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## **Nirmal to Swachch: More Money, More Toilets, More of the Same**



NITYA JACOB



SUNETRA LALA



Two women (sisters-in-law) stand in front of the toilets they constructed in Dharmapura village, Bijnor district, Uttar Pradesh (May 2016). Photo: Nitya Jacob

*Four years after the Government of India launched the Swachch Bharat Mission (SBM), what is the reality in rural Uttar Pradesh, India's largest State? To examine how the government has delivered upon its widely announced SBM, what it means for villagers, and to assess the changes that have taken place, Nitya Jacob and Sunetra Lala, Policy Analysts, retrace their steps to villages in Uttar Pradesh, which they had visited in 2006-07. They find*

*that the rural element of the SBM has merely built on the Total Sanitation Campaign and the Nirmal Bharat programmes started by earlier governments.*

*The SBM, the authors say, has provided only the façade for a structure that has been in the making for a decade. The only real major difference was the subsidy amount, which has introduced its own set of distortions. Moreover, the patriarchal mode of propaganda continues. The messaging has remained the same over the years: focussing on women's dignity and honour rather than on the health of the women and the larger rural population. The authors also highlight the importance of utilising the momentum gained to focus on other water, sanitation and hygiene, and developmental initiatives, such as washing hands with soap, safe drinking water and waste management.*

**I**n 2015, India accounted for 52 per cent of the world's population that defecates in the open, and 22 per cent of world's total under-five deaths<sup>1</sup>. Every year 3,34,000 children die in India before they reach their fifth birthday<sup>2</sup>. Inadequate water, sanitation and poor hygiene cause 88 per cent of diarrhoeal diseases<sup>3</sup>. Nearly half the children under five children in India are stunted, with open defecation being a major contributing cause. Furthermore, countries in South Asia, including India, suffer significant economic losses due to poor sanitation<sup>4</sup>.

Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous State, with over 200 million people, fared the worst in sanitation of all large States. We visited Uttar Pradesh back in 2006-07 and revisited it in 2017 to understand the progress of sanitation in the State, as the current Union government had claimed that it had made enormous progress in the march towards sanitation and health gains. Most importantly, we wanted to understand the difference in the implementation of sanitation programmes by the various Indian governments since 2006.

On October 2, 2014, the Government of India launched the Swachh Bharat (Clean India) Mission (SBM). The SBM has two components, namely Urban and Rural or Gramin (G). The SBM aims to make India free from open defecation (ODF) by 2019. This is a demand-led programme in which States have been given the freedom to devise their own programmes in keeping with national policy guidelines. They are free to choose how to plan, implement, and sustain sanitation. This article analyses

the SBM (G) implementation on-ground in Uttar Pradesh and concludes that this is no more than a mere toilet construction campaign at best; it simply provides the finishing touches that has been more than a decade in the making.

### **The many toilets at Jiwan Sarai and Gaganpur Naraha**

The flat, featureless plains of Uttar Pradesh are notable for their lack of greenery, high population density, and the stench of excreta. Scarcely a kilometre passes without a village: so densely populated is the State. A western district, Bijnor, typifies this high density. About three hours' drive from Delhi, this largely rural district is richly watered and heavily farmed with sugarcane and cash crops. The roads connecting the villages to the highway are good. Jiwan Sarai, a village on National Highway 34 connects Bijnor to Pauri — a blink and you will miss it. The road separates the village from its main mosque. Jiwan Sarai's lanes are clean, if

dusty: dirty water does not slush up the lanes, so it is possible to walk around with ease. The houses are largely *pucca* and they line narrow lanes and narrower drains.



We are there to speak to people about the SBM, the Modi government's pet project to cleanse India. Before settling down to innumerable cups of tea and talk, we take a walk through and around the village. We cross the highway and descend a dirt path to a mosque, trekking through the eucalyptus grove to the fields a few hundred metres beyond. We expect to be assaulted by the sight and smell of human waste. But we get a pleasant surprise — there is no pong in the air or brown squiggles on the ground.

**A women holds her child over the pot in her toilet in Dharmapura village, Bijnor district, Uttar Pradesh, in May 2016. Photo: Nitya Jacob**

When sanitation inspectors declared Jiwan Sarai ODF in 2016, it was with a sense of *déjà vu*. A decade earlier, in 2006, at the height of the Total Sanitation

Campaign (TSC), SBM's predecessor, the village had earned its first sanitation spurs when it 'nearly' got the Nirmal Gram Puruskar (NGP), an award given to ODF villages in the mid-2000s. We say 'nearly' because, as the Pradhan [Village Head], Abdul Samad, points out, "There are still the 10 per cent who do not have, or do not want to use, toilets. These difficult elements exist everywhere."

"See, we Muslims have a purdah system so we cannot go out to defecate near our homes. We women have always used toilets, but men think these are part of the *zenana*, so some of them continue to defecate outside. They go out of sight of the village in their fields," says Shabana, an anganwadi worker.

"So, they go in a group? How many and when do they go?" we ask her. "They go to work in the fields early and squat there when they go to farm."

The village is visibly free of human faeces, but not the environment. The nearest defecation fields are nearly a kilometre away and therefore, the chances of flies carrying germs back to the village are remote. But the fact is Jiwan Sarai is not ODF. Behind the shiny façade and Samad's bravado lies a tale of how, the more things seem to change, the more they remain the same. Jiwan Sarai has a long history of sanitation dating back a decade to the TSC, when district motivators were spurred on by engineers, and sanitation was a joint effort. Many villages like Jiwan Sarai cleaned up their act.

We see this repeated in other villages of the region. A metal board painted yellow with black letters in Hindi proclaims the village of Gaganpur Naraha in Kannauj district as a Swachh Gaon. In the TSC days, this board would have proclaimed it a Nirmal Gram, and indeed, it got the award in 2007 implying that everybody had toilets back then. The village has been ODF for more than a decade but the dirt track from the main road to it suddenly deteriorates into a bumpy brick road with deep ruts the driver is chary of going over. We stop and walk a kilometre to the Pradhan's house.

Pradhan Balbir Singh enthusiastically jumped on to the SBM bandwagon in mid-2016 and, in six months, he claims, made the village ODF. Kannauj Collector Anup Kumar Jha prodded him to act, provided him with money and people and set a tight

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deadline to make the panchayat ODF in six months. It also helped that the village is on the banks of the river Ganga. The State and Union governments in their desire to clean the river, channelled money and manpower into these villages to make sure they all had toilets. No untreated sewage was to sully the river divine. Balbir Singh got a tailwind for his sanitation campaign.

But while toilets sprang up in Gaganpur Naraha, the village remains filthy. Cow dung and garbage litter the lanes that overflow with dirty water. The brick-lined lanes are grimy and slippery. As we walk to Balbir Singh's *haveli* on the banks of the Ganga, we have to be extra careful not to slip and land in the slop. Cows glower at us as we pass by.

### **Money talks, not sanitation**

What is the difference this time, we ask Samad. You were a leader a decade ago and got your village the Nirmal badge. Why work on the same project again? It is another opportunity to serve his constituency, he says. We suspect there is more than altruism driving sanitation in the fields of western U.P.

Indeed, what stands out in SBM is the substantial subsidy of Rs 12,000 per toilet. Everybody wants a piece of the action, and thanks to the shoddy manner in which the Baseline 2012 Survey to ascertain beneficiaries was conducted, it left scope for manipulation.

The politics around updating the data ensured that the names of many people without toilets were replaced with those who had them. And yet, even today, in many villages, toilets are so poorly made that they could not possibly have cost Rs 12,000. In the TSC days too, subsidies for toilets were allotted, based on the income of families living below the poverty line (BPL). And BPL lists, too, were notorious for being fudged.



**A woman lends a helping hand during the construction of the pit of her toilet in Dharmapura village, Bijnor district, Uttar Pradesh, in May 2016. Photo: Nitya Jacob**

The obsession with a single goal – to make toilets – is evident in the Sarkhauli panchayat of Kannauj district. Pradhan Sarwesh Dwivedi is overseeing a frenzy of toilet construction. As we walk through the muddy lanes, we see toilets at various stages of completion. The streets are *kuccha* or bricked and the drains are broken. But Dwivedi is single-mindedly chasing the SBM dream of making toilets. Some toilets are mere circles in the ground where pits will be dug, some are completed. Subsidy money is flowing in thick and fast, mostly to those in *pucca* houses who have already made toilets. They are the most satisfied. Others show various levels of enthusiasm and scepticism.

Pratibha, a widow who lives in a semi-*pucca* house with her two children, is busy digging. Her tiny courtyard is heaped with mud from the two pits. Her toilet has been sanctioned but the money is yet to come.

"I am sure it will (come in) soon. Pradhanji has assured me," she says.

Meanwhile, she is doing the heavy

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lifting for the toilet construction by taking on the job of digging pits to save money. A mason has promised to make the toilet and accept payment later. We gingerly step into her courtyard and survey the mess — mud, bricks, cement and goats. But it is a

work in progress and her son assures us that the next time we come things will be smooth sailing.

"When did you get the sanction? Have you got the subsidy?" we ask Pratibha.

She says, "The sanction came two months ago. No subsidy has been paid yet though I have a bank account for MGNREGS (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme). Pradhanji has taken up my case with the block officials. I haven't had to spend anything yet."

This subsidy has been a powerful motivator, more than the 'community' methods of public meetings, shock treatment and faeces calculations. Pratibha will get the full amount regardless of what part of it she spends on the toilets; she, therefore, has an incentive to do things cheap and quick. She has calculated that she will be able to save half if she breaks her back digging the holes and helping the mason. That is several days' income for a daily wage labourer.

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the subsidy have oiled the SBM system more than anything else, supported by the motivators trained in Community Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) approaches. They spend three days in each village, meeting groups of people and persuading them, using the common CLTS triggers of disgust to make toilets. Then the members of the committees take over and harangue their fellow-villagers to make toilets or use them if they have already built them.

The subsidy under TSC a decade ago was a meagre Rs. 1,200. Needless to say, it did not attract the same interest as SBM does now. At that time, people made poor quality toilets that were not used. Now contractors make shoddy toilets that will not be used.

## **Patriarchy, purdah, and then toilets**

Adjacent to the perfume city of Kannauj, the village of Naurangpur Nagaria has a different story to tell. This is a favoured village in a favoured district. Former Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav's wife, Dimple Yadav, represents it in the Lok Sabha. Naurangpur Nagaria was picked as a Lohia Gram in 2012-'13, and attention and money was lavished on it. The previous Pradhan, says his successor's husband and proxy, Prithvi Raj Pal, has done nothing. Preeti Devi Pal is the designated Pradhan but she is constantly put down by her domineering husband who matter-of-factly acts on her behalf. Trying to score political brownie points, Pal boasts that since his wife was elected in 2015, he has transformed the village.

Preeti appears in the panchayat building with a translucent *ghunghat* [veil] across her face. She never opens her mouth; when we address her pointedly and ask her what toilets mean to women, her husband, Prithvi intervenes, "Toilets are as important to her respect and dignity as her *ghunghat*." Toilets have their pride of place, that is, after patriarchy and purdah. That puts things in perspective. Rajputs and Muslims appear to agree on one thing: women should not venture out of home, so they need toilets for them to defecate. This has other consequences, as we shall see later.

Preeti's *ghunghat* bobs as she nods. Again, she makes to speak, and again Prithvi interjects. "Our women were ashamed to defecate in the open and now they have toilets. We are proud of the village," he says.

We take a walk through Naurangpur Nagaria. All the families had built toilets a decade ago, so this is the village's second tryst with sanitation. Only a few people used those sorry structures; most were locked or used as goat sheds, kitchens, store rooms or *puja* rooms. That is not surprising, for they are tiny and claustrophobic. The village is open with lots of space that can be potential defecation fields. But we don't get a whiff of faeces even on the outskirts of the village. Under SBM, the old toilets were dusted off and used for defecation.

The Pradhan's husband has provided the political leadership in her stead. He had not only helped form the district government's team but provided the all-important local

leadership without which sanitation runs aground. Local leadership holds the key to success in SBM, just as it did in TSC.

### **Children show the way**

An hour's drive away in the same district, the village of Sujan Sarai is part of the Gadnapur panchayat in Kannauj district. However, it is not a typical village as only 100 of the about 250 families living there had toilets when the community motivators came calling in June 2016. No sooner did they leave than the villagers opposed Pradhan Satendar's efforts to take forward what the motivators had begun.

The *Nigrani Samitis* [monitoring committees] set up by the motivators were soft targets. Men and women in separate *samitis* wilted under the onslaught of the villagers. It was then that the children decided to step into the shoes of the adults. We catch Aafreen Bano, a class VII student, donning her cap and T-shirt to join her committee and go on an evening patrol.

"We get up early now that school has closed and stand in groups where people go to defecate. I blow my whistle if I see anybody walking out with a bottle," she giggles. Another child, Anshu Devi, a class V student, says people now hide their bottles, or throw them, if they spot children in *samiti* uniforms. The *samitis* are now comprised mostly of children, the brainwave of Satendar.

Back to Bijnor and another village that is having its second rendezvous with sanitation. Sirdhani Bangar figured in the 2007 list of 5,000 NGP awardees, when it got the prestigious cash award of Rs 200,000. But there was a catch, says Pradhan Azhar Abbas. "Those were paper toilets. These are for real." The village is small, with 210 families. It had gained from TSC as 70 per cent had made toilets and used them regularly. It was easy for the Pradhan and the community motivators to tip the village into becoming ODF. A short visit, a few village meetings and people capitulated. However, we spied several people walking, bottles and *lotas* in hand, to fields with *Nigrani Samiti* members in hot pursuit to stop them or make them dig pits.

The Pradhan watched us taking in the scene and said, "This is the powerful motivator of the village. When people know they are being watched they obey. The community

is close-knit, and shaming carries a big price. They would rather make and use toilets than be shamed in front of their neighbours and relatives.”

After triggering the first change in mindset, Azhar Abbas and others from the village set up *Nigrani Samitis* that also included health workers (ASHAs) Bala and Karanum Jahan, and the anganwadi worker (AWW) Geeta. Abbas’s appeal to his constituents to make toilets was backed by the previous Pradhan, Suresh Kumar, and other village elders. Together, they say they used the threat of stopping rations and pensions to people who have toilets but defecate in the open.

Sirdhani is a good example of how a village with high coverage but low use can be quickly converted to ODF with the help of a Community Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) programme, and an effective follow-up.

Abbas is as enthusiastic as his team but they have a long way to go before people make and use toilets. Toilets made in earlier sanitation programmes have become goat sheds and godowns. While the owners of these ‘defunct’ toilets are being forced to use them, construction of new toilets is going on apace. All the old TSC toilets have been repaired and used, enabling Sirdhani’s ascent to ODF.

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Not all women sarpanchs are *hunghat*-covered dummies. In the Dharampur panchayat of the Haldor block of Bijnor district, Pradhan Mamta Chaudhry is a vocal and visible presence. She shows what is possible, leading from the front. She made her panchayat ODF in three months in April 2016. Most families had toilets but they were just not using them. She not only goaded others in the village to make new toilets; now, no one has the nerve to defecate in the open.

While Chaudhry led the battle, members of her family — which boasts two former pradhans — also took up the baton and went house to house to motivate people, especially the women. She stopped people from defecating in the open in 15 days; construction of toilets for all took about 40 days. But even as she emphasised that toilets were crucial for women’s dignity, she reinforced patriarchal values, sounding a discordant note in an otherwise very successful campaign. Toilets, she said, are for

women, not for men. Men must protect the dignity and respect of women by making sure they have toilets to defecate in.

To encourage the use of toilets, in addition to reiterating the CLTS messages, she occasionally resorted to threats of withholding rations, pensions and scholarships. Coercion has worked. But what has worked for her most of all is the relative prosperity of the village — we did not see any *kuccha* houses — and the fact that her family has dominated village politics since 1985. The quality of toilets is very good, evidence that the masons' training and visits by engineers from the district has had an impact.

### **Demand compression**

Mamta Chaudhury also tried out something new here called demand compression, an idea devised by the District Collector. All those with any means were 'persuaded' to make their own toilets. Subsidies were given only to the really poor, comprising about 20 per cent of the population. In our rounds of the panchayat with Chaudhry, she pointed out the small houses of the poor people who got the subsidy, and the somewhat larger houses of the better-off who did not. Just 20 per cent of the really poor people on the Baseline 2012 list got the subsidy. Nobody seems to have grudged her this. This is a major difference from TSC where pradhans and officials followed the BPL list blindly. This strategy has helped her, and the district, stretch SBM funds further.

All the families here either had toilets or had built new ones. The difference in quality is stark as the new toilets are spacious and tiled, while the older ones are smaller and have cement walls. Even poor people invested some of their money to make large toilets, proof of the power of her persuasion. The critical fact is people are using the toilets.

Dharampur has a population of about 1,800 - all Hindus of different castes. It looks clean and there is no garbage or cow dung strewn in its lanes. Water runs through and floods a few streets in the neighbouring village of the panchayat but Chaudhry's village is spick and span.

This is evidence that a local benefactor can make a difference. Dharampur is what it is because of the Pradhan's family. The village secretary has played little part in the

transformation. All the panchayat office bearers are women. Generally in western U.P. it is the husbands (Pradhan *pati*), or elders of the Pradhan's family who call the shots if the Pradhan is a woman. But not here.

Though this is encouraging, the mood depressant is the impression we get that toilets are not as important to a woman's health, well-being and dignity as her purdah, a recurrent theme across the plains of western UP with motivators, Pradhans, village secretaries, committee members and villagers parroting this line. In doing so, they

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make women objects to be protected rather than portray them as human beings with real needs, and thus toilets become another link in the patriarchy chain, rather than a tool for bettering the lives and health of people, irrespective of gender. Of course, women have taken to toilets like fish to water, irrespective of their caste or religion. Men remain recalcitrant.

### **Rehabilitating manual scavengers**

U.P.'s first real encounter with sanitation has a deeper link with human dignity. The western part of the State was infamous for its manual scavengers who cleaned the toilets of Muslims and Rajputs by hand. Before TSC and pour-flush toilets, there were dry toilets that were cleaned by manual scavengers. In the mid-2000s, goaded by a Supreme Court interim order in 2005 to eliminate manual scavenging, the Union and State governments used TSC to force dry-toilet owners to switch to pour-flush latrines. One of TSC's objectives was to eliminate manual scavenging; it was added to SBM later. In 2006, we had visited many parts of western U.P. where dry toilets and scavenging were rampant, to understand what districts had done to wipe out this practice.

Moradabad is better known for brass and aluminium artefacts than sanitation. In the mid-2000s, the district administration brought in sweeping changes to rural Moradabad. In what has echoes in SBM, the district set about eliminating manual scavenging, using TSC. Trained motivators and masons, subsidies, contracted sanitation officials and district government officials ran a concerted

campaign for several years to get people to make toilets and convert dry latrines into pour-flush ones.

In 2007, Balbir Singh was the Pradhan of Faizulganj village in the Thakurdwara block. Most houses had dry toilets. In 2004, Singh started a movement to persuade all 203 families in his village to build pour-flush toilets. In three years, he achieved his goal. But it was not easy. The subsidy, then Rs 1,200 for BPL families, was a poor reason for making toilets. He canvassed house to house using the carrot of subsidy and the stick of police action. He recalls, "Changing attitudes was so hard as I had no support from anywhere — just the Collector sahib's assurance of help that I used to my advantage as a stick."

The village had just three Valmiki families who worked as scavengers. They stopped their erstwhile occupation, says Geeta Devi, a former manual scavenger. But they needed employment. The panchayat employed them as sweepers, paying them Rs 1,500 a month. "I have four children who study. I most certainly do not want this sort of life for them." But not all were so lucky.

Elsewhere, in Ibrahimpur village, Mohammad Usman, who was the Pradhan in 2007, decided to penalise upper caste families for employing scavengers. The traditional payment for cleaning toilets was a bag of wheat or rice per household. Usman fined each house Rs 10 a month and used the proceeds to pay Valmikis who stopped scavenging. Some like Kalicharan Bidhur got a job as an accredited social worker-health activist (ASHA).

Ibrahimpur had 450 families, mostly Muslims. All had dry toilets and Usman goaded them into making pour-flush toilets, a process that took two years, starting 2005. He was called to a district workshop by Collector Amit Ghosh who warned the pradhans they had to eliminate manual scavenging as the Supreme Court had ordered it. TSC offered a way out through technology and money. All the families constructed pour-flush toilets, with those below the poverty line getting the subsidy. Being used to toilets, everybody used the new ones as well.

Walking through the village we were not assailed by the acrid odour of human faeces. Instead, the sweet-sour fragrance of cow-dung floated in the air. Usman had made his village ODF but had much to do before it could be called clean.

The seven Valmiki families engaged in manual scavenging were rehabilitated and provided alternative jobs, largely as village sweepers. It was more than a lateral shift in occupation, from the indignity and humiliation of carrying faeces to cleaning drains, without having to touch the muck.

The same Collector-led approach has found echoes in SBM. Collectors pick panchayats based on toilet coverage. They take a mix of villages with high and low toilet coverage. Most of the former type had made toilets under TSC. District Collectors instruct pradhans to make their panchayats ODF in a short time. But things have changed little since the mid-2000s at the height of the Nirmal Gram fever.

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There were no dry toilets in Harora Ahtmad, a village of 550 families in the Puwarka block of Saharanpur district. The 20 Valmikis, former manual scavengers, have been employed by the government as sweepers, once again marking a lateral shift in occupation. A decade ago, all had made toilets under TSC; just 135 were BPL and the others made these themselves. The first generation of Valmikis to leave their calling, most moved to distant Chandigarh or Delhi and were lost in the namelessness of big cities.

In Harora Ahtmad, the upper castes claimed they never discriminated against the Valmikis. "Even though the practice of scavenging is ages old, we do not stigmatise them here like people do in Moradabad or other places," Rao Babar said. The Valmiki houses in Harora Ahtmad were pucca and in the centre of the village, very different from Ibrahimpur or Faizulganj, where the Valmikis were segregated, usually pushed to the dingiest and dirtiest part of the village near the pond.

In 2007, Muzaffarnagar was in the news for getting rid of manual scavenging from some places. In Raipur Aterna village, Budhana block, the pradhan, Mukesh Sharma, persuaded the villagers to change dry toilets into pour-flush ones. Wielding the stick, the Additional Development Officer stormed in with police to demolish 32 dry toilets, leaving their owners no choice but to make pour-flush latrines

overnight. The subsidy was released and in 10 days, the village was free of open defecation and scavenging.

Here too, the Valmikis migrated, barring the family of Rajesh, who chose to work in the fields and on construction sites, making less than his wife did as a scavenger, but earning more respect. Sharma, a Brahmin, made a show of brotherly love by throwing his arms around Rajesh, the Valmiki, who wasn't in the least bit fazed. "We are better off in terms of health but wish we had government jobs," Rajesh told us.

A decade ago in Kanpur Dehat's Hardua Aima village, Mehnaz had converted her dry toilet into a pour-flush one with her own money; she was not eligible for subsidy. "Polio has become very rare now that all the dry toilets are gone," she told us. For her achievement, the district collector made her the village motivator for TSC.

Hardua Aima's pradhan in 2007, Mohammad Shahid, echoed her sentiment. Diseases like diarrhoea, polio and cholera were endemic till all the villagers replaced their dry toilets with pour-flush toilets. Shahid attended a meeting at the district headquarters and came back with the knowledge that flies breeding in the faeces in the dry toilets caused the various illnesses. He campaigned for a year to convince fellow villagers of the need to make better toilets and succeeded in 2006. Children conducted rallies, painted walls and shouted sanitation slogans. But it was all persuasion — there was no coercion by the higher-ups in government.

"There were 71 dry toilets while the rest defecated in the fields when I started. The fields used to flood during the rains so there was nowhere to defecate. This made my job of persuading people easier. I told them about the subsidy for BPL families that helped changed their minds even though the award was too small to make a proper toilet," said Shahid. The district administration helped by sending some sanitation motivators but Shahid did the heavy lifting.

Ram Pujari, the sole Valmiki, was happy her scavenging days were behind her. What changed was the demand – suddenly there was no work. She had to find something else to do. Shahid told her the occupation was outlawed by the Supreme Court and she could be fined if she was caught carrying faeces. Ironic. With the Pradhan's help,

her husband got a job as a sweeper in the primary health centre nearby and her son, with the highways department.

In 2007, Sushila was the Pradhan of Jallapur, village, 30 km from M Ahtmad (is this different from Harora Ahtmad), in 2007. It was another unremarkable village in western U.P., far from the main road with just 96 families. It wasn't difficult for Sushila to get them to make toilets even though most were not eligible for the subsidy, being above the poverty line (APL). At the district meeting called by the collector to tell pradhans to eliminate manual scavenging, she learnt it cost less than Rs 2000 to make a toilet.

The village had two Valmiki families. They 'lost' their jobs once the toilets were made but she made sure they got job cards that let them work as labourers under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), earning up to Rs 10,000 a year. As this gave them work in the village, they did not migrate like their fellow Valmikis in neighbouring villages. Pramod Valmiki, who used to clean toilets, in 15 houses said, "I earned more cleaning toilets. Each house paid me Rs 250 and up to 15 quintals of grains. But it was demeaning. MGNREGAS work pays less but I am better off now." About discrimination, Pramod says villagers look at him differently now that he has stopped carrying their excreta.

We have a sense of *déjà vu* when we reach Gujrain village in Kanpur Dehat's Derapur block. In 2007, Ram Ganesh Trivedi was the Pradhan. He still is. He has been Pradhan since independence, he boasts, and has always been elected unopposed. He does not remember my earlier visit a decade ago. Then, the village had just 31 dry toilets and he persuaded their owners to convert them to pour flush ones. Making it sound simple, he said, "The APL families made their own, the BPL families got the subsidy."

What made him act? The Collector issued orders to eliminate dry toilets. Then, as now, the district administration was driving the agenda. He was merely a tool, he said. To create a role model, he picked on Ramashankar Mishra, a Lucknow resident, who, revolted by manual scavenging, made a regular toilet after being asked to. Mishra became Trivedi's toilet ambassador and his village became a Nirmal Gram.

All the houses had toilets. What Trivedi did in 2017 was merely to speak to the new families to make theirs. It was a small victory compared to what he had achieved a decade ago, freeing the Valmikis from scavenging.

When we reached Gujrain, Trivedi had been informed of our arrival by the local sanitation coordinator. He sat, draped over a plastic chair, surrounded by a few hangers-on. Among them was an elderly woman, Rubaina, purdah-less, a battered identity card around her neck, squatting a short distance away: she regarded us with indifference.

Extolling the virtues of SBM, Trivedi said, "For the first time, I felt like doing something for my village. When collector sahib came, he asked pradhans to take up the mission and clean their villages. I was one of the first to volunteer and achieve ODF. Now I am the local sanitation champion and he takes me to meetings in other parts of the district."

But didn't Gujrain also have a tryst with sanitation a decade ago? Yes, it did, Trivedi said. So, it was much easier to make the village ODF now. Recognition by the Collector is a big thing for the village pradhan, who became pradhan the year before. From a member of a rich if obscure family, he was now somebody who other pradhans could look up to. But that's not all. We reminded him of the manual scavenging campaign. His face lit up: "Yes, the Valmikis are here."

Rubaina, one of the committee members who patrolled the village morning and evening till people made, and used, their toilets, is old, tired, jobless and lives alone. "I would have liked more than this. I put in many days' efforts getting up early on winter mornings and walking in the cold evenings to stop people from crapping in the open. All I got for my trouble were a hat, a whistle and I-card. The government should have paid me." "Show us your house," we ask her, more to get away from Trivedi's tirade and get her side of the story which she was more likely to do in private.

"See, the sanitation work only got done for the rich and upper caste Hindus. We got our share much later, after they had made their toilets. The 10 Muslims from my *mohalla* were told to make toilets with their own money and then we would be

paid the subsidy. We are poor, it was hard to raise the money. Sure, Trivedi helped with materials, but we had to work hard for the toilets."

Are they being used, we ask. She grins -- we don't want to die, we use the toilets. Everybody, all the time? Heads nod and some voices speak up that they all do. Where else can they go? Rubaina proudly shows me her toilet, her Taj Mahal. It's a squat grey cubicle but stands in stark contrast to her home.

In 2007, we met Manghi, a 'liberated' scavenger-turned-fisherman. He had lost his livelihood some years before I met him as everybody had switched to pour-flush latrines. A few days before we met Manghi, the panchayat had given him permission to fish in the village pond. He got a loan from Trivedi to buy fingerlings to stock the pond. We watched as he scattered stale chapattis on the water that immediately turned into a maelstrom of catfish, fighting for the crumbs. "I will pay off my debt in January (2008) and then earn a good income," he told us, grinning through broken teeth.

Then and Now: There are similarities between the TSC and the SBM at many levels.

### **Motivators without motivation**

The State's strategy for motivators under SBM is similar to what it was under TSC. There were swachhata doots (cleanliness ambassadors) under TSC; there are motivators now. The government selected local youth who could speak well, trained them for five days and sent them to villages to initiate campaigns. Over a day or so, they would 'trigger' villagers to demand toilets or stop manual scavenging. Panchayats with a high percentage of household toilets were picked to show quick wins successes.

The language used by the motivators to persuade people in TSC was used again for SBM: toilets, officials said, the focus being on the need to ensure "the respect and dignity of women" and only occasionally, for better health. Swachhata doots were paid an incentive for household and community achievements under TSC. The SBM's motivators are paid daily rates and an incentive for each ODF village. The difference is the urgency to get things done that spawns short cuts, coercion and, ultimately, resentment.

After creating a need, they set up *Nigrani Samitis* of local people to make sure the campaign reaches its desired end — of making toilets. Forced by *Nigrani Samitis* and local officials not to defecate outdoors, people make toilets. But once there is no pressure, many revert to their old ways of defecating outdoors.

It has been observed that while the motivators worked well for a few days, their enthusiasm waned after a few months, and the quality of community meetings deteriorated. Most motivators were not quite the sanitation messiahs that the SBM called for; they merely regurgitated CLTS messages without passion or bothering whether people understood that they had to stop defecating in the open. Instead, they appealed to the lowest common denominator — make a toilet and get Rs 12,000. We noticed this difference between new recruits and old hands in 2016 as the latter used health- and income-related messages and worked as motivators for longer than the former.

### **The power of Pradhans**

The Pradhans held, and continue to hold the key, to the panchayats. They led the campaign, supported by motivators, materials and masons. The main change from the TSC to the SBM is the impossibly short time allowed to change behaviour. In 2006, they took two or three years to make a village ODF; in 2016, they bragged about doing this in weeks. Changing sanitation behaviour is a slow process but Pradhans and Collectors have taken short-cuts to show results. Sanitation practitioners are seriously concerned about the quality of training for motivators and the resultant problems with behaviour change.



**Saburinissa , wife of Nasirullah, uses the Honeycomb Twin Leach Pit Toilet built at village Virhamatpur in Gonda district, Uttar Pradesh, as part of the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan. File photo: Rajeev Bhatt**

Pradhans have used threats to hold back government pensions, rations and other provisions in both TSC and SBM. They admitted this is illegal, but added that they had not actually carried out the threats that had rolled off their tongues. Threats similarly rolled off, like it did off the tongues of officials at the many meetings in which they invoked sanitation. Pradhans seemed more concerned with recovering the costs of their election campaigns and rewarding supporters than making a success of the SBM.

Gloating them on and leading the planning are the district officials. From 2006 to 2016, chief development officers (CDOs) have been responsible for sanitation. Some collectors have thrown their hats into the ring too, earning the moniker of collector-led total sanitation.

### **Collector-led total sanitation**

Over the past decade, sanitation campaigns have been executed by district administrations. The approach in 2017 to making districts ODF is not very different from what it was in 2007. In Bijnor, the young sanitation evangelist, V. K. Anand, took up where his predecessor had left off. With the zeal of a CLTS crusader, he

drew up an ambitious plan to rid the district of open defecation within a matter of months. The approach was straight out of the 2000s, even though the nomenclature had changed. Funds were limited, the number of beneficiaries was large at 247,279.

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**The demand compression method ensured that only the poorest were eligible for the subsidy.**

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Anand improvised by using the demand compression method, ensuring only the poorest were eligible for the subsidy.

Everybody with any means to make a toilet was forced to do so. This cut the number from around 43 per cent of eligible households under the Baseline 2012 to less than 15 per cent. He split the panchayats into three lots and started a branded SBM campaign, Bemisal Bijnor.

The key to Bemisal Bijnor is the community-led approach in SBM. The communication is the same as a decade ago, when motivators brought up the virtue and safety of women, economic losses due to ill-health and the link between open defecation and disease to bring about behaviour change. Toilets were painted with the owners' names on them. But in 2007, we saw similar scenes in rural Kanpur. Along with strengthening institutions and building human capacity, Bijnor's administration had beefed up the supply of trained masons and materials.

In Kannauj, the story was the same. It started around the same time as in Bijnor: in 2015 Kannauj Collector Ajay Kumar Jha attended a Collectors' meeting in Delhi in May that year and a CLTS session in Lucknow. Fired by missionary zeal, he started with making 50 gram panchayats ODF, 10 per cent of the number in the district. He went slow as this was the former Chief Minister's wife's constituency; politics put many demands on his time and team. For instance, the district team had to immediately address any demands she made such as providing a school building in a village, or make logistical arrangements for visits by VIPs from Lucknow.

He deployed his teams in 50 of the 504 gram panchayats for the initial phase of ODF. This was a modest number, deliberately chosen to demonstrate and prove that these villages could be made ODF. These were Lohia villages with a substantial toilet coverage achieved under TSC. To ensure the quality of construction, 250 masons were trained over two days on the technical aspects of building toilets. Jha had a phased plan to make the district ODF by March 2017, stepping up both human

resources and the number of gram panchayats in each phase. WhatsApp was the communication tool of choice both to monitor and to motivate.

The script in Bijnor in 2016 was to pick Lohia villages which already had a high toilet coverage and proactive Pradhans, and then train and deploy motivators. The District Panchayati Raj Officer (DPRO) Manish Kumar said the district worked in phases and also used “demand compression”. "About 85-90 per cent people have the means to make or repair their toilets. The remaining 10-15 per cent are too poor to do so. We ordered Pradhans to bring lists of beneficiaries from their panchayats and focused subsidy on these 10-15 per cent. We can cover all these beneficiaries with existing funds."

In 2006 too, many villages in western UP became Nirmal Grams under TSC under the able supervision of District Collectors, Sanitation Coordinators and Chief Development Officers. The process took years, starting in 2004 and achieved significant results by 2007. Many were even awarded the Nirmal Gram Puruskar (NGP).

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**In 2006 too, many villages in western UP became Nirmal Grams under the Total Sanitation Campaign**

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Many more fell a little short, but most houses had toilets. Perhaps what helped in these villages was the large population of Muslims and Rajputs, who were used to toilets, even though they were dry toilets. Here, sanitation workers only had to persuade people to replace their dry toilets with pour-flush toilets. Then this part of the sanitation story was forgotten in the scams that followed the NGP in 2009.

The District Panchayati Raj Officer (DPRO) of Saharanpur, Mahendra Singh, (the collector was not in the loop then) – outlined his strategy to us. He had picked Chhajled Block that had 9,000 dry toilets to kill two birds with a stone. He could make it ODF and get rid of manual scavenging. The district would follow. In 2006, 63 villages won the NGP giving them preferential treatment in awarding other government schemes.

### **That remains the case in 2017**

"I ensured BPL families in the block got the subsidy to make toilets. I issued orders to take all scavengers off work, forcing the APL families to make their own toilets;

these people had dry toilets that scavengers cleaned. Scavengers were paid six months' wages and provided alternative jobs such as composting solid waste. Nearly 90 per cent were women so they were amenable to my suggestions," Singh said.

"They pressured families into making toilets and the scavengers were upset since they lost their jobs. We then instituted their rehabilitation package," said Singh. Most dry toilets belonged to Muslims, Brahmins, and Rajputs. "I met women who practised scavenging and asked them to stop. Most did, but some continued under pressure from their clients. We gave those that stopped work or salaries from TSC. I warned those employing scavengers they would be arrested."

The Panchayati Raj officer of the Saharanpur division in 2007, Sardar Aslam Khan, candidly admitted scavenging continues in the cities. But it had been eliminated in the villages.

The District Magistrate of Moradabad, Amit Ghosh, said as much: "Much work remains to be done to eliminate manual scavenging. We gave them loans but those were misused."

No shortcuts then. Singh estimated that just 40 per cent of the toilets made under TSC were used. Many years later, the RICE Squat Survey<sup>5</sup> was to reiterate this. The reasons remained the same – bribe people into making toilets and hope they will use them. That has not happened.

### **Failing institutions**

But there have been significant changes on the institutional front, not all welcome. As TSC morphed into Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan, and then SBM, district governments changed their nomenclature as well. In 2007, there were district water and sanitation missions (DWSMs). Under TSC, those who worked on them included Zilla Parishad members, citizens, experts and officials from assorted departments, a broad-based group with elected people as well.



**Minister of Rural Development, Drinking Water and Sanitation, Jairam Ramesh with brand ambassador and Bollywood actress Vidya Balan during the launch of sanitation campaign 'Nirmal Bharat', in New Delhi on Friday, September 28, 2012. File photo: Shanker Chakravarty**

Instead of reviving these DWSMs, SBM State mission directors have set up district SBMs staffed with consultants under the CDO. Each block has a sanitation coordinator who reports to the block development officer.

DWSMs were more accountable than the SBMs, largely because of their membership. In the name of expeditiousness, and meeting targets, public participation has been excluded. Under TSC, people had to contribute to the toilet. This has disappeared from SBM's menu again to expedite matters. The result is that neither other departments nor the people themselves are willing to take ownership for the success of the scheme. The failure, or success, rests solely with a team of consultants. The officials they report to, usually the CDO or Collector, have limited liability. There is no accountability to the people, only to the government's management information system that records the number of toilets made.

In the districts of Kannauj and Bijnor we did not find any evidence of the DWSM, unlike in Moradabad, Saharanpur and Muzaffarpur, where DWSMs ran TSC in the 2000s. The UP Jal Nigam and Jal Sansthan looked after implementation while the

Communication and Capacity Development Unit (CCDU) handled training and IEC. These in turn supported DWSMs and panchayats.

The more things change the more they remain the same. While DWSMs ran the sanitation shop in 2007, a decade later consultants were solely responsible as DWSMs had faded away, and still did a decade later. Both district and State missions were headed by IAS officers but now run by consultants with little clout or power. This concentration of power for planning and implementing is driven by the need to achieve ODF targets.

At the State government level, in 2017, the SWSM was trimmed and renamed as the State Swachh Bharat Mission (SSBM). Sanitation has been separated from the UP Jal Nigam and handed over to the Panchayati Raj Department (PRD). Down the line, to the district, sanitation is now looked after by the PRD. Taking it out of the hands of engineers was expected to deliver on the ground – engineers were used to lofty projects to make water systems, not dig toilet pits.

### **The problem is the message**

Even as SBM came along and made sanitation sexy again, and western UP repainted its sanitation successes, the ODF gloss hides a few ugly truths. In the villages, people continue to parrot sanitation mantras – use toilets, stay healthy, protect the dignity of women; tick marks in behaviour change. But there was no talk of washing hands after defecating. Or providing water in toilets. Or making them safe for women and children. This headlong rush to make toilets, ignoring use, has been deleterious to sanitation.

A woman's virtue remains top of the mind in these patriarchal lands. In the TSC days, we recalled seeing in 2007 a painting on the wall of a house in Jallorpur village in rural Kanpur, that was attacked plagued by dacoits in the mid-2000s: a dacoit with a handlebar moustache and a large *tikka* on his forehead carried off a woman and her brass pot from the fields where she had gone to relieve herself. That message, – 'toilets for dignity and safety', — has morphed into 'toilets for dignity and respect' for women in SBM. Clearly, little has changed in the decade since. If anything, the messages have become shriller.

The other motivator is the Rs 12,000 subsidy per toilet and faster pay-outs. In 2006, the subsidy was Rs 1200 and payments were slow. If the district government innovated in making Nirmal Grams and ridding rural areas of scavenging in 2007, they innovated with behaviour change in 2017. Kannauj used the subsidy to change attitudes, paying Rs 6000 as the first instalment when construction reached plinth level and the second on verification. Payments were made directly to the beneficiary's accounts.

Officials say women's dignity and subsidy have worked more than enlightened motivations and have remained the mainstay of behaviour change, from 2006 to 2017.

Media reports coming out of U.P. describe how *Nigrani Samiti* members and local

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**Sadly, it is often the poor who are at the receiving end, as they are the ones unable to afford material and labour.**

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officials whistle and boo people going for open defecation. Sadly, it is often the poor who are at the receiving end, as they are the ones unable to afford material and labour.

While the system has helped some make toilets, many others are yet to receive the bounty of SBM.



**Campaigns for a clean India would be incomplete without other initiatives to promote washing hands with soap, providing access to safe drinking water and efficient waste management.**

**File photo: Special Arrangement**

As a result, SBM is quickly becoming a lost opportunity in the green fields of western UP. Coercion, poorly made toilets and the continuing bureaucratic obsession with numbers that now borders on the manic, have spelt its doom much before the State becomes ODF. The only solace UP can take is it may improve its sanitation ranking a little from the TSC days.

To conclude, the SBM- G has merely built on the TSC and the NBA programmes started by earlier governments. It has only provided the icing on the cake that the government and others started baking a decade ago. The only real major difference is the subsidy amount is much larger now, that of Rs 12,000. Furthermore, whatever successes have taken place in Uttar Pradesh are largely because of individual administrators such as Collectors, Pradhans and public participation, and not because of the SBM-G's programming design. The State government's claims that it has made UP ODF ignores the contribution of people and institutions going back more than 10 years.

However, past experiences suggest that sustaining ODF status has been a challenge and several communities have slipped back to practicing open defecation. Therefore, there is a need to ensure continuous monitoring of ODF communities for a period of up to six months post - ODF declaration and to reward this. This would require independent and transparent monitoring systems that focus on toilet usage and not just construction.

Furthermore, What U.P. needs now is a need to channel the momentum generated due to collective achievement of ODF, to add on other water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)<sup>6</sup> and developmental initiatives, including washing hands with soap, safe drinking water and waste management. Successfully sustaining the ODF status for a period of at least six months by a village could possibly be used as a trigger for further government support on other WASH interventions, especially water supply. This may be done in the same manner as the ODF achievement with social norm change at the core to ensure that sustainability and quality issues are not affected in the long-term.

*[Nitya Jacob is a policy analyst and water expert. He authored Jalyatra, a book on India's traditional water management practices, and other books and articles on India's traditional water wisdom, rural governance, and trends in rural development. His essay on water was published in an UN-sponsored publication Water Voices from around the World. He is a WASH Policy Analyst. He can be contacted at [nityajacob@hotmail.com](mailto:nityajacob@hotmail.com).*

*Sunetra Lala is a WASH and Knowledge Management Specialist.]*

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