

DR. BINDESHWAR PATHAK

Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak is a great humanist and social reformer of contemporary India. To the weaker sections of society especially, his is the compassionate face of a paternal redeemer. He has the vision of a philosopher and the undying zeal of a missionary. Inspired by one of the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi to abolish scavenging and based on the bedrock of technology, Dr. Pathak, founding Sulabh International Social Service Organisation in 1970, launched a social reform-cum-environmental upgradation movement taking up the challenge of the problem of sanitation-related pollution leading to environmental degradation and health hazards caused by the practice of defecation in the open and use of bucket toilets.



In search of a solution Dr. Pathak developed eco-friendly twin-pit compost pour flush toilet technology for the individual households as an alternative to the cost prohibitive sewerage or septic tank-based systems of excreta disposal. Against this, the Sulabh technology is appropriate, economically affordable, eco-friendly and culturally acceptable. It has on-site human waste disposal facility; dispenses with installation of a vent pipe and has requirement of hardly 2 litres of water for flushing purpose. It thus helps improve environment and leads to economic water use. More than a million household toilets have been made and bucket toilets converted into Sulabh Shauchalayas, liberating nearly 120,000 (One hundred and twenty thousand) scavengers from their the sub-human occupation and rehabilitating them in different vocations with their human rights and dignity restored; and their wards imparted quality education and vocational training to bring them in the mainstream of society.

This technology has been declared as one of the Globally Best Practices by UN-HABITAT/UNCHS (United Nations Centre for Human Settlements) and recognized and approved by various national and international agencies. The UNDP Human Development Report of 2003 and of 2006, has recommended its use for the 2.6 billion people in the world without access to improved sanitation facility.

A technology was also developed by Dr. Pathak for recycling and reuse of human excreta from public toilets maintained on pay and use basis by Sulabh. In this technology, biogas is produced by anaerobic digestion of human excreta, and is used for cooking, lighting, electricity generation, etc. Biogas plant effluent is treated by a simple method to make it colourless, odourless and pathogen-free, making it

quite safe for reuse or discharge into rivers or any water body. The biogas plants can be installed at and serve housing colonies and high-rise buildings and areas not served by sewers. These technology and management based facilities used by 10 million people on daily basis have made a marked difference in environment both in urban and rural areas.

Put also into practice by Dr. Pathak is the duckweed-based waste-water treatment technology. For the bio-degradable organic waste, he has developed a convenient technology that takes only 10 days to degrade the waste.

While maintaining the public toilets, run-on-pay and use basis, the surplus income thus generated is used for socially useful activities like running vocational training centres, catering to the needs of wards of scavengers, promoting health awareness amongst the slum dwellers.

Women in absence of toilet facilities at home are the worst sufferers. Compelled to withhold answering call of nature from sunrise to sunset and subjected to likelihood of facing insecurity, indignity and lack of privacy, women have gained the most from provision of toilet facilities which have eliminated the mentioned problems. In rural India, absence of toilet facilities at schools makes the girl students averse to attending classes. Dr. Pathak's effort to provide toilet facilities at schools has removed the aforementioned discouraging factor.

By providing the toilet related sanitation facilities, Dr. Pathak has used it as a tool to combine technology with a social purpose and human face. Through it, he has touched the untouched, reached the unreached, and helped them overcome social barriers based on caste distinctions in India. The crusade of sanitation has coverted into a movement without involving violence or social resistance and upheaval. Founding the Sulabh International Social Service Organisation in 1970, its 37 years of existence has seen a silent revolution in the sanitation scenario; a fundamental change in attitude of people and a transformation of mindset towards improved sanitation practices. He has shown the path and ushered in the dawn of sanitation amidst area of darkness.

Dr. Pathak is the recipient of many awards including Padma Bhushan by the Govt. of India, St. Francis Prize for the Canticle of all Creatures and Indira Gandhi Paryavaran Puruskar. His Holiness Pope John Paul-II gave him audience and appreciated his contribution for the upgradation of the environment and selfless service to the poor.

From the above, it is seen that practices of environmental protection and conservation compatible with sustainable development have been successfully implemented by Sulabh under the able leadership and guidance of Dr. Pathak who has ingeniously utilized technologies and expertise to enrich and empower the depressed classes, improve community health, hygiene and environment. Thus, he is fulfilling the dreams of Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar.