficiaries of the SBM. Also, we talked to several other villagers during the survey to know their views about the SBM. The survey that happened during June-August in the year 2020 reflected a fantastic fact that the SBM provided Corona Shield to all by promoting cleanliness in the society leading to success against the Corona pandemic. The research focused on this finding with other helpful factors in preventing the spread of the first wave

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of Corona pandemic in India, a highly populated country with fewer medical resources beyond the expectations of the developed nations.

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1. Introduction

The world is going through the Covid-19 pandemic, which is the most catastrophic event after the Second World War, which surpassed all previous epidemics and pandemics both in terms of transmissibility and number of deaths. The COVID-19 pandemic is also known as the Corona pandemic due to the associated virus. The Coronavirus originated in Wuhan (the largest city of Central China) and transmitted worldwide primarily through human to human transmission killing more than one million people. In January 2020 itself, the WHO proclaimed the current outbreak of Corona virus as Global Public Health Emergency. It is almost more than one year that we live with Wuhan Coronavirus, and now everybody is aware of its symptoms, spread, and preventive measures, so I will not go into the detail. Each country of the world is affected now without any discrimination of the stage of development. Interestingly, the world's most developed countries are badly affected, such as America, England, Spain, France, etc. India is one of the less affected countries from the corona pandemic in terms of the slow spread, the high rate of recovery and the low number of deaths as per its population.

The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting declared that India's fatality rate is the lowest in the world at 2.41% resulted in the highest recovery rate in the first wave of corona pandemic. India's case fatality rate (CFR), the proportion of people who have died among the confirmed cases, is also declining continuously and always remained below the global average of 3.1% (Hindustan Times, Monday, 28 September 2020). The world is wondering why India has a lower rate of corona cases, a higher recovery rate, and a lower mortality rate is proportionate to its population and resources. The developing country, India, is the second highly populated country of the world. India is still trying to meet the pressing medical needs of its rising population due to fewer health-related resources such as hospitals, doctors, beds, ventilators, etc. In this respect, a rapid increase in the number of corona cases and resultant deaths expected. People believed that it would be hard for India to control the outbreak

and provide necessary healthcare to all Corona patients. India set an example while fighting against Corona beyond all expectations and successfully prevented the spread of the pandemic with fewer fatalities. India successfully challenged the Corona pandemic and helped other countries by the unprecedented actions in the leadership of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi. India became self-independent through indigenous production of health care resources like a mask, sanitiser, PPE Kit, ventilator, vaccine etc. and provided these to needy nations. The number of daily cases is rising in India due to the ongoing highest number of daily tests in the world since the mid-2020.

2. The Objective of the Study

An attempt has been made in this article to find out a possible explanation behind the behaviour of Indian citizens against the Corona pandemic.

3. Possible Explanation offered so far

The studies and researches of scientists, doctors, culturists and sociologists indicate three possible reasons behind India's successful defeat of the corona pandemic. *First*, the decision of complete lockdown proved to be the most effective step by the current Indian government of the Bhartiya Janata Party. Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ordered a mandatory national lockdown on 24 March 2020 after a one-day voluntary Janata curfew on 22 March. The complete lockdown continued till 30 May, and the government started unlocking the country in phases after 1 June 2020. The complete lockdown proved a big blow to the Indian economy but stopped the spread of Corona among Indians. The government saved the life of millions of Indian citizens at the cost of economic growth. The countries with partial lockdown witnessed the highest number of Corona cases and resultant deaths, especially the developed nations. The nationwide lockdown welcomed by 1.3 billion Indian populations between vigorous and promotional activities such as beating *thali* and lighting *Diya*. The phased unlock down is still going on. The United Nations and the World Health Organization believed in India's tremendous capacity to deal with the pandemic. They applauded the BJP government's comprehensive and robust efforts, especially lockdown, to prevent the spread of the outbreak. The UN

and the WHO called the lockdown restrictions aggressive but vital for containing the attack and creating healthcare facilities.

Second, India is a land of unity in diversities of cultures, which worked in the background for the lower deaths due to Corona and hindered the spread of the pandemic. Our culture is an accumulation of experiences, thoughts, and philosophies of ancestors in a peculiar environment since the beginning of civilization. The Corona pandemic reminded us about our vibrant culture and society, which also earned respect in foreign countries due to its closeness to nature. The Western world, which criticised Indian culture for its conservativeness, clearly understood its significance during the Corona pandemic. For example, our way of greeting by folded hands, i.e. *Namaste*, became eye-striking for the Western world due to its usefulness in preventing Corona spread. There are several features in our culture, i.e., living, eating, dressing, worshipping, meditation, medication, and drinking, which stopped the quick spread of the Corona pandemic. We learnt the benefits of fresh food from our ancestors, i.e. cook every day and eat every day. The use of spices in food preparation also made our body healthy and immunised, such as black pepper, garlic, ginger, cardamom etc. Indians generally avoid packed and frozen foods, which is preventing corona infection. We always respected our elderly and took special care at the time of sickness, who were vulnerable to Corona infection but recovered fast. Generally, most of the population of India worship in their home and burn Human and *Kapur*, which purifies the air and kills viruses and bacteria in the environment. Indians are famous for their unique meditation and medication, which is getting appreciated by the world now. Meditation and Yoga became crucial in preventing Corona spread, which Indians are practicing since the pre-modern days, such as *anulom*, *vilom*, *Kapal Bhati* etc. Indians have been fond of *ayurvedic* medication, which became part of daily life. Indians use different kinds of medicinal drinks made of *pudina*, *tulsi*, ginger, pepper, honey etc. and become highly immune to any infection.

4. Swachh Bharat Mission and the Corona Pandemic

The most comprehensive public policy to achieve complete cleanliness, the Swachh Bharat Mission (hereafter SBM), is another reason behind India's successful challenge to the corona pandemic, which focuses on this article. Most intellectuals ignored the vital role

of the SBM, which prepared the ground to halt the spread of the Corona outbreak in India. Our honourable Prime Minister Shri Narendra Damodar Das Modi announced the SBM during the Independence Day speech at Lal Quila on 15 August 2014, long before the Corona outbreak. On October 2, 2014, the Government of India tossed the SBM celebrating the 145th birth anniversary of the father of nation Mohan Das Karamchand Gandhi. India's Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi initiated this drive of Swachhta to achieve Swachh Bharat by 2019 when Corona started. The SBM or the Clean India Mission became one of the flagship programmes of the present BJP led Indian government, aiming to achieve clean India through the increase of cleanliness and sanitization and the end of open defecation. The SBM aims to provide sanitation and cleanliness facilities to every household such as pour-flush toilets, safe and adequate water, to end the manual scavenging, to increase awareness about healthy sanitation practices, to bring behavioural changes, and to increase people's participation in the policies of sanitation and public health.

The Prime Minister Sri Modi took cleanliness pledge to start the SBM on 2 October, 2014, which turned this policy into a mass movement through the increased participation of citizens. Millions of Indians took the pledge with Mr. Modi. The pledge focuses on not only personal involvement but also the engagement of society. It mentions that "We must serve our country India like Mahatma Gandhi by keeping it neat and clean. Being dedicated to cleanliness, I take this pledge that I will work 100 hours per year, and two hours per week. I will initiate the quest for cleanliness with myself, my family, locality, village, and workplace. I will spread the message of the Swachh Bharat Mission in my family, workplace, locality, village and town and I will request citizens that do not indulge in littering and nor do allow it to happen. I will inspire hundred other persons to take the same pledge and devote their hundred hours to cleanliness" (<http://www.oneindia.com>).

We became aware of the critical role of the SBM in defeating the corona pandemic during field surveys related to our project. We Prahlad Kumar Bairwa and Pintu Kumar awarded with a research project entitled "Operation and Impressions of Swachh Bharat Mission in Rajasthan and Bihar: A Step towards Social Revolution" by the Indian Council of Social Science Research under IMPRESS

scheme. The field surveys indicated that the SBM is a programme to achieve Swachh Bharat by 2019 by improving the levels of cleanliness and turning out as a social movement in increasing awareness and consciousness about sanitation and healthy life in villages and urban areas. Here we can note the deep connection between the corona pandemic and the SBM based on ongoing experiences. Cleanliness is the only enemy of deadly Coronavirus enthusiastically promoted under the SBM. In this regard, the WHO also published an interim guidance document on 23 March 2020 entitled “Water, Sanitation, Hygiene and Waste Management for the COVID-19 Virus (available at https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/333560/WHO-2019-nCoV-IPC_WASH-2020.4-eng.pdf?ua=1.)” The WHO guidelines mentioned that the protection from all infectious disease pandemics including the COVID-19 episode needs availability of safe water, sanitation and hygienic conditions. There is still no medicine for the treatment of COVID-19 patients, but you can kill and stop human-to-human spread of Coronavirus by applying sanitiser or washing your hand with soap and water and the waste management practices. It is a matter of pride for all Indians that the most comprehensive public policy of SBM promoted and focused on the above preventive measures related to the spread of the Corona pandemic since 2014. All Indian States and Union Territories achieved substantial progress towards the achievement of Clean India by becoming Open Defection Free. More than six lakhs villages also became ODF. More than 107300000 individual toilets have been constructed in the country. The sanitation coverage in Indian villages has increased to a hundred per cent from thirty-eight per cent since the beginning of the SBM in 2014 (<http://newsonair.com/News?title=Year-ender-2020%3A-Report-on-Swachh-Bharat-mission&id=406425>). The transformation in rural sanitation and behaviour of over 600 million people turned hand hygiene into a Jan Andolan. In this way, the SBM became very significant in increasing awareness about the crucial role of sanitation and hygiene in preventing diseases during the COVID-19 pandemic.

5. Findings of Survey in the Nalanda District of Bihar

We have seen a brief report on the success of the SBM in connection with the preventive measures needed in the COVID-19 pandemic. The cleanliness drive has been a great support in the fight

against Coronavirus, which became evident during our survey of the Nalanda district of Bihar during the pandemic. An Indian district of Nalanda is one of the thirty-eight districts of Bihar with the administrative headquarters in Bihar Sharif. Nalanda became a fully-fledged district in 1972, split from Patna. The majority of the land in the community is a fertile land of Indo Gangetic plain. The section comprises 20 blocks, 1084 villages and four municipalities with a literacy rate of 64.73%. We collected data for the study through a questionnaire in Hindi with observation and discussion on the SBM. In the months of June-August 2020 approximately 360 households surveyed from the villages of Nalanda district benefited from the program selected through random sampling. A comprehensive but general survey of districts performed to witness changes on the levels of culture, society, family, and individual due to the SBM. The following table shows the number of villages surveyed and the number of households covered in the same town :

Table-1 : Surveyed Number of Villages and Households of Nalanda District

| S. No | State | District | Village | Households |
|-------|-------|----------|---------------|------------|
| 1. | Bihar | Nalanda | Beldaripar | 10 |
| 2. | Bihar | Nalanda | Chandaura | 13 |
| 3. | Bihar | Nalanda | Kadichak | 13 |
| 4. | Bihar | Nalanda | Mandilpur | 10 |
| 5. | Bihar | Nalanda | Rampur | 10 |
| 6. | Bihar | Nalanda | Mirzapur | 10 |
| 7. | Bihar | Nalanda | Khaira Salaru | 15 |
| 8. | Bihar | Nalanda | Milkipar | 13 |
| 9. | Bihar | Nalanda | Sultanpur | 09 |
| 10. | Bihar | Nalanda | Nagma | 10 |
| 11. | Bihar | Nalanda | Bhandari | 10 |
| 12. | Bihar | Nalanda | Khirauna | 11 |
| 13. | Bihar | Nalanda | Fatehpur | 10 |
| 14. | Bihar | Nalanda | Sonsa | 10 |
| 15. | Bihar | Nalanda | Pathraura | 03 |
| 16. | Bihar | Nalanda | Manjaita | 04 |
| 17. | Bihar | Nalanda | Dhamasang | 43 |
| 18. | Bihar | Nalanda | Kadibigha | 51 |

| | | | | |
|--------------|-------|---------|-------|------------|
| 19. | Bihar | Nalanda | Rahui | 43 |
| 20. | Bihar | Nalanda | Amba | 60 |
| 21. | Bihar | Nalanda | Kevai | 02 |
| Total | | | | 360 |

The questionnaire included a question related to the practical aspects of the SBM and its long term effect in the Corona pandemic, i.e. Q. 30. “There is a need for cleanliness to fight Corona. Did the SBM provide Corona Shield to all by promoting cleanliness in the society leading to success against the Corona pandemic? (कोरोना महामारी से बचाव के लिए साफ-सफाई आवश्यक है। क्या स्वच्छ भारत अभियान ने इसको बढ़ावा देकर जनता को पहले से ही कोरोना कवच प्रदान कर दिया जिसके कारण वो काफी हद तक कोरोना से लड़ने में सफल हो रहे हैं?)” The question included two options, yes or no, to answer. The participant has to answer the question by writing yes or no in the provided blank space. The survey became a success with an overwhelming response from almost all participants except five. The data analysis of the questionnaires indicates the long-term effect of the SBM on the mass population resulting in a social revolution. The following pie chart and graph present the data analysis of the survey of the Nalanda district of Bihar, which is telling several stories of the success of the SBM.

Figure-1 and 2 represent Pie chart and Graph of Q. 30 of the Survey of households of Nalanda :

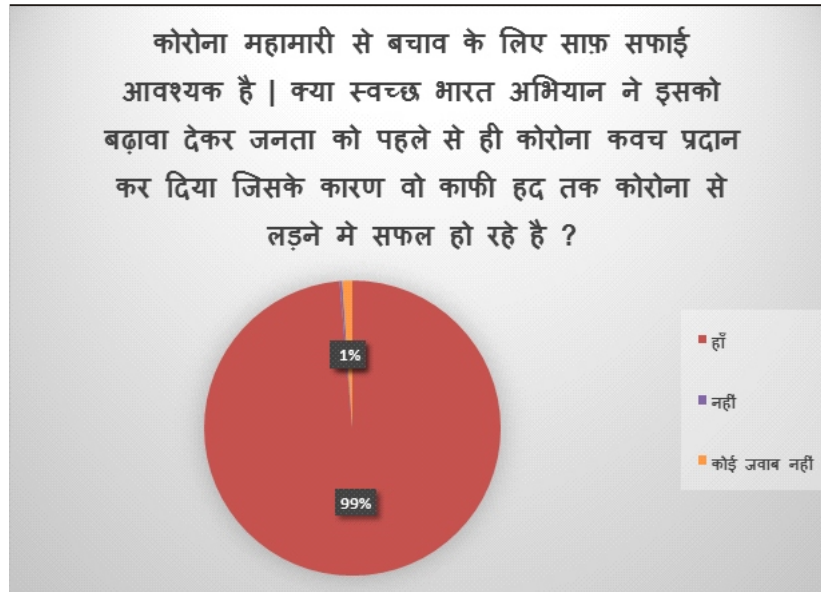


Figure-1 : Pie chart



Figure-1 : Graph

A total number of 360 households from the Nalanda district of Bihar participated in the survey. There are only four participants who did not answer the question. Only one participant responded to the question negative. In this way, the total number of 355 households, i.e. 99 per cent, responded to the question favourable. These households agreed that the SBM provided them Corona Shield long before starting the Corona pandemic in India through increased cleanliness and hygiene. The SBM promoted cleanliness and hygiene among individuals and the community through all possible ways, one of the deadly enemies of the COVID-19 virus. The families shared with us that the construction of a personal toilet in the home prevented us from going outside for nature's call and increased the level of personal hygiene. During the interview, the families also told us that we understood the importance of healthy and hygienic living and a clean neighbourhood through the constant requests, promotions and ground zero works of the swachhtadoots and the swachhta-grahi. The developed awareness about sanitation, cleanliness and hygiene and the habit of using the toilet, washing face, hand and foot and taking a bath proved helpful during the Corona pandemic.

The government of India has explicitly declared that the SBM is a joint responsibility of the government and citizen of this country because cleanliness has a social dimension or implies a system of interaction concerned with hygiene and disease prevention. Cleanliness has played an essential role in re-establishing cultural

values, traditions and humanitarianism. Social awareness and behaviour change are necessary for complete and sustainable cleanliness. The government has a clear view in this regard, and that is why community-level Swachhagrahis are appointed and promoted to motivate communities to construct and use toilets in villages. Swachhagrahis recruited from among Panchayati Raj institutions, co-operatives, ASHAs, Anganwadi workers, women groups, community-based organizations, self-help groups, etc. The Mission aims to have one Swachhagrahi in every village, with at least 6.5 lakh swachhagrahis volunteers by March 2019. Another social feature of the SBM is the Swachhta pledge, an oath for all to participate in the Clean India movement. The interactive and social dimensions of the SBM had turned it into a mass movement.

The SBM developed a sustainable, healthy and hygienic society both in urban and rural areas, which became crucial during the Corona pandemic. It initiated behaviour change and a positive attitude towards cleanliness and sanitation. It touched the daily life of individuals through the promotion of clean surrounding. The personal cleanness includes hand, face and footwash before preparing and eating food and after toilet, ecologically safe and sustainable community and environmental sanitation and waste management system (http://www.mdws.gov.in/sites/default/files/TS_CGuideline2007_0.pdf). The SBM increased the level of awareness about personal and community cleanliness for a healthy society. People understood the real significance of personal hygiene and a clean neighbourhood after the spread of the Wuhan virus.

Earlier, the concept of sanitation was limited to the disposal of human excreta. Still, the SBM turned it into a mass movement with the inclusion of liquid and solid waste disposal, food hygiene, and personal, domestic, community, and environmental hygiene. Proper sanitation is essential not only for good health but also for a sound individual and social life. Sanitation is one of the fundamental determinants of quality of life, which prevent contamination of water and soil and thereby prevent diseases. The concept of cleanliness now includes not only personal hygiene but also home sanitation, safe water arrangement, garbage, water and excreta disposal. The SBM programme became the most persuasive advocates of good sanitation practices, including the human body, working and living places, surrounding area, i.e. colony, street, etc. The SBM brought an

improvement in the general quality of life by promoting cleanliness and hygiene as per its one of the main objective. Altogether, these good sanitation practices became the part of corona shield later as per the guidelines of medical professionals.

During the survey, we were surprised to know that the SBM is more successful in Indian villages than urban areas. In other words, the SBM (G) proved it is more powerful. The SBM upgraded the standard of living in the rural areas like ancient days by accelerating sanitation coverage, motivating communities and Panchayati Raj institutions, promoting cleanliness, hygiene and eliminating open defecation. An army of foot soldiers, i.e. Swachhata Doots and Swachhagrahis on sanitation created through using existing and working state, central and non-government institutions.

The Swachhta Survekshan (an annual survey of cleanliness, sanitation and hygiene) 2021 also shows that the Indian villages are cleaner than cities and achieved the vision of Swachh Bharat by accelerated sustainable sanitation practices and coverage, adopted of sustainable sanitation practices and facilities. India's spirit dwells in its villages. The heart will change, then the body will change accordingly. The transformed villages proved their value with the lowest spread of Corona in Indian villages at the peak point. Even there will be no exaggeration to mention that when thousands of infected urban people migrated to their villages, they infected less healthy villagers and became healthy soon in the clean environment of villages.

The smooth and efficient implementation framework worked behind the success of the SBM to provide a Corona shield to everyone. To achieve total cleanness and swachhta, the government of India provided sanitation as a state subject with the flexible authority to decide on the implementation of their policy of sanitation and its mechanism, taking into account State-specific requirements. Each state prepared the implementation framework with a road map of activities, actions and checks covering the three critical phases necessary for the policy, i.e. planning, implementation, and sustainability with the community-led community sanitisation approaches triggering behaviour change and house-to-house interventions. Community-based monitoring and vigilance committees created essential peer pressure to meet the community needs at the district level. Participation of prestigious civil societies, self-help communities, NGOs, international, national and local level organi-

zations working for the society secured. An effective monitoring mechanism is activated to monitor both toilet construction and usage.

6. Conclusion

The SBM is the most comprehensive public policy of the BJP led Indian government in terms of its coverage and beneficiary. The success of the SBM lies in its skilful management at all phases, i.e. planning, implementation and sustainability. It is unique in the sense that the programme is for the public, of the public and by the public. The concept of community management successfully launched through the SBM in one of the largest populous countries like India. India became a clean country and improved the standard of living in the rural and urban areas by promoting cleanliness, hygiene and eliminating open defecation. All Indians returned to their roots of a healthy and hygienic life by expanding sanitation coverage, adopting sustainable sanitation resources, the community managed sanitation systems, solid and liquid waste management, behaviour change, and awareness creation and health education. It is the secret behind Corona shield. Altogether, a changed lifestyle by the SBM worked as a shield during the first wave of COVID-19. The guard controlled the rapid spread of the Wuhan virus in India. The second wave of single and double mutant Coronavirus arrived in India from foreign countries like England, Africa, Brazil, etc., spreading nothing like anything. The situation is now quite serious since with hundreds of causality every day. Soon, Indians will develop herd immunity through the provided Corona shield by the SBM in the form of a healthy, hygienic, and natural life. We will again defeat the Coronavirus with extraordinary management of the government and the public.

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