

# A State, a 'clean sweep' and the art of sanitation

The citizens of Madhya Pradesh and the State machinery have enabled a transformation, down to the grassroots



SHIVRAJ SINGH CHOUHAN

It was on October 2, 2014 that Prime Minister Narendra Modi, newly elected, launched a nationwide cleanliness campaign on the occasion of Mahatma Gandhi's birth anniversary. Coupled with tackling open defecation through behavioural change, the now famous Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, or Clean India Mission, aimed to provide every family with sanitation facilities, including toilets, solid and liquid waste disposal systems.

## For social reformation

His call to achieve the goal by October 2, 2019 and make this an appropriate tribute to Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Nation, on his 150th birth anniversary was well-received by all Indian citizens and the international community, too. Indeed, this was a historic moment in the development story of India, as this campaign was to become the largest cleanliness drive by any country.

This path-breaking idea initiated by the Prime Minister was beyond partisanship and politics. It lit up the spirit of a patriot and became known as a masterstroke to unify a nation that had suffered much at the hands of some divisive forces.

This visionary and courageous idea for social reformation inspired me to rally the people of Madhya Pradesh and make open defecation, truly, a thing of the past.

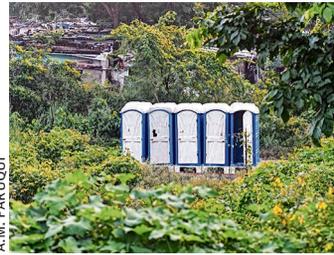
Before launching the pro-

gramme in the State, it was important for me to understand the ground realities. We initiated a comprehensive exercise to identify the sanitation issues people faced through a series of interactions with all identified stakeholders. This was an opportunity for us to initiate social change that the world had never seen before, all the while contributing to the story of an Atmanirbhar India.

## Driven by the individual

Through a succession of such stakeholder interactions, we gathered insights that would go on to inform our strategy to make Madhya Pradesh 100% Open Defecation Free (ODF) by 2019. We understood that while people, as individuals, abhor unclean environments and attempt to keep their homes clean, nobody takes the responsibility when it comes to the collective whole. Instead, people believe it is the responsibility of the government to keep their surroundings clean. What the Prime Minister's idea did was to make Swachhta an individual's responsibility, both at a personal and public level. We wanted to ride this wave of a renewed public understanding towards cleanliness and ensure that *janbhagidari* (people's participation) was the driving force behind the success of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan in Madhya Pradesh.

As the Chief Minister of the State, it would have been much easier for me to issue a directive to only construct toilets, guarantee the provision of piped water supply, and levy fines to offenders to ensure that the goal was achieved. But a lesson I have learnt is not to go in for short-term solutions, but, instead, to address all issues with a long-term view in sight. Hence, I



A.M. FARUQUI

decided upon a multi-pronged strategy involving the construction of toilets, implementing tough regulatory steps such as levying fines for open defecation, and encouraging behavioural change through innovation – both communication-based and engineering solutions. This approach guaranteed the sustenance of changed behaviours and the longevity of the impact of our efforts.

## The power of simple solutions

We capitalised on the age-old understanding that good leadership encourages a sustained change of behaviour. Consequently, we ensured that right – from a Collector to a local level leader at the gram panchayat level – took the message of cleanliness to the people within their precincts. This catapulted the pace of the movement. The more the leaders engaged with the people, the better they were able to open fresh lines of communication and build deeper bonds of trust.

What followed was a remarkable change in the attitudes of the people as they began to own the movement at the grassroots and began to evangelise their peers and community members with the message of Swachhta.

We encouraged and recognised simple yet path-breaking engineering innovations at the local level. I remember one of our Collectors from Sehore district devised

an innovation called 'Tippy-Tap'. This is a simple foot-operated device, which uses a can with a hole to dispense water for handwashing. We implemented this 'tippy-tap' solution across all anganwadis and schools in Sehore district, and this easy-to-operate solution was welcomed by all. Another simple solution was the installation of a small hook in the toilet to enable seniors and those with disabilities to rise with ease from a squatting position. Following the success of these simple solutions, my belief that simple solutions can bring about lasting change has been strengthened.

## The record so far

As a result of this comprehensive and scientific approach, Urban Madhya Pradesh received its ODF certification on October 2, 2017 – much ahead of time; rural Madhya Pradesh received its ODF certification the following year on October 2, 2018. As of today, it is, therefore, no surprise that Madhya Pradesh ranks third in the country in the cleanliness survey, 2020. Not only this, several of our cities have been consistently spearheading the list of clean and green cities in India.

Take Indore, for instance, which has been ranked the cleanest city in the country in Swachh Survekshan (Cleanliness Survey) since 2017. Leading from the front lines, Indore has become India's first 'Water Plus' city in Swachh Survekshan 2021. It achieved this feat by treating its wastewater to a satisfactory level, before releasing it into rivers, thus maintaining cleanliness in rivers and drains under its administration.

The capital city of Bhopal, which has been known as the 'city of lakes', has also shown the way for other State capitals by bagging

the title of the cleanest and the greenest capital of the country in the cleanliness survey of 2020. The result is clear: the steps taken by the State government towards realising the Prime Minister's call to enable cleanliness have become lifesavers during the novel coronavirus pandemic by ensuring reduced interaction during the lockdown, and preventing the transfer of infection.

## The formula

My approach to providing holistic sanitation facilities to the people of Madhya Pradesh emanates from my understanding of travelling and interacting with numerous people and observing and learning from their struggles. Without our "all-hands-on-the-deck" approach and the 'provision of an integrated sanitation approach that includes water supply, water connections, and waste management', our efforts to construct toilets and implement regulatory measures alone would have not brought about a tangible behavioural change at the grassroots. The status of ODF Plus received by 355 urban bodies of the State, and the status of ODF double plus received by 71 urban bodies in the past year alone are a reverberating testament to the effectiveness of our strategy.

I experience unbridled joy when I see that the collective efforts of the citizens of Madhya Pradesh and the State machinery have brought about an irreversible positive transformation in sanitation, right down to the grassroots, giving credence to Gandhiji's words – that "sanitation is more important than Independence".

Shivraj Singh Chouhan is Chief Minister, Government of Madhya Pradesh